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FROM: WALT ROSTOW  
TO : THE PRESIDENT  
CITE: CAP67680

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JULY 6, 1967

MR. PRESIDENT:

FOLLOWING IS THE DAILY REPORT ON THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN VIET-NAM (NO. 7) ---

BUNKER REPORTS IN SAIGON 418 THAT DISCUSSIONS AMONG THE GENERALS ARE CONTINUING, PRESUMABLY ON THE UNDERSTANDINGS BEHIND THE THIEU-KY SLATE. ACCORDING TO GENERAL THANG, MINISTER FOR REVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT, KY IS CONCERNED ABOUT THE VAGUENESS OF HIS AGREEMENT WITH THIEU. KY IS MEETING WITH CORPS COMMANDERS "IN AN EFFORT TO NAIL DOWN WHAT HE REGARDS AS THEIR DEBTS TO HIM".

THE EMBASSY ALSO REPORTS THAT BIG MINH'S RUNNING MATE LIENG HAS REPORTEDLY SENT LETTERS TO THIEU, KY AND ASSEMBLY CHAIRMAN SUU REQUESTING THAT MINH BE ALLOWED TO RETURN TO VIET-NAM BY JULY 15. MINH TOLD REPORTERS HE WOULD APPEAR IN SAIGON SOON AS A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. HE IMPLIED HE WOULD GO CLANDESTINELY IF NECESSARY. GENERAL VIEN, CHIEF OF THE JOINT GENERAL STAFF, AND THE FOUR CORPS COMMANDERS HAVE FILED A COMPLAINT AGAINST MINH'S CANDIDACY. THE EMBASSY DOES NOT YET HAVE THE TEXT, BUT UNDERSTANDS THE COMPLAINT IS BASED ON GROUNDS OF NATIONAL SECURITY.

THE EMBASSY ALSO REPORTS THAT COMPLAINTS HAVE BEEN FILED AGAINST THIEU-KY, INCLUDING ONE FILED BY "PEACE" CANDIDATE AU TRUONG THANH. THEY CLAIM THAT THIEU AND KY ARE DISQUALIFIED BECAUSE THEY DID NOT TAKE LEAVE OF ABSENCE FROM THEIR JOBS AS DIRECTORATE CHAIRMAN AND PRIME MINISTER UPON FILING THEIR CANDIDACIES. COMPLAINTS AGAINST TWO MINOR CANDIDATES HAVE BEEN FILED. THEY QUESTION ONE CANDIDATE'S RESIDENCY QUALIFICATION AND ANOTHER'S CITIZENSHIP QUALIFICATION.

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COMMENT

CURRENT EMBASSY COMMENTS IN GENERAL CONFIRM THE ASSESSMENT PROVIDED IN YESTERDAY'S SITUATION REPORT. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT ACCEPTANCE OF ANY THIEU-KY AGREEMENT WITHIN THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT AS WELL AS THE REAL NATURE OF THAT AGREEMENT, IS STILL VERY MUCH UP IN THE AIR. THE EMBASSY NOTES THAT FEW OF THE CONCERNED GENERALS HAVE HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO EVALUATE THE SITUATION FULLY IN TERMS OF THEIR OWN INTERESTS AND POSITIONS. PRESUMABLY KY'S TALKS WITH THE CORPS COMMANDERS CONCERN THEIR FUTURE ROLE WITH THE IMPLICATION THAT HE RATHER THAN THIEU WOULD BE PRIMARILY CONCERNED WITH SUCH MILITARY QUESTIONS.

THE EMBASSY ALSO SAYS THERE IS SOME EVIDENCE SUPPORTING KY'S JUDGMENT OF A FEW DAYS AGO THAT SOME OF HIS SUPPORTERS WOULD HAVE DOUBTS ABOUT SUPPORTING THE NEW THIEU-KY TICKET. FOR EXAMPLE, SOME CATHOLIC LEADERS WHO REPORTEDLY FAVORED KY ARE NOW DOUBTFUL ABOUT SUPPORTING A THIEU-KY TICKET. THE EMBASSY NOTES THAT SOME CIVILIAN SUPPORT MAY BE LOST BECAUSE THE THIEU-KY TICKET IS PURELY MILITARY. THIS WILL DEPEND TO SOME DEGREE ON THIEU'S AND KY'S ACTIONS TO ATTRACT CIVILIAN BACKING.

THE EMBASSY STILL BELIEVES THAT US INVOLVEMENT IN THE BIG MINH ISSUE WOULD NOT HELP MATTERS AND COULD PROVE EMBARRASSING.

THE EMBASSY COMMENTS THAT THE COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE THIEU-KY SLATE ARE BEING TAKEN AS PUBLICITY STUNTS IN SAIGON POLITICAL CIRCLES. THE CLEAR INTENT OF THE ASSEMBLY WAS NOT TO REQUIRE CABINET OR DIRECTORATE MEMBERS TO RESIGN OR TAKE LEAVE IN ORDER TO BECOME PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES. THE PERTINENT ELECTION LAW PROVISION STATES THAT CIVIL SERVANTS AND MILITARY PERSONNEL MUST REQUEST LEAVE WITHOUT PAY WHEN THEY FILE THEIR CANDIDATES.

ACTION REQUIRED

WE ARE PREPARING A NEW MESSAGE TO BUNKER REGARDING THE DESIRABILITY OF HIS DISCUSSING FRANKLY WITH KY AND THIEU THE FULL IMPLICATIONS OF BARRING MINH FROM CANDIDACY AND FROM A RETURN TO CAMPAIGN.

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DTG: 062038Z JULY 1967