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Tuesday, October 3, 1967
10:55 a.m.

96
for file

Mr. President:

I have sent over this draft letter
from you to Thieu and Ky for consider-
ation by Sec. Rusk et al.

Until they move in this direction,
I believe our effort in South Viet Nam will
be operating on quicksand.

W. W. Rostow

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By kg, NARA, Date 10-24-95

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TO: Ben Read

FROM: Walt Rostow

FOR THE FOLLOWING DISTRIBUTION:

Secretary Rusk
Under Secretary Katzenbach
Asst. Secretary Wm Bundy

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4
NEJ 94-403
By 48, NARA, Date 10-24-95

What do you think of a letter like this from the President:

W. W. R.

DRAFT 10/3/67

Dear Chairman Thieu and Prime Minister Ky:

I was pleased to hear today that the Assembly has validated the recent nationwide elections. This action paves the way for continued progress down the path toward representative and Constitutional government, and in particular, frees you to concentrate on the formation and policies of the new government.

The political progress of South Vietnam has been remarkably rapid and this achievement has won the admiration of millions of men and women who believe deeply that the Vietnamese people must have a chance to build their own nation and their own institutions in their own way.

I have been following closely the evolution of political life in your country. Your people and your friends have an enormous stake in its success.

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We all know how vigorously the Liberation Front has been trying to frustrate the creation of a constitutional political order in South Vietnam. Even without their subversion and terror, the job of creating new and representative political institutions would be difficult enough. We have all watched many breakdowns in efforts of this kind -- in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

There are useful lessons to be learned from such failures, as well as from earlier efforts which have succeeded. I am sure you will want to consider both as you and your colleagues and your people move forward along the path you have courageously chosen.

One lesson to be learned is that the political life of any nation must be its own. Political institutions cannot be transplanted from one setting to another with much hope of success.

However, it has seemed to me that certain essentials appear time and time again in the records of those societies which have managed to develop democratic structures successfully and sustain them. One of the most obvious elements that appear in such societies is the development of broadly based national political parties capable of reaching out to the majority of people and developing within themselves the compromises and co-operation necessary for effective democratic government.

We had some experience with this in our early days. We started, as you know, with a very weak national government. This presented

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General Washington with many difficulties in his conduct of our war of independence, and it was a government that functioned rather poorly in the early years of peace.

We wrote and adopted a constitution in 1787 and this strengthened the hand of the executive branch of government. However, our political life in the first 12 years under that Constitution was marked by factionalism in the Congress, and even within the Executive itself.

Only in 1800, when two great national political parties began to emerge, did we find the basis for effective unity and mutual loyalty within the Executive as well as a framework of common interests that permitted the Executive to work effectively with the Congress.

Other democratic nations have arrived at a similar solution where constitutional government has proved durable.

As I see the problem of Vietnamese politics from a distance, there are four major requirements that have to be met in the days before us. First the government itself -- led by yourselves -- must organize a program of action around which the maximum number of South Vietnamese can rally with hope and conviction. Second, the government must draw to the execution of that program men of talent representing as many elements in Vietnamese life as possible. Third, good working relations must be built up between the government on the one hand and the Senate and Assembly on the other. As I know very well

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from 35 years of experience, the legislative and executive branches do not always see eye to eye in a democratic system. But there must be enough common agreement to permit the government to do its job. Fourth, you must begin to prepare now to defeat the Communists at the polls. We must expect the Communists to try to organize an anti-government front, as they did in other cases where violence failed. I am sure that the overwhelming majority of South Vietnamese are anti-Communist; but if they are politically fragmented, the danger would exist that a well organized, Communist-led front could undo all that the Vietnamese people and their allies have achieved in defeating the Communist military aggression.

These are the particular reasons which lead me to the judgment that the organization of the widest based national political party now possible in South Vietnam is worth your urgent consideration.

If South Vietnam were not under vicious attack from without and within, you could, perhaps, let time and experience shape your nation's political institutions gradually and slowly. But the defense of your nation's independence has required a very high order of courage, vision, and statesmanship throughout these difficult years; and that requirement continues.

I know you will understand that these are the thoughts of a friend not only of your nation, but of yourselves. I know well that if we have

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come thus far forward in the struggle, it is, in substantial part, because of your patriotism and because of your commitment to stay together and together to see this phase of your nation's history through.

Only you and your government can decide whether the advice I have given should and can be carried out. [But* I would wish you to know that if you choose to go down this road, we would be pleased to help you in any way that we can.] But I did wish you to have my thoughts on this fundamental matter.

Sincerely,

*To be added in oral statement by Ambassador Bunker.

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