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FROM WALT ROSTOW  
TO THE PRESIDENT  
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By 120, NARA, Date 8-11-93

*Pres file*

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HEREWITH THE VICE PRESIDENT REPORTS HIS DISCUSSION WITH THE VIETNAMESE DELEGATION IN SEOUL.

1. FOLLOWING IS MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION AT SEOUL, KOREA, JULY 1, 1967 BETWEEN VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY AND GENERAL PHAM XUEN CHIEU, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE OF SOUTH VIET-NAM. PRESENT ON THE AMERICAN SIDE: THE VICE PRESIDENT, AMBASSADOR PORTER, MR. VAN DYK, COLONEL BECKINGTON, MR. REILLY, MR. JEROME STENGER (INTERPRETER). ON THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE SIDE: GENERAL CHIEU, MINISTER OF ECONOMY AND FINANCE HANH, AND CHARGE KIEU.
  2. THE VICE PRESIDENT ASKED GENERAL CHIEU IF HE HAD ANY INFORMATION THAT WOULD BE HELPFUL TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF LAST NIGHT'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF POLITICAL CHANGES IN SAIGON. GENERAL CHIEU SAID THAT HE HIMSELF WAS NOT WELL INFORMED ON THIS LATEST CHANGE. HE HAD READ ABOUT IT IN THE NEWSPAPER. HE BELIEVES THAT WHAT WE ARE SEEING IS AN EFFORT TO ASSURE CONTINUED UNITY IN THE ARMED FORCES OF SOUTH VIETNAM. THE VICE PRESIDENT ASKED IF THE JOINT CANDIDACY OF GENERAL THIEU AND PREMIER KY ANNOUNCED LAST NIGHT, WOULD RESULT IN SOME AGREED DIVISION OF AUTHORITY BETWEEN THE TWO MEN IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT. DID THE VICE PRESIDENT OF VIETNAM HAVE ANY ADMINISTRATIVE AUTHORITY UNDER THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE CONSTITUTION? GENERAL CHIEU REPLIED THAT THE VICE PRESIDENT WOULD HAVE THE AUTHORITY DELEGATED TO HIM BY THE PRESIDENT. THIS WOULD BE AN AGREEMENT, HE SAID, BETWEEN THE TWO MEN AND ONE WHICH HE FELT WOULD BE MADE IN THE FUTURE. THE VICE PRESIDENT ASKED IF IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE THAT THE VIETNAMESE VICE PRESIDENT BY AGREEMENT MIGHT HAVE SOME ADMINISTRATIVE AUTHORITY AND GENERAL CHIEU REPLIED YES.
- THE VICE PRESIDENT THEN NOTED THE CONCERNS OF OUR GOVERNMENT VIS-A-VIS DEVELOPMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM. WE BELIEVE VERY STRONGLY, HE SAID, THAT THE MILITARY MUST REMAIN UNITED. WE ALSO BELIEVE IT IMPERATIVE THAT IN THE NEXT TWO MONTHS THERE BE AN ACTIVE POLITICAL CAMPAIGN CULMINATING IN HONEST ELECTIONS. WE ARE CONCERNED THAT IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT, FOLLOWING THE ELECTIONS, THERE BE

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SUBSTANTIAL CIVILIAN PARTICIPATION. A FAIR ELECTION WITH THE WIDEST POSSIBLE PARTICIPATION OF THE PEOPLE IS IMPERATIVE, HE SAID, NOT ONLY FOR DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM, BUT ALSO FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF SUPPORT IN AMERICA FOR OUR EFFORT IN VIETNAM.

GENERAL CHIEU SAID HIS GOVERNMENT ALSO FULLY RECOGNIZED THE NECESSITY FOR AN HONEST AND FAIR ELECTORAL PROCESS. HE NOTED THE ABSENCE IN SOUTH VIETNAM OF POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF PARTIES. THIS MADE POLITICAL PROCESS MORE DIFFICULT.

