

File Memorandum
February 19, 1963

Dr. NGUYEN TON HOAN (M.D.)
42 rue de la Montagne Ste. Genevieve
Paris V, France
(Tel: Danton 3887)
(In New York, c/o Mrs. Le Thi Bac-Lan)

(nom de guerre: NGUYEN TON LONG -- after
his son who died in childhood)

Dr. HOAN, a South Vietnamese and leader of the Dai Viet party of the South, has been resident in Paris, where he owns a small restaurant, since he left Saigon in October or November (he could not recall which), 1954. He flew from New York today to see me, and returned this evening to New York.

His reason for coming to Lansing, he said, was to solicit my advice and assistance in the efforts of his "group" to come to power in Vietnam. He has been in this country since two months ago, but explained that he had not come to see me earlier because he had been ill since leaving Paris and had been convalescing in New York, and visiting occasionally with HUYNH SANH THONG at Yale University, as well as with other dissident Vietnamese among the students on the Eastern seaboard. He is planning to go to Washington next week, but felt he should consult with me first. In particular, he wanted me to introduce him to Senator Mansfield, General Lansdale, and other "leading American Government personages." I declined to do so.

He travels on a French identity paper, valid for two years, the Vietnamese Government having refused him a passport "even to go to England." But his two years are almost up, since, "for some unknown reason," it required over a year for the American Embassy in Paris to issue him a visa to visit this country. He will remain in the U. S. another two or three months, and then return to Paris, where his wife and children (four?) reside.

(Dr. HOAN has aged considerably since I saw him last in Washington in 1955. He suffers from asthma of allergic origin or sinus-connected, and though a doctor he has been unable to cure himself or find anyone else who could do so. He attributed his trouble today to getting his feet wet, among other things, but added that he suffers from this ailment almost constantly. He is also on a diet, takes no coffee or tea or milk, but drank ginger ale and water. He asserted he has no capacity in English, even though I reminded him that he had spoken some English to me in 1955. When a Vietnamese graduate student entered my office and met him this afternoon, the three of us spoke English for a full minute before lapsing back into French; his English was quite understandable and unlabored.)

As on previous occasions, HOAN promised more than he obviously was in a position to produce. He claimed the support of the persons listed on Attachment No. 1, but admitted that they met very seldom and rarely all at one time. He also acknowledged that their "program" as yet consists only of "saving Vietnam" and eliminating the NGO DINH DIEM regime. Since he spoke only in generalities I challenged him for evidence of support from individuals on the list of his "group." He produced Attachment No. 2, dated 1957, but claimed that these men all still support him. He also showed me Attachment No. 3, a letter from Fr. HO VAN VUI, former Cure of Saigon, dated 12 February 1963, who, he asserted, had been sent to Paris by Bishops TU, CHI, and BINH, to profess their loyalty to HOAN and their adherence to this "group." "All the Catholics have now turned against DIEM, except NGO DINH THUC."

It was clear that HOAN and his friends are not at this moment plotting a coup, and though he claimed that they do have an action program, he obviously did not have one in hand or even in his head (he stated just before leaving that he will write it up and send it to me). The "group" are awaiting the next coup in Saigon to move. He expects to be summoned at that moment to take power. He will be Prime Minister or President in the new government (he was unclear on its probable form); this has been agreed upon by his associates, including NGUYEN NGOC BICH, VU VAN THAI, and NGUYEN HUU CHAU, he said. He also firmly claimed the support of PHAN HUY QUAT and DANG VAN SUNG. His cabinet will include men from among those listed on Attachment 1.

HOAN's cabinet will be non-sectarian, in that it will include Catholics, Buddhists, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and men from all parts of the country (with the South holding heaviest representation, "of course"). "It will be truly a Government of National Union." He recognizes that acts of the DIEM regime have hurt the Catholic cause in Vietnam, but observed that he has always been known for his non-religious outlook in politics ("the Dai Viet has been a lay party").

He claims followers among the military and the students. (My graduate student, a Catholic who was a refugee from the north in 1954 and has since turned against the Church and the regime, told me he had never heard of Dr. HOAN before today, and after talking with him for about twenty minutes observed--to me, privately--that he found HOAN "very unimpressive I asked him for his program, and he gave me propaganda. He is like all the politicians.") I suggested that every revolutionary claimed followers among the military, and HOAN responded by producing a letter written to him by Col. NGUYEN CHANH THI, who led the November, 1960, coup d'etat attempt, offering his services to HOAN and his group (letter dated September 7, 1962, from Pnom Penh; no copy available). When I asked him about contacts among the military in Vietnam, he pulled out another letter (dated in January, 1963; no copy available), which reported to him that three ARVN officers who had been in the United States are "secret Viet Cong," and are now back in Saigon, "managing the ARVN radio service." He added, quoting the letter, that they are in liaison with the DRV (by radio?). Their names VO DAI KHOI and two of his brothers-in-law: KY QUANG THAN and KY QUANG DIEM.

Dr. Hoan disclaimed any French support and spoke contemptuously of the French, remarking that the "Foreign Ministry group" are subsidizing TRAN VAN HUU, (who, however, supports HOAN!), and BAO DAI himself, since the latter has run out of money and the two former gentlemen are former fonctionnaires in the French service and rate pensions and "other support." These same Foreign Ministry people are out to get rid of DIEM, he said, but they don't want HOAN, they want HUU. HUU is now allied with the Viet Cong in the Comité pour la Paix et la Renovation du Sud-Vietnam, a group espousing "union nationale et neutralite" and having headquarters in Geneva. HUU's associates in this enterprise are the following (characterizations inside quotes are those of Dr. HOAN):

NGUYEN VAN THOI (former Minister of Agrarian Reform for DIEM)
 NGHIEM VAN TRI (Former Minister of National Defense for NGUYEN VAN XUAN, and an engineer)
 NGUYEN MANH HA (Viet Minh Delegate to Fontainebleau Conference; "Viet Cong")
 BUI QUANT TUNG ("Naive professor"; formerly with Ecole D'Extreme Orient)
 LE THANH KHOI (Economist, historian; "crypto-Communist")
 NGUYEN TAN PHAT (Journalist and "small potato")
 PHAM SY THANH (Hoa Hao/Dan Chu Xa Hoi; formerly with Gen. SOAI)

Gen. NGUYEN VAN HINH, he added, was no longer a factor; he commands a French Air Base and has the rank of Brigadier General and is living comfortably.

Anent other individuals, he remarked that the DIEM regime was "shot through" with Viet Cong. I asked him to name some. He named Col. ALBERT PHAM NGOC THAO. I questioned this, and he replied that THAO definitely had been one many years ago, and even if he is not one today--which he grudgingly admitted was a possibility--his wife definitely still is.

As for the present government in Saigon, "It would be fine if the President would accept to be the symbol of our freedom, which he is, and leave the administration to others." The Vice President? "A bureaucrat; nothing more; incapable of making decisions; he doesn't have a politician's mind" (said with obvious scorn). "No one will follow him," he added. The generals? "The best are KHANH, (DUONG VAN) MINH, and DUC," the last-named currently "with me" in Paris. "And if the military make a coup, they don't want power for themselves; they will call upon us." His own stand? "Nationalist," "pro-American," and "anti-Communist, anti-Neutralist." "Neutralism would be fatal for us, but it is the main danger today; in Paris this is the trend one sees."

Dr. HOAN was never a really impressive person, and he is even less so today. Yet, among the expatriate Vietnamese nationalists (and self-designated "Nationalists"), he does have a certain following; at one time even NGO DINH DIEM spoke well of him. He, NGO DINH NHU, and Dr. LE TOAN, were the regional leaders in the Congress of National Union of 1953. He says that he never trusted NHU, and that TRAN TRUNG DUNG, among others, had warned him about NHU as early as 1953, pointing out that "this NGO DINH family is like a deep swamp, hard to fathom or to penetrate, very tight and power-hungry." However, NGO DINH DIEM he still respects (at moments), and he told three people on the campus today that DIEM had been "taken in" by NHU, "who is more clever and unscrupulous." He agreed with my statement that Vietnamese politicians are unlikely to stick together for any length of time in a coalition such as that which he claims to lead, and even offered examples of his own to support my statement. "But this is different," he added. (I am not convinced.)

He asked my suggestions on proceeding. I told him I thought it would be useless for him to try button-holing people in Washington (but he is determined to do so) until he and his associates have a forward-looking and constructive program detailed in specific terms; not a petition of grievances such as that of the 18 in 1959, but something more precise and constructive, which can have meaning to readers in Vietnam as well as here. I told him that, candidly, he seemed to be even less in touch with events in Saigon than I, and that before he went to talk with others more cynical than I he would do well to do some "homework" on developments in his country, because it was clear that his information is extremely sketchy and that his major source is the Paris edition of the New York Times. He asked if I would assist his group, and in reply I stated only that I would be happy to hear from him at any time. I cautioned him not to be optimistic about the outcome of his interviews with people in Washington and warned him that people in the executive branch would be reluctant to receive him because our government has a "firm policy" of support for NGO DINH DIEM. He assured me that he was not operating under any illusions in this connection.



File Memorandum
February 22, 1963

Dr. NGUYEN TON HOAN phoned from New York to say he will be going to Washington on Sunday, February 24. He will stay there with NGUYEN TRUNG THANH ("he is reliable")
202 Peabody Street, NW
(Phone: 526-0243).

He voiced effusive appreciation for my this and that during his visit the other day, and asked for a copy of my manuscript ("Vietnam Reconsidered"), of which he had learned from a mutual friend at Harvard. I declined to send it until it has been revised for publication, since it was clear that he planned to use it as evidence of my change of attitude and to imply that I am behind him. ("We need it in our work."). He repeated remarks he had made about the position of the Army and the clergy, and cautioned me against trusting NGUYEN NGOC THO, because "before he was with DIEM he was with the French; he has no ethics."

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Lunt', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.