

21 March 1967

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Vice President

FROM: Rufus Phillips

SUBJECT: Suggested Talking Paper on Ed Lansdale, for Ambassador Bunker

1. Background

I hope that you will be able to talk to Ambassador Bunker about Ed Lansdale. As part of Lodge's staff, Ed was requested to turn in a proforma resignation by Lodge and did so. As far as Ed is concerned, and I just saw him in Hong Kong, he has mixed emotions about staying on. Out of a sense of duty only ~~he~~ believes he should. Personally he feels that the U. S. has not understood, recognized or made use of what he has done and of his special relationship with the Vietnamese. He is not asking any favors. So I am not raising this subject on his behalf, or even with his agreement, but only because I am profoundly convinced that he represents the only hope the U. S. has of achieving anything politically constructive in South Vietnam during the rest of the year. Conversely, without him I feel that the coming Vietnamese national elections are very likely to be a political disaster.

2. The attitudes of the Vietnamese are becoming even more elusive than ever because of the increasing tendency through the U. S. pacification set-up, OCO, to give the Vietnamese orders. With the exception of Ed, they just won't talk frankly to the Americans. General Thang, the Ministry of Revolutionary Development, won't even meet with the Americans if he can possibly avoid it. (This state of affairs is confirmed by Father Dan McLellan's observations). Ambassador Bunker will step into this climate brand new and no matter how hard he tries, if he doesn't have close-in help from Ed, the Vietnamese are simply not going to tell him their real problems. This means that he will be operating blind; and no amount of either diplomatic or political skill will be able to overcome this. It is simply an inherent characteristic of the Vietnamese that they will not say what is really on their minds to people they do not know and like personally.

3. With the above in mind I would suggest that the following be covered in any talk you might have with Ambassador Bunker:



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- a. That Ambassador Bunker request that Ed stay on at least until he, Bunker, has had some chance to evaluate the local situation and get to know Ed and the Vietnamese.
- b. That Bunker should prepare himself for a different situation and a very different set of people than he encountered in the Dominican Republic. That without other Americans helping him, who have close personal relationships with the Vietnamese, he cannot hope to understand what it is the Vietnamese want and what it is they are up to because they simply won't tell him. (We've gone through this twice before with Taylor and with Lodge).
- c. That there are no real political groupings in Vietnam, only individuals or religious and regional groups struggling for power, and that one great task which the U. S. can and must undertake is to help the Vietnamese build political groupings, but that this can only be accomplished by a few, trusted Americans working freely and informally among the Vietnamese with a free hand and the full backing of the Ambassador. It cannot be done by the Ambassador himself no matter how diligently he applies himself because the Vietnamese will keep their relationship with him on formal terms. For example, Lodge knows Ky well enough to joke with him; but Ky never tells him anything. The Vietnamese always work through intermediaries; they do this in dealing with each other (i. e. Ky to Thieu). They are not likely to change two thousand years of custom for Ambassador Bunker.
- d. That Ambassador Bunker avail himself of the presence in Washington of Bui Diem to get to know the Vietnamese and to find out what Ed means to the Vietnamese. Bui Diem will speak as frankly to a stranger as any leading Vietnamese political figure I know and this could be an invaluable preparation for dealing with the Vietnamese in Vietnam. Perhaps I could help by sitting in on the first meeting and getting Bui Diem to talk.
- e. I also suggest that Ambassador Bunker talk to Bill Jordan on Rostow's staff. Bill has the best understanding of the Vietnamese of any official I know who is directly concerned with Vietnam. K Kommer and his staff are too narrowly program-oriented to properly understand the profound problems and great political opportunities which exist there. Also, a number of Kommer's staff, are unconsciously beginning to adopt a very paternalistic attitude toward the Vietnamese.