

Monday, August 14, 1967

~~1-See file~~
2- Pres file

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Mr. President:

Attached is the memo you wanted laying out the various ways in which we have -- for 1-1/2 years -- been stressing to the Vietnamese the importance of free and fair elections and the development of democratic institutions.

It comes from classified sources, but I see no reason it cannot be declassified. I flag one problem: if this were too widely distributed, someone might use it as proof of regular U.S. intervention in Vietnamese internal affairs.

William J. Jorden

Att.

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Monday, August 14, 1967
9:00 A.M.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: U. S. Efforts to Encourage Free and Fair Elections
in Viet-Nam

Members of Congress, columnists, and editorial writers are suddenly stressing the importance of a free and fair electoral process in Viet-Nam.

President Johnson, his principal foreign affairs advisers, the Department of State, and the American Mission in Saigon all have long recognized the importance of encouraging the growth of democratic institutions in Viet-Nam. This subject has been a principal theme in our talks with Vietnamese, in and out of government, for the past year and a half especially.

This memorandum sets forth some of the numerous ways and occasions in which American officials have encouraged the development of representative government in Viet-Nam and have stressed the importance of carrying out elections in a fair, free and honest way.

1. January 1966 - Prime Minister Ky announced his Government's plan to develop a constitution and to hold national elections to select a representative government. Ambassador Lodge and others had been encouraging the Vietnamese to take this step.

2. Honolulu Conference (Feb. 7-8, 1966) - Importance of free elections stressed throughout. In Honolulu Declaration, the Vietnamese Government pledged "to formulate a democratic constitution" and "to create on the basis of elections rooted in that constitution, an elected government." President Johnson encouraged Vietnamese leaders in this course and stressed the need for free and fair elections.

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L.C. 12345, Sec. 3.4

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By lsp, NARA, Date 6-22-95

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3. March-May 1966 - A time of political crisis brought on by the effort of militant Buddhists in Hue and Danang to overthrow the government. Ambassador Lodge and his staff repeatedly stated privately and publicly the U. S. Government's view that development of free political institutions was of greatest importance.

4. March-April 1966 - Vietnamese National Political Congress met to plan political evolution. U.S. Ambassador and staff were in almost daily contact with political leaders, government and non-government, advising on democratic procedures. Decree of April 14, announcing plans for election of a Constituent Assembly, reflected this advice.

5. May-June 1966 - Electoral Law Drafting Commission met. Ambassador and staff met regularly with commissioners urging need for democratic electoral plans. Hardly a day passed without some contact between U.S. officials and Vietnamese. Former repeatedly stressed the importance of a free and open electoral process. Ambassador Lodge met repeatedly with Chief of State Thieu, Prime Minister Ky and others. Technical advice on democratic electoral machinery was provided by officials and special consultants.

Some examples:

May 13 - Ambassador Lodge urged Prime Minister Ky to make every effort to hold Constituent Assembly elections in the Fall of 1966.

June 9 - Ambassador stressed to Prime Minister the great importance the U.S. attached to the Assembly elections.

July 13 - Prime Minister was reminded of the importance of widest popular participation in the elections.

July 22 - Ambassador underlined importance of widest possible participation in the elections and strict observance of election laws by all.

September 3 - Prime Minister was urged to take all necessary steps to protect voters from VC harassment and to encourage maximum voter participation on a free basis.

6. Constituent Assembly election held September 11 - Election closely observed by American Embassy, other embassies, high foreign press corps, and independent observers. Election was described as free and fair. VC terror failed to disrupt elections.

7. Constituent Assembly met to draft constitution - It was not a government "rubber stamp." U. S. officials used all appropriate means to underline with government and Assembly members the importance we placed on the development of democratic institutions.

8. Manila Conference (October 1966) - Vietnamese reported on democratic political progress. President Johnson and other leaders encouraged development of democratic institutions and urged that electoral process be honest and open. Vietnamese leaders promised early promulgation of constitution and "within six months thereafter to select a representative government." President Johnson and other leaders "concurred in the conviction that building representative constitutional government . . . was indispensable to the future of a free Viet-Nam."

9. During meetings of the Constituent Assembly, U. S. officials repeatedly encouraged democratic development.

Examples:

-- Secretary Rusk, in December visit to Saigon, emphasized to governmental and non-governmental leaders the importance of unobstructed progress toward constitutional government and for free and fair elections for representative institutions.

-- Ambassador Lodge told Chief of State Thieu (on January 19, 1967) that U. S. had a deep interest in the progress of the constitution and in free elections for a president representing a real choice by the Vietnamese people.

-- On Feb. 8, Ambassador Lodge again discussed with the Chief of State the importance of assuring broad civilian representation in the Vietnamese government.

-- Ambassador Goldberg, visiting Saigon in March 1967, discussed with Vietnamese officials and others the importance of developing representative political institutions in Viet-Nam.

-- William Bundy, in Saigon later that month, emphasized the importance of honest elections.

10. Guam Conference (March 20-21, 1967) - Prime Minister Ky gave President Johnson a copy of the completed Constitution. There was full discussion of the document and of the steps that would follow. President Johnson stressed the importance of avoiding destructive divisions among the military and between military and civilians and underlined the critical need for free, fair and honest political developments. Vietnamese leaders pledged the development of a "freely-elected, popularly chosen government."

11. In the post-Guam period, local elections were held over a period of weeks with substantial voter turnout. More than 14,000 local officials have been elected so far. By all accounts, these elections have been honest.

12. Constituent Assembly began to write electoral laws. U.S. Embassy made U.S. views clear. There were literally thousands of contacts with Vietnamese leaders and politicians in this period.

Examples:

-- April 6 - Ambassador urged Prime Minister Ky to work closely with the Assembly and to assure electoral laws that would provide for fair and free elections, equitable opportunities for candidates, and safeguards against electoral frauds.

-- Again in April, Chief of State Thieu was reminded of the importance of the coming elections and that conduct of the elections would affect Viet-Nam's international position.

-- On May 23, Embassy reported it had contacted all factions and made clear the importance of conducting free elections.

-- May 30 - Ambassador Bunker talked with Prime Minister Ky and emphasized the importance we placed on the constitutional process and on the elections in which we expected the free will of the people would be expressed.

-- June 20 - Ambassador Bunker again emphasized to Vietnamese leaders the importance of free elections.

-- July 1 - Vice President Humphrey repeated to a high Vietnamese official (General Chieu in Seoul) our deep concern with the development of democratic government and honest elections.

13. Secretary McNamara, under instructions from President Johnson, told Vietnamese leaders in July in unmistakable terms of the importance we attached to free and fair elections.

14. Clark Clifford and General Taylor, again on instructions from the President, stated repeatedly and frankly the importance for all concerned that the elections be free and honest.

15. Throughout the current evolution of political institutions in Viet-Nam, the United States has made its support for the establishment of representative government clear and unequivocal. Official statements have continually stressed to the government and all candidates that it is important "that all those concerned in the election recognize that the primary need is that the elections be fair and honest, so that the encouraging development of the political process can be maintained, and so that the Vietnamese people, including military leaders, unite behind whatever government emerges from the elections."

This public statement by the Department of State was repeated on June 30, July 28 and August 11.

In Saigon, on July 15, in a talk before the Vietnamese Journalist Association, Ambassador Bunker restated the position of the U.S.

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Government. He stressed that the U. S. "supports no single candidate and we oppose none." He also said that the world was watching the elections closely, that free and fair elections would demonstrate to the world that South Viet-Nam is its own master, and that the press has an important role to play in insuring success for the movement toward representative government.

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