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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4
NEJ 94-365
By sig, NARA, Date 12-15-94

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Copy of SAIGON 4939 Sept. 5, 1967

Dan

1. Embassy Officer called on Dr. Phan Quang/the afternoon of September 5. Dan was in excellent spirits and his usual witty, optimistic self. He said he was planning to take a week or so off in Vung Tau or Dalat in the very near future.

2. Dan began by saying he thought the election had been very free. There had been some instances of rigging, most notably in Gia Dinh, but Dan was sure that this was at the initiative of the province chief and not on orders from Thieu or Ky. Election fraud, Dan concluded, had been insignificant factor in the Thieu/Ky victory, and he strongly doubted that Huong or Dzu could have conducted such an honest election had they been in power.

3. Dan went on to say that he did not plan to take part in any attempt to discredit the election. Suu, Ha Thuc Ky, Huong and Dzu, on the other hand, are planning to protest results and hope to get the National Assembly to declare the election invalid. Danger exists that Deputies in Assembly loyal to these presidential candidates might muster enough votes to seriously discredit the election even if they don't succeed in getting it declared invalid. Dan said throwing out this election would be senseless, unjustifiable and disastrous act. He urged that we use whatever influence we have with National Assembly Deputies to assure that this doesn't happen.

4. Embassy Officer asked Dan why Suu, who has played such a constructive role during the past year, would associate himself with an attempt to create political chaos. Dan replied that Suu is old, senile and at times hysterical. Dan recounted story of the morning of election day when Suu called him to say that Thu Duc district chief in Gia Dinh had publicly announced the withdrawal of Suu from the Presidential race and removed Suu ballots from all polling places. Dan rushed to Thu Duc, visited several polling areas as well as the district chief, and found everything in order. Suu, Dan said, had simply overreacted to a wild rumor, as is his wont. (Throughout the conversation, Dan was not particularly charitable towards Suu and at one point claimed that they would have done much better if order of the slate had been reversed.)

5. Dan then gave his analysis of the election results. He said he had known all along that Thieu and Ky were inevitable winners. How could they lose with government machinery at their disposal and 10 civilian opponents? Dzu's strong showing is not all that surprising. There had been only two slates with unique platforms on the issue of war and peace. One was Pham Huy Co, who advocated victory at any cost, even if it meant stationing 5 million US troops in South Viet Nam. The other was Dzu, who advocated peace at any price.

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Co's position proved to be very unpopular, and he got only 1% of the vote. Dzu's platform, on the other hand, was the only one acceptable to the Viet Cong. Thus, Dan claimed, the Viet Cong decided to throw its weight behind Dzu, and at the last minute put out the word to people living under their influence. All one has to do is look at the areas where Dzu polled well, Dan maintained, to confirm that he benefitted from the Viet Cong. "Kien Phong, Camau, Tay Ninh, Hau Nghia -- why, in some of these provinces Dzu didn't even have a campaign apparatus," Dan exclaimed.

6. Dan went on to say that Dzu's vote in fact is a very encouraging development. Assuming that of the 17% of the total vote Dzu received, 2% was Tan Dai Viet, then 15% was Viet Cong. "This is really a good sign," Dan added, "and proves the Viet Cong really don't have much popular support. They are well organized, yes, but if we nationalists close ranks, we could defeat them easily." Elaborating further on his theory that VC vote went for Dzu, Dan claimed the fact that I Corps Buddhist vote went for Suu was proof that Buddhists are not Communists.

7. Commenting further on election results, Dan said he was happy Huong had been beaten "because he is a real regionalist"; and Dan was even happier that the powers and responsibilities of Prime Minister Ky will be reduced. Ky is brash and irresponsible, Dan said, while Thieu is reflective, reserved and polite. Dan praised Thieu's behavior during the campaign, and said he had taken criticism well, and not once had Thieu engaged in any mud-slinging.

8. Looking to the future, Dan expressed great hopes for the new, constitutionally elected government. Dan said he would work with Thieu and mentioned several other oppositionists whom he thought would be willing to cooperate with the new government, among them Ha Thuc Ky and Nguyen Van Truong. As for Suu and Huong, their political careers are finished and "we should put them in the national museum together with Tran Van Ly, Nguyen Hoa Hiep and Vu Hong Khanh." On no account, Dan insisted, should Dzu be invited into the government. Instead, Dan suggested, Dzu should just be allowed to discredit himself, something he's sure to do if allowed enough time.

9. Dan said he doubted that efforts to discredit the election would really succeed and he was equally skeptical that Buddhists would try to launch any protest demonstrations. After all, Dan pointed out, at least two of the upper house slates they favored are likely to be elected (List 10 headed by Pham Ba Cam and list 13 headed by Tran Van Don); and thus they should be able to make their influence felt in peaceful, constructive way. Dan concluded on a cautious note observing that, despite his own personal optimism and good will, the course of events during the next few weeks and months depends largely on the way Thieu himself decides to play his cards.

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10. Comment:

a. We believe Dan's attitude is very helpful and while he seems to be angling for a position in the future government, his remarks appear to reflect a sincere belief that the election was, on the whole, honest.

b. We agree with Dan that some danger exists that the National Assembly will attempt to annul the election. In our discussions with National Assembly Deputies, we plan to point out that any rash moves on the National Assembly's part or excessive emphasis on minor instances of fraud could have very damaging consequences for the country's future. We will also explain that we of course recognize that legitimate complaints should be aired in Assembly debate in accordance with election law.

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