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Ambassador Bunker

July 2, 1967

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

NIJ 92-224

Talk With Dr. Dan, July 1

By jl, NARA Date 8/13/92

I talked with Dr. Phan Quang Dan, Suu's Vice-Presidential running mate, the afternoon of July 1. Primarily, I checked on the firmness of the Suu-Dan tickets' intention to continue their election campaign in the face of the military coalition; apparently Suu-Dan intend to campaign even harder. Secondarily, I introduced the idea of General Thang heading a GVN body to assist the Central Election Councils and Campaign Committees in conducting honest elections; Dr. Dan is highly in favor of this, but is uncertain of how best to bring this about.

Here are highlights of our talk:

Suu-Dan Intentions: Dr. Dan admitted that the Thieu Ky coalition caught him by surprise, and really astonished Suu. Since the Thieu-Ky coalition was announced, Suu and Dan have come to some preliminary conclusions that the military might have actually weakened their political position by the move. Thieu is not a person whom the voters will feel they can trust. Thieu will be counting upon Ky to furnish the organization and "drive" in the election campaign, but there is a very good chance that Ky--as he thinks over what happened to him--will start dragging his heels subtly, so that Thieu won't get elected. Many Ky supporters will slacken off likewise, in disgust. Dr. Dan said that it wouldn't surprise him at all if Ky withdrew his candidacy at a late stage in the campaign. Rivalry will continue to smolder in the military, under the surface, so unity really hasn't been achieved. The Suu-Dan ticket has a lot of willing volunteer workers who are as enthusiastic as ever, but is still plagued by having too little financial support.

Thang: Dr. Dan continues to have an unusually high regard for the integrity of General Nguyen due Thang. When I asked Dr. Dan if he felt the elections would be conducted honestly, he admitted that the Election Law provisions might prove to be inadequate, and that a principled GVN election coordinator--such as General Thang demonstrated

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In the CA Elections last September--might be the answer. Dr. Dan felt that Special Commissioner Tuong, while a good bureaucrat, had neither the authority nor the courage to make Province Chiefs comply with the law. He noted that both Thieu and Ky had given separate, secret, and conflicting instructions to the Province Chiefs, before their coalition move. As a result, the Province Chiefs were stymied, unsure of which candidate they should really support in their rigging. Now, the Thieu-Ky coalition has provided an answer to the Province Chiefs' dilemma, and they can cheat for the military ticket.

Dr. Dan feels that Ky might be inclined just now to appoint General Thang to oversee the conduct of the election, and make it truly honest. He mused that this would be about the only way to keep most Province Chiefs straight. The difficulty is that it would be ticklish right now to bring this subject up in the Assembly, since the Assembly would be hesitant to propose additional electoral procedures to the GVN. Also, it might be difficult to get someone such as Huong, if a gathering of leading candidates were called to discuss the adoption of such means for conducting a fair election, to either attend the meeting or to agree on the selection of Thang. Dr. Dan remarked rather bitterly that Thieu had spread a lot of bad rumors about Thang being Ky's man, which Huong believes. Dr. Dan stated that he was sure that Thang would always place the good of the country above personal connections. He then grinned and said that maybe you should call all the candidates together and make them agree on this--look what happened when you gave lunch to Thieu, Ky, and Vien. Dr. Dan concluded by saying that he would start doing a little missionary work towards getting Thang into the conduct of this election, since he believes that this would be most constructive.

Huong: I asked Dr. Dan for his estimate of the Huong campaign. He replied that Huong's camp was due for fractioning among some of the hardest-working members of the Huong camp. He explained that he had intimate information that Huong had promised the Prime Minister reward secretly to each of the four most energetic managers in his camp. Since Huong was planning to sit in Vung Tau for the campaign, there would come a time soon when his campaign managers would clash, ask who was boss, discover the duplication of promises, and start falling out. Dr. Dan added, a bit maliciously, that Huong had relied on the use of oxygen when he held office, being in poor health then as now. I asked Dr. Dan what was wrong with Huong. "High blood pressure," he answered.

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"Big" Minh: Dr. Dan said that "Big" Minh had a constitutional right to run for President. However, he regrets that "Big" Minh is running. He feels that Minh cannot win--and wouldn't even campaign too actively if he returns to Viet-Nam. However, "Big" Minh is well and favorably known to the people. He will get a considerable vote. However, it will be at the expense of other candidates, both military and civilian, and probably mean the winning of the election by a plurality rather than a majority. Thus, "Big" Minh has weakened the chances for a decisive vote, without really having a chance to win himself.

cc: Ambassador Locke
General Westmoreland
Ambassador Komer
Mr. Calhoun
Mr. Hart
Mr. Jacobson

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