

32194

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

INFORMATION

SECRET

September 10, 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR:

DR. KISSINGER

FROM:

JOHN H. MOLDRIDGE *JHM*

SEP 27 1971

SUBJECT:

CIA Memorandum on the Political Situation in South Vietnam

General Cushman has sent you a CIA memorandum entitled "Election Developments in South Vietnam" (Tab A). It contains some background leading up to the withdrawals of Minh and Ky last month, as well as some thoughts on what may lie ahead.

Generally, it is a bit lengthy and repetitious, and you may not wish to read it through. The tone of the memorandum is neither overly pessimistic nor optimistic, and the following points scattered throughout the report seem worth noting:

-- Minh was never a very vigorous or determined candidate. He made no effort to organize. As much as anything, he seemed to concentrate on building a rationale for his withdrawal.

-- Thieu overplayed his hand by galvanizing the GVN machinery, thus handing Minh a credible excuse for dropping out.

-- The circumstances of Minh's withdrawal and Thieu's decision to proceed with an uncontested election have provided ammunition to those who wish to attack the government's claims to legitimacy.

-- But it is not clear whether Thieu's opposition will grow larger or react strongly. Although developments have offended the sense of justice of many South Vietnamese, others may be impressed by Thieu's

MORI/CDF  
C05099545

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE  
INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

SECRET

SECRET

2

demonstration of political power. Thieu's natural opponents are likely to pause and review the bidding before choosing their next move.

-- Minh appears to have no stomach for leading a broad opposition movement. Although Ky is almost certainly willing, he is a most unnatural ally for many of Thieu's strongest opponents.

-- The likelihood of a coup is probably no greater now than before. Basic ARVN interests have not been threatened by recent developments, and a substantial number of military leaders would probably not choose to move against Thieu (or any incumbent) unless the withdrawal of U.S. assistance was threatened, a coalition with the Communists was impending, or real political chaos developed.

Comment: Overall, the memorandum seems to allow equally for the possibility that things will get worse, or that things will get back on the track with little if any permanent damage sustained. This is a good safe way to hedge bets, but hardly helpful.

SECRET