ANOTHER DIFFICULTY WAS COMMUNIST INFILTRATION OF SUCH POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS GROUPINGS AS DID EXIST. THE VICE PRESIDENT THEN ASKED GENERAL CHIEU WHO HE THOUGHT WERE THE LEADING CIVILIAN CANDIDATES FOR THE PRESIDENCY. GENERAL CHIEU REPLIED THAT BECAUSE SOUTH VIETNAMESE SOCIETY WAS SO "DISPERSED" THERE WERE NO LEADING CIVILIAN CANDIDATES.

THE VICE PRESIDENT ASKED ABOUT GENERAL DUONG VAN MINH. GENERAL CHIEU REPLIED, "THEY WILL NOT LET HIM BACK." THE VICE PRESIDENT: "WHY NOT?" GENERAL CHIEU: "I DON'T KNOW". GENERAL CHIEU THEN NOTED THAT BIG MINH HAS GREAT PERSONAL POPULARITY BUT NO POLITICAL ORGANIZATION BEHIND HIM. AMBASSADOR PORTER INTERJECTED AT THIS POINT TO ASK IF IT WERE CORRECT THAT PERHAPS HIS CANDIDACY WOULD BE PERMITTED IN ABSENTIA. GENERAL CHIEU SAID HE DID NOT KNOW.

THE VICE PRESIDENT THEN SAID THAT HE FELT THIS PERIOD OF THE NEXT TWO MONTHS WAS PROBABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT PERIOD IN THE UNITED STATES - SOUTH VIETNAMESE RELATIONSHIPS TO DATE. HE SAID HE FELT THIS WAS SO BECAUSE THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES WOULD BE WATCHING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND THE ELECTION ITSELF VERY CAREFULLY. HE NOTED THAT THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS HAS WORKED WELL SO FAR, REFERRING TO THE ELECTIONS FOR THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY, THE WORK OF THAT ASSEMBLY IN DRAFTING THE CONSTITUTION, AND THE SERIES OF LOCAL ELECTIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN HELD. ALL OF THIS, HE NOTED, HAS BEEN FULLY REPORTED TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AND A MATTER OF GREAT INTEREST TO THEM. THE AMERICAN PEOPLE HAVE FOUND THIS PROGRESS NOT ONLY PLEASING BUT IN A SENSE SOMEWHAT SURPRISING. THE WHOLE PROCESS TO DATE HAD SERVED TO STRENGTHEN THE CAUSE OF SOUTH VIETNAM IN THE EYES OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AND THE HAND OF THE PRESIDENT IN CARRYING OUT THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY IN SUPPORT OF SOUTH VIETNAM. THIS IS THE REASON, THE VICE PRESIDENT SAID, WHY HE HAD SPOKEN SO FRANKLY IN THIS MEETING CONCERNING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS. THE VICE PRESIDENT SAID THAT THE RECENT EXPERIENCE HERE IN SOUTH KOREA CONTAINED A LESSON. ANY EXCESSES IN THE FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS SUCH AS UNWARRANTED INTERFERENCE BY THE POLICE OR THE MILITARY IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS WOULD BE MOST HARMFUL. HE NOTED THAT HE SPOKE AS A FRIEND AND AS ONE WHO SUPPORTS THE POLICY OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT IN ITS EFFORT TO ASSIST SOUTH VIETNAM. HE COULD NOT, HE CONCLUDED, OVERSTRESS THE GREAT IMPORTANCE OF THE FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS AND THE MANNER IN WHICH THEY WERE HELD.

