



UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY

WASHINGTON

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THE DIRECTOR

July 13, 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

NLJ 92-220By AS NARA. Date 5-15-72

During a six-day stay in Viet-Nam I conferred with:

1. Prime Minister Ky
Chairman Thieu
General Tri (Minister of Information in Chieu Hoi)
The heads of press, radio, television
Representatives of the Vietnamese Information Service
2. Ambassadors Bunker, Locke, Konner and other Mission heads
3. USIA officials in Saigon and the provinces, Bac Lieu and Son Trang, which I visited for one day.

Based upon this experience I would like to report the following:

1. Press Relations

We are facing today the most serious problem in dealing with the press stationed in Viet-Nam. Pessimism and criticism about the course of the war is more pronounced today than at any time in the past two years. There is a growing vocal doubt about the Presidential campaign, the military situation, ARVN's capabilities, the pacification program, prospects for social justice in Viet-Nam society and U. S. intentions for the future.

Correspondents are more critical in private conversations than in their written dispatches, although the latter are sufficiently critical.

This situation has been brought about by complex reasons, including the following:

- A. The loss through reassignment and summer vacations of the more experienced and mature correspondents who have been replaced by a relatively new and young press corps in Saigon.

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They are new to Viet-Nam and to the Far East, new to the complexities of any war and this war in particular, and new to the need for discrimination and evaluation of the many factors involved in this conflict. Many of these correspondents have built-in doubts and reservations which they brought with them from the United States. Many are here on their first "big assignment" and have a tendency to search for the critical story which might lead to a Pulitzer Prize. Such stories are easy to find if reliance is placed upon selfish interests and dissidents who seek publicity.

B. A general sense of war weariness and frustration.

Few correspondents see progress that holds any promise for an end to the war.

C. A growing doubt about the ability of the Vietnamese to do anything for themselves.

There is a despair about the corruption and government inefficiency, a belief that the Presidential campaign will be little more than a mockery of free election procedure and the belief that the Vietnamese lack motivation.

When I met with Prime Minister Ky and commended him on his patriotic attitude in accepting the Vice Presidency to avoid a conflict within the military, he thanked me but became quite indignant at a report filed by R. W. Apple of the New York Times which called this move "a stunning defeat" for Ky. He became quite intemperate when he explained that he had done everything possible to keep Mr. Apple informed, had taken him aboard his personal helicopter on trips so that he might have an opportunity for a firsthand review of the war and political situation -- and yet Apple persisted in attempting to "bring him down." He threatened to throw Apple and other correspondents of that nature out of the country. Prime Minister Ky repeated this accusation later that night to a group of correspondents.

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RECOMMENDATION:

The problem outlined is not readily resolved but may be alleviated by explaining to the American radio and television networks, the wire services and the principal newspaper publishers, the importance of having experienced and mature correspondents available to cover the elections in the next several months. I will undertake this effort if you approve. In doing so, I am mindful that every effort must be made to avoid any interference with the reporting of the news and that any suggestion of this nature must not be construed as a criticism of individual reporters.

2. Vietnamese Information Service (VIS)

There are at the present time, 14,000 persons employed by the Vietnamese Government to carry on an information program within Viet-Nam. I am informed that funds for this operation are being provided by AID.

During the past year, I have stressed the importance of having VIS take over many of the functions which USIS is currently providing in the provinces and throughout Viet-Nam. Our efforts have been unsuccessful.

When I met with General Tri, Minister of Information in charge of VIS, I reminded him of the promises made by him and by his predecessor, Minister Chinh, to fulfill this responsibility and complained that no progress had been made. I told him that it was apparent that relatively few of the 14,000 employees were performing a valuable function and earning their salary. When I asked him to give me his opinion of how many were doing their job, he replied "about 50." He frankly confessed that the others were doing little or nothing, that they were incompetent, that he was powerless to change the situation.

Despite his pessimism, on two previous occasions the VIS had responded to the challenge -- during the TET campaign and during the elections for the Constituent Assembly. In both cases they received strong orders "from the top" and they carried out their responsibilities.

