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Monday, August 14, 1967  
10:20 a.m.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Mr. President:

I believe you wanted a draft of a speech which might be made in the Senate on the Vietnamese elections.

The attached text should serve the purpose.

William J. Jorden

Attachment

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DRAFT SPEECH

SUBJECT: Elections in Viet-Nam

MR. PRESIDENT:

The United States has a very great commitment in Viet-Nam.

Our men are fighting and dying so that small country can be safe from outside attack. We are also pledged to help the people of Viet-Nam develop their own political institutions in their own way.

So it is not strange that in recent days -- in this body and in our press -- a good deal of attention should have been devoted to the electoral process now underway in Viet-Nam .

It is right that we should be interested.

It is right that we should be concerned.

And it right that we should express our opinions.

But given all the circumstances, Mr. President, I think it is also our duty to insure that our comments are based on fact and on reality.

Responsible comment that will help encourage the political process to move along democratic lines is one thing.

And I have no doubt that some of the comments I have heard and read in the last week -- comments based on the flimsiest of evidence -- have been a source of some cheer to the men in Hanoi.

For if they think there is a chance that we might pull out of Viet-Nam because a coming election is not purer than any election in this or other countries, then surely they are going to hang on just that much longer.

It is obvious that most of the comments made here are based on newspaper reports from Saigon. And it is equally clear that many of those reports contain rumors, misquotations, and in some case a naive acceptance of this or that opposition politician's statements as fact -- rather than as electioneering.

There is also, Mr. President, a tendency to measure the fairness of the Vietnamese electoral process by a standard of perfection. It is a standard that does not prevail, even in the United States. Certainly it is a standard that cannot reasonably be applied, especially in a young nation in the midst of a war for its survival.

Mr. President, it took the United States thirteen years from its revolution until it created a constitutional government. The Vietnamese elected a Constituent Assembly only last September. By March this year it had completed the nation's new constitution, and a thoroughly democratic document it is.

Now, only a few months after promulgation of the Constitution, the Vietnamese are about to select their executive and legislative leaders.

I think that is progress.

I think that kind of achievement deserves our congratulations and our good wishes.

Surely, it does not merit the kind of snide comments and cynical descriptions that some have been making.

I know, Mr. President, that our Government -- from President Johnson down -- have been stressing for more than one year and a half the necessity for the Vietnamese to begin building democratic institutions. Our officials, here and in Saigon, have repeatedly underlined the necessity for the electoral process to be free and fair and open.

Let me cite just a few of the things that the Government in Viet-Nam has done recently to insure that those goals are achieved.

-- One of our colleagues last week stated that press censorship was preventing a free political campaign. I note that press censorship of political statements was lifted more than three weeks ago. All one has to do is check the Saigon press to see that free reporting exists.

-- General Vien, Commander in Chief of the Vietnamese Armed Forces, publicly stated that the Army would not have a candidate, that military men would stay out of the election, and that Armed Forces personnel should not electioneer and should vote as individuals. A written directive to that effect has gone out.

-- The election law provides stiff penalties for civil servants who engage in election frauds and pressure tactics.

-- The Chief of Military Security, General Loan, who has been blamed in many rumors for election pressures, was removed from his military post. He remains as National Police Chief, but I have seen no evidence that he has been conducting any campaigns in the countryside.

-- The Government has provided all candidates with funds for the campaign, as provided in the election law.

-- It has also agreed to provide transportation, to help arrange public meetings, and to insure the security of candidates -- none of which is required by the law.

-- All candidates have been guaranteed free time on the government radio and television. I note that all eleven presidential candidates appeared on TV in Saigon yesterday -- and four of them gave speeches on radio.

-- The Vietnamese Government has invited impartial observers to come and watch the electoral process and form their own judgment. Invitations went to the United Nations, to all governments having relations with the Republic of Viet-Nam, and to the world press.

Each of the individual complaints that we have heard can be answered -- have been answered for the most part -- with facts and with reason.

I would remind all my colleagues here of one inescapable fact -- that it was the present government in Saigon -- led by Generals --

that first launched this promising movement toward representative government. It was Chief of State Thieu and Prime Minister Ky who first said that Viet-Nam must have a constitution -- and that the constitution should be written by men freely elected.

They made that pledge in January 1966. And they carried it out.

They didn't have to do it. But they did.

Was it the act of men who so hungered for power that they could not abide civilian participation in government, that they would conduct a political campaign that was lacking in fairness and honesty.

I repeat -- they didn't have to raise this problem at all.

But they did.

And they have pledged -- publicly and privately -- that ~~will~~ <sup>they</sup> support a new government whoever wins -- so long as it is the outcome of fair and free elections.

It is reported that some of the generals are plotting to retain effective power -- whoever wins the election.

I have seen no convincing evidence that this is true.

But it is possible that some misguided military do think this way.

I for one doubt, however, that any freely elected president -- whether he be a military man or a civilian -- is going to be willing to

abdicate his constitutional powers and do the bidding of a clique of generals.

Nor do I think that the people of Viet-Nam would willingly accept such an outcome.

Finally, Mr. President, I remind my colleagues that the Vietnamese are going to elect more than a President and Vice President. They are also going to select -- next month and the month after -- a Senate and a House.

If you read the constitution you know that this new legislature is going to have very great powers, indeed. And the legislative bodies are going to be almost entirely composed of civilians, whoever is elected president.

So let us not abandon hope for democracy in Viet-Nam before it is even born.

Let us not prejudge the outcome of a process in which the entire Vietnamese people have a great stake.

Let us be patient.

Let us encourage them to move down the path of democracy.

Let us help them -- not hinder them.

For their success will be our success -- and the success of free men everywhere.