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THE VICE PRESIDENT ASKED FOR MINISTER HANH'S ASSESSMENT OF THE ECONOMIC FRONT. THE MINISTER NOTED THAT THE RISE OF PRICES HAD BEEN STABILIZED SINCE MARCH AND THAT THE OVER-ALL PICTURE WAS GOOD. HE NOTED IN PARTICULAR THAT THE PRICE OF RICE WAS NOW STABILIZED. THE MINISTER EMPHASIZED THAT THEY WERE ENDEAVORING TO MEET PROBLEMS BEFORE THEY DEVELOPED RATHER THAN TO CORRECT THEM AFTERWARD. HE ALSO NOTED THAT THE INFLATIONARY GAP HAD NARROWED DOWN AND THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM HAD JUST REIMBURSED, IN PIASTERS, ONE OF THE THREE LOANS THAT THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT HAD MADE TO THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM.

THE MINISTER NOTED WHAT HE TERMED "ONE SAD POINT IN THE ECONOMIC PICTURE": TRANSPORTATION. THE MINISTER SAID HE CONSIDERED THE PORT PROBLEM TO BE SETTLED. HE NOTED THAT IN THE PORT OF SAIGON, INSTEAD OF 1,000 BARGES IN USE AS WAS TRUE AT THE PEAK OF PORT CONGESTION, THERE WERE NOW ONLY 90. THIS, HE SAID, IS A NORMAL NUMBER FOR A PORT THE SIZE OF SAIGON. THE GREATLY REDUCED USE OF BARGES, HE NOTED, HAD A MAJOR EFFECT IN REDUCING PILFERAGE IN THE PORT. THE VICE PRESIDENT INTERJECTED TO SAY THAT THE QUESTION OF PILFERAGE IS OF PARTICULAR CONCERN TO THE AMERICAN CONGRESS. THE MINISTER SAID HE REALIZED THIS WAS SO AND THAT, WHILE THE SITUATION WAS NOT 100 PERCENT PERFECT, IT WAS GREATLY IMPROVED AND THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS TAKING VERY STRICT MEASURES. ONLY IN THE LAST TEN DAYS, HE SAID, SECURITY FORCE IN THE DOCK AND WAREHOUSE AREAS HAD BEEN INCREASED AND THAT THOSE FORCES NOW HAVE ORDERS TO SHOOT TO KILL.

BUT THERE WAS A TRANSPORTATION PROBLEM INLAND. THE VIETCONG CONTINUED TO BE ABLE TO INTERRUPT AND BLOCK NORMAL ROAD AND RAIL TRAFFIC, MOST SERIOUSLY SO IN THE I CORPS AREA. NEVERTHELESS, HE SAID AID AND THE MILITARY HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MOVE ESSENTIAL SUPPLIES ABOUT THE COUNTRY.

THE VICE PRESIDENT ASKED GENERAL CHIEU ABOUT INCREASED MILITARY PRESSURE IN THE NORTH. GENERAL CHIEU REPLIED THAT IN HIS JUDGEMENT THE ENEMY WAS ATTEMPTING TO PIN DOWN OUR FORCES, PERHAPS IN PREPARATION FOR OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS IN ANOTHER LOCALITY. BUT HE FELT THAT THE ENEMY'S MILITARY EFFORT WAS NOT THE MAIN POINT. HE SAID THAT THEIR MAIN GOAL WAS TO EXERT PRESSURE ON THE POPULATION IN THE I CORPS AREA. IT WAS A POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFORT.

THE VICE PRESIDENT ASKED GENERAL CHIEU FOR HIS ESTIMATE OF THE IMPACT OF VIET CONG LOSSES IN RECENT MONTHS. THE GENERAL FELT THAT THE STRENGTH OF THE VIET CONG REGULAR FORCES HAS BEEN DECREASING, THAT THEIR LOSSES ARE HIGH AND NOT BEING FULLY REPLACED. BUT HE SAID THAT AS THIS PROCESS WAS OCCURRING, THE STRENGTH OF THE GUERRILLA FORCES, AS DISTINGUISHED FROM THE VIET CONG MAIN FORCES, HAS BEEN SUSTAINED. THE CONTINUING LEVEL OF GUERRILLA ACTIVITY HAS THUS HINDERED PROGRESS OF THE OVER-ALL PACIFICATION PROGRAM.

