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Friday, August 4, 1967
11:55 a.m.

Mr. President:

Bill Jorden maintains a useful, special
tie to Bui Diem.

Here is his report of a conversation
yesterday, on Bui Diem's return from Saigon.

W. W. Rostow

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WWRostow:rla

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4(b)
White House Guidelines, Feb. 24, 1983
By rg, NARA, Date 7-24-91

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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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August 3, 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. ROSTOW (EYES ONLY)

SUBJECT: Talk with Bui Diem

The Ambassador just returned from Saigon--with a bad summer cold, but otherwise in good spirits.

He was under instructions from both Thieu and Ky to convey good wishes to President Johnson and to assure him that the two of them are working together, determined to maintain the military unity they had promised.

Diem spoke quite movingly about their feelings toward our President. He quoted Ky as follows: "President Johnson is carrying many heavy burdens. He has so many problems to deal with. And yet, because of circumstances, he must worry about Viet-Nam every day even though we are at the other end of the world. We must try not to add any more to his worries. He is our friend."

Thieu and Ky are determined to stick together. Diem admits, however, that there is little love between them--and even less between some of their followers. But past bitterness has been smoothed over and the new ticket is working out.

Diem thinks there is little doubt that Thieu-Ky will win the election. But he has cautioned both men - and their supporters - not to fall prey to over-optimism. They have several important strikes against them--both are military men, neither is a Southerner, both are relatively young. Diem would not hazard a guess on what percentage of the votes the ticket would get; he thinks that with the campaign just getting underway, any estimates now would be meaningless. It is clear he believes the military ticket will get less support than Ky alone would have garnered.

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By CB, NARA, Date 4-3-95

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- 2 -

Diem thinks there is fairly strong Southern and civilian support for Huong and Suu. Surprisingly, he said he thought Huong had lost some ground in the last week or so and that Suu has gained strength, especially in Saigon.

There is an agreement between Thieu and Ky that the latter will have a decisive voice in future government policies and actions. The reported new military committee has Ky as its chairman and Thieu as a regular member. Diem thinks Ky will run the committee, not vice-versa.

Ky's plan for post-election action calls for a thorough reshuffling of the Government. The main emphasis will be on five ministries-- Defense, Pacification, Chieu Hoi and Information, Foreign Affairs, and Economy and Finance. General Vien is slated to become Defense Minister. Ky plans a thorough-going overhaul of the armed forces and General Thang will be responsible for carrying it out. Diem expects changes from top to bottom--probably most corps commanders and many division commanders will be replaced.

There will be problems of "face" in giving Thang this job because he is a relatively junior general. On the other hand, he is widely respected as honest and incorruptible. His base operations probably will be as Deputy Chief of Staff. A more senior general will be chief of staff.

Thang will also have responsibility for the security elements of pacification--ARVN as well as PF and RF. A civilian will be in charge of the action programs of RD--health, education, agriculture, etc.

Diem is likely to be called back to Saigon to work in the new government--either to revamp Viet-Nam's foreign ministry or to take charge of the confused information program.

Thieu and Ky followers have been busy preparing a political platform for the campaign. Diem said Thieu's preference was for statements of broad principles. He (Diem) had advised Ky to get in some specifics--particularly on land reform, education, and the like.

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- 3 -

Ky hopes to be able to begin developing a national political party after the election. It will be based on the present coalition of forces that is supporting Thieu-Ky as well as those supporters who are successful in the Senate and House elections. Ky says that the main problem for this enterprise is going to be money and an appealing national program.

A friend of mine, Dan Duc Khoi, has just been moved into Ky's inner office by Bui Diem to help Ky with press relations. If anyone can give Ky good advice in this area, it is Khoi.

General Loan is still bitter with Ky because of the latter's withdrawal from the Presidential race. The same is true of Thang and General Tri. But Diem had long talks with all of them and the latter two, at least, seem mollified.

There is surprisingly wide interest in the coming elections. Diem says that the people in Saigon seem to talk about little else these days.

Diem asked what we were concerned about these days as regards Vietnamese politics. I told him:

- keeping the military on the tracks;
- making the election fair and honest;
- producing a government that is a good blending of civilians and military--and one that can get the job done.

Bill
William J. Jordan

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