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APPROVED FOR RELEASE  
DATE: MAY 2001

MEMORANDUM FOR: General Collins

SUBJECT: Briefing points on South Vietnam

1. In accordance with your request, this memorandum summarizes briefly the principal points which General Cabell, Mr. Bissell and I made in our briefing, as well as one or two other points which were developed in the course of our discussion.

2. With regard to the general political and administrative situation presently prevailing in South Vietnam, it is our considered view that as matters have been going up to now the situation is deteriorating to such an extent that there could be a collapse well prior to the scheduled date for the elections. However, there are a number of American observers on the ground who feel that the situation is far from hopeless and that with vigorous US action and with strong leadership it should be possible to assemble and exploit the elements of strength potentially present in such a way as to check the downward spiral and very possibly reverse the trend of developments.

3. The outstanding element of weakness within the Vietnamese governmental situation is, of course, the all-absorbing struggle for power. The dissension and bitterness engendered by this struggle is apparently being exploited by certain elements among the French who, for their particular purposes, do not wish to see the Diem Government succeed. As of the second week of October it was the consensus of US opinion that General Hinh was being incited and encouraged by subordinate elements in the French military set-up to continue his campaign of attack against Diem with a view to undermining and bringing down Diem and his government. (General Salan and General Renucci were the officers most frequently referred to as being responsible for this activity, even after the conclusion of the Washington understanding that both governments would support Diem.)

4. [It has been the policy [REDACTED] to work closely with the Embassy and with General O'Daniel in an effort to prevail upon Diem and Hinh to submerge their differences in the interests of getting a stable government and turning

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their respective energies in the direction of combatting the very well organized and extremely effective campaign of subversion and terror being conducted by the Viet Minh. Certain [redacted] people, notably Colonel Lansdale, have been successful in establishing close contacts with both factions, and they have been exploiting these contacts to the fullest extent of their ability along the lines indicated and with some evidences of success at least in so far as Hinh is concerned. Our most recent reports indicate that Diem, although willing to listen [redacted] has thus far not been willing to modify his ~~intelligent~~ attitude toward Hinh. We do not recommend Hinh as a reliable long-term asset.

5. The position of the British in all of this has been very obscure, with some local evidences of an intention to discourage the governments of the Associated States from accepting US military and economic assistance. [With State Department knowledge and approval, we have been spear-heading an effort to smoke out the British Foreign Office position and possibly to obtain a reversal or modification of any policy which may exist contrary to US objectives in the area.] We will keep you advised of any developments which may occur in this regard, [including in particular any clarification of the Foreign Office position which we may receive.]

6. [It is our impression that] the Australian Government is interested in seeing the area of Southeast Asia strengthened, at least to the extent of enabling South Vietnam and the other countries concerned to protect and defend themselves against overthrow by Communist subversion. Sir Allen Watt, the Australian Commissioner in Singapore, has given [us] the impression of being a staunch potential ally in this regard, and it occurs to us as a possibly useful idea that you might establish contact with him at some future date. We understand that USIA is prepared to put in a larger effort in South Vietnam provided that opportunities for effective action are brought to the attention of USIA headquarters, Washington (Mr. Streibert). Admiral Stump is well informed concerning the critical situation in South Vietnam and has urged that a top US representative of established stature and influence be appointed to provide authoritative leadership and coordination for all US elements in the country.

7. [redacted]

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Colonel Edward Lansdale, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Assistant Air Attache, [REDACTED] and his staff of approximately twelve officers have been functioning as a part of General O'Daniel's MAAG organization. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Colonel Lansdale, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] has much useful background concerning conditions and personalities in Vietnam, and we would recommend that you be briefed by him [REDACTED]

8. Concerning the position and method of operating of Colonel Lansdale, it was your thought, with which we agreed, that upon your arrival in Saigon you might find it desirable to swing Lansdale over into a position directly under you in order to enable him more properly and appropriately to engage in activities of a political nature. We should like to suggest that you discuss this matter on the ground upon your arrival with the various American principals and parties concerned; and whatever seems wise to you after your survey of the situation, will be acceptable to us. The main point with regard to Lansdale, is that he is an exceptionally able, energetic and imaginative officer, who should be most useful to you in the attainment of your major objectives. (Colonel Lansdale's established status as Assistant Air Attache should make it easier for you to use him in an Embassy capacity if you so desire.) [REDACTED]

9. We further agree with you that as soon as possible after your arrival Colonel Lansdale should be encouraged to devote more of his time and attention to the development of programs calculated to combat the subversive activities of the Viet Minh and to work in this regard with the Vietnamese Army. We have the distinct impression that the French are doing very little, if anything, in this regard and that the Vietnamese do not have the necessary inspiration and know-how to undertake such programs without leadership. [REDACTED] For historical reasons which we explained to you, our organization has never been able to enter into this field of activity, but in [REDACTED]



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view of the change of our governmental policy to one of direct dealing with the Vietnamese Government, [REDACTED]

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Our latest reports indicate that perhaps the most critical area at the moment is that referred to as South Central Annam, i. e. the area immediately south of the Seventeenth Parallel. A program of establishing order and inaugurating military administration is probably necessary, in view of the fact that the Viet Minh are believed to be operating there without any appreciable governmental opposition or control. The situation is also very bad in the extreme south, i. e. the area known as Cochin-China -- although we hear that the French have some plans for attempting to cope with the problem there.

*Frank G. Wisner*  
FRANK G. WISNER  
Deputy Director (Plans)



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