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TO: General Lansdale

FROM: R. C. Phillips

SUBJECT: Conversation with General Le van Kim (ret.) on  
August 30, 1966

1. Kim, as an old friend, invited me to lunch at the restaurant which he is now managing, the Ramuntcho. We talked mainly about family and old friends but he made some observations worth reporting. He said he was no longer bitter but had become philosophical about being out of the Army although he remained very concerned as a Vietnamese citizen about his country's future.

2. Kim felt that despite the current leadership's words about wanting to establish a democratically elected regime, they really desired a Korean type solution, with the Army remaining in power. He said he had spoken to one of General Ky's staff officers who had returned from a trip to Korea and this officer had told him that the Korean solution was the only answer, that the Army must remain in power for many more years.

3. Kim said that politics had just about ruined the Army and that he felt that the Korean solution would not work for Vietnam. If the Army remained in power, but tried to do so through elections it would have to rig the elections a la Diem; and this would completely discredit the Army. As it was, the Army was already badly discredited because of rampant corruption. Discipline was breaking down and young Army officers were becoming disheartened.

4. Kim said that as for himself he would prefer to remain a private citizen and that he had no political ambitions, but as a former officer who had once had high hopes for the Vietnamese Army he could not help but be concerned. Besides many of his former junior officers and enlisted men were still in service and talked to him as a friend from time to time. In one particular instance, a Captain had come to him recently to ask his advice. A Lieutenant serving under the Captain had told the Captain that he could not afford to live off his present salary, that he had two choices. He could engage in corruption or take a second job. He realized that both were wrong

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but at least by doing the latter he could keep his honor as a soldier and an officer; would the Captain morally authorize him to do so. The Captain then came to Kim to ask for advice. Kim pointed out that the Captain had no choice except to give his moral authorization if the Lieutenant was to keep his self-respect.

5. Kim felt that under the strain of economic, social and political pressures the Army was slowly disintegrating. He said that there were many practical problems to be faced and solved, one of them being the terrible impact of the rise in prices on the junior officer and non-com level of the Army, and that words alone were not effective. If all shared equally in the difficulties the situation would be different but the extent of corruption at the top was already widely known among the lower levels of the Army.

6. Kim said he hoped that the elections might lead to a legally established Government; and that he felt the people would only accept and support a civilian Government. But, he said, he was not too optimistic because he did not feel that the current leadership had a firm political plan to which they all agreed. The effort was all too likely to fail, he said, because the Generals spent too much of their time and effort vying for position and power with each other, while the Communists every day were becoming more firmly entrenched politically in the countryside. They have a political plan, he said, while we do not.

SLO:RCPhillips:pag  
August 30, 1966

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