

September 25, 1970

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State Dept. review completed

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE
INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

FROM: W. R. Smyser

SUBJECT: Your Meeting With Vice President Ky

BACKGROUND

Ky's Mood. Vice President Ky has become increasingly frustrated this year, and as a result his normally temperamental and impulsive tendencies have become especially acute. His most recent performance in the McIntire episode is a case in point. After seeing Ambassador Bunker on September 17 and saying that he would withhold any decision on attending the October 3 rally until he talked with Bui Diem in Paris, he went out of his way three days later to commit himself publicly to attend the rally.

Ky's main source of frustration has been his deteriorating relation^s with Thieu and his inability to make any impact as an independent political figure. He has tried to generate opposition to Thieu, either private or public, and has failed. He has tried to develop his own power and image (e. g., in Cambodia) and been knocked down. He now sees that his chances of running for President next year are rapidly vanishing, and that he will probably not even be Thieu's candidate for Vice President. In this situation, he is increasingly moody, bitter, and ready to seize any opportunity - at whatever risk - to get ahead.

Ky and Americans. While Ky was in power, he had good relations with Americans - particularly Ambassador Lodge and Phil Habib. Since 1967, however, he has become increasingly critical of the U. S. in private and even in public. He believes that the lack of firm U. S. support made him lose to Thieu in the 1967 power struggle. He blames Ambassador Bunker and the State Department. His attitude toward President Nixon, however, appears to be favorable. He also has always had good relations with American military.

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Like many Vietnamese, Ky is intensely nationalistic. Though he appreciates American support, he resents Vietnam's dependence bitterly. He also probably resents our disposition to tell him and the South Vietnamese in general what we think he and they should do. Like most Vietnamese of Northern origin he tends naturally to be violent and volatile in his reaction to such pressures, rather than reserved and calculating like the Central Vietnamese. But he has learned over the past few years to restrain himself briefly, and his outbursts thus take delayed, unpredictable and indirect forms.

The Agnew Visit. We do not know what impression Ky was left with from his last meeting with Vice President Agnew. Although it is not shown in the memorandum of conversation, Agnew apparently did speak to Ky privately and used the occasion to stress our desire for harmony and unity between Ky and Thieu. Agnew's staff say that Ky took this very well, but on the following day Ky made a point of changing the honors ceremony so that American and Vietnamese medals were awarded separately.

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HANDLING

Obviously, we will be in an extremely delicate situation. Ky may still think his visit and speech will help us, the South Vietnamese and himself.

We have received one report, however, which suggests that he may already have been dissuaded by Bui Diem and Khoi, or at least has begun to have some doubts. But he does not want to say anything until he gets on "Meet the Press" this Sunday, since he wants to make the dramatic announcement himself.

It is thus unclear whether or not you will have to push him very hard or whether you will be in a situation where you can simply put in some expressions of appreciation for his change of mind. That remains to be seen. It also remains to be seen whether Ky expects - as Bunker told him - to be invited later. We will have to get word on that in Paris.

In either case, it would probably be best for you to talk to Ky yourself, or in a very small group. He is a proud man and we will not want to make this any more difficult than necessary.

Talking Points: Ambassador Bunker has suggested some points, which are included in the following list of things you may want to say:

- Both the friends of Vietnam and the enemies oppose his visit.
 - The enemies because it will give them a chance to rally and put on a public show. Galbraith says it is the greatest thing that could have happened to the Democratic Party. The hippies are preparing for the biggest fun-fest since Cambodia.

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- The friends because they believe that the best way to carry out the President's policy is to put Vietnam into a lower key.

-- Moreover, McIntire is not a friend of the Administration and Ky will be used against President Nixon - not for him. McIntire represents an extremist group which is unpopular with most Americans - including Catholics.

-- In short, Ky would be making trouble for America and Vietnam rather than helping us, and he would also do himself no good by being associated with such an extremist and isolated cause.

ALTERNATIVES

There are two things we can offer Ky:

-- A later visit. This should be avoided if at all possible. Even after elections he would create the kind of disturbances we want to avoid, and create problems for the President. It would also increase his tendencies to run against Thieu. However, he has already been offered this by Bunker, and it may be difficult for you to back off in case Ky asks about it.

-- A chance to address the American people by other means. The "Meet the Press" interview may serve that purpose, and perhaps he could make any remarks he had in mind in the form of an "open letter to the American people."

PRESS LINE

I think we will need to leave it up to him how he decides to explain his change of mind. None of the alternatives are as bad as a visit would be, and we should let him save face gracefully. But we should get some agreement on it, and also explain your meeting.

He could say the following:

-- That he changed his mind because the President had asked him not to visit at this time. This would not be helpful, of course, but he may want to say that.

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-- That he changed his mind because he is coming later. That would create the later problems for us which I cited above, but he might expect it.

-- That he changed his mind because there is too much to do in Paris. It is transparent, but he may want to do it that way.

-- That he changed his mind because he could reach more Americans via "Meet the Press" and his open letter than he would have reached by speaking in Washington. Also pretty transparent, but good.

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WRS:bib 9/25/70