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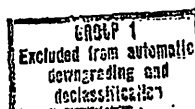
MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

VIA: Deputy Director (Plans)

SUBJECT: Leadership in Vietnam - Ngo Dinh Nhu

1. The associated questions have been posed whether we can hope for eventual victory over the Viet Cong with the Diem-Nhu regime in Vietnam and whether alternate leadership is available in the country. This memorandum will discuss Ngo Dinh Nhu in this connection, and will not cover the unrealistic assumption that Diem and Nhu can be separated. As preliminary, I believe that Nhu would not attempt to displace his brother but would remain in a subordinate position during Diem's incumbency. Even assuming no other critical event, however, the likelihood of Diem retiring in April 1966 is considerable and at that time if not before Nhu may take over the full leadership of Vietnam.

2. Nhu is a highly complex individual who is very little known or understood by the Vietnamese or foreigners. For many years he deliberately took a very withdrawn position as "political counsellor" to his brother, in order to emphasize his brother's full authority as President of Vietnam. During the past year Nhu has taken public responsibility for the strategic hamlet program and there are clear indications of a political build up of Nhu as a public figure in Vietnam. During the withdrawal period, however, he was the subject of a plethora of rumors and allegations which established his public image in Vietnam and abroad as that of an intriguing, sinister and ruthless individual, supplemented by his wife's harsh and sometimes hysterical utterances. On the basis of this image many have concluded that it is impossible to win the war in South Vietnam as long as he is in a position of leadership. I believe that an examination of the man and the facts behind the image would indicate a contrary conclusion. A balance sheet of Ngo Dinh Nhu might be drawn up as:

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A. Highly intelligent, sophisticated and experienced in the practical techniques of political power.

B. He has adopted and is translating into action the political philosophy of personalism. Despite much cynicism from outsiders about this philosophy, its key factors are certainly laudable and compatible with U. S. interests, i. e. the dignity of the human person, his full participation in a community and the need for collective effort to progress.

C. Courage, dedication and toughness.

D. The author and executor of the strategic hamlet revolutions designed to create a new political and social infrastructure for Vietnam, to include self reliance, community development, defense against the Viet Cong, individual participation in community decisions, etc. This included the establishment of an effective interministerial coordinating committee to bring all Vietnamese agencies together on this. It also included an intense effort of indoctrinating the entire bureaucracy and military, who are weak at best, with the objectives of the program.

E. Organizer of the Republican Youth Movement. While this organization may have "fascist" overtones and more than a modicum of the "Potemkin Village" which was the fatal weakness of other GVN sponsored political movements, it has represented a mechanism for activating and integrating the youth of the country into its development and defense. As usual in Vietnam, there is a difference between objectives and realities, and therefore this organization can only be evaluated as ambiguous at this time.

F. Fully anti-communist, stemming from the incompatibility of the Communist doctrine with his own. The similarity of some of Nhu's techniques of political action with those of the communists, e.g. the CanLao party, should not be understood as implying a collaboration between Nhu and communism.

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G. Non-corrupt. Despite the Saigon rumor factory we have no evidence of corruption by the Ngo family and the atmosphere of the GVN in this respect has been noted by many as contrasting sharply with the governments of Thailand, Cambodia and others. There is an indication that shady techniques have been used, with Nhu's approval to accumulate funds for use for political organizations, but not for personal gain.

H. The grudging respect of and some contact with intellectual and political circles outside the GVN, e.g. the labor movement, certain intellectual fronts, etc.

I. An intense Vietnamese nationalism and anti-colonialism, with insistence that the Vietnamese solve their problems and build their country to the greatest extent possible through their own efforts rather than relying on foreign assistance.

J. Supervision and molding of unconventional paramilitary and political action in support of the war effort, including the efforts among the Montagnards, in which he has demonstrated imagination, flexibility and judgment.

LIABILITIES

A. Vanity, a fascination with intrigue and an intellectual arrogance. This has on occasion led him to statements which, if not false, can only be tortuously rationalized and occasionally to an acceptance of patently false but tempting stories (e.g. some "contacts" with the Viet Cong).

B. Highly unfavorable public image stemming in good part from poor handling of the press.

C. An intense nationalism, frequently resulting in an anti-foreign attitude and a rejection of recommendations or assistance because of his belief that these will encourage reliance upon foreign guidance or assistance. It also appears in his rejection of the significance of foreign and U. S. opinion on Vietnam, if he considers it mistaken.

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D. Ruthless in achieving political goals and manipulating people and organizations toward these ends. This ruthlessness should, however, be properly evaluated in light of the fact that even for acts of treason such as the 1960 revolt and the 1962 bombing of the palace no individual has been executed although this may represent Diem rather than Nhu. In general, however, Vietnam under the GVN has seen little Asian brutality except in the Viet Cong war.

E. Frequent confusion between the goals and the reality of a program and in particular a failure to appreciate the ways in which lower level officials may warp theoretically laudable programs. Nhu frequently complains of the inadequacy of Vietnamese cadre and their inability to carry out such programs but he is also inclined to press forward with them despite these inadequacies.

F. A temptation to shenanigans in international affairs in matters in which his hand is not welcome, e.g. Cambodia.

3. Just as Mr. Nhu cannot be separated from Diem, so Mrs. Nhu cannot be separated from Mr. Nhu with any degree of practicality. Her liabilities are well known, and stem largely from her complete lack of tact in all of her activities. It is essential, however, to say that some of her activities have had a positive side. These would include many of the provisions of the family law (end of polygamy, protection of property rights of wives, etc); and the organization of the Womens Solidarity Movement to bring the hereto withdrawn Vietnamese woman to her full role in modern society and give her a sense of responsibility and participation in the community outside her family. She also contributes her full portion of courage to the ample reservoir possessed by the Ngo family.

4. Reviewing all of the above I believe that a case can be made that Ngo Dinh Nhu represents a strong, reasonably well oriented and efficient potential successor of Diem as a leader of a country fighting communist subversion, establishing its national solidarity and building a modern society. His major liability is the highly unfavorable public image possessed by Nhu and his wife, but I suggest that efforts to improve this

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rather than to assume its continuation would be well directed. This is not to say that there are no alternatives in Vietnam; it is merely to suggest that a careful review of the man and the facts rather than the image suggests that Nhu is a desirable rather than a catastrophic candidate in the search for dynamic leadership for Vietnam. Few others offer as favorable a list of some of the critical assets necessary to Vietnam's situation.

W. E. Colby
William E. Colby
Chief, Far East Division

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