

8 November 1973

HW:

This is an attempt to respond to your various remarks recently on the possibilities for a coup. As you know, this long has been in our minds here, and the world-wide alert served as a sharp reminder.

There's no indication that the alert did not function smoothly, as far as it went, but every indication that no one took it seriously in the sense that it was based on a real crisis. Ordinary people related it to the Gulf of Tonkin incident; in other words, they tended to believe any crisis behind the alert was synthetic and probably phony, whether it was or not.

What this seems to point toward is a judgment that any attempt at a coup under these conditions would run into serious trouble, simply because emergency conditions do not exist in the popular mind. It is not that there would be any organized resistance. There is none, and no leadership for such resistance. But with such volatile popular scepticism, the possibility for serious trouble is formidable, if only because of inevitable blunders in carrying out a coup.

We had assumed, as you did, that a takeover could come from one of two directions; either by our GL's initiative or by the military using him as a front. We tend to feel that under present conditions neither is likely now. Conditions can get much worse, of course, both at home and abroad, but until they do, the time seems to be past where our GL could get the military to go along, and if any of them had the idea of using him to carry out a plan of their own, that idea appears to be less ~~attractive~~ attractive on a more or less day-by-day basis. Each branch of the military has to look out for itself, and rushing off into the wild blue yonder under such leadership, even if that's only a pose, is no way to insure survival.

At this stage, anyway, the military behave as separate and very comfortable bureaucracies. The Navy loves to maneuver behind the scenes to influence political matters, but knows better than to assume responsibility. The Air Force has the same motivation but is much less sophisticated and is probably the most dangerous of the three. The Army does the best it can, trying to avoid letting itself get committed to far-off ground wars by the other branches of government. At present none of these is likely to bite too quickly at a chance to save the nation by rushing off to war, not, at least, until they get a few facts and a few ground rules worked out. That's at present. But as things have developed our GL probably would have a hard time sucking them in on any really serious deal. This could change, of course, but the admirals and generals will necessarily judge any step he takes or wants to take in the light of his fading fortunes and his developing pattern of erratic if not irrational behavior. If they want a coup, they'd probably look elsewhere for a figurehead right now. Hope I'm right.

Best



jdw