

~~TOP SECRET~~

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FROM WALT BOSTOW
TO THE PRESIDENT
CITE CAF67595

THURSDAY
1967 JUN 29 PM 4:06

~~TOP SECRET~~

FOR THE PRESIDENT FROM WALT BOSTOW

JUNE 29, 1967

HEREWITH BUNKER'S RESPONSE TO THE CABLE ABOUT WHICH YOU INQUIRED.

BUNKER PROPOSES:

1. TO HAVE WESTY FIND OUT FROM VIEN WHAT HAPPENED AT THE DIRECTORY MEETING AND THE SESSION OF DIVISION COMMANDERS ON JUNE 28.
2. THEN EXECUTE THE INSTRUCTION ON THE BASIS OF SEPARATE TALKS WITH THIEN AND KY.

~~TOP SECRET~~ SAIGON 29167

1. I FULLY UNDERSTAND THE CONCERN EXPRESSED IN REFERENCE TELEGRAM REGARDING THE RELATED MATTERS OF THE THIEU-KY RIVALRY, MILITARY UNITY AND THE ELECTORAL PROCESSES, AND THEIR POTENTIAL EFFECT ON AMERICAN OPINION. I HAVE DISCUSSED THESE PROBLEMS WITH LOCKE AND WESTMORELAND AND WE ARE FULLY AGREED ON THE FOLLOWING VIEWS.

2. DEPT WILL HAVE SEEN SAIGON 29152 REPORTING ON THE SERIES OF HIGH LEVEL GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM MILITARY MEETINGS OF THE PAST TWO DAYS HAVE BEEN DISCUSSING VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THIS PROBLEM AND THE ADDITIONAL COMPLICATING FACTOR OF BIG MINH'S PUBLIC ENTRY ON THE STAGE. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THERE ARE FURTHER MEETINGS GOING ON TODAY. I THINK THE REPORTS OF THE MEETING OF THE DIVISION COMMANDERS ON JULY 28 AND OF THE DIRECTORATE MEETING THAT

EVENING ARE ENCOURAGING IN THAT THEY INDICATE GROWING AWARENESS OF THE NEED TO WORK OUT A SOLUTION AND SOME MOVEMENT IN THAT DIRECTION. THIS IS A DELICATE AND COMPLICATED PROCESS INVOLVING TYPICALLY ASIAN QUESTIONS OF "FACE" AND PRESTIGE. OUR ROLE IN IT CAN BE CRITICALLY IMPORTANT IN HELPING TO LEAD THE WAY TO A SOLUTION OR CONVERSELY IN INJECTING FACTORS WHICH MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT TO FIND A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE ANSWER. IT IS FOR THIS REASON THAT WE HAVE BEEN TRYING TO LEAD THEM ALONG TO WORK OUT THEIR OWN SOLUTIONS. IF WE CAN DO THIS, IT WILL BE GOOD FOR THEM, AND GOOD FOR US. I HAVE AN INSTINCTIVE FEELING THAT THERE IS ALREADY SOME MEASURABLE PROGRESS TOWARDS REMOVING THE MILITARY FROM DIRECT INVOLVEMENT IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS. OUR JUNE 19 LUNCHEON SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN HELPFUL AND ITS EFFECT AS WELL AS GENERAL CAO VAN VIAN'S EFFORTS ON THE SUBJECT ARE BEING FELT. OUR OBJECTIVE AT THE MOMENT SHOULD BE TO KEEP THIS PROCESS GOING AND TO AVOID MOVES WHICH MIGHT BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE. WE SHOULD, OF COURSE, BE PREPARED TO MOVE IN IF A SERIOUS IMPASSE SEEMS TO BE DEVELOPING.

3. WITH THE FOREGOING AS BACKGROUND, WE BELIEVE THAT OUR FIRST EFFORT SHOULD BE TO GET A CLEAR AND AUTHORITATIVE VIEW OF WHERE THINGS STAND TODAY. TO THIS END WESTMORELAND WILL SEE VIEN EITHER THIS EVENING OR TOMORROW MORNING. HE IS THE RESPONSIBLE MILITARY AUTHORITY, IS PROBABLY THE MOST DISINTERESTED AND APOITICAL OF THE KEY GENERALS, AND WE BELIEVE HE IS GENUINELY SEEKING THE SORT OF SOLUTION WE WANT.

4. FOLLOWING THIS SOUNDING WE WILL CONSIDER WHAT IS THE BEST NEXT MOVE. IT IS OUR JUDGEMENT THAT A MEETING OF ALL THREE OF US WITH THIEU AND KY TOGETHER MIGHT ONLY FREEZE THE SITUATION UNDESIRABLY AND PUT ONE OR THE OTHER IN A POSITION WHERE HIS FACE OR PRESTIGE BECOME IRREVOCABLY INVOLVED. (THIS APPEARS TO BE THE CHIEF FACTOR BEHIND THIEU'S PRESENT STUBBORN INSISTENCE ON RUNNING FOR THE PRESIDENCY DESPITE HIS OWN FEELING THAT HE WILL LOSE.) IT WOULD ALSO INEVITABLY ATTRACT PUBLIC ATTENTION AND THAT AT A MOMENT WHEN THE CITY IS RIFE WITH RUMORS AND SPECULATION AS THE JUNE 30 DEADLINE FOR FILING DRAWS NEAR AND AS THE STORIES OF BIG MINH'S MOVE CIRCULATE IN A VARIETY OF FORMS.

5. BECAUSE OF SIMILAR CONSIDERATIONS, WE BELIEVE WE SHOULD GIVE FURTHER CONSIDERATION ALSO TO THE DESIRABILITY OF ALL THREE OF US SEEING THIEU AND KY SEPARATELY OR WHETHER I SHOULD SEE THEM ALONE. DEPENDING ON VIEN'S COMMENTS AND REACTIONS, WE SHOULD THEN CONSIDER WHEN AND HOW TO SEE THIEU AND KY, SEPARATELY, TO DISCUSS THE SITUATION AND TO CONVEY THE ESSENCE OF THE PRESIDENT'S CONCERN EXPRESSED IN REFERENCE TELEGRAM. I WOULD HOPE THAT THE PROCESSES ALREADY AT WORK MAY BY THEN SUGGEST THE WAY IN WHICH OUR COMMON OBJECTIVES ON THIS KEY QUESTION CAN BEST BE ACHIEVED.

BUNKER