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Wednesday, June 21, 1967

FOR THE PRESIDENT FROM BUNKER (Saigon, 28493) CBS Subpoena

Herewith my eighth weekly telegram: Case # NLJ/CBS 10

A. General

Document # 57

The second of the reports on top priority matters mentioned in my weekly telegram of May 31, i. e. Action Program for Stepping Up Revolutionary Development, has been submitted to me by Ambassador Komor. I believe it represents the most complete and comprehensive study including definite and specific recommendations for action that we have had on Revolutionary Development. Ambassador Komor's proposals have been approved by General Westmoreland and myself.

Based on a detailed assessment of where we stand today on pacification, the report develops an action program to give pacification a new thrust during the last half of 1967 and to plan for more rapid advances in 1968. We have given the program the name of Project Takeoff as an indication that we expect to make more rapid progress from here on out (I hope Walt Rostow will recognize the implied compliment). As soon as possible we want to get the Government of Vietnam to adopt the principles of Project Takeoff and to subscribe to a set of action programs. One thing we want to guard against especially is that the pacification program should not slacken during the election period. Just the opposite should occur. Elections and movement toward responsible representative government is a fundamental part of pacification. Elections should support and foster other pacification efforts and vice versa.

In order to get moving rapidly we have limited ourselves to the selection of the most important and most pressing programs in order not to dilute our efforts or overtax the somewhat limited capacities of the Government of Vietnam. They are the following eight action programs:

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By ics, NARS, Date 11-28-83

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- a. Improve 1968 pacification planning.
- b. Accelerate the Chieu Hoi program.
- c. Mount an intensified attack on the Viet Cong infrastructure.
- d. Expand and improve support by the Vietnamese Armed Forces. We hope to add as soon as possible 50,000 Regular Force/Popular Force troops and another 50,000 in 1968, the bulk of which will be assigned to pacification.
- e. Expand and supplement the Revolutionary Development team effort and employ also substitute techniques to achieve a more rapid expansion of the pacification program. An example is the combined civil-military teams used in First Corps by General Vinh Loc to carry on Revolutionary Development work in hamlets which Revolutionary Development teams because of lack of trained personnel are unable to cover.
- f. Increased capability to handle refugees.
- g. Improve and expand the National Police and the Police Field Forces. We hope to bring the National Police up to the year end goal of 74,000 and to expand the police field forces to 17,000.
- h. We plan to increase the advisory structure and increase the number of AR VN battalions in direct support of Revolutionary Development programs from 53 to 60 or more. We also plan to put greater stress on night patrolling, active defense instead of digging in, and rapid employment of mobile reaction forces.

As is so often the case, the Government of Vietnam performance remains the crucial factor. Nevertheless I believe by this programming technique, with direct program management on the U.S. side and the systematic evaluation of progress and problems, we cannot help but achieve some increase of effectiveness of the pacification

effort. If certain other things happen concurrently, and I believe there is a good chance this will, such as the successful creation of a functioning, reasonably stable, popularly based government, increased momentum in the anti-main force campaign, a substantial increase in numbers and quality of the pacification security forces, an increase in the Chieu Hoi rate, success in our new plans for attacking Viet Cong infrastructure together with better pacification planning and management control, I believe we should see demonstrable and visible pacification progress during 1967-68.

The relative lull in military operations which I mentioned in my last message has continued. I believe this has been due to the splendidly executed offensive operations undertaken by General Westmoreland beginning in late April which I referred to in my June 7, message. The enemy has been badly hurt, has been kept off balance, and his time schedule has been disrupted. General Westmoreland's strategy of anticipating enemy threats has paid off handsomely.

The enemy's offensive thrust has been blunted but not eliminated. Enemy pressures (from two and possibly three divisions) continues along the Demilitarized Zone. Infiltration through Laos continues steadily and the use of Laotian and Cambodian sanctuaries gives the enemy great and, to my mind, unwarranted advantages. It seems to me apparent therefore that the crux of our military problem is how to choke off North Vietnam infiltration. If ways can be found to do this effectively, it should have at least following advantages:

a. It would drastically reduce the dimensions of our problem in South Vietnam. Militarily we would be dealing only with the Viet Cong whose problems of recruitment and supplies would be enormously multiplied lacking the assistance and reinforcements of North Vietnam. I believe the result would be that the Viet Cong would eventually wither on the vine.

b. After the infiltration is choked off, it should be possible to suspend bombings at least for a period and thereby determine whether there is substance to the statement in many quarters that Hanoi would then come to negotiations; we should at least call their bluff.

c. Tensions now existing between the U.S. and Vietnam on the one side and Cambodia on the other should be, over a period of time, relieved and our relations with Cambodia improved, even though initially Sihanouk might continue to allow the North Vietnamese Army/Viet Cong to use Cambodia as a haven and a source of certain supplies.

