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TO: Ambassador Bunker

DATE: September 9, 1967

FROM: Ed Lansdale

SUBJECT: Views of Kieu

The attached memo from Rufe Phillips reports a talk he had with Nguyen van Kieu, brother of the President-elect, on September 8. A number of timely and constructive ideas were discussed.

SLO:EGLansdale:md

cc: Ambassador Locke  
General Westmoreland  
Ambassador Komer  
Mr. Calhoun  
Mr. Hart  
Mr. Jacobson

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TO: General Lansdale

DATE: September 9, 1967

FROM: Rufe Phillips

SUBJECT: Talk with Nguyen van Kieu on 8 September 1967

1. Kieu got word to me that he would like to see me before my departure. I met him at 14 Tu Xuong where he is now staying - which turned out to be the government house formerly occupied by Tran Trung Dung until 1960 and Nguyen Dinh Thuan until the coup against Diem. I told Kieu that the house brought back much of the Vietnamese past to me; and I hoped the new Government would be able to profit from some of the lessons learned from this past. In particular, I mentioned Diem's failure to attract and hold good people around him who would tell him the truth rather than what they thought he wanted to hear.

2. Kieu said Thieu knew he needed good people and wanted to form a broadly based Government. Kieu had already approached Tran van Huong, on Thieu's behalf, to ask him to accept the Prime Ministership. Huong had refused and had at first pleaded bad health. Then talking further it became clear that his principal objection was that he would not associate himself with Ky. He had apparently taken some of Ky's campaign comments personally. Also, he (Huong) was now living in seclusion and was obviously feeling downhearted. Kieu finally asked Huong to recommend someone acceptable to him, if he could not himself accept. Huong made a recommendation to Kieu (Kieu did not say who it was but later in the conversation intimated that it was Nguyen Lau Vien). I asked Kieu if he felt the Prime Minister must absolutely be a Southerner. He said it was preferable but, as a matter of fact, Tran van Do was also under consideration. I asked him if he considered Dr. Dan a possibility. He said that in his opinion, Dan was not politically acceptable for the Prime Ministership, but would make an excellent Minister of Information.

3. Kieu said he had been with his brother at Vung Tau after the elections. They discussed at length how the President's office should be set up to facilitate coordination within the Government and communication between the Presidency and the Ministries. Their plan was to have an inner circle of presidential assistants who would serve as the President's "brain trust." Kieu would preside on an informal basis over this "brain trust," but would not hold any formal Government position. Each presidential assistant

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*Dallas by Stat*  
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would be responsible to the President for facilitating the work of one or more of the Ministries falling within his assigned area of responsibility. The President's "brain trust" would breakfast together together on a daily basis, often with the President. The President, in turn, would hold regular cabinet meetings to directly guide and coordinate the work of the Ministers.

4. I pointed out to Kieu that such a system could only work if the "brain trust" was very carefully selected and composed of people who would have the wisdom to support and not undercut the Ministers. I said it was my experience from the past in Viet Nam that too often people operating out of the Presidency had tended to undermine the Minister whom they were supposed to support. Kieu agreed that this was a danger and that the selection of good people and their proper orientation would be critical to the success of any such system.

5. Kieu then talked about how best to achieve American-Vietnamese cooperation and teamwork. He said he could understand how the Americans would want the Government to institute new measures and start implementing many programs as soon as possible. The Government also wanted to do this. Many American ideas were undoubtedly similar to those held by the Vietnamese but some might be different. He was sure that the essential objectives were the same. If true progress was to be achieved the Vietnamese had to feel that what they were doing represented their own ideas and not just American desires. He was sure that agreement on a joint plan of action could be reached but the best way to approach this was to first have an informal, preliminary exchange of ideas and priorities between selected staff members of the American Mission and the Vietnamese "brain trust." (He indicated that the "brain trust" would be formed soon.) Then, based on the results of these informal working sessions, formal measures and programs could be worked out in draft for the concurrent top level approval of both sides. This was better than having the Americans draw up their own ideas all by themselves and then formally present them to the GVN at the highest level. If the Vietnamese and the Americans could informally work things out in advance, this would help to ensure true agreement rather than mere polite acceptance.

6. Also, Kieu said he thought that formal top level meetings between Americans and Vietnamese accomplished little

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unless it was to obtain approval on something which had already been informally worked out. He went on to say that publicized high level meetings should be avoided as much as possible since actions taken after such meetings are too often interpreted by the Vietnamese people as resulting from American orders.

7. Kieu went on to talk about the problems of maintaining good relations between Thieu and Ky. He said it appeared that Ky may have promised his campaign manager, Loc, the post of Prime Minister and this was just one of the problems coming up. Kieu said that he had sent a cable to Bui Diem on 8 September asking him to return to Saigon, and that he was counting on working closely with Bui Diem to maintain coordination and good relations between Thieu and Ky. He said the problems were due mainly to some elements in the entourages of both men. Also, he said, there were many outsiders trying to sow dissension between them.

8. Before leaving I told Kieu that Mr. Robert Coate, Chairman of the Democratic Party for Northern California was staying with us and that he (Kieu) might like to meet him and exchange views. I explained that Coate had been an unofficial observer during the elections. Kieu said he thought his brother should talk to Coate, so he went directly to the telephone and called Thieu. After talking to his brother, Kieu told me that Thieu would be busy the next day (Saturday) in the morning with a Philippine delegation and then was to have a luncheon meeting with the Generals and others (presumably the Directory) at his house, but wanted to see Coate later in the afternoon. Kieu said he would call to confirm Thieu's meeting with Coate.

9. As we said goodbye, I wished Kieu good luck in helping his brother to once again launch constitutional government in Viet Nam and said that I was sure that Thieu could win support if he could find it possible to reach out and get good, honest people around him.

SLO:RCPhillips:ed

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