

98. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, March 2, 1966.

3159. For the President from Lodge. Herewith my weekly telegram:

A. Concerning Senators.

1. From a CIA source, I learn that Prime Minister Ky is writing to Senator Robert Kennedy disputing his thesis that the Viet Cong should be put in the Government of Viet-Nam, and in effect asking him, "Why don't you come out here and see the truth?"

2. Rev. Tam Chau, Chairman of the Institute for the Propagation of the Buddhist Faith, said Senator Kennedy's proposal had renewed uncertainty about U.S. objectives in Viet-Nam and would undermine anti-Communist morale.

3. In the February 25 issue of *The Reporter* magazine, Douglas Pike gives an account of the true situation of the Viet Cong, which I recommend that you read as I believe it will interest and encourage you. It should be put into the *Congressional Record*. In this article, he makes this statement:

"Viet Cong theoreticians have traditionally held that there are three routes to victory: (1) the Khoi Nghia, or general uprising; (2) the famed Mao-Giap three-stage revolutionary guerrilla war; or (3) coalition government."

It is not so surprising to learn that the Viet Cong themselves regard the creation of coalition government as one of the three principal routes to victory, since we in USG have long realized that to put the Viet Cong into the Government of Viet-Nam would disintegrate everything we have worked so hard to accomplish here and would gravely endanger the security of our own troops. But Communist skill in selling this idea to distinguished and patriotic Senators is surprising.

4. U.S. Senate debate on Viet-Nam drew heavy attention to American role in the Viet-Nam press. *Quyet Tien* asked if Senators Fulbright and Kennedy would accept Communists' price for peace—a disgraceful American surrender in Southeast Asia. *Tien Tuyen* wondered what Mr. Fulbright would do if, Viet-Nam having been abandoned, Communist aggression turned to Thailand, the Philippines, India, and even the United States. *Tien Tuyen* labeled Senator Kennedy's proposal for coalition government violation of principle of self-determination and

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 VIET S. Secret; Priority; Nodis. The source text does not indicate the time of transmission; the telegram was received at 8:16 a.m. and passed to the White House.

uncalled for interference in Viet-Nam's affairs. *Tieng Van* commented that "While many people think White House cannot ignore . . . Messrs. Fulbright, Wayne Morse, Robert Kennedy, best informed observers think that defeatist camp cannot shake determination of U.S. number one citizen L. B. Johnson."

B. Communist propaganda success.

5. Persuading U.S. Senators unwittingly to support V.C. victory formula is on a par with Communist successes in convincing the non-Communist public that:

A double standard about aggression is all right that is—if Israel attacked Egypt in 1956 it was dreadful, but for North Viet-Nam to commit aggression against South Vietnam is fine.

Or that the words of the U.N. Charter calling for "suppression of aggression" are somewhat disreputable.

6. I suggest publicity be given to the statement which you made in Honolulu in which you mentioned the word "aggression" fourteen times in a row. You really put your finger on something very crucial and for this reason:

7. In the propaganda war, we have been on the horns of a dilemma. If we stressed peace negotiations, we pleased certain elements in the West, but we aroused contempt in Asia and probably hardened the Communist will to fight. But if, on the other hand, we decided to "play it cool", we would increase the chances of impressing the Asians with our toughness and improve the chances of peace, but we appeared bellicose and indifferent to human suffering in the West.

8. The way out is, I think, to stress the idea of aggression and the corollary that we are fighting a limited war. The thought to get across is that "The North Vietnamese must get out of South Viet-Nam. Then the war will be over. They are the escalators; we are fighting a limited war."

9. I realize that this has been said many times, but the Communists repeat and so should we. Your stress on aggression at Honolulu, therefore, hit the bull's eye.

C. "Revolutionary development".

10. Porter is doing superbly in his new job, sharpening the whole U.S. approach to "revolutionary development". He is boldly and rapidly pulling all the strings together. I frankly admit that I had not realized that giving him this added status would make such a tremendous difference. My congratulations for having thought of it.

11. Under your leadership, a corps of men and a body of ideas and procedures are developing here [that] will be available for use elsewhere to overcome subversion and terrorism and carry out the true revolution in freedom, which will be more potent than the Communist revolution. If we succeed here, we will have men and measures for use in underdeveloped

countries anywhere in the world and the downward spiral of world Communism will have begun. The year that this blow at Communism is struck in Viet-Nam may well be, in the history of Communism, on a par in importance with 1917—the year of its birth.

12. We are watching the national priority areas in Quang Nam (no.1) and Binh Dinh (no.2) even more closely than usual because the GVN changed chiefs of both provinces this week. We are uncertain as to the effect these changes will have on the revolutionary development effort, though Americans generally in Binh Dinh feel that the departure of Col. Tuong, the Province Chief and Major Be, his chief deputy and the guiding hand of provincial revolutionary development efforts, may have an adverse effect on the program there. But it is too early to tell.

13. Lansdale visited Quang Nam and found General Thi much more involved in revolutionary development than in conniving against Prime Minister Ky.

14. General Thang, Minister of Revolutionary Development, spent most of last week visiting provinces in the IV Corps area checking progress against provincial plans. He plans to continue trips of this sort until he has visited every province.

15. Prime Minister Ky has issued a decree making trainees at the National Institute of Administration available for work in the Revolutionary Development Program for one and one half years of their total three and one half year training program. It is hoped that this arrangement will help meet needs for trained personnel.

D. Military.

16. Contacts with the Viet Cong increased in both number and intensity and the enemy mounted one regimental attack and at least three attacks employing one or two battalions. As a result of this harder fighting, allied casualties reached a new high for the war.

E. Economic.

17. Retail prices in Saigon, including rice prices, increased slightly but the USAID index showed the general price level three percent below the level of a month ago. The free market price of dollars remained unchanged and the price of gold rose very slightly. Imports increased rice stocks in the Saigon area but deliveries from the Delta remained low.

Minister of Economy plans to announce new economic program on March 17.

F. News from Hanoi.

18. Hanoi reports indicate that, while the hold of the Communist government is as ironclad as ever, the government is disappointed by the failure of the people to have an enthusiastic attitude towards the war. Apparently the "prospect of protracted conflict with no foreseeable

and perplexity". The pressure of pursuing an expanding war in South Viet-Nam, while defending the North, and maintaining economic progress is apparently a problem.

19. For the first time, I note reports from Hanoi that all our military activities plus our psychological activities have "created much difficulty for the political struggle movement". There are reports of "confusion about the political struggle", the political movement not developing "apace with the arms struggle".

20. This undoubtedly does not indicate big trouble, but it is the first time that I have seen reports that they were having any political difficulties at all. We are accustomed to military success and political failure. It is cheering to read that we are finally giving them political troubles, however small in number.

21. After talks with North Vietnamese political and military prisoners, General Thi (I Corps) was struck by the immunity they felt they had. They were "sure there would be no U.S. or GVN invasion". Therefore, he told Lansdale, "They could afford to send a great mass of their manpower into South Viet-Nam rather than keeping them North for the defense of the homeland, and simply to inundate South Viet-Nam." They were no longer even pretending to "liberate South Viet-Nam but were quite nakedly setting out to put their own people in place."

22. Question: Might it not be well to take some action which would make Hanoi think we were planning an invasion?