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ACTION SS 25

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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5817

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

NJ 94-365

By ~~SO~~, NARA, Date 12-15-54

1. FOLLOWING HIS ARRIVAL IN SAIGON, ROGER HILSMAN GAVE POLITICAL COUNSELOR FOLLOWING REPORT OF TWO-HOUR CONVERSATION HE HAD HAD WITH THE NORTH VIETNAMESE DCM (NGUYEN TU YU) IN PHNOM PENH ON AUGUST 24. HILSMAN SAID HE HAD NOT RECEIVED ANYTHING REALLY NEW IN THE TALK BUT HE THOUGHT IT SHOULD BE REPORTED IN CASE THERE WERE SOME FACTORS OF WHICH HE WAS NOT AWARE.

2. HILSMAN SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN TOLD BY THE AUSTRALIANS, CANADIAN COMMISSIONER NUTTING, AND THE CAMBODIANS THAT THE NVN DEPUTY WAS IN FACT THE REAL POWER IN THE NVN EMBASSY.

3. HILSMAN SAID HE HAD DESCRIBED HIS CURRENT WORLD TRIP TO THE DCM IN TERMS OF AN EFFORT TO LOOK AHEAD TO THE WORLD SITUATION IN THE 1970'S. HE DESCRIBED HIS VISITS TO THE USSR AND THE

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EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. DCM ASKED WHAT THE SOVIET AND EAST EUROPEAN VIEW OF THE VIETNAM WAR WAS. HILSMAN DESCRIBED IT AS REFLECTING A GENUINE INTEREST IN DE-INTERNATIONALIZING OF THE WAR. SOVIETS AND EASTERN EUROPEANS HAD STATED THAT AS A FIRST STEP THE U.S. SHOULD STOP THE BOMBING OF

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NORTH VIETNAM UNCONDITIONALLY. WHEN ASKED WHETHER THE NVN WOULD THEN TAKE ANY SUCCEEDING STEPS, THEY EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT HANOI COULD BE PERSUADED TO WITHDRAW ITS REGULAR NVA DIVISIONS FROM SVN.

4. IN LENGTHY DISCUSSION THIS SUBJECT HILSMAN SAID ~~HE~~ NEVER MADE REFERENCE TO PRIOR REQUIREMENT OF U.S. FORCE WITHDRAWALS FROM SVN. HE ALSO NEVER DENIED NVA FORCES WERE IN SVN ALTHOUGH ON THE OTHER HAND HE NEVER STATED THAT THEY WERE THERE. IN REPLY TO HILSMAN'S QUESTION AS TO WHETHER NVN WOULD WITHDRAW ITS REGULAR DIVISIONS, DCM SAID QUOTE FOR OUR PART, WE ARE CONFIDENT THAT THE 14 MILLION PEOPLE OF SOUTH VIETNAM, WHO STAND WITH THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT, WILL BE ABLE TO BRING THE STRUGGLE TO A SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION WITHOUT DIRECT MILITARY HELP FROM NORTH VIETNAM UNQUOTE.

5. IN DISCUSSING THE POSSIBLE CESSATION OF U.S. BOMBING, DCM

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SAID THAT TALKS COULD FOLLOW IMMEDIATELY THEREAFTER. HILSMAN ASKED IF THIS COULD TAKE PLACE BEFORE U.S. FORCES WERE WITHDRAWN AND DCM SAID YES.

6. HILSMAN EXPRESSED THE VIEW TO DCM THAT HE WOULD THINK HANOI AND NLF WOULD NOT SEE LONG TERM ADVANTAGES ON THE MILITARY SIDE, AND THAT PURSUIT OF A POLITICAL SOLUTION, INCLUDING NEGOTIATIONS, WOULD OFFER ADVANTAGES FOR THEM. WHY, THEREFORE, DO THEY NOT PURSUE THIS COURSE? DCM REPLIED HE DID NOT HAVE THE COMPETENCY TO RESPOND TO THIS QUESTION AND WOULD REFER IT TO HANOI.

