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J-F President, Tel. 2200
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Friday, August 25, 1967 (7:00pm)

MEMORANDUM FOR MARVIN WATSON

I understand that Senator Inouye is out of town and will be calling Monday for an appointment.

You may wish to hold this ready for the President when the Senator comes in.

William J. Jorden

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MR. PRESIDENT:

I have always believed that the Vietnamese Communists defeated the French, not on the field of battle, not at Dien Bien Phu, but in Paris.

And I believe today that Ho Chi Minh's last hope is to win in Washington what he cannot win in the hills and paddy fields of South Viet-Nam.

In this connection, I have just read some very disturbing words in The Economist of London. This outstanding journal has shown a deep understanding for our involvement in Viet-Nam and has strongly supported what our country is trying to do there. But in its latest issue it says the following:

"Maybe the Americans don't have what it takes after all. What it takes in Viet-Nam is patience: the patience to slog on with a defensive war, and to accept the restraints on military action that this sort of war calls for. If the Americans can command enough patience, they can do what they set out to do in Viet-Nam. ... The United States can fight the Viet-Nam war and go on raising its standard of living at the same time. That is the measure of its economic power. President Johnson has the money and men to carry on the war at its present level for a long time to come. In this sense, he almost certainly has more staying power than Ho Chi Minh; and it is staying power that will count in the end."

But The Economist then raises the question whether we are not running out of that most essential element for success.

Mr. President, I think The Economist is wrong.

I firmly believe that we have what it takes -- and that we will see this conflict through to a successful end.

But I must admit that our South Vietnamese friends must be puzzled by some of the statements they have heard recently from a few Americans.

At the same time, I think Ho Chi Minh and his followers -- those who want to hang on and continue the war -- must have found some of these statements encouraging..

I see signs, too, that some of our other friends in Asia -- people whose future depends heavily on our help, on our power, and on our resolve -- have been worried by the scattered signs of wobbling and weakening.

Just the other day, the distinguished Foreign Minister of Thailand, one of our closest allies, said:

"Our friends in the United States don't seem to have faith in themselves and, if they don't, how can others have faith in them? The United States offers a picture of confusion and self-doubt. America's position in international affairs is affected by domestic politics."

Mr. President, it is right and proper for those of us in this distinguished body to have thoughts and opinions on a problem as serious

as Viet-Nam. It is important for us to make those thoughts known -- to each other, to the Administration, and to the American people.

But in a matter of such consequence, we have a responsibility to base our opinions and our statements on the very best facts available to us.

It is easy, Mr. President, to look at a situation 10,000 miles away and to think that one knows what is happening. It is easy to pick up the latest rumor -- or to read a hastily written news story -- or to see a 30-second strip of film on television -- and to react immediately.

But given the stakes in this conflict, I think we owe it to ourselves -- and to our government -- and to our people -- to do better than that.

As I look back over the past few weeks to many of the things I -- and all of us -- have heard and read, I find two elements of the Viet-Nam situation that have been the subject of great attention. It seems to me that much of the discussion of these two subjects has produced considerable heat and very little light.

I refer to the military situation: is there a stalemate?

And the political situation: are the elections a fraud?

On the military side, let me say that I -- and many of my distinguished colleagues in the Senate -- have seen our share of war. But there are few, I think, who would qualify as expert witnesses or analysts of the war in Viet-Nam.

Many of the brave young reporters in Viet-Nam have also seen a good deal of this war. But they, too, hardly rank as specialists.

Who then are the experts?

I submit that a man like General Westmoreland is an expert. I regard the Army Chief of Staff, General Johnson, as an expert. I think there is no doubt that a man like Lt. General Stanley Larsen, our commander in the II Corps for the last two years, is an expert on the military situation in that area which represents almost half the land mass of Viet-Nam.

What do these distinguished experts say about the war? Do they think there is a stalemate?

Listen to the words of General Westmoreland speaking just last month:

"The statement that we are in a stalemate is complete fiction. It is completely unrealistic. During the past year tremendous progress has been made... We have opened up roads... We have invaded long-established base areas... The enemy had planned to take control of the two northern provinces... He has been stopped... The enemy planned to take over domination of the highlands. Again, he has been defeated... Greater population has been secured and taken away from communist domination... The ARVN troops are fighting much better than they were a year ago... The number of defectors coming in to the government has substantially increased..."

