

Memo

South Vietnam's Leaders

4 September 1963

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: ONE Memorandum "South Vietnam's Leaders"

1. I wish to express some reservations about the judgment that the counterinsurgency fight in South Vietnam cannot be won so long as the Ngo family retains leadership, as is set forth in the ONE memorandum to you of 3 September.

2. Prior to the Buddhist controversy, it was generally agreed that the combined South Vietnamese-US effort was beginning to show signs of progress in the anti-Communist struggle. Time was bringing steady improvement to the civilian and military sectors of the Vietnamese government, and the strategic hamlet program, in particular, seemed to be getting off the ground.

3. The impact of the Buddhist affair on the prosecution of the anti-Communist struggle may not prove to be lasting. The consensus of observers is that recent political developments have not deeply affected the bulk of the population residing in the countryside. The government demonstrated firmness, which the Vietnamese people traditionally respect, and is now engaged in a comprehensive effort to normalize the situation. It may even be that the emergence of Nhu to an open position of influence will enhance the government's efforts to galvanize the war effort.

4. International repercussions over the Buddhist controversy probably will be short-lived and of little real consequence. The Thai government is now acting behind the scenes to undercut Caylong's efforts to organize Southeast Asian censure of South Vietnam, and even Cambodia--for pragmatic reasons of trade--is not anxious to take further steps which would antagonize the Diem government.

5. In short, I do not believe one can rule out all possibility of winning the war under a Ngo administration. In viewing the matter, it should be remembered that it took the British nine years of intensive effort to beat down the Communist rebellion in Malaya, where the problems were less than those of Vietnam.

S. J. SMITH
Acting Deputy Director
(Intelligence)

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