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MAR 13 1970

Dear Bob:

Thank you for your perceptive report on South Vietnamese political developments and on what we should do about them.

When are you coming this way again? Your paper is fascinating but there is no substitute for personal conversation.

Warm regards,

(Signature) Henry

Henry A. Kissinger

**Mr. Robert M. Shaplen
In care of Mr. Joseph F. Baker
Box 30
American Consulate General
FPO San Francisco, California 96659**

Retyped:HAK:feg:3/10/70

Feb. 12, 1970

Dear Henry -

Herewith another "report" from the "front." I hope it proves of some use. I feel that our political time draws shorter and shorter and hope the disinclination to do anything about the deteriorating situation in this regard is still rectifiable.

If you have the time, I'd appreciate some of your own thoughts in response. I sent you a reprint of Time Out of Hand by the way, or asked that one be sent (it's just out for March publication), which has some revisions and updates. You'll note that I quoted your "philosophy of foreign relations" comment, as I did in a piece just finished for the upcoming Foreign Affairs on Laos.

I trust all goes well with you on your "front." It's rougher there than here!

best regards,


ras

As usual, excuse the quick typing -- I've been held up a week in getting it off to you, but by now, I imagine, you're used to my informal style.

Memo to Henry Kissinger
From Bob Shaplen

As you will have seen from the last New Yorker piece (January 31st), I have grave doubts about Vietnamization, let alone the developing political process in Vietnam. There is nothing much we can do about Vietnamization except plug away, doing many of the things now that we should have done four and five years ago. I won't pretend to try and tell the military experts how to teach the Vietnamese, but I do have the feeling that the overall program of training the RF and PF, as well as ARVN, could be stepped up. It has been improved, I know -- more Vietnamese studying abroad, etc. -- but there are other ways to do this in Vietnam too. Essentially, from what I have observed, the sooner we get down to the concept of mobile force training, the better. I know that people like Vy have this in mind, but they need prodding. They still have no essential understanding of strategy and tactics, of co-ordinated effort. There are places in the country where we should jump the gun to what will presumably be a 1972 posture: establish a group of American advisors, something superceding the MATS concept, and pick a place that is under some pressure but not really in trouble at the moment. Put such a group of advisors in there, say up to twenty, and let them try to mesh the RF and PF and the PSDF approach with a mobile battalion or regimental ARVN element. Who does what, when and why. This goes beyond the Combined Action Team approach the Marines used because it's of wider scope, done over a broader area. I have the feeling, based on my observations during my last trip, that our effort is too scattered and that we are simply using Vietnamization as a "method" in a broad, almost semantic sense. A way for us to get out "gracefully." But we are not yet ~~xxx~~ nuts-and-bolting it beyond the equipment (M-16 etc.) stage etc, or at least not doing this well enough. Again, this is the time to start, not two years hence. If Thieu is serious about the new regional re-organization that is supposedly pending, then there should be an ~~opened~~ opening for us to move in and try to do what I'm suggesting. Just proving that they can get along on less advisors doesn't work (as with the 22d division experiment), and satisfying their need for more MATS teams on a scatter basis doesn't do the trick either. What is needed now is an overall, well-planned, co-ordinated and implemented American advisory effort comparable in talent and approach to that of 1962, but let's get moving on it now, not in 1972.

Anything I say about the political picture must be assessed by you ~~from~~ on the basis of my prejudice against Thieu. I have never trusted the man, and I don't now. He can make all the speeches he wants about never dealing with the Communists (as he did again last week), but I still think he wants two things -- re-election in 1971 and a chance to make his own deal in his own way with the other side. There have been signs that I may be right, such as Tinh's opening the door to coalition in his delta speech a few weeks ago (Tinh is Information Minister). He would not have done that without some OK from Thieu -- he is the closest man in the cabinet to Thieu in many ways (Nhan Xa etc.) and this was calculatedly floated by Thieu, just as calculatedly as Thieu sends Nguyen Cao Thang or someone else abroad to make soundings. One reason Thieu has been so violent in his attacks on Don and Minh, and on the "neutralists" and "coalitionists" in the National Assembly, etc. is his fear that they will open the door to accomodation in their way, which is not his. Every Vietnamese, with very few exceptions, thinks in terms

of some kind of accommodation by now. Thieu wants no one to take the ball away from him -- again, he'll do it all in his growingly imperious way. This is the chief reason he operates as he does, with that small inner palace guard (Cao Thang, Dang Van Quang, etc.), why he continues to play the divide-and-conquer game with other political personages and groups, and why he wants to remain essentially isolated. It seems to me it's our job to convince him that this will not only fail to serve his own best interests, but will also further divide the embittered country and play into Communist hands. We can do this only by being tougher with him than we have, as I have maintained all along, and by also using the gloved hand with him when possible. But, beyond that, we must, it seems to me, think in terms of alternatives to Thieu and do what we can, both through him and by ourselves, to stimulate political developments that will, minimally, backstop the present regime if it fails or falls in one way or another. Will we ever learn to think in terms of alternatives? Or does the President just really want to fly on with Thieu so that Vietnamization will "work" and we can go home and let them stew in their own juice?

