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Corrected Copy, Saigon 4420, August 15, 1967

Text of Cable from Ambassador Komer

The following represents my thoughts on rebuttal to the Moss Subcommittee attacks. Their use in public responses necessarily depends on Washington judgment as to how directly to engage with Moss:

First, all the latest mass criticism, like those in previous reports, can fairly be labeled as focussing almost exclusively on minor blemishes to the exclusion of major accomplishments. In broad perspective, AID programs in Vietnam have been remarkably successful in achieving the overall aim of keeping war-torn economy afloat, in keeping the South Vietnamese people fed, and in helping prevent runaway inflation. On the last score one need only compare Korean war experiences of 700 percent retail price inflation during the first year and 2400 percent during the three years before armistice with the U.S./South Vietnam ability to hold Saigon retail prices to less than a 300 percent rise in the over two and a half years since January 1, 1965.

Similarly, licking the Saigon port bottleneck was a classic success which makes the Moss nitpicks look pale indeed. Department of Defense and AID can provide plenty of details.

As to the chief Moss theme that U.S. officials avoid rocking the boat rather than pressing vigorously for needed reforms, Moss is speaking both from ignorance and from his room with a rather narrow view. In fact, the U.S. mission has had to choose judiciously which issues to press on the Government of Vietnam. Our sense of priorities are rather different from his. Moreover, the present Government of Vietnam has been far more responsive to U.S. advice and pressure on key issues than were those of Diem or Minh or Khanh during 1955-64.

On pacification, I don't know what Moss will bring forth. I do know that he and his staff spent so little time on pacification during the last brief visit as hardly to justify a report. Nor did anyone with whom they spoke provide ammo to support "lagging and floundering" in pacification. Indeed his only concern was over militarization of pacification under the new reorganization, and when Ambassador Bunker explained the facts to him, he had no retort.

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Thus, the best tack would be to ask Moss for specifics before he issues a pacification report. I have attempted to make the above points in a friendly letter to Moss, which can be used as Washington sees fit. Hence I suggest anticipating a Moss blast on pacification by inquiring promptly at high level as to his concerns and then publicizing the relevant facts and figures before this report comes out. Just tell us what target to shoot at and we'll let fly.

On land reform, let's face the fact that the Government of Vietnam performance is unimpressive. But neither is land reform a burning issue in Vietnam. Of 11 presidential slates only one (Suu/Dan) seems to have stressed it at all. But we have ginned up a new land reform package and now have another variant proposed by Professor John Montgomery from Harvard, who has been consulting out here. We'll try these on the Government of Vietnam right after the election.

Ambassador Bunker concurs in the above, and shares my views on tactics.

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