



7 Feb '67

Dear Ed,

A note to keep you up on some
news from back here.

I've seen quite a bit of
Bui Diem and we have had a
couple of good political talks.
He plans to return to Saigon in
early March with a program of
political action here including
what he should do about his
trip. I advised him that he
should first make up his mind
about running or not running
before coming. He agreed. I also
suggested that Mrs. He ought
to come in any case on a private
basis. The latter was followed
up by a conversation that George
Peabody and I had with him.

Bui Diem likes the idea and
will propose it. I am trying to
help get George into the PR
picture which may come about.
He and Bui Diem seemed to
get along well. Will follow up
on that unless you advise to
the contrary.

I raised with Bui Diem
the problem of thinking through
what happens after the Constitution
is proclaimed. I suggest new
Assembly elections come before



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Presidential elections to permit
more maturing of national
political unity. I said I
didn't think any of the con-
didates were yet ready to abide
by the rules; and if by running
but leaving a loan in as
Chief of Security, Vy violated
the rules then the whole
process would be aborted. Bui
Diem thought the idea of
having new Assembly elections
first a good one and said
he would pass it on to Vy.

I urged him to reestablish
contact with Thi and not stand
on his prerogatives. Two days
later he went informally and saw
Thi in Thi's apartment which
made a big hit with Thi. They
got on well apparently and Thi
was happy and wants to reestablish
contact with Vy. Ted Britton
was here and gave me the info
about Thi's favorable reaction. I
think Vy and Thi can be brought
back together again. Is there
anything in particular you want
me to push on this from back
here.

I also talked to Bui Diem
about the possibility of the Army



(3)

getting out of partisan politics
altogether and becoming ~~un~~
united on this basis. I said
Ky would be a national hero
if he did it - The Army could
stand behind the civilians and
could help them and sustain
but now with somebody like Ky
at the helm could show greater
restraint and not intervene as
before at the slightest provocation.
He said perhaps, but Ky was
afraid that if he didn't run
he might have to intervene
again ~~but~~ because the civilians
failed and this would destroy
the whole process. I said, it
was better to run that risk
than the sure one that if Ky
runs the civilians are going to
change intimidation and illegal
practices thus spoiling the
atmosphere. Finally, I urged him
to try to think ^{the} problem of
the presidency and potential
candidates in all its aspects. Will
follow up on this but would
like to know your plan. Trust I
am not too much off base. May-
be the military can rehabilitate
itself in another year but I'm
afraid a presidential campaign



(4)

(This year
with military candidates) would
destroy what unity has been achieved.
Please advise on this. I also
again surfaced the idea with
Bui Diem that they might
challenge the Viet Cong in the
next Assembly elections (he
has mixed emotions about it
but agrees that it might
be worth the risk)

Went to a dinner
Wed where the VP spoke. He
was in great form and really
bore down on political development
and elections as the answer
in Vietnam, and elsewhere. Terrific
speech. Seems to have some of
his old form back now that
RFK has dropped in the polls.

Lastly, Father Don ~~McLellan~~
McLellan is on his way out
to Saigon at the personal request
of the VP (over Culbertson's dead
body I understand). I have
been briefing him and we will
see you ~~right~~ out almost
immediately. He's pretty cantankerous
with the Americans so if you
can slip him in with them and
get him out in the field right
now I think he will be helpful.
He's one of the VP's heroes - a drinking,
swearing priest who knows how (over)