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Friday, October 13, 1967
5:45 p.m.

Pres file

Mr. President:

Here is Nick's evaluation of the
problem posed for us by the East German
Film on U.S. prisoners of war in North
Vietnam.

W. W. Rostow

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WWRostow:rln

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4(b)
White House Guidelines, Feb. 24, 1983
By rg, NARA, Date 10-21-91

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

NY 94-47

By [initials], NARA, Date 6-16-95

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

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October 12, 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: East German Film on U.S. PWs in
North Viet-Nam

Averell Harriman, Dix Donnelley, Paul Warnke and I have taken a hard look at the NBC and "Life" purchase of East German films on American PWs in North Viet-Nam. The facts are these:

NBC plans to use approximately 6-8 minutes of the film on next Monday's (the 16th) evening news. Averell Harriman has talked to NBC officials who readily agreed to show us the pictures and to consult with us in advance. They have accepted our guidance and assured us that they will handle the subject constructively.

"Life" plans to use stills (attached) in its October 16 issue. They have asked us for comments, and Averell will provide a statement--emphasizing the propaganda nature of the films--to be included in the article.

My own judgment is that there is little we can do to prevent the importation and showing of these films. The Department of Justice, Governor Harriman and Warnke all concur in this judgment. Since the purchase was from the East Germans rather than the DRV, we have no recourse to the Trading With the Enemy Act. Other less formal means of influencing "Life" or NBC would probably not work because:

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- Any attempt to persuade them to drop the projects would almost certainly become known, with consequent bad publicity.
- The East Germans are obviously offering the film to a wide variety of outlets, and it is virtually certain that these--or comparable--films will be available to American audiences through channels which we cannot control.

Underlying the problem is the intense desire of next-of-kin for any shred of information about the prisoners. The existence of the PW films is virtually impossible to conceal. (We have heard, for example, that "Paris-Match" and "Stern" have also purchased portions of the films.) The prisoners' families have made clear in similar cases in the past that their relief at seeing the men overshadows any concern about public display. Further, the publicity may influence Hanoi to improve treatment of the prisoners.

I believe the best solution open to us is to elicit the cooperation of the networks, and appeal to their sense of responsibility and sensitivity to criticism. (They have already made clear their worries about reports in the New York Times and elsewhere describing "trafficking" in Communist propaganda--reports based on material we supplied.)

Meanwhile, we will offer guidance--some of which they will accept--to NBC and "Life" in the editing and presentation of the films, as well as Averell Harriman's commentary.

Attachment.


Nicholas deB. Katzenbach

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