

November 14, 1960

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

Professor Wesley R. Fishel  
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East Lansing, Michigan

Dear Wes:

As you are well aware, the events since your two letters arrived last Thursday have been rather earth-shaking. To deal with the more mundane matters in your letters first, let me mention Talbot and Reischauer. Phillip Talbot had, of course, come and gone before your delayed letter arrived. Fortunately we learned of his presence in Saigon and I had several good chats with him, both at his hotel and at our house. Our daughters also had a chance to get together. Both he and his wife seem like very fine people. As to Professor Reischauer, he could not, of course, arrive as scheduled on November 12. I checked with the Hotel Majestic yesterday, where Vo Van Hai had made a reservation for him, and found that no one by that name was as yet registered there. We shall check again today. We have set up a dinner in his honor for Wednesday night and we sincerely hope that he can make it.

Let me turn now to the matter of the coup and the related question of whether you should come to Vietnam. The suggestion made by President Hannah that you come to Vietnam has been kept very quiet. In view of our relationship with USOM and in view of the impending visits of various MSU people, you will understand why I have sympathized with Hannah's decision not to push for your visit under MSU auspices. At the same time, I am certainly sympathetic with the dilemma in which you are placed by this decision. Nevertheless, the only way in which you could come to Vietnam, in my opinion, would be at the request and at the expense of GVN.

The above was my opinion before the coup. Now that we have had this very serious challenge to Diem's power, other considerations may come to the fore. It is my impression that the populace was relieved to have the revolutionists take over. If this impression is correct, then Diem's future course of action becomes extremely critical. If he becomes more repressive and if the regime bogs down even further in red tape and if no really effective actions are taken to move the country forward on the political and military front,

Professor Wesley R. Fishel

November 14, 1960

Page 2

the President is likely to be in for a more serious rebellion in the future. Actually, this rebellion would have become a successful revolution if the military negotiators had not been so considerate of the President. So far as present information indicates, the revolutionists could easily have killed the President and his family. Instead they paused to negotiate with him and obtained an agreement that he would disband the present government, place military representatives in the cabinet and pay attention to the proposals of a revolutionary committee. The time taken for negotiation sealed the fate of the revolutionists. They found themselves surrounded by the time that the negotiations were completed. Of course, it is true that the revolutionists did not obtain a broad enough base of support and, in fact, were so inept they even failed to provide the troops besieging the Palace with food and water. Given the ineptness of the revolutionists, it is quite conceivable that the country would have bogged down in a hopeless civil war had the revolutionists remained in control, but it is still too early to pontificate on the consequences of the abortive coup d'état.

At any rate, to return to the subject of your letters, I suspect it would be wise for you to hold off on any visit to Vietnam and perhaps on even any approach to Diem about making such a visit. As time goes on we should be able to get a better sounding as to 1) whether Diem is adopting a constructive course of action, and 2) how he is received by the people. If we can learn anything pertinent to the situation we shall certainly pass it on. Meanwhile this would be my advice to you, but I will be the first to admit that any impressions I have conveyed to you are on the basis of very tentative information after a most stormy three-day period.

Best personal regards.

Cordially,

Lloyd D. Musolf  
Chief Advisor

LDM/dw