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Monday, August 21, 1967
10:05 a.m.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Mr. President:

I was informed that you asked for three speeches for possible use on the Hill today, subject: The Vietnamese Election and the U.S. Press.

I have sent the attached four drafts to Barefoot Sanders with a request that he try to get them used.

I understood that Congressman Resnick was one possible user.

William J. Jordan

Att.

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8/21/67

MR. SPEAKER:

There is a famous rumor mill in Saigon known as Radio Catinat (KAK-TEE-NAH), after the old name of one of the main streets in the Vietnamese capital. There is no radio station on it. But it broadcasts rumors faster than the most modern electronic gear. The trouble is that the modern electronic gear picks it up also and then we read about it here.

You only have to look at your morning paper, or turn on your radio or television set to realize that Radio Catinat is working overtime during Viet-Nam's presidential election campaign.

A number of stories have appeared here charging rigging of the elections in Viet-Nam, intimidation of candidates, willful government sabotage of the campaign, casual refusal of the Vietnamese Government to approve the candidacy of politicians who supposedly were a serious threat at the ballot box.

There were few specifics. Key facts were left out of the accounts. And when the facts were examined, the situation looked very different from the original reports.

One incident -- in which a plane load of presidential candidates were set down at the wrong airport and then found no cars to take them to the election rally -- is a case in point.

There was a strong cross-wind at the airport where they were scheduled to land. Should the pilot have taken a chance on setting down there and wiping out most of the opposition presidential candidates? We can image what the charges would have been then!

The fact is that one hour after the candidates had landed, transportation was available to take them to the rally. But by then they had taken off back to Saigon. This important fact was missing from all news accounts of the incident. Of course, the truth never caught up with the first impression.

The election rigging charge made the rounds, amplified in each rebroadcast with more adjectives and adverbs but unsullied by a few key facts that would have put the whole tempest back in the teapot where it belonged.

Vietnamese politicians have learned that rumors are not only easier to start than to stop. But they can have great political impact. The trouble is that exaggerated reports get in the way of the facts. And at a distance of 10,000 miles, it is hard to get a picture of what is really going on in the campaign. We should realize that everything said by a candidate for public office -- whether he is running in Viet-Nam or in the U. S. or elsewhere -- may not be the Gospel.

American reporters send thousands of words each day from Viet-Nam. Facts and rumors, or half facts and half rumors, are well

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mixed in the process. American readers need an extra dose of our usual suspicion and an added measure of our normal sophistication. Otherwise we will find ourselves depending on Radio Catinat -- and that's not news.

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