Let's list some of the alternatives, and discuss what we can do about them:

1 - Starting on the assumption that we have hoisted ourselves by overbacking legality and constitutionalism, which I think we have prematurely in Vietnam, we cannot or should not simply undercut Thieu. I have been accused by some of my Mission friends of being virtually "seditious" by my criticism. "We can't let blood to let the sharks in," one of them said to me. I'll buy that, up to a point; but let's not kid ourselves by assuming that Thieu is the only shark in the sea.

So, alternative number one is helping Thieu help himself. A tough one, but patting him on the back and telling him he's one of the four or five greatest statesmen in the world is hardly the way to go about it. He must be convinced that not everybody is as suspicious of him as he is of them. There remain people in Vietnam, such as Dr. Tran Kim Tuyen, who are able and willing to help him. We can do more than we have to open the palace doors to and for them. This should be done indirectly, by the Vietnamese, but with our guidance. I have talked to Tuyen and other Vietnamese (Sung, Buu) about how to do this. They say they'll do it, we'd only get in the way, but that's not altogether true, I feel. If they alone try to do it, they will simply arouse Thieu's suspicion further. Buu, for example, admits that danger. The advisory council approach failed, in my estimation, because we didn't push hard enough on it, or we didn't go about it in the right way. But the fact remains -- Thieu desperately needs help in creating his Cadre-Khaki party if it's going to get anywhere because he doesn't know how to do it himself, launch it and move it. People like Tuyen who have the knowledge and organizing ability can help him, if he'll let them.

At this moment, Thieu is in trouble on this, because men like Sung and Buu, who are perhaps finally beginning to put blocs together that so far have failed, are ready to throw him the ultimate challenge, as Sung put it to me just before I left: "either you trust us and we trust you and we work together, ~~xx~~ in your behalf, or we go it alone." That point is about to be reached. There are things we can do to make Thieu realize it, though I think the sooner we have a new "team" in Saigon the better. I say this with all due respect to Bunker and Berger, but they are too much connected with the past now, with getting Thieu over the Paris hurdles and all that.

The 1970 Senatorial elections provide us with an opening wedge to move in on Thieu. We must somehow convince Thieu that he must think in terms of creating meaningful Senate-Palace working options. The alternative is continuing battles over every piece of legislation or every Thieu move --

budgets, land reform bills, etc. The bloc that Sung is now setting up, to include some of the defeated (in the lottery) Catholic Senators, some Buddhists, some of Buu's people and others, must be encouraged and we must help Sung in his effort to confront Thieu with the facts of life -- work with us, or we're giving up on you.

Such an approach must be related to the political parties, weak as they still are. Personally, I don't have much hope for the National Social Democratic Front, but in some respects it's the only poker game in the house, for Thieu at least to deal "publicly" -- I'm not thinking of the Cadre-Khaki approach at the moment. Obviously, at this juncture, the NSDF is not viable. I think it's not so because that's how Thieu wants it, non-viable. Some of my Mission friends think otherwise. At any rate, I would admit that it deserves a final shot of adrenalin, but we've got to give it, because Thieu won't. So we should relate the movement among the leading Senators (and some Representatives) to form blocs to the parties in the NSDF, including Buu's, which is still half in and half out (the new Worker-Peasant Party).

Buu, whom I know well, possibly better than any other American, has often told me about his troubles in dealing with Thieu, the seeming Diem-like approval ~~and~~ and go-aheads he gets when he sees Thieu alone; then the new mistrust, the knife in the back from Dang Van Quang or someone else. Buu at present hovers somewhere between Thieu and the NSDF and Sung and himself - going it alone, that is. We should try to convince him and Sung to make their final approach to Thieu with some of the above considerations in mind, and we should simultaneously convince Thieu that this time they mean business, it's co-operation or chaos.