The means to be employed to achieve this objective, of course, present many difficult and delicate problems, both military and political. I have confidence, however, that with imagination and ingenuity these can be met. What is involved, of course, are operations within Laos but I do not believe this fact should present insuperable obstacles. The North Vietnamese government is a signatory to the 1962 Geneva Accords but its forces have been in Laos both before and since the signing of the agreements. It is now using Laos as the main route for infiltration into South Vietnam. Is it not logical and reasonable, therefore, that South Vietnamese troops should oppose and combat North Vietnamese offensive action by whatever method can be devised in order to prevent the invasion of their country?

Guarantees, of course, would have to be given to the Lao government by the South Vietnamese, and I believe should be underwritten by us, that Vietnamese troops were on Lao territory for defensive purposes only and would be withdrawn immediately peace is secured. The operation, especially in its preparatory stages, should be carried out with as much security and secrecy as possible. I have made some recommendations as to methods we might use to achieve these objectives in a message to Secretary Rusk. This is a matter which I believe we should pursue with the utmost concentration.

Political

The split between Thieu and Ky widened somewhat this week. At the same time the general tempo of political activity accelerated markedly with the promulgation of the Electoral Laws and the approach of the June 30 filing deadline for both Presidential and Upper House candidates. It also became clear that the government and the military are increasingly preoccupied with the coming election and the maneuvers of the leading candidates. In this fast-moving and fluid political situation, we are aiming at three major objectives: (1) preservation of the unity and effectiveness of the armed forces despite the division between Thieu and Ky; (2) a clean election which will result in a genuine popular mandate for the nation's new leaders; (3) maintaining and if possible increasing the momentum of the war and pacification effort despite the natural preoccupation of the nation with the vital business of electing a new government.

Thieu made what amounts to a formal declaration of his candidacy on June 14. In a press conference in Hue and also in talking with reporters on his return to Saigon, he indicated

unequivocally that he will run, and he stressed his determination to assure a fair and absolutely honest election. This is also the line he took with me when I saw him shortly after his return from Hue. In our conversation, he alluded directly to some of Ky's less than completely honest campaign tactics. He said that he is determined to do all he can to hold honest elections, that as things now stand he cannot guarantee the honest of the elections even though as Chief of State, he will be held responsible, and that if he cannot bring about a change in this situation he would rather resign than be blamed for something he is unable to control.

In addition to announcing his candidacy, Thieu made the split with Ky even more evident by choosing not to attend the June 19 ceremonies marking Armed Forces Day and the second anniversary of the assumption of power by the present Thieu-Ky government. At the ceremony, Ky gave a "state of the union" speech in which he recounted the achievements of the present regime and the armed forces. In the question and answer period that followed, a newsman asked why Thieu was not present, and Ky replied that Thieu had telephoned the night before saying he was not well and asking Ky to preside. Two hours after the ceremony, Thieu was at my home for lunch and that evening he attended the Armed Forces Day Reception. In his own Armed Forces Day message, which was carried by Vietnam press and Saigon radio on June 18, Thieu stressed again the necessity to elect the new government in a "totally democratic, free, fair and just manner," and he called on all military personnel to adopt an attitude of "impartiality, justice and honesty."

I saw Ky and Thieu separately on June 14, and I brought them and General Vien, Minister of Defense, together at my home for lunch on June 19 in an effort to find a way to prevent their differences from dividing the armed forces. Ky said on the 14th that he was trying to arrange a meeting with Thieu and that he would continue to do so. Thieu assured me later that day that military unity would be preserved regardless of the number of military candidates. Neither seemed to be making good on these assurances, however, so I decided to try to bring them together. At the June 19 luncheon at my home Ky agreed to my proposal for a joint Thieu-Ky statement of non-involvement of the armed forces in politics. Thieu, however, was rather non-committal and thought that the problem could be handled administratively by General Vien. If something is not forthcoming within a few days, I shall prod them again in an effort to get some action.

I judge from all this that there is little hope of healing the split between Thieu and Ky, though we will of course use every means available to do so. More to the point now is an effort to insure that their rivalry does not seriously divide the armed forces and interfere with the war effort. This is not likely to be easy, and it may well require further constant pressure from us to keep things on the rails. We will be watching for the effects of the Thieu-Ky split on the war effort and will demand prompt action from the principals to resolve any such problems.

With regard to our second objective -- a clean election -- I had a frank talk with Ky on the 14th about reports of unfair tactics in the campaign, particularly censorship of the press and some of General Loan's activities. Since that interview we have noticed some improvement in the situation, at least so far as censorship is concerned. Thieu's announcement statement and his remarks to the press were front-paged by almost all of the press and there was no censorship of any of those articles. In our conversation, Ky defended Loan as a loyal friend, but he did not deny that Loan has used some unfortunate pressure tactics to line up support for Ky. He said that he has cautioned Loan in the past about such things and will do so again. I hope that his warning is more effective this time than it has proved to be in the past and I will be keeping a close watch on this situation.

I suspect that General Thieu is thinking about using the matter of clean elections as a principal issue in the campaign. His public and private remarks plus some [redacted] suggest that he may resign from office at some point on the grounds that Ky is using the government and the armed forces to rig the elections. He might then continue in the race himself or throw his weight behind one of the civilian candidates. Several of the civilian candidates have reportedly been considering withdrawing eventually if it becomes evident that the elections have been rigged. 1.3(a)

In our luncheon discussions on the 19th, General Westmoreland and I made clear to Thieu and Ky the great importance we attach to continued progress on both the military front and in Revolutionary Development during the election period. They agreed that efforts on these fronts should not be diminished by diversion of attention to the elections. On the specific point of full mobilization, Ky said that this should be done as soon as possible by the new government, meaning after the elections. General Westmoreland

suggested that as a preliminary to mobilization the terms of those in service should be extended and the draft age lowered. General Vien proposed that he issue orders for extension of service now without making any public announcement before the elections, and both Ky and Thieu agreed that this should be done. Given the political sensitivity of the matter, I think that it may be difficult to get the draft age reduced before the elections, though we will continue to press for that action. We will also continue at all levels to try to insure that preoccupation with the campaign and the elections does not impede the war effort.

Ky's campaign activity intensified last week. He made a number of "inspection trips" in the course of which he made speeches, gave government assistance to flood and storm victims, resided at a military awards ceremony, and attended inauguration ceremonies for newly-elected Hamlet Chiefs. He presided over the public introduction in Saigon of a new youth organization, the Vietnamese Unified Youth Force, which is rather clearly designed to rally youth in support of his campaign. He met with three former generals who have just formed a new veterans organization, the Freedom Fighters Association, and it seems clear that he means to use that organization to try to win the backing of veterans (the official veterans organization is headed by General Pham Xuan Chieu, a Thieu supporter who would not be likely to allow Ky to use the organization for his campaign). Ky went on leave without pay from the Air Force, a step which the Electoral Law requires him to take in order to run for the Presidency, and as noted above, he presided over the celebration of Armed Forces Day and the second anniversary of the Thieu-Ky government.

Ky has been active behind the scenes as he has in public.

[redacted] he convened a meeting on June 10 of 12 persons [redacted] he intends to use as the Central Committee for his Presidential campaign. These include Generals Linh Quang Vien, Nguyen Duc Thang, Nguyen Bao Tri, and Government Ministers Nguyen Xuan Phong (Social Welfare), Tran Van Lu-y (Health), and Truong Van Thuan (Communications and Transport). Ambassador to the United States Bui Diem and the Saigon Port Director Pho Quoc Chu also took part. Minister Phong is to act as coordinator for the Committee. According to this report, Ky urged that government cadres be used in the campaign with no feelings of compunction. He reportedly said that other candidates will exploit government officials, and he named two high officials who, he said, are working almost full time for Tran Van Huong's candidacy.

Discussion within the group on the issue of an "honorable" versus a "strong pressures" approach to the campaign was inconclusive, but most seemed to favor the "honorable" approach. We know from other reports that this group is only one of several overt and covert organizations Ky is forming, though this is probably the most important one.

The Directorate promulgated both the Presidential and the Upper House Electoral Laws on June 15. Both the Presidential and Upper House elections will be held on September 3. The controversial requirement that Presidential candidates be "introduced" by 30 elected officials was dropped from the Law. These provisions were in accord with Assembly actions on Directorate proposals, but the Directorate also took an unexpected action in regard to the voting procedures for the Upper House. The Directorate had proposed that all voters be allowed to vote for six lists of Senate candidates whereas the Assembly had originally opted for only one. In considering the Directorate's proposal the Assembly decided on a compromise, namely that each voter should vote for two lists. The Directorate, however, promulgated the law with a provision that each voter cast ballots for six lists.

