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Friday, September 1, 1967
3:35 p.m.

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for file

Mr. President:

You will be interested in this account
on the American observers in Viet Nam.

We should consider having someone
call the New York Times and the AP and
simply let them know that the evidence we
have is that their representatives are not
objective reporters but political operatives.

W. W. Rostow

Saigon 4658

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WWRostow:rlm

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Authority 71CJ 90-263

By kg/lap, NARA, Date 10-3-91

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Copy of SAIGON 4658 1 Sept. 1967

SUBJECT: American Observers to Vietnam

1. Observer visit appears to be progressing well so far. August 31 in the afternoon, Murphy, Gullander, Scerra, Barr, proceeded to Danang from which central point they have been able to cover election preparations and activities in a number of localities in I Corps. They return to Saigon in the early afternoon today, September 1. Antell and James went to Nha Trang, where they have remained overnight and from which they are travelling to Qui Nhon and Pleiku to observe election preparations prior to returning to Saigon.

2. Others have been in the Saigon area and on various short trips to localities in III and IV Corps. Places visited have included Phu Cuong, Cao Lanh, Phan Thiet, My Tho, Bao Trai, and others. Several observers are moving more independently, notably Senator Muskie, who made arrangements on his own for meetings with the press and attending joint presidential press conference August 31. Mayor McKeldin is in Danang today, and after the morning in Saigon, Archbishop Lucey and Senator Hickenlooper are in Can Thao this afternoon.

3. Most observers are expected to return to Saigon by late this afternoon (Sept. 1) to view the final election rally of the campaign, to be held in front of City Hall, and thereafter attend the Ambassador's reception. Saturday and Sunday the majority are following the Government of Viet Nam schedule, but several are expected to take separate trips and all Corps areas should be covered.

4. Reactions so far are fragmentary and obviously preliminary. On the basis of these, however, observers appear to be pleased at the opportunity to move about freely, and they seem to be undertaking their task with determination to be as objective as possible. In addition to discussions with Province Chiefs, local election committee members and similar contacts, at least two of the observers, Governor McCall and Rabbi Rudin, have even stopped people on the street asking them if they had been pressured to vote for any particular candidate. Apparently they have received consistently negative replies.

5. Some of the more critical members of the press have been at pains to get to the observers. Also, some of the observers themselves have been anxious to talk to critical correspondents and have done so. Correspondents have accompanied almost all of the groups and in some instances appear to have overplayed their hand in attempting to influence the observers. For example, the escort officer for Rabbi Rudin, reported that members of Group IV,

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including Rabbi Rudin, Governor McCall and Mr. Patterson, were considerably irritated yesterday, August 31, by accompanying reporters (Buckley of New York Times and Arnett of AP) who tried to convince them that the election would be fraudulent. The attitude of the observers was that so far they had not seen anything which would indicate that the elections would be rigged. The same officer reports that Whitney Young has said that unless he sees some indications of election rigging or pressure he is going to start asking reporters why they haven't been reporting elections correctly.

6. Arrangements are being made when requested and to the extent possible for observers to meet candidates. With individual arrangements, and Thieu/Ky reception on Saturday (to which candidates are invited), most observers desiring to meet candidates should have had an adequate opportunity to do so prior to election day. We will report on these contacts. Knight and Sullivan visited Huong campaign headquarters today, where they had an opportunity to talk with senatorial candidates. The latter gave a pat recital of complaints, and neither Knight nor Sullivan appeared impressed. Buckley of New York Times and AP Stringer were present.

7. Congressman Wolff and McCarthy have arrived. We are assisting them in various ways, but they are moving independently of the observer group.

Bunker