2 - Buu: We should help him ourselves, as still one of the best alternatives. I think I had him almost convinced when I left a month ago that he must finally take over the leadership of the new party himself. He told me, rather sadly, that this was not his nature tho he realized I was right. Spoke of his three great disillusionments as a man behind the scenes -- trying to push first Nhu, then Sung, then Don into the limelight while he pulled the strings. The answer in each case we know. Nhu used him and all but destroyed him afterward. Sung, good as he is, is also a behind the scenes man (a better one than Buu in some respects). And Don is Don Quitoxe. So Buu said he now agreed he has no alternative (I hope he's still agreeing when I get back there in March).

In any case, we should help Buu with our own resources - agency, etc. - and with the AFL-CIO and the international labor movement. This requires care and caution, but unless, again, the President is simply flying on to "safety" with Thieu - "See it Through with Nguyen Van Thieu" -- we must be willing and bold enough to back worthwhile alternative leaders and movements. Buu's cadres are good, but he has no money, beyond what Thieu gave him earlier, and he wants to go it alone really, or is at least ready to do so.

3 - Nguyen Ngoc Huy and Nguyen Van Bong, the Bong-Huy party: This is the nearest thing to a "loyal opposition" and it could be viable. Trouble is that neither leader has any moxie. We can help there, though, by pushing them. We have to be careful that it's not cut off at the knees by Thieu in One Hundred Flowers fashion (to mix the metaphor). It should be allowed to bloom independently and its people around the country -- considerable, since Bong heads the National Institute of Administration and Huy is Dai Viet -- need money and guidance. A quiet bit of help from us on both counts would be highly worthwhile, I think. Both men are politically knowledgeable, if they lack drive, and that at least is a plus.

4 - Be: My good friend Nguyen Be, who has caught the political bug, is in danger of really having his knees cut off, by Thieu. He not only needs guidance but is willing to take it, and he needs it soon or he will be lost in the shuffle. What he has got is true leadership potential. He should be tied in to the Buu party, which Sung stands behind, or possibly with Bong-Huy. I have already brought him together with Buu twice and Sung once and both men asked me, a month ago, to tell him to come see them again, ~~separately~~ separately. But Be needs a "rest cure" which would also be a source of indoctrination. He is one of those who knows a lot but sometimes understands nothing. Politically, some of my Mission friends consider him a neophyte. I don't agree. I think he is much more than that, is full of ideas, many of them good, especially when talks about the Communists and ways to combat them covertly as well as overtly. But, like Don, he lacks direction, a weathervane. I agree with some of my American friends that he needs to be "rationalized" and that he should be subjected to some outside ideas and developments. Accordingly, we ought to set up some short trips for him, while he still retains the Vung Tau job. First Taiwan, where he can take a look at the sophisticated agricultural-industrial development schemes, co-ops, etc.; then Thailand, where he can get a better understanding of rice production and marketing and cottage industry; then Singapore, where he can better comprehend the urban type of development program; then Indonesia, where he can get a look at the wide sweep of mass movements, etc. Two weeks at a time, with a month back in Vietnam between each trip. Again, we must convince Thieu, who likes Be where he is, in his back pocket, really, since he depends on Thieu to keep his job. Someone like Sung could help here, or Khiem, or even Kieu, Thieu's brother, through Buu maybe. Once again, though, unless we convince Thieu that he must allow personal flowers to bloom, nothing will do any good. If he DDT's anyone who comes along he considers a threat, which has been his way and wont, nothing will work. So if he means what he says about a real election in 1971 and a run-off maybe, let him start proving it now, and that, more than anything else, would push the Communists into accepting the kind of election challenge they don't want to accept if they can help it.

5-Ky:- We should keep our lines open to him, in a sophisticated way, because he must still be reckoned with. He has a lot of young turks who could hurt as well as help around him. He is no fool, has learned a lot, and is making his own soundings for the future. We should not discourage him to run in 1971, if he decides to, nor should we push him into it. Maybe a few trips would help him too, especially since he likes to think he's an economic expert nowadays. If he means all he says about self-sufficiency, suggest he, too, look at Singapore, Taiwan etc.

6 - Khiem: Something of the same. I personally think he has his eyes on the Presidency and that he will side with Don-Minh and maybe Ky in a possible showdown. He has not forgotten that Thieu killed his friend Thao. (Nor has Be). Khiem is able but colorless. He is capable of rallying the generals against Thieu in certain circumstances. He is close to Tuyen, and that could be a plus in creating a backstop to Thieu, if Thieu gets bumped off or something. I would keep an American close to Khiem privately, as I would to Ky, and watch him carefully.

