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FROM WALT ROSTOW
TO THE PRESIDENT
CITE CAP67693

Pres file

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

JULY 7, 1967

SEC. RUSK ASKED ME TO FORWARD THIS OBSCURE BUT POSSIBLY INTERESTING SHIFT IN HANOI'S PUBLIC NEGOTIATING STANCE.

NORTH VIETNAMESE FOREIGN MINISTER TRINH IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH VIENNA VOLKSTIME (COMMUNIST) CORRESPONDENT JANACEK HAS APPARENTLY EMPLOYED SOME NEW LANGUAGE ON THE QUESTION OF NEGOTIATIONS AND SETTLEMENT. THE UNDATED INTERVIEW WAS CARRIED IN THE 2 JULY ISSUE, BUT THUS FAR HAS NOT BEEN CARRIED IN THE NORTH VIETNAMESE PRESS OR BY RADIO HANOI. IN REPLY TO QUESTIONS ON PEACE AND VIETNAMESE REUNIFICATION, TRINH MAKES THE FOLLOWING POINTS:

1. EVERY TIME THE U.S. TALKS ABOUT PEACE, IT BRINGS MORE TROOPS AND INTENSIFIES ATTACKS AGAINST THE NORTH, "IT TALKS ABOUT 'NEGOTIATIONS WITHOUT PRECONDITIONS' BUT IN ACTUAL FACT IT DEMANDS THAT THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE ACCEPT THE ARROGANT AMERICAN CONDITIONS: 'MUTUAL DE-ESCALATION'".

2. "IF THE U.S. IS REALLY LOOKING FOR A SETTLEMENT OF THE VIETNAM PROBLEM, THERE WILL BE NO DIFFICULTIES. IN HIS REPLY TO U.S. PRESIDENT JOHNSON OF 15 FEBRUARY 1967, OUR PRESIDENT HO CHI MINH SAID QUITE CLEARLY: 'THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT HAS STARTED AN AGGRESSIVE WAR IN VIETNAM. IT MUST DISCONTINUE THIS AGGRESSIVE WAR. THIS IS THE ONLY WAY TO THE RESTORATION OF PEACE.'"

3. "I, MYSELF, MADE A STATEMENT ALONG THE SAME LINES ON 28 JANUARY 1967: 'IF THE U.S. UNCONDITIONALLY DISCONTINUES ALL BOMBING RAIDS AND ALL OTHER ACTS OF WAR AGAINST THE DRV, THEN THERE CAN BE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE DRV AND THE U.S.' I NOW REPEAT THIS STATEMENT."

4. "THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE---WILL NEVER CONDUCT TALKS WITH THE AGGRESSORS UNDER THE PRESSURE OF FORCE."

5. "THE SVN LIBERATION FRONT, THE ONLY GENUINE REPRESENTATION (SIC) OF THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE PEOPLE, PURSUES A CLEAR-CUT POLICY AIMED AT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT, DEMOCRATIC, PEACEFUL, AND NEUTRAL SOUTH VIETNAM AND AT A SUBSEQUENT TRANSITION TO THE REUNIFICATION OF THE COUNTRY."

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INR COMMENT:

THE GERMAN VERSION OF THE INTERVIEW USES THE SAME FORMULATIONS AS THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION, THUS REDUCING THE POSSIBILITIES OF MISTRANSLATIONS WHILE NOT ENTIRELY ELIMINATING THEM. WE DO NOT KNOW IN WHAT LANGUAGE TRINH GAVE THE INTERVIEW.

IF THE FORMULATIONS ARE AN ACCURATE REFLECTION OF HANOI'S POSITION, AND ARE NOT CHANGED IN A SUBSEQUENT OFFICIAL VERSION, THEY REFLECT A SLIGHT SHIFT IN THE NORTH VIETNAMESE STAND. HANOI HAS NOT PUBLICLY SAID AT A HIGH LEVEL THAT "IF THE U.S. IS REALLY LOOKING FOR A SETTLEMENT---THERE WILL BE NO DIFFICULTIES." IN ADDITION, TRINH'S STATEMENT THAT IF THE U.S. UNCONDITIONALLY DISCONTINUES ALL BOMBING RAIDS AND OTHER ACTS OF WAR THERE "CAN BE NEGOTIATIONS" IS NOT, AS HE IMPLIES, A DIRECT QUOTE OF HIS JANUARY 28 STATEMENT. THE JANUARY 28 STATEMENT IS IN FACT LESS FORTHCOMING, AND MERELY SAYS THAT IF THE U.S. "REALLY WANTS TALKS, IT MUST FIRST HALT UNCONDITIONALLY THE BOMBING AND ALL OTHER ACTS OF WAR---IT IS ONLY AFTER THE UNCONDITIONAL CESSATION OF U.S. BOMBING AND ALL OTHER ACTS OF WAR THAT THERE COULD BE TALKS." TRINH'S COMMENT ON SETTLEMENT, WHICH INCLUDES AN INFREQUENT REFERENCE TO THE GENEVA AGREEMENT'S PROVISION FOR REUNIFICATION THROUGH FREE ELECTIONS, ARE ALSO RELATIVELY MILD. THUS TRINH CALLS FOR A "SUBSEQUENT TRANSITION TO THE REUNIFICATION OF THE COUNTRY," WHICH APPEARS TO STRESS GRADUALISM. FINALLY, TRINH IS QUOTED AS SAYING HANOI WILL NOT TALK UNDER THE "PRESSURE" OF FORCE (RATHER THAN THE "THREAT" OF FORCE), POSSIBLY IMPLYING A READINESS TO NEGOTIATE WITHOUT A PERMANENT BOMBING HALT.

NONETHELESS, TRINH DOES USE SOME STANDARD TOUGH FORMULATIONS. FOR EXAMPLE, WHILE HE DOES NOT CALL FOR RECOGNITION OF THE FRONT, HE DOES REFER TO THE FRONT AS THE "ONLY GENUINE REPRESENTATION (SIC?) OF THE SVN PEOPLE." HIS DENUNCIATION OF "MUTUAL DE-ESCALATION" ALSO IMPLIES CONTINUED HANOI REJECTION OF THE CONCEPT OF RECIPROCITY. THIS INTERVIEW CONSTITUTES THE FIRST WORD WE HAVE HAD FROM TRINH SINCE HIS TALK WITH JAPANESE NEWSMEN, CARRIED IN ONE VERSION BY KYODO ON JUNE 2 AND IN AN ALTERED, HARDER VERSION BY HANOI RADIO ON JUNE 6. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT TRINH MAY BE ENGAGED IN AN EFFORT TO USE THE PRESS IN COUNTRIES LIKE JAPAN AND AUSTRIA AS A VEHICLE FOR ENUNCIATION OF A MORE REASONABLE LINE. CURIOUSLY ENOUGH, THE SHORT MOSCOW TASS PICKUP OF JULY 2 OF THE INTERVIEW DOES NOT QUOTE THE SOFTER PORTIONS OF THE TEXT.

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GROUPS: