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Sunday, July 23, 1967 -- 11:55 a.m.

Mr. President:

You asked us some time ago to prepare a reply to Chet Bowles on land reform, etc. Here it is, although you may now have reservations about dealing with the matter so formally.

You will recall that you have an appointment to see him on August 8.

W. W. Rostow

Dispatch letter ✓

You send letter in this sense _____

No letter required _____

See me _____

WWRostow:rln

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11/10/67
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July 19, 1967

Dear Chet:

My sincere thanks for your recent letter and for your view on two key elements in the Viet-Nam situation. The question of land reform and the military manpower problem are both matters to which I and all of my advisers have been paying the closest attention.

Ambassador Bunker and Bob Komor have as one of their items of highest priority the speeding up of land reform. They tell me that they are putting great pressure on the Vietnamese to produce more in this critical field. Recently, the distribution of permanent titles to Government-held land has been accelerated. The Government has issued an order forbidding their troops to collect or help collect rents. Another decree has waived back rents on land while it is under Viet Cong control. I mention this because of the criticism you cited that back rents are being collected.

Moreover, an aerial survey is being conducted in large parts of the Mekong Delta. Results to date indicate that new photogrammetric techniques will break through historic bottlenecks in giving title to land by eliminating slow and costly ground surveys.

Finally, several special survey teams have been sent to look at land reform. The respected independent Stanford Research Institute has done highly useful work in this field. They are now back in Viet-Nam looking into a variety of suggestions, including yours, on land redistribution.

I am enclosing with this letter a brief survey of the land reform problem which you may find informative and interesting.

The military manpower question is one that we have been looking at with closest attention. As you know, Secretary McNamara has just returned from Viet-Nam, and I have been discussing this matter with him and General Westmoreland and others. The cautions which you mention are very much in our minds.

The fact is, however, that Hanoi does not have the kind of automatic capability that you suggest to increase their forces in the South to any level it chooses. The level of the enemy's military strength has remained fairly stable over the last six months or so. I think it would not be true if they had a choice. For we have known for a long time that Hanoi would like to carry out a destructive and crushing blow at our forces in the field. They simply have not been able to do it.

Nonetheless, the points you make are well taken and will continue to receive every consideration.

My thanks again for your frank expression of views. They are always welcome. I trust that you are being equally frank with our Indian friends as they face the wide range of problems that confront them.

Sincerely,

(S) Lyndon B. Johnson

Enclosure

Honorable Chester Bowles
American Ambassador
New Delhi

LBJ:WJJorden:pas:7/19/67