

~~2- President's file~~

125

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Monday, August 21, 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Mr. President:

The attached letter from Prime Minister Ky was forwarded by Ambassador Bunker. It is addressed to the Vice President (as President of the Senate) and to the Speaker.

It is a long but rather eloquent explanation of Vietnamese politics and of the Prime Minister's attitude. It is a plea for understanding and tolerance. And it notes that the Vietnamese do not need "any lesson in honesty and patriotism from any quarter." It is clearly designed to meet Congressional criticisms.

I thought you would like to read it. I assume the Senate and House will give it appropriate exposure.

Bill
William J. Jorden

Att.

CONFIDENTIAL/ EXDIS

125a

August 21, 1967

DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

NEJ 94-299

TEXT OF CABLE FROM SAIGON (3644)

By , NARA, Date 12-15-94

Following is the text of identical letters (except for the difference in titles) dated August 21 from Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky to Vice President Humphrey (as President of the Senate) and Speaker McCormack, which were sent to Ambassador Bunker on August 21 by the Prime Minister with the request that they be forwarded to the addressees. The Prime Minister states in his letter to the Ambassador that he has "deemed it proper to reaffirm to the American Congress the principles which inspire the conduct of national affairs by my Government as Vietnam is on the eve of acceding to democracy." No mention is made of publication plans. Signed originals follow by pouch.

Begin text:

Dear Mr. President,

I take the liberty to write to you at a time when the events in my country occasion passionate debates in the Congress of the United States. Since the American and Vietnamese nations are together defending freedom, and are consenting to tremendous sacrifices, I deem it my duty to affirm again the principles which command the conduct of national affairs by my Government.

The defense of freedom in Vietnam requires more than our joint efforts at war, it involves first and foremost our mutual commitment to the achievement of democracy and social justice. Should we stray from that basic commitment, or should you misconstrue our purposes, our alliance would indeed be in jeopardy.

As my Government is nearing the completion of its term of duty, I sincerely feel that we have dispatched our task with honesty and effectiveness under most difficult circumstances. I take special pride in the fact that we have successfully started the

CONFIDENTIAL/ EXDIS

course toward democracy and equality for a society which was imprisoned within the deep walls of feudalism, corruption and intolerable social discrepancies. In spite of war, subversion and several grave crises, my Government has undertaken to organize five nationwide elections of vital importance within about a year's time: elections for the Constituent Assembly in September 1966, elections for hamlet and village administration in April-May 1967, Presidential and Senatorial elections next September, and elections for the Lower House next October. I do not know of any better way to warrant our determination to stay the course toward democracy. For it would be proper for all concerned to acknowledge the painful dilemma of our nation, torn between the dream to attain the integrity of democratic life and the necessity to fight for survival. We have lost many of our people, our soldiers, our cadremen in the past elections, and undoubtedly we shall lose many more in the coming weeks; we must devote a great deal of resources to the exercise of democracy which are badly needed on the battlefield; we run the risk of subversion and division at a time when the nation must unite in the face of the enemy. Yet we have all accepted the challenge without a shadow of reluctance.

It seems a cruel irony that some of our friends chose this very moment to voice doubt on our sincerity.

Perhaps the fact that my Government includes officers of the Armed Forces leads to misgivings, for I know of the inherent distrust toward military government in the advanced societies. But in our present historical context, the Vietnamese Armed Forces are of a very particular nature: 700,000 of our young men are under arms in a nation of 15 million people. Our Armed Forces are not composed of militarists or people inclined to the use of force or violence, but of all the generations of Vietnamese within the age of offering the fullest measure of service to their imperiled fatherland. They are the present and the future of our nation.

Furthermore, my Government did not seize power; it was a civilian government which, unable to resolve instability and division, passed on to the Armed Forces the burden of preserving the nation from collapsing. We then formed a mixed team of civilian and military leaders, decided that our term of duty was to be a

transitional one, and set out to establish the very rapid time table for the advent of representative government. We are now reaching the final stage of that time table.

Of course, two years are a very short period of time. We are convinced that we have engaged our country on the right path, but we are also aware that the tasks which we have begun, such as rural development, reorganization of the administration and of the Army, reinforcement of the national economy ... need to be continued. That is why, in good conscience, we deem it our duty to run for offices in due democratic process. We hope that the people of Vietnam will entrust us with further responsibilities on the basis of our past performances. But should the people decide otherwise, we shall readily accept their verdict.

I am particularly sad to hear accusations that the Vietnamese Armed Forces will resort to coups in the event the election returns should be unfavorable to us. We have devoted the finest hours of the past two years to bringing about the first democratic institutions in our country, we shall not be the ones to destroy them. I have repeatedly warned our soldiers, our civil servants, our cadremen against rigging the elections in any manner, for I think that dishonest elections would deprive our country of democracy for a long period of time. In 1963, the people and the Army overthrew a dictatorial government which was issued from dishonest elections.

That a few press correspondents should misquote my word of caution against unfair elections and make it sound like a threat of coup was, after all understandable. But for a moment, I felt very discouraged to see some of the best friends of my country give credence to those inaccurate reports. Time and again, I have proved that I am capable of placing the interest of our nation above all possible personal ambition: the decision I made on the 30th of June to withdraw from the Presidential race and to seek the Vice Presidency instead, was another instance of my sincerity.

I see therefore no reason for attributing to ill faith on the part of my Government the difficulties that the candidates may encounter in their campaigning. My country is short on physical facilities, several of our airfields are still unsafe, and the wind

blows where it may . . . in my opinion, a dignified attitude for those among us who ambition to be public servants by popular choice should be to endure those misfortunes and persevere in seeking the support of the electorate, and not to display resentment against the adverse conditions which prevail for our entire people. In the meanwhile, I am satisfied that our Government has done its very best to give all candidates a fair share of the means for campaigning. The same amount of money is allotted to all tickets. The Government television and radio allow equal time to all candidates in direct broadcast, and anybody in Vietnam can testify that those means are used at their fullest capacity by our opponents, the Vietnamese press is free, and, in part, quite virulently anti-Governmental; on the other hand the foreign press is at full liberty to cover the campaign and the forthcoming elections.

If by the standards of a country with a long experience in the exercise of democracy, and free from the predicaments of war and underdevelopment, our elections still present serious shortcomings, I am the first Vietnamese to deplore that situation. But I can say without any doubt in my conscience that my Government does not deserve any lesson in honesty and patriotism from any quarter.

I am afraid that persistent criticism without substantiated evidence on the part of some prominent American figures may, in the long run, impair the harmony of our joint efforts. The Vietnamese are a proud people, they will accept any amount of tribulations and sufferings, but their dead count as much as the dead from all the friendly lands, and they will admit no discrimination in all the mens supreme tribute to freedom and human dignity.

I see an urgent need, Mr. President, for all of us to keep an appropriate perspective in the partnership between nations, large and small, which are in pursuit of a common ideal; for intemperate reliance upon the physical scale of strength would be the negation of that very ideal.

Mr. President, may I ask you to convey my letter to all the distinguished members of the Senate of the United States.

I stand in profound respect for the great traditions of democracy and justice embodied in your institutions. I greatly

~~CONFIDENTIAL/EXDIS~~

-5-

value the support of the Congress of the United States for the cause of Vietnam, and I am always ready to discuss in total candor with the distinguished Senators who wish to further examine the developments concerning the common endeavor of our two nations.

Sincerely yours,

(signed)

Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky

End text.

~~CONFIDENTIAL/EXDIS~~