"I think to measure progress, one has to think in terms of objectives. Our objective in South Viet-Nam is to give the people freedom

of choice, to resist the aggression from the North, and to try to give the people protection from the terror and intimidation of the Viet Cong.

"On the contrary, the enemy's objectives have been to terrorize the people, to disrupt the revolutionary development program, to take over more of the population, to sabotage the road and lines of communication.

"He has failed in achieving his objectives. We have succeeded in attaining our objectives..."

"The enemy has not won a single, significant victory during the past year, despite the tremendous effort he had put forth."

General Johnson, just back from his eighth trip to Viet-Nam, said recently:

"Everywhere that I went, I felt that there was significant progress being made. I think much of this progress is not reported -- partially because much of it is being done by the Vietnamese, and partially because we have an intensive focus on the activities of U.S. units out there."

"Somehow or other, we tend to concentrate on our catastrophies or disasters rather than on our successes. Our successes, I believe, far outweigh any disaster that has occurred..."

General Larsen, just returned from II Corps, has reported:

--half the population of the Corps area was under Viet Cong control two years ago; today, almost 90 per cent is under government control;

--two years ago, 70 per cent of the rice growing area was dominated by the VC; today, 95 per cent of the rice land is under Vietnamese control;

--two years ago, no important highway could be used without a major military effort; today, 90 per cent of the important roads are open -- 40 percent without any protection, 50 per cent with minimal convoy protection;

--two years ago, almost no railroads were operating; today, more than half the railroads are in use;

--a recently captured Viet Cong document admitted that whereas they control 265,000 people two years ago, they now control only 20,000.

I could go on, Mr. President. But I think the testimony of these distinguished military men who have followed developments closely speaks for itself.

It can be summed up very quickly: there is no military stalemate in Viet-Nam.

We and our Vietnamese allies and our other friends are moving steadily forward. And if we have the patience, we shall succeed.

On the political scene, there is a great readiness on the part of some Americans to write off the coming elections as meaningless. They are declared a "fraud" even before they are held.

Mr. President, it is easy to be arrogant and self-righteous about this matter.

It is easy to say that if this young country -- fighting a war to stay alive -- does not have elections that are 100 per cent pure, totally honest, and free from all blemish, then the political process has no meaning.

Mr. President, when I am told that the Vietnamese elections must not only be good but that they must be "better than ours," I can only reply that this judgment is nonsense.

We all know our own history well enough, I presume, to know that our elections have not always been pure and fair. Indeed, I can remember only a few elections in recent times in which there were not charges of unfair tactics or cries of "foul."

Now I think that the Vietnamese people deserve the right to express their political judgment freely and without coercion. I believe that the coming elections will be more fair and free than any of us dares hopes. And I note that that judgment is shared by our distinguished Ambassador in Saigon, Mr. Ellsworth Bunker. He is a wise man -- and an acute observer.

I applaud the President's decision to invite a number of leading Americans -- including several distinguished members of this body -- to visit Viet-Nam and to observe the electoral process. I am sure we all look forward to hearing their observations when they return.

But I would say, Mr. President, that the real miracle here is that elections are being held at all. The encouraging thing is that the progress toward representative government has been so great in so short a time.

I remind my colleagues that two years ago, Viet-Nam did not have a democratic constitution. Today it does.

I recall that two years ago there was no popularly elected national assembly. Today, there is.

Moreover, in the coming months, Viet-Nam will have a Senate and a House of representative and popularly chosen men and women. And under the Constitution, those legislative bodies will have great powers.

I think that as we watch this heartening progress we owe it to the Vietnamese -- and to ourselves -- to be patient, to be sympathetic, to be encouraging. For they have begun to move down the path toward real freedom -- toward the goal we have tried to make possible.

That is what the vast majority of Vietnamese want for themselves. And I have enough confidence in those brave people to believe that they will achieve their goal -- not overnight, not in one election, but slowly, surely, steadily -- as we and other free men have moved toward our own goals.

And as they move forward, we can take pride in the fact that American courage, American sacrifice, American patience have helped to make it possible.