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TO THE PRESIDENT FROM BUNKER

SAIGON 2867

August 11, 1967

I saw Ky late the afternoon of August 11, and took up the same matters I had discussed earlier with Thieu.

Ky made many of the same points as Thieu, emphasizing that the government was doing more than was required and was prepared to work out solutions with the candidates, as had been indicated at their August 8 press conference. Ky, in referring to the candidates, said they might actually prefer not to travel in the provinces and to do their talking from Saigon. He said that if they were serious and responsible, then they should have discussed the problems directly with Thieu and Ky and they could have been worked out. Instead, the candidates had excluded the Government of South Vietnam representative from the campaign committee, and written the August 8 letter and issued their communique, none of which had been correct. With respect to the letter, Ky said that he would not sign a reply himself but that Administrator Truong had been instructed to send a letter on behalf of Thieu and Ky to say what the government was prepared to do.

In discussing the developments in Quang Tri, Ky said that it was up to the local campaign committees rather than the Government of South Vietnam to make arrangements. I remarked that it was too bad that Thieu and Ky had not gone along on the trip as there could have been no complaint then. Ky admitted it would have been better and said that their representative, Nguyen Van Loc, was supposed to have gone but that he understood that Thieu had told him the evening before not to go. I asked Ky whether he and Thieu planned to go on some other trips, and he said that they would do so.

I then raised with Ky the possible desirability of a high level Government of South Vietnam election coordinator such as Deputy Prime Minister Vien, along the lines of my earlier talk with Thieu. Ky replied that Tuong has sufficient authority and had in fact ordered all the arrangements that were so carefully made through the Province Chief at Quang Tri. I commented that it was too bad that General Lam also had not been available as this had had a bad effect.

In order to impress Ky with the seriousness of the American reactions to recent developments here, I read him the text of the election appeal made by a group of prominent Americans and the statement by the Congressmen as contained in State 19045. In this connection, I asked him

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about the report of an armed forces committee to run the government which had had much adverse editorial comment. Ky said this report was completely untrue and added that it was merely a series of meetings that the usual group of top generals had held to discuss reorganization of the armed forces and pacification matters prior to discussion with Westmoreland, Komer and me. He said that they had put off this meeting with us since they had more preparatory work to do. He said there was absolutely no intention to set up any inner military group to run the government after the elections and this report could be flatly denied.

I also mentioned to Ky some of the reports from the civilian candidates that there were various harassment measures being taken. Ky referred to press accounts that he had been campaigning in Sa Dec and putting pressure on the local authorities to get out to vote for him. He said that accompanied by CBS and NBC and other press representatives he had stopped at a village and had asked the villagers who they were going to vote for and they replied they didn't know. He then asked them whether they knew who he was. The villagers had simply said, "no." Ky said that if reports of pressures on the part of Province Chiefs come to his attention, he will act on them. He considered, however, that most of them were rumors, such as the report of pressures by the police in Hue where in fact the Police Chief belongs to Ha Thuc Ky's Dai Viet Party. Ky also said that he hoped I had noticed that ban was being kept here in Saigon and was being kept quiet.

Ky concluded by saying that he was confident that everything would be gotten back on the tracks. I reverted to my earlier advice to him as an "elder" regarding handling of the press. Ky said yes, he remembered, and perhaps the best thing for him to do was just to keep his mouth shut. I agreed with him.

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