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RE-PACIFICATION: GENERAL CHIEU SAID THAT THE VIETNAMESE CONCERN HAS BEEN LARGELY ADMINISTRATIVE, I.E. THE BUILDING UP OF CADRES. BUT A MORE BALANCED, MANY-FACETED APPROACH WAS NECESSARY, INVOLVING SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC EFFORT. THIS WAS NOT A MILITARY PROBLEM.

THE VICE PRESIDENT ASKED IF, WITHIN THE SOUTH VIETNAM MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT, THERE WAS ADEQUATE POLITICAL ORIENTATION. THIS WAS CRITICAL IN PACIFICATION. GENERAL CHIEU DID NOT REPLY DIRECTLY, NOTING ONLY THAT THE CIVILIANS MUST BE TRAINED TO DEFEND THEMSELVES. HE ADDED THAT THE ARMY PERSONNEL HAVE NOT BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN PENETRATING THE MASSES BECAUSE OF THEIR UNIFORM.

THE VICE PRESIDENT NOTED THE CONCERN OF OUR GOVERNMENT OVER THE ABILITY OF THE VIET CONG TO ATTACK SUDDENLY, UNDER COVER OF DARKNESS, DO GREAT DAMAGE, AND ESCAPE WHILE MANY TIMES THE DEFENDING FORCES DID NOT REACT UNTIL DAYLIGHT. GENERAL CHIEU REPLIED BY NOTING HOW CAREFULLY THE VIET CONG PREPARE FOR THESE ATTACKS, SOMETIMES PLANNING FOR AS LONG AS SIX MONTHS BEFORE A PARTICULAR ACTION.

THE VICE PRESIDENT RETURNED AGAIN TO THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS. MEMBERS OF THE VIET CONG WHO ARE NOT COMMUNISTS THEMSELVES, HE NOTED, MIGHT FIND IN A FREE ELECTION MOTIVATION TO LEAVE THE VIET CONG RANKS. GENERAL CHIEU SAID THIS WAS POSSIBLE, BUT HE OBVIOUSLY WAS DOUBTFUL. HE REFERRED AGAIN TO THE IMPORTANCE AND NECESSITY OF POLITICAL ORGANIZATION, SAYING THAT THIS WAS WHAT WAS NEEDED. HE COMMENTED, AS A FORMER PARTICIPANT IN THE RESISTANCE, ON THE DIFFICULTY OF DEFECTION FROM A DISCIPLINED ORGANIZATION.

THE VICE PRESIDENT THEN ASKED GENERAL CHIEU WHAT HE CONSIDERED TO BE THE STATUS OF OUR JOINT EFFORT IN VIETNAM.

GENERAL CHIEU SAID HE FELT NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE COMMUNISTS WERE USELESS. THE COMMUNISTS WOULD GO TO THE CONFERENCE TABLE ONLY WHEN IT WAS TO THEIR ADVANTAGE TO DO SO. THEREFORE, HE PERSONALLY DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT NEGOTIATIONS NOW WOULD SERVE ANY USEFUL PURPOSE. THE STRUGGLE MUST CONTINUE, HE SAID, UNTIL THE COMMUNISTS CLEARLY SEE THEY CANNOT WIN THE WAR. HE SAID THAT HE FORESAW WHAT HE TERMED THE "MAIN LINE" WAS GRADUALLY DECREASING. IN THE PART OF THE STRUGGLE, HE SAID, WE HAD THE INITIATIVE FOR OVER A YEAR. HE FELT THAT THE COMMUNISTS IN THE NORTH WILL REACH THE LIMIT OF THEIR STRENGTH AND WILL BE UNABLE TO SUPPORT INDEFINITELY THE MAIN LINE UNITS THEY NOW MAINTAIN IN SOUTH VIETNAM. BUT AS THIS OCCURRED, THE GUERRILLA WAR WOULD CONTINUE AND THIS IS THE PROBLEM WHICH MUST BE SOLVED BY POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION. IT WILL BE A LONG, A DIFFICULT STRUGGLE, HE SAID, BUT A GRADUALLY LESS COSTLY ONE, PARTICULARLY TO THE AMERICANS.

