

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Conversation with Bui Diem on 24 September 1965

1. Bui Diem said the major obstacle to South Vietnamese unification was religious dispute. He said the differences between the Catholics and the Buddhists were deep, bitter and almost irreconcilable. These differences had been solved on the surface in more recent months but were now beginning to surge up again. Tri Quang was unreasonable on the subject. He had three unshakable beliefs:

- a. He despised all French.
- b. He hated and mistrusted all Catholics.
- c. He saw plots and conspiracies behind everything ("a Buddhist Ngo Dinh Nhu").

Tich Tam Chan was more reasonable but was surrounded by opportunists and trouble makers. The Catholic leaders were also surrounded by trouble makers. This made it almost impossible to get the two sides together.

2. Bui Diem said that he had come to the reluctant conclusion that the Vietnamese were unable to solve their problem themselves, that only General Lansdale could help as a catalyst to bring the Buddhists and Catholics together. He had spent a lot of time arguing with the Buddhists (two hours once in his car with Tri Quang when he was taking Tri Quang back to the Pagoda from his house) but they didn't trust him enough. He said that when General Thieu talked about this during the dinner with General Lansdale he was appealing for General Lansdale's help on this.

3. Bui Diem asked me to pass along the desire expressed by General Ky to work very closely with General Lansdale on pacification. He asked that any ideas General Lansdale had on how it might be better organized be passed informally to him (Bui Dieu) as well as directly to General Ky so that he could reinforce these ideas. He felt strongly that General Lansdale should draw up an outline political plan for General Ky. He said that Ky tends to be non-committal at first when new ideas are presented to him, but that he grasps new ideas readily and in a short time starts utilizing them as his own.



4. Comment: This conversation occurred after a very informal dinner at Bui Diem's house with his wife, Ngoc, and with Le Van Kim and his wife, Gaby. (Kim is now retired and has gone into business. He has not received any retirement pay since March 1965. He is the most experienced movie director in Vietnam and a top-flight photographer. I promised Bui Diem that Hank Miller would contact Kim through Bui Diem to see if we could help Kim to help his country.)

LG:RPhillips:pag
September 28, 1965

