

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Thursday, October 19, 1967
7:20 p.m.

free file

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Mr. President:

You will be interested in Ky's views. As always, they are quite sharp.

W. W. Rostow

Saigon 8995

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S.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4(b)
White House Guidelines, Feb. 24, 1983
By LG, NARA, Date 11-9-81

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

NEJ 94-449

By 118, NARA, Date 10-23-54

23a
Thursday, October 19, 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

TEXT OF CABLE FROM AMBASSADOR BUNKER (Saigon 8995)

I called on Prime Minister Ky accompanied by Jordon and Habib, and found him in good health after several days of illness.

In discussing the prospects for formation of the new government and the program to be presented thereafter, he exhibited impatience with what he considered to be Thieu's overcautious approach. He said that Thieu had been taking too long to make his decision on the cabinet and getting it in place. He said that as far as he was concerned the problem was not that he was insisting upon Nguyen Van Loc as Prime Minister. It was up to Thieu to decide and then form the government as quickly as possible. He did not think it was necessary to wait until the end of the month to do so.

He said that time was being lost in which the government could be formulating its policy and presenting it to the people. He thought it was absolutely necessary that the government move quickly to announce those things which it had intended to do, selecting those areas in which success could be achieved within a short time, certainly within six months.

Ky said that he conceived of the primary tasks as involving the following:

A. Putting into effect those changes affecting the better mobilization of the armed forces, which had been already decided upon by the military leaders. These involved the lowering of draft age, the retention of military men in service beyond their normal tours, and bringing former military men with particular skills back into the service. The government should move immediately to meet its manpower targets to demonstrate both inside and outside Vietnam their determination to do their share. The decree was all ready for Thieu to sign but he has been procrastinating. Ky intended to talk to Thieu about it this day and to urge Thieu to move ahead aggressively on this and other fronts.

B. The government needed to implement plans for reorganization at province levels. He said that it was their intention to train a pool of province level officials, beginning about December 1, so that they would be ready to be deployed in the provinces by the first of the year. The plan involved selecting the best men from among those presently in the province leadership and from among new capable men so as to form a pool of about 150-200 of the best people. These would

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then be broken down to groups of three to work as a team as Province Chief, Deputy Province Chief for Administration, and Deputy Province Chief for Security. Lines of authority to them would be improved so as to make them more directly responsible to the central government rather than to Division and Corps Commanders. Ky did not expect any undue interference in this process from the present military leadership at corps and division level.

C. The government had to push ahead dramatically in its campaign against corruption. More than anything, this would convince the people that the government was serious when it spoke of a new deal and greater progress.

D. The government should develop a major short-term program for improvements in the cities. He thought it was necessary to provide evidence clearly visible to the man in the street that the government was doing something about problems in their daily life. He wanted to use the military and was hoping to get American engineering support for cleaning up the cities, repairing the roads, and providing better public services.

Ky said that if the government is able to concentrate its attention on those things that could be accomplished within the next six months, people would increase their faith in the government and that this would provide the necessary strengthening of the government position throughout the country. He thought people should be promised only those things that were capable of being done efficiently and quickly. The sorts of things he had outlined above were those which could be easily done if the government would concentrate its efforts.

I asked him what he thought of the possibility of some move toward Hanoi. He said that he thought they would be in a better position to really get somewhere in this regard after about six months of the type of success of which he had been speaking. Unless they approached Hanoi from a position of accomplishment, there would be no response. He did not look with favor upon Thieu's suggestion to write a letter to Ho Chi Minh or to think in terms of bombing pauses. He didn't expect Ho Chi Minh would reply if Thieu were to write ten letters. Ky agreed that it was desirable to pursue the war while at the same time showing flexible readiness to seek a peaceful solution. But he felt that Hanoi would be recalcitrant until feasible progress had improved the climate in South Vietnam. He thought it was necessary to combine determination in the war, willingness to seek a peaceful settlement, and efforts to achieve progress in South Vietnam.

When asked about any possible approaches to the National Liberation Front, Ky said that he thought they could develop lines to the Southerners among the National Liberation Front. He was in favor of such direct approaches. It was not possible, at this time, to conceive of allowing the National Liberation

Front to function as a political party in South Vietnam, but he did not exclude this as a possibility for later on. He foresaw that the time would come when the Southerners in the National Liberation Front, who were not the same as the Northern Communists, would be prepared to make the compromises which would allow the government to work with them.

Ky said that once they were in a stronger position, which he expected would take about six months, they could deal with Hanoi and the National Liberation Front along the above lines. Until then, he did not favor bombing pauses, which would be only propaganda gestures, as he did not favor attempts at contact directly with Hanoi without indications that the situation was ripe.