THE VICE PRESIDENT SAID THAT HE UNDERSTOOD GENERAL CHIEU TO FORESEE GRADUAL DE-ESCALATION AND WITHDRAWAL OF MAIN LINE FORCES TO THE NORTH. THE GENERAL SAID THIS WAS CORRECT.

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THE VICE PRESIDENT ASKED IF A GOVERNMENT HEADED BY PROFESSIONAL MILITARY MEN COULD EFFECTIVELY BUILD THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE NECESSARY TO SUCCESSFULLY COMBAT THE GUERRILLA. THE CHARGE ANSWERED THAT HE THOUGHT SUCH A GOVERNMENT COULD ACCOMPLISH THIS IF THERE WERE GOOD COOPERATION BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND CIVILIAN.

THE VICE PRESIDENT ASKED IF THIS WOULD BE DONE. THE CHARGE REPLIED, "I HOPE SO."

THE VICE PRESIDENT THEN ASKED IF THERE WERE ANYTHING STANDING IN THE WAY OF BETTER COOPERATION AND UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN UNITED STATES AND THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH VIETNAM, NOTING THE IMPORTANCE OF HONESTY AND CANDOR AND OPEN CONSULTATION BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS.

GENERAL CHIEU REPLIED THAT THERE WAS NO SUCH OBSTACLE AT THE MOMENT, THAT RELATIONS WERE VERY GOOD, AND THAT COOPERATION WAS EXCELLENT. AS CITIZENS OF VIETNAM, HE SAID, WE ALL HOPE THAT OUR FUTURE GOVERNMENT WILL BE THE KIND THE VICE PRESIDENT HAD DESCRIBED, THAT IT WOULD INCLUDE CIVILIANS AND THAT IT WOULD UNITE PEOPLES OF ALL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND POLITICAL TENDENCIES, AND ONE WHICH WILL CONTINUE TO HAVE THE CLOSEST RELATIONS TO THE UNITED STATES.

GENERAL CHIEU THEN ASKED THE VICE PRESIDENT TO COMMENT ON THE RECENT GLASSBORO MEETING. THE VICE PRESIDENT LISTED BRIEFLY THE SUBJECTS THE PRESIDENT AND KOSYGIN HAD DISCUSSED. THE VICE PRESIDENT NOTED THE DISCUSSION ON VIETNAM, INCLUDING THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT CONCERNING THE AMERICAN WILLINGNESS TO ABIDE BY THE RESULTS OF FREE AND SUPERVISED ELECTIONS THROUGHOUT VIETNAM. GENERAL CHIEU NOTED THAT THE COMMUNISTS OF NORTH VIETNAM WERE POLITICALLY ORGANIZED AND PREPARED FOR AN ELECTION, WHEREAS THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE WERE NOT. ANY VIETNAM-WIDE ELECTIONS NOW, HE SAID, WOULD BE AN UNEQUAL CONTEST. SOUTH VIETNAM NEEDED TIME TO PREPARE ITSELF AND MUST PREPARE FOR SUCH ELECTIONS.

THE VICE PRESIDENT CONCLUDED THE DISCUSSION BY NOTING THAT HE WOULD REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT ON THEIR CONVERSATION. HE ASKED THAT GENERAL CHIEU, IN SPEAKING TO PREMIER KY AND GENERAL THIEU REPORT WHAT THEY HAD TALKED ABOUT THIS MORNING. HE REPEATED AGAIN THE NEED FOR BOTH GOVERNMENTS TO DEAL WITH EACH OTHER OPENLY AND HONESTLY.

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