The Directorate action, while perhaps technically defensible in terms of the Constitution, upset many Assembly Deputies. Ky supporters in particular took the floor to attack the Directorate's action, probably in large part because it was known that Ky had favored the two list proposal when the matter came before the Directorate. There was even a motion before the Assembly that all Deputies resign in protest against the Directorate's high-handed action. In the end, however, the Assembly merely issued a mildly worded communique which said only that the Directorate's "unilateral action" had disregarded the will of the people's representatives.

The June 30 filing deadline for Presidential and Upper House candidates has resulted in a spurt of behind-the-scenes activity as candidates scramble to put together the required ten-man lists for the Senate. To date, two Presidential candidates have filed: Phan Khac Suu with Phan Quang Dan, and Ha Thuc Ky with Nguyen Van Dinh. (Dinh is relatively unknown and will add very little to Ha Thuc Ky's slate.) Only one Senate list has been filed, that of Saigon Mayor (and brother-in-law to General Loan) Van Van Cua. The short filing period has been criticized by several newspapers. Perhaps in part because of this criticism, the Assembly has publicly suggested that candidates be allowed to continue filing supporting documents until July 8.

In the First Corps the situation remains essentially unchanged from last week. Enemy-initiated ground activity dropped, but Route One was frequently mined with the result that traffic is down and kerosene is again rationed in Hue. The Viet Cong made their presence felt again in the Hue area by burning 46 houses in a refugee hamlet two miles from the city after residents failed to heed their orders to move out.

General Westmoreland reported to the Mission Council this week on the very encouraging results of his vigorous efforts to reduce the size of the American military presence in urban areas, particularly Saigon. The number of American military personnel in the Saigon/Cholon area will be cut to 6,325 by this December. For the entire metropolitan area including Tan Son Nhut, we will be down to 25,434 from the present level of 38,564. Measures are also being taken to reduce the number of transient military personnel in the Saigon area. All of this adds up to a most effective effort to decrease the adverse political and economic impact of the large American presence during our military build-up period, and I am most pleased to be able to report this excellent progress.

Economic

The Saigon Retail Price Index again showed a slight decline this week, down from 271 to 269. This is three percent above the level of one month ago and 19 percent above the price level at the beginning of the year. Imported commodities also dropped slightly, from 220 to 219. The most important element in the overall price decrease was the continuing fall of rice prices. The price of rice is now only slightly above the legal retail level for the first time in many months, and the wholesale prices of some qualities are actually below the official level. Another factor contributing to the price decline was the return to normal of kerosene prices when hostilities ceased in the Middle East.

The barge situation at the Saigon port continues to make significant improvement. As of June 10, 116 barges were under load and only 36 of those have been under load in excess of 30 days. These figures compare with 966 barges under load and 658 of that number under load in excess of 30 days as of March 20, 1967.

Chieu Hoi

The number of returnees was up slightly this week, to 485. This compares with 354 for the same week last year. The

total to date for 1967 is 16,660; last year at this time the total stood at 8,879. We have reports that returnees are frequently making important contributions to tactical operations. In Binh Dinh, for example, returnees recently led our forces to a large arms cache.

Vietnamese Killed

During the week ending June 17, the enemy killed 178 Vietnamese civilians, wounded 263 and kidnapped 74. The dead included 6 National Police officers, 22 Revolutionary Development workers, 2 Village Chiefs and 2 Hamlet Chiefs. These figures may be compared with an average of 85 Vietnamese civilians killed each week during the past 8 weeks.

MEMORANDUM

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4
NIJ 91-14

Wednesday, June 21, 1967
6:15 p.m.

MR. PRESIDENT: By W, NARA, Date 5-27-92

1. The case for seeing Kosygin:

-- At home it will cover your flank to the left and among the columnists. If you don't do it, they will blame every difficulty that follows on the lack of a meeting. The Republicans will run on: I will go to Moscow.

-- There is a 20% chance that it will have a net favorable effect in U.S.-Soviet policy;

-- Given the present state of affairs, I think the chance is well under 10% that it could make things worse between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. (The trouble with Vienna was not the meeting itself, but that Khrushchev had decided to see if he could break President Kennedy on Berlin. I do not see the Soviets in an ultimatum mood on either Viet Nam or the Middle East at the moment. There is always, of course, the chance. But if the chance exists it is because the Soviet Government, which is a collective organization, has so decided. And we might as well get it straight and soon, as obscurely and later.)

