

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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November 4, 1966

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By SP/ig, NARA, Date 2/24/93

MEMORANDUM FOR

THE PRESIDENT

At your instruction I went to Saigon from Manila and spent three days trying to convince the mission that a period of profound calm in Vietnamese politics was a top United States priority.

I discovered on arriving that--with the elections here a mere ten days off--Ambassador Lodge was off on vacation in Thailand.

Deputy Ambassador Porter has been virtually forbidden by the Chief of Mission to deal with Thieu and Ky.

--The Ky's talk only to Lodges. And Lodge doesn't talk to anybody--in Saigon at least.

This has as its practical consequence that effective American pressure on the GVN can come only from Ambassador Lodge. And he is seldom really there--he puts in a five or six-hour day.

I want to make it clear that I consider Ambassador Lodge a fine American who has loyally undertaken what may be an impossible task.

But we need in Saigon a man with immense vitality, who can and will work an 18-hour day.

--one who can assert real administrative authority over that sprawling, feudal American mission.

--one who can keep two jumps ahead of the Vietnamese, anticipate and head off trouble, and put the arm on them when they play French games.

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--For example, they have--in the best French tradition--agreed "in principle" to the reform of the Port of Saigon.

--Which means they really haven't agreed to anything that will specifically remedy the problems; they are stonewalling at the administrative level.

Plenty of trouble is coming. Some time this winter or spring there will be a moment of truth between the Directorate, the Peoples' Army Council and the Constituent Assembly.

--The recent resignations were a precursor and the lines of stress run through all three bodies.

--There are generals in every camp and a to me ominous fact is that Chief of State Thieu (who has played second fiddle to Ky so far) is a very old buddy of two generals Ky is out to purge: Co and Quang.

--None of them is Northern. (Thieu is from the center, Co and Quang from the south.)

--They were together at Hue Military Academy (1948-49), at Infantry School in France (1949-50), Tactical Command School, Hanoi (1951-52) and at Fort Leavenworth (1956-57).

Our task is to prevent any confrontations and disruptions--or we are likely to be back where we were after Diem fell--which would be disastrous in terms of American public opinion and the long-range conduct of the war.

And somebody out there in top authority should be worrying about this sort of thing seven days a week, 18 hours a day (possibly even 24).

In my considered judgment this is our top priority in Vietnam. We can't lose the war, but we can find ourselves fighting it endlessly in a political vacuum.

J. P. Roche
John P. Roche

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