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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
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## CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: France and Vietnam

1. President De Gaulle's comments on Vietnam late last month seem to be based on the judgment that the US efforts to maintain an independent, Western-oriented South Vietnam cannot succeed. He apparently believes that eventually a return must be made to the provisions of the 1954 Geneva Agreements which call for the unification of the country and the withdrawal of foreign military forces. The French, mindful of the opportunity to exercise once again some initiative in Indochina, may be presently engaged in clandestine or diplomatic activity designed to sponsor a rapprochement between the two halves of the country, although evidence on this point is conflicting. There is also the possibility that De Gaulle may call for an international conference on Vietnam in which he would expect to play a major role.

2. In his remarks, De Gaulle intimated that he favored a reunited Vietnam free from outside influences. He also asserted that France was prepared to lend a helping hand to such a country.

3. On the face of it, this statement is merely a reiteration of Paris' basic goals, and French officials have gone out of their way to make this point. Specifically, they have been unanimous in denying that it presaged French moves to undermine the US position in South Vietnam, or that France was supporting elements in South Vietnam which might be more favorable to Paris' point of view.

4. Despite its ostensible hands off position, Paris has never gotten over its hostility toward the Diem regime, and has disapproved of large-scale US military intervention in South Vietnam. It has, instead, pointed to the neutral regimes in Laos and

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Cambodia as the best guarantee of keeping Southeast Asia peaceful and non-Communist.

5. Paris, however, has held its peace as long as the military effort against the Viet Cong appeared to be making progress and the Diem regime remained firmly in control. In fact, there was some evidence that, prior to the outbreak of that government's trouble with the Buddhists, France was increasingly inclined to support the US in South Vietnam.

6. The recent evidence of the Diem regime's latent brittleness, coupled with reports that Hanoi is in trouble agriculturally, may have encouraged the French to think the time is propitious to take more active measures toward a North-South rapprochement. However, Hanoi has repeatedly stated that all US troops must be withdrawn from South Vietnam prior to meaningful negotiations.

8. Out of the apparent conflict between French denials that they are pushing for the neutralization for Vietnam and reports to the contrary, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- (1) France regards the eventual unification and neutralization of Vietnam as inevitable.
- (2) Any time the South Vietnamese war effort appears to be facing a setback, the French can

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be expected to do what they can to win broader support for their position.

(3) France does not have a candidate waiting in the wings to take power in Saigon as it did with Souvanna Phouma in Laos, although ex-Premier Tran Van Huu, now in exile in Paris, has apparently been receiving support from some French officials.

(4) Given the continuation of the Diem government in power and the limited nature of French resources, France is unlikely to call for the removal of the US presence at this time. However, with little or no warning France could request the reconvening of the 1954 Geneva conference.

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