

192. **Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant
(Rostow) to President Johnson¹**

Washington, July 25, 1966, 3:30 p.m.

Mr. President:

This is the first explicit suggestion from Saigon that Ky might run for President of South Viet-Nam in the 1967 election.²

This should be no surprise: Ky's Directorate has been studying the evolution of South Korea after 1961. There Park took off his soldier suit and became a politician, barely winning a quite honest election in 1963. He has since grown remarkably in his job.

¹ Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, vol. LVI. Secret. The source text is marked with an indication that the President saw it.

² Attached is an extract from the text of telegram 1848 from Saigon, July 25, in which Lodge reported that, according to Do, "Mrs. Ky's trip to the U.S. was also the opening gun in Ky's campaign for the President." Also attached is the text of telegram 1786 from Saigon, July 24, in which Lodge stated that he thought it "imprudent to rule Ky out as early as this"; envisioning adoption of a Vietnamese constitution with a "strong U.S. type President," Lodge saw no one else "as ready to fill this job" and "ready to run."

The Quayle polls showed Ky quite strong when they were taken late in 1965: 92% of the people were familiar with Ky; 34% liked him "very much"; 43% liked him "only a little"; only 5% "disliked" him. Only two other men in South Viet-Nam were close, in terms of being known and "liked"; the moderate Buddhist leader Tam Chau and our old friend Dr. Quang.

Since then he has gained stature by his showdown in Hue and Da nang; but he will lose because of devaluation and inflation, unless we really get that rice, pork, etc., in there.

I'm sure we shouldn't hook ourselves to Ky; but I believe we should keep our mind open to the possibility that he may emerge as a logical candidate, if he handles himself well over the next 6-9 months.

The critical question, in my view, is whether or not in the months after the Constituent Assembly meets, the South Vietnamese can form a big national political party. The party should have military support but reach far out into every region, religious and racial group.³ If Ky and the Directorate can form such a party and Ky can lead it, his candidacy might make sense.

A party law in the Constitution, forcing the small fragmented parties to come together in bigger units, would be helpful. Such an article was written into the Korean Constitution.

In the meanwhile, quarrels and jealousies inside the Directorate are our greatest concern: a sample is the attached bitter comment on Ky by his Foreign Minister.⁴

Walt

³ Rostow elaborated on this point in an August 4 letter to Lodge, a copy of which he forwarded to the President under a covering memorandum, August 6, in which he noted that his views about the urgent need for a large national political party were shared by Kissinger, Unger, and Jorden. (Johnson Library, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, vol. LVI)

⁴ According to Lodge's report in telegram 1848, Do said that "anybody could beat Ky," who was "inescapably connected in peoples' minds with devaluation and with inflation" and "literally had nobody with him." Only Bui Diem could "get any work out of him," and "if Bui Diem were removed, Do said, Ky would be like a man with both his arms