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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Office of Current Intelligence  
23 March 1966

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in South Vietnam  
(As of 4:00 P.M. EST)

1. Political agitation continued today in I Corps at an intensified pace. Attacks on the "rotten regime" in Saigon and on specific government leaders including Premier Ky were repeated on both the Hue and Da Nang radio stations. A largely effective general strike, scheduled to last three days, was in effect in Da Nang and may spread to Hue as well. Crowds of students were milling about the city of Hue, calling for further protest actions.

2. For the first time since protests began 12 days ago over the ouster of General Thi, today's demonstrations contained overt attacks on the US for backing the Ky regime. Some banners were seen displaying anti-American slogans, and some of the propaganda broadcasts accused the US of delaying the development of parliamentary democracy in order to maintain tight control of South Vietnam. There was, however, some effort to distinguish between the American political and military roles in South Vietnam, with criticism leveled at the former and gratitude still being expressed for US military help against the Viet Cong.

3. Although there has been no firm information on the activities of Buddhist monk Tri Quang since his return to the Hue area, the themes being expressed in the current agitation in I Corps are largely in support of the four Buddhist demands with very little reference to the case of ousted commander General Thi. Several of the radio statements stressed arguments privately raised by Tri Quang, who had also warned US

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officials that a popular campaign could have anti-US overtones, but that this would not be directed at the US military.

4. At the same time, [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Tri Quang is still passing assurances [Redacted]

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[Redacted] that the Buddhists do not wish to create trouble in I Corps and do not desire the overthrow of Premier Ky. Other Buddhist leaders in Saigon reportedly are indicating that, although angered over Ky's intemperate weekend attack, they are willing to accept his retraction and do not desire new disturbances. The Buddhists reportedly were offering similar assurances last week, while continuing to press the government for some action on their four principal demands.

5. Whether or not the government is giving credence to these alleged assurances, government leaders are continuing intensive behind-the-scenes talks with key Buddhists in an effort to put a halt to Buddhist-inspired agitation. Although it is possible that a compromise is still being explored, these talks may be in the nature of probing by both sides for indications of disunity on the part of the other.

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7. Although there continue to be reports that anti-government activity will be stepped up in the Saigon area, US Embassy sources claim that there is still only limited support for the Buddhist position in the capital. The bulk of Saigon university students are seeking to avoid involvement, although high

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school age students are felt to be vulnerable to exploitation by agitators. There is also some danger that if a Buddhist campaign gains momentum, Catholics and other religious groups now attempting to remain neutral may react.

8. Although General Thi has stayed out of the limelight for the past few days, he apparently remains in the Hue area, residing in a government villa, and showing no sign of obeying a government order to return to Saigon. Thi may be awaiting some opportunity to step into the situation should it appear that Ky's position is in jeopardy. The government reportedly is now sending an officer from Saigon to I Corps to "persuade" Thi to return to the capital.

9. Ky today addressed the opening session of a conference of provincial administrators in Saigon, primarily on the subject of local administration and rural construction. He made a point of stating that the government recognizes "democracy building" as one of its main duties, and would carry out its plan as announced at the second Armed Forces Congress early this year. His remarks suggest no intention to budge from the government's present plans or timetable in order to accomodate Buddhist demands for a faster transition to civilian rule.

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