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I raised the subject with Prime Minister Ky and Chairman Thieu and received the polite promises to investigate the matter and do something. In my opinion, nothing will be done.

It is apparent that there is an ever-growing need for an expanded information service within Viet-Nam, yet an inability or a reluctance by the Vietnamese to carry it out. The USIS is unable to handle the entire responsibility.

3. Vietnamese Overseas Information Program

At the Manila Conference, I secured an agreement from the then-Minister of Information General Chinh, Chairman Thieu, Bui Diem (then acting as Assistant to Prime Minister Ky) and Foreign Minister Do that the Vietnamese Embassies in various parts of the world would undertake an information program. They promised that qualified news officials would be assigned to assist the Ambassadors in the principal capitals. When I reviewed this situation last week in Saigon, I found that nothing had been done.

I raised the subject with Chairman Thieu who recalled our discussions in Manila and reiterated his willingness to assist. He readily agreed that there were "a dozen" competent Vietnamese who could be assigned to fill this function and then asked if we would provide the funds for the salaries and expenses required -- about \$500,000. Ambassador Bunker and I explained that the amount was small and certainly within the resources of the Vietnamese Government; however, we urged him to secure the personnel as soon as possible and that if funds had to be provided, we would see what arrangements could be made.

4. Use of Media

A. My investigation revealed that we are using our press, radio and television facilities to good advantage. However, I am not satisfied that we have done everything possible to carry out an information program in North Viet-Nam. Our intelligence reveals that there are relatively few shortwave receivers in North Viet-Nam and that most people listen only to their local stations and that many are served by a central broadcasting service over which they have no choice of programs.

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- B. The Voice of Freedom, operated by the Vietnamese with U. S. assistance, is currently broadcasting about 12 hours per day. I have ordered an increase to 24 hours per day. To enable the North Vietnamese to listen to this station which has an excellent signal throughout the area, I propose to have fixed-frequency radio receivers dropped in North Viet-Nam. These sets will cost about \$3.00 a piece and should provide means of reaching a substantial audience.
- C. The Voice of America is currently broadcasting to North Viet-Nam from Hue about 12 hours a day. This schedule is being increased to 24 hours a day effective next month.
- D. Good progress is being made on the construction of land-based television stations and the entire country will have this service before the end of the year.

I am informed that there are in excess of 100,000 television receivers in the hands of the public. I visited radio and television stores which displayed Japanese, German and other sets. There is a brisk sale of these receivers. However, I found to my dismay, that no licenses had been granted by the Viet-Nam Government for the assembly or manufacture of television receivers in Viet-Nam. On my last visit to Saigon, this subject was discussed with Prime Minister Ky and others who readily agreed that these licenses should be issued to stimulate local industry and to siphon off excess purchasing power in the hands of the Vietnamese.

I raised the subject again with General Ky and Chairman Thieu who have again promised to do something.

5. European Reaction to Viet-Nam War

Despite increasing efforts to inform European audiences, there has been little improvement in European reaction to the U. S. position in Viet-Nam. Accordingly, I intend to continue the program of bringing European journalists to Viet-Nam for firsthand study of the war and non-military aspects.

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In addition, I will send our PAOs to Saigon in small groups for a 4-5 day indoctrination course so that they may acquire firsthand experience and a greater knowledge of the issue. Hopefully, this will permit them to tell the story more effectively in their respective countries.

6. Comments on Organization

At the present time, U. S. operations are conducted by a multitude of committees and working groups. As a result, many of our officers are devoting a great deal of time to meetings and liaison work which could better be spent in carrying out their informational activity. I would hope that there could be a simplification of the structure which now houses MACV, OCO, CORDS and JUSPAO. Ambassador Locke is aware of this situation.

SUMMARY

There is an acute need for an expanded information service in Viet-Nam between now and the September elections and continuing thereafter during the transitional period to constitutional government. Despite this need, little effort is being directed toward this end by the VIS and there is an apathy towards correcting the situation. Similarly, there is a desperate urgency for the Vietnamese story to be told by the Vietnamese in world capitals -- and yet little is being done. I have brought these matters to the attention of the highest authorities and will continue to remind them of their responsibilities in these areas.

Leonard H. Marks

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