7 - Don-Minh: Well, I'm prejudiced here because I like Don, even though I know his many faults. He has leadership qualities, is well-liked, obviously needs to be channeled and "rationalized." How to do it? He will take advice, from me and others, but he goes off like a sputnik, now again, to Israel and US (I did my best to dissuade him). But he cannot and should not be neglected, nor should Minh. Like Minh, he remains close to the An

Quang group, and they shouldn't be neglected either. Tri Quang, whom I have seen several times in the last few months, is indeed becoming more moderate and less anti-American, and realizes that he was led up the garden path in the past by the Vietcong. No longer does he act like a Buddhist Sidney Hillman. So we should encourage his moderate development, and we should let some of the Buddhists do this, including perhaps some of the outside ones, like the Japanese, who have political know-how that Tri Quang, in his odd mystic way, still lacks so often. He must be de-Minhed (Thich Thien Minh), which he is on the verge of doing himself, but ~~the~~ the de-lousing process is not always easy and, while less against us, he still has a sense of suspicion about the Americans because he fears (with absolute justification, I feel) that we have misunderstood and misused him in the past -- above all, after the failure of the 1966 Struggle Movement, ^{when} we went along with the government in foolishly subjugating the Buddhists and excluding them from public life. In any event, an An-Quang-Big Minh-Don dialogue should be sustained and encouraged, and moderated.

All of this is based on the supposition that we're still interested in doing something. There are moments, as I say (and have written), when I doubt that we are, when I feel that the President, following the feeling of the country, silent majority and otherwise, wants to wash his hands of the whole matter as best we can, which means non-interference short of neo-isolation. I disagree, of course. If we are to maintain a proper posture in SEA, a la Guam, then the sort of political approach I'm talking about ~~above~~ is part of it. It certainly does not mean that Vietnam like the other countries in the area, should not and must not make up their own minds about their future and go their own ways. But the South Vietnamese need the kind of help I'm suggesting. The political picture, like the country itself physically, is so much rubble. Someone has to help clear it away and separate what's ~~salvageable~~ salvageable from what's not. Or chaff from wheat, if you will. I've outlined some of the alternatives and suggested what could be done. I'll be curious to get your reaction.

rms

P.S. * I hear, but haven't yet read, that Teddy White wrote a piece (Herald-Trib in Paris) suggesting that Vietnam will inevitably be partitioned. If you remember, back in October, 1967, in Foreign Affairs, I was among the first if not the first to suggest that local and regional accomodation was perhaps the best way out, and I have since alluded to this several times in pieces. There remains the need, as I suggested some months ago, for a strong authoritarian regime at the top plus proper decentralization, and this should be tied into regional development. None of this, however, contradicts what I suggest above. If we help the political situation move along in some proper direction, then this, in turn, will enable us to benefit from local accomodation, if and when it takes places. This is what Thieu cannot do alone, with his Cadre-Khaki party. But the Buu's, the Be's and the Bong's can play a vital role in furthering the accomodation possibilities and in preventing the Vietcong from achieving politically what they have failed to do militarily.

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ACTION

March 4, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: John Holdridge
SUBJECT: Letter from Bob Shaplen

Bob Shaplen has written you an interesting letter analyzing the South Vietnamese political situation and recommending what we should do about it (Tab B). After expressing his "grave doubts" concerning Vietnamization and speaking of a "deteriorating political situation," he goes on to make some suggestions for improving the situation. Among these suggestions are the following:

- "An overall, well-planned, coordinated and implemented American advisory effort comparable in talent and approach to that of 1962, but let's get moving on it now, not in 1972."
- That we try to help President Thieu help himself by teaching him not to be suspicious of every other Vietnamese (though Shaplen does not trust Thieu).
- That we think in terms of alternatives to President Thieu.
- That we persuade President Thieu to think in terms of creating meaningful Senate-Palace working options.
- That we counsel Thieu to cooperate with some of the other political groups.
- That we help labor leader Buu through the CIA, AFL-CIO, and the international labor movement.
- That we help some of the "loyal opposition."

-2-

--That we send Nguyen Be (head of the Vung Tau training center) on a series of trips to give him a "rest cure" as well as some indoctrination on how things are done abroad.

--That we keep in touch with Ky and Khiem, and not neglect Don or Minh either.

He closes his letter with a suggestion for a strong regime at the top in South Vietnam plus appropriate decentralization with all this tied into regional development.

As usual, Shaplen has a lot of good points, but I am not sure that we can implement all or even any of them.

RECOMMENDATION:

That you sign the letter to Mr. Shaplen at Tab A.

Attachments

JHH/WRS/alh (3/4/70)