7. HILSMAN SAID HE HAD SPOKEN IN STRONG TERMS TO DCM ABOUT THE SITUATION IN THE U.S. HE SAID THAT HE FEARED NVN WAS COMPLETELY MISINTERPRETING VOICES OF DISSENT IN THE U.S. HILSMAN POINTED OUT THAT HE DIFFERRED WITH PRESIDENT JOHNSON'S POLICY, BUT THAT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE SHOULD NOT CONCLUDE FROM SUCH DIFFERENCES THAT THERE WAS ANY CHANGE IN U.S. DETERMINATION. HE ADDED THAT INCREASING U.S. CASUALTIES WERE IN FACT STIFFENING U.S. RESISTANCE AS WAS U.S. BOMBING OF NVN ON THEIR SIDE. HILSMAN

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THEN SAID THAT THE LOGICAL STEP FROM BOTH SIDES WAS TO BEGIN NEGOTIATIONS. HE CONCLUDED THIS POINT BY SAYING THAT IN THE U.S. THE HAWKS AND DOVES ARE POLARIZED AND THAT THE IMPORTANT DEBATE WAS

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AMONG THE GREAT MAJORITY WHO HOLD DIFFERING VIEWS BUT WHO UNDERSTAND THE NECESSITY FOR OUR POSITION IN VIETNAM. HILSMAN ASKED THAT THE FOREGOING BE REPORTED TO HANOI AND DCM SAID HE WOULD DO SO.

8. HILSMAN SAID HIS GENERAL IMPRESSION FROM THIS CONVERSATION WAS THAT THERE WAS NO CURRENT GIVE IN THE NORTH VIETNAMESE VIEW ON NEGOTIATIONS. EVEN IF SOME OF THE FOREGOING LOOKED LIKE A SHIFT, WHEN INTERPRETED IN THE LIGHT OF OTHER STATEMENTS, HE PERSONALLY DOUBTED THAT THIS WAS THE INTENT. HILSMAN EMPHASIZED THAT HE WAS AWARE THAT NORTH VIETNAMESE DFM WAS VERY POSSIBLY NOT IN A POSITION TO SPEAK AUTHORITATIVELY FOR HIS GOVERNMENT.

9. COMMENT: (A) WE NOTE THAT THE ABOVE VIEWS BY NGUYEN TU VU APPEAR TO BE CONSISTENT WITH AND RECONFIRM HANOI DIPLOMATIC STATEMENTS OVER PAST SIX MONTHS WHICH GIVE APPEARANCE OF SLIGHT ADJUSTMENT IN NVN TACTICS IN HOPES OF ENDING BOMBING. EXAMPLES HAVE BEEN VARIOUS REMARKS BY NGUYEN DUY TRINH (APRIL HOC TAP ARTICLE, MAY INTERVIEW WITH JAPANESE NEWSMEN AND INTERVIEW WITH AUSTRIAN PAPER VOLKSTIMME). (B) THIS LINE, WHICH APPEARS TO BE A FURTHER REFINEMENT OF THE TRINH-BURCHETT JANUARY 28

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INTERVIEW, DRAWS A DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE CONFLICT IN SVN AND THE AIR WAR IN THE NORTH. HANOI EXPRESSES READINESS TO TALK AFTER BOMBING STOPPED AND DOES NOT SEEM TO EXCLUDE POSSIBILITY WITHDRAWAL OF NVA TROOPS FROM SVN. THE QUESTION OF US TROOP WITHDRAWAL IS NOT MADE A PRIOR REQUIREMENT. (C) ABOVE SUGGESTS A GREATER ROLE FOR THE NLF AND KEEPS THE NEGOTIA-

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TIONS ROAD OPEN. FYUYEN TU VU CONVERSATION WITH HILSMAN ADDS ONE MORE SMALL PIECE OF EVIDENCE TO SPECULATION THAT THIS VARIATION ON TALKS-FOR-BOMBING-HALT FORMULA IS PREDICATED ON FURTHER SEPARATING PROBLEMS OF WAR IN THE SOUTH FROM THOSE IN THE NORTH, THUS LEAVING HANOI WITH NUMBER OF OPTIONS OPEN WITH RESPECT TO WAR IN THE SOUTH WHILE ENDING THE BOMBING IN NVN. (D) WOULD APPRECIATE DEPT'S COMMENTS ON FOREGOING.

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