

INFORMATION

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Monday, March 25, 1968
2:20 p.m.

Mr. President:

This is a remarkable and heartening letter; and the writer may well be correct in sensing a wholly new mood in South Vietnam.

In any case, he has a right to his judgment, given his experience.

I attach a draft note to him, should you wish to send it.

W. W. Rostow

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2. Press file



WORLD VISION INTERNATIONAL

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March 19, 1968

(Personal)

DR. BOB PIERCE
President

From the Office of
LARRY WARD
Executive Vice President

Hon. Lyndon B. Johnson
President, United States of America
White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

For ten years I have traveled in and out of Vietnam.

During the past three years, I have spent at least part of 31 of the past 36 months in Vietnam-- traveling to every corner of the country in connection with our relief program there, and with the bulk of my contacts with the Vietnamese themselves.

I write you now (as I fly from Vietnam) because I am gripped with a tremendous and encouraging conviction.

On the basis of my observations of the Vietnamese themselves, from throughout the country and from every walk of life, I am convinced that:

- (1) The Viet Cong overplayed their hand.
- (2) The Tet offensive is providing a great rallying point for the South Vietnamese-- a sort of Pearl Harbor experience which unifies them and stiffens their determination.

(3) The violation of Tet (not just the violation of the truce, but the very spirit of Tet itself) has aroused the Vietnamese. First they were shaken; now they are angry and determined.

I realize these statements may seem extreme and over-simplified, but I base them on:

(1) The amazingly quick reaction time as the Vietnamese themselves have moved to grapple with the problems of reconstruction and refugee rehabilitation.

(2) The new mood of confidence the people place in their own GVN troops. The Vietnamese know (with all due respect to the U.S. and other Free World forces) that the ARVN themselves saved Saigon. In the light of this, the typical Asian inferiority gives way to a new climate of self-confidence.

(3) The changed attitude of even the "Tu Do Street Cowboys"--the Honda boys who have so irritated the foreign press. (I do not have the statistics, but I am told that many of them have now moved to enlist as many of us did that fateful morning after Pearl Harbor. I can point to conversations of my own with some of the younger "cowboys," who for the first time now stand straight and tall with a spirit of "I'm ready to go if my country needs me.")

(4) The cooperative spirit of the disparate and historically opposed religious groups, especially the new involvement of the Protestant Church of Vietnam in meeting the human needs of the wounded and the homeless and the orphaned.

(5) Two lengthy conversations with President Thieu this past week. I have known him for two years. I see him now, particularly as he assumes personal charge of the refugee assistance program, moving with a new decisiveness and authority.

(And now, since I have left Saigon, I read in the papers of the new MNA-- March to the North Army. I do not know how you react to this, Sir, but I cite it as just another example of the determined mood I now sense and see.)

I suppose an obvious reaction to what I say here is: "What about the press? Why do their gloomy reports differ so from the optimism expressed here?"

I have endeavored honestly and objectively to analyze this. They seem to agree; does this mean they are right? Am I guilty of the attitude of "Everyone is out of step but me"?

Here's my answer to that. I am quick to praise my fellows in the press corps in Vietnam for their gutsy, graphic, spot coverage... but:

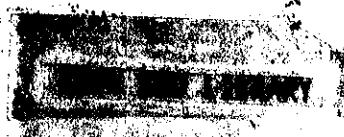
(1) They agree because their information stems from basically the same sources-- and essentially from American viewpoints.

(2) They lack direct involvement with the Vietnamese people.

(3) They write, obviously, from the viewpoint of a flesh-and-blood individual. They don't have direct contact with the Viet Cong, and so their normal irritations in the midst of war are often directed at the ARVN or the Vietnamese police.

(4) War at best is brutal; the brutality they see (and for which many of them are unprepared) is necessarily on the South Vietnamese and Free World sides.

(5) There has been a "fad" aspect in the criticism of the ARVN and the Government of Vietnam. Within the tiny confines of the press community, the echoes reverberate-- and we tend to believe the things repeated just because of the repetition.



(6) The Tet offensive left many members of the press shaken. They expect to see the war when they fly to Pleiku or Hue-- but not when they step outside the Caravelle Hotel.

(7) The charges of government corruption grow out of measuring Asian situations by a North American standard. It just doesn't work. Vietnam in the midst of war is no worse than many other countries in other parts of the world, and the situation is rapidly improving. (I have recently been to another country which is much, much worse than Vietnam.)

I have written all this just to report what I see and feel as one who travels the world (especially Asia) ten to eleven months out of the year.

I have not planned or attempted to advise you. Everyone is doing that. But perhaps it would not be out of order or disrespectful to say: "Hang on, Mr. President."

God grant you wisdom and strength to make your decision not on the basis of temporal expediency but on the standard of His eternal truth.

His is the vote which ultimately will out-weigh all the others.

It may be a long time, with a lot of histories written, before that vote is tallied... but it will be worth it.

And my deep personal conviction is that the course you have followed-- and which has drawn fire from the two extremes-- now begins to pay off in the form of an increasing stable



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government and a new military posture of confidence in South Vietnam. Watch what develops, Mr. President. I'm convinced it will.

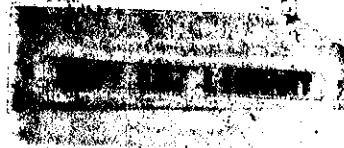
Sincerely,

Larry Ward

Larry Ward

Vice President-Overseas Director

LW/Lf



March 25, 1968

Dear Mr. Ward:

I found your letter of March 19th interesting and heartening. Your long knowledge of Vietnam and the first-hand character of your impressions give your judgments weight.

Your words of encouragement and support gave me strength.

Sincerely,

LBJ

Mr. Larry Ward
Executive Vice President
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