2. On a cold, hard, objective basis I am confident that your net impact on Kosygin (and through him on his colleagues) will be positive. I have had the privilege of seeing you deal with a wide range of governmental leaders. Your batting average justifies this confidence. Kosygin should feel both the steel and compassion; the determination and flexibility; and, above all, your willingness to treat the Soviet Union as one of the two older responsible children in the human family if they will so behave.

For these reasons, on balance, I am for the meeting, if it can be arranged in ways which leave you feeling comfortable and not cornered. That is why I support strongly Maguire Air Force Base, although it's going to be a little tough for them to swallow.

3. What might come out of the meeting? Aside from your impact on Kosygin, nothing hard that they have not already decided. But it could accelerate the pace.

4. With respect to the Middle East, they may have decided to move in time from a straight confrontation on the question of Israeli withdrawal to playing a role in a settlement. If so, that would emerge in the days ahead

via Gromyko. You may be able to smoke him out a little in advance.

5. With respect to ABM-ICBM, Kosygin is in a position where he must give you a simple Yes-No answer on whether his government is willing to engage in serious talks. Again, that has probably been decided. It could be communicated diplomatically. You might, through this meeting, get authoritative word earlier than otherwise.

6. On the substantive side, the serious case for talking with Kosygin is Viet Nam. Frankly, I am a little impressed by the fact that the North Vietnamese have initiated contacts with us at several points. I am impressed by the fact that Kosygin dropped "permanent" from his bombing formula. It may be that our polls, which show popular support for a harder policy, have led them to believe that they will not be saved by the election of 1968; they may believe that we are about to make important decisions to increase our forces and perhaps apply more pressure against the North; that the bombing we have been doing is too unpleasant to be accepted over a period of years ahead; that there is danger, if we proceed on our present track, of either a clear-cut Hanoi defeat or a U.S. /Soviet confrontation which they do not want; and that Hanoi is coming to believe that time is no longer its friend.

7. If there is anything at all in this line of thought then, of course, a meeting with Kosygin could be most important. And certainly the most important thing on which you must make up your mind is what you say to Kosygin -- after hearing him out -- on Viet Nam.

8. My own thoughts are not final, but here they are. You might say that he knows our commitment and our views; and that the formula of the Foreign Minister in Hanoi is not satisfactory to us. We cannot accept a stoppage of bombing simply for the possibility of talk. What are his views? If it emerges that he does not repeat the permanent formula and goes on to say he is sure talks could take place if we stop bombing unconditionally, you could then explain that so long as the DMZ is being violated you cannot make a commitment to stop bombing. You might ask him if they would respect the DMZ if we stopped bombing the North. He is most unlikely to be able to give you a definite answer on this; but he might agree to find out.

You could then indicate that there is a certain urgency in this matter. Your forces are under great pressure. They are taking heavy casualties every week. Secretary McNamara is going out to review the situation and to make recommendations. You might then add this: every mature American remembers that we lost more casualties during the Panmunjom negotiating period than we did during the Korean War. The critical question that must

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be answered by Hanoi is whether they are or are not willing to make peace on the basis of the 1954 and 1962 agreements and leave the South Vietnamese to settle their own political affairs on the basis of politics and not violence. We are looking for peace in Southeast Asia at the earliest possible time; but not on the basis of turning South Viet Nam over to North Viet Nam/

Amb. Thompson dictated following over the telephone, June 21, 1967

1. I believe the Soviets have a false idea of our policies and objectives. They consider our action in Viet Nam and their assumption that we were using the Israeli to bring down the Syrian government as being in the same category. The difference is, of course, that the Syrians chose their present regime without outside interference and we did not in fact attempt to use the Israeli to bring it down. Also, I think, and Dobrynin has somewhat indicated this, that the Soviets have a false idea of the President and his policies. Finally, I think the declaration of the Central Committee indicates that the Soviets are committing themselves to giving the Arabs whatever help they may need to bring about either by threat or actual conflict an Israeli withdrawal. While I am no judge of our internal affairs, I should think our people and the world would have expected the President to have taken every step possible to have prevented another crisis.

2. I do not think, in view of the high level public declaration of the Central Committee, that a meeting will result in any specific agreement on any specific question. If, however, the President could put the question to Kosygin whether he thought that if our bombing in Viet Nam were cut back to the actual invasion routes in southern Viet Nam, there might be some response from the other side or whether this would enable the Soviets to be more helpful, I believe that this, plus the effect of the President's personality on Kosygin, would enable, when he goes back, to influence his colleagues in a better direction.