

RUFUS C. PHILLIPS, III

October 25, 1983

Mr. William J. Rust
Director of Research
U.S. News & World Report
2300 N Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037

Dear Bill.

I would appreciate it if you would pitch in to defend your original write up and the written record of the NSC Meeting. If you are taking impressions from a later memorandum to Forrestal about specific actions to isolate Nhu and converting that into a general premise about what I told President Kennedy, then you and U.S. News and World Report are giving the wrong impression.

In any case, the central part of what I had to say to President Kennedy was my recommendation that he make an extraordinary effort to save Diem by sending Lansdale to Saigon. While that part of Bromley Smith's memo is deleted, enough evidence is in the first sentence after the deletion to confirm it. Moreover, this can be confirmed by General Lansdale who got a telephone call immediately after the meeting by someone who had been there. And, in fact, most of this is in the final draft of the history which you wrote (copy of which is attached).

There is only one thing wrong in your history and that is the reference to showing "displeasure with the Diem-Nhu Government". That should read simply - "with Nhu". Perhaps I am at fault in not picking that up sooner, however, I had thought that verbally I had given you a rather complete background picture of what was happening.

I certainly never shared Lodge's view, which was not fully apparent to me at the time, that Diem wasn't worth salvaging. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if Lodge himself might not have vetoed sending Lansdale to Saigon after giving me the impression that he favored it.

RUFUS C. PHILLIPS, III

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To The Editor
U.S. News & World Report
2300 N Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037

Dear Sir:

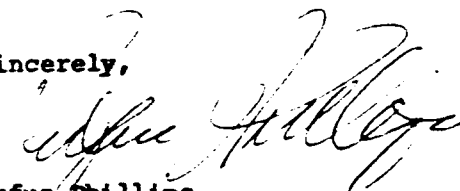
Your October 10 article on the "Untold Story of the Road to War in Vietnam" gives the impression that I advocated to President Kennedy at the NSC Meeting of Sept. 10, 1963, the cut-off of economic aid to the Diem Government in order to give the generals a favorable sign for a coup d'etat.

What I told President Kennedy at that meeting was that a coup was inevitable unless we made an extraordinary effort to save Diem and that I recommended he make that effort. "This can only be done," I said, "by sending General Lansdale to Saigon." "Lansdale is," I said, "the only American who has Diem's trust and therefore has a chance of persuading him to exile his brother, Nhu, which would make reconciliation with the Vietnamese Army possible."

President Kennedy responded by thanking me for my recommendations, "particularly", he said, "about General Lansdale." Unfortunately, for reasons which remain obscure General Lansdale was never sent.

I also advocated trying to protect the reputation and standing of the U.S. in Vietnam by isolating Nhu and separating us from his actions against the Buddhists. Specifically, I suggested cutting CIA assistance to Col. Tung, whose Special Forces conducted the raid on the pagodas under Nhu's direction and stopping U.S. support for the local motion picture program which had become a propaganda vehicle for Nhu. I never advocated cutting economic aid in general, nor was I in favor of a coup until at the end when the only choice became a coup conducted by Nhu or a coup conducted by the Army.

Sincerely,


Rufus Phillips

cc. Mr. William J. Rust

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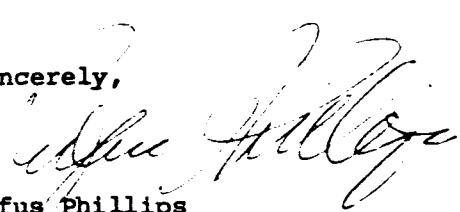
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