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FROM WALT ROSTON
TO THE PRESIDENT
CITE CAP671207

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HERewith A SUMMARY OF HIGHLIGHTS FROM AMBASSADOR LOCKE'S WEEKLY TELEGRAM FROM VIETNAM. THE COMPLETE TEXT OF THE TELEGRAM WILL BE AVAILABLE UPON YOUR RETURN.

1. WE ARE IN PROCESS OF DISCUSSING CHRISTMAS, NEW YEARS AND TET CEASE FIRES WITH PRESIDENT THIEN. WHATEVER WE AGREE TO WILL BE DISCUSSED WITH THE AMBASSADORS OF THE SEVEN TROOP CONTRIBUTING COUNTRIES BEFORE RELEASE.

THIEN'S IDEA (AFTER TALKING WITH GENERALS VIEN AND VY) WAS 36 HOURS CHRISTMAS, 36 NEW YEARS AND 72 TET, WITH PROVISIO THAT EACH CEASE FIRE WOULD BE CONTINUED ON THE ENEMY'S OBSERVANCE OF PRECEDING CEASE FIRE.

OUR IDEA WAS THE FORMULATION 24-24-48 HOUR STANDDOWNS, WHICH I FEEL SURE PRESIDENT THIEN WILL ACCEPT IF WE WISH.

2. THE NEW CABINET OF PRIME MINISTER LOC, INSTALLED IN OFFICE NOVEMBER 9, IS A SYMBOL OF THE RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM.

THE NEW CABINET HAS BROUGHT A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF NEW FACES INTO THE GOVERNMENT, ONLY 7 PREVIOUS MEMBERS OF THE CABINET REMAINING ON.

PRESIDENT THIEN INDICATED TO AMBASSADOR BUNKER ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS, THAT THE SELECTION OF THE CABINET WAS BASED ON THE NEED TO FIND THE BEST-QUALIFIED GROUP OF MINISTERS, WHO WOULD WORK TOGETHER AS A TEAM IN RESOLVING NATIONAL PROBLEMS. PRESIDENT THIEN IS CONFIDENT THAT THE NEW CABINET WILL BE ABLE TO WORK TOGETHER AS A TEAM.

LIMITED EVIDENCE WOULD INDICATE THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT IS REASONABLY COMPETENT, HONEST AND DEDICATED AND THERE HAS BEEN NO EVIDENCE OF SERIOUS DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THIEN AND KY.

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A FRAME WORK EXISTS FOR A SLOWLY AND CAREFULLY BROADENING OF THE BASE OF THE GOVERNMENT. I WOULD SAY SO FAR, SO GOOD, BUT IT IS A LITTLE EARLY TO MAKE DEFINITIVE JUDGMENTS.

3. PRIME MINISTER LOC HAS MADE A GOOD BEGINNING, PRESENTING A WIDE-RANGING, THOUGH AMBITIOUS SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM GOVERNMENT PROGRAM.

THE PROGRAM APPEARS TO BE A REWRITTEN, SHORTER AND MORE MODEST VERSION OF THE MORE AMBITIOUS TOP PRIORITY PROGRAM AND NATIONAL POLICY DESCRIBED IN AMBASSADOR BUNKER'S 26TH WEEKLY TELEGRAM.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GOVERNMENT PROGRAM WILL BE A MAJOR TASK, AND ONLY BEGINNINGS CAN BE MADE ON CONSIDERABLE PARTS OF IT IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

4. THE REACTION OF THE SAIGON PRESS AND THE POLITICALLY ACTIVE PUBLIC TO THE NEW CABINET HAS BEEN CAUTIOUS AND RESERVED. THERE IS SOME DOUBT EXPRESSED THAT PRIME MINISTER LOC WILL BE ABLE TO GET THINGS MOVING, HOWEVER, VICE PRESIDENT KY TOLD THE NEW CABINET HE EXPECTS IT TO SERVE IN OFFICE FOR FOUR YEARS.

5. WE WERE ENCOURAGED BY A CONVERSATION BETWEEN BOB KOTER AND VICE PRESIDENT KY ON NOVEMBER 13 IN WHICH KY EXPRESSED HIS DESIRE TO DO HIS BEST TO HELP WITH CURRENT DIFFICULTIES IN THE UNITED STATES WITH RESPECT TO VIETNAM.

BOB EMPHASIZED THAT PROGRESS IN THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY SPHERES DURING THE NEXT 6 MONTHS WOULD BE THE MOST HELPFUL ANTIDOTE TO UNITED STATES CRITICISM AND FRUSTRATION.

6. ON NOVEMBER 26 THE VIET CONG'S LIBERATION RADIO REJECTED RECENT PUBLIC COMMENTS BY PRESIDENT THIEU THAT HE MAY SOON SEND A LETTER TO HO CHI MINH, PROPOSING DIRECT PEACE TALKS.

THE RADIO SCORNEED THE STATEMENT SAYING THIEU DOES NOT HAVE THE CAPACITY TO REPRESENT ANYONE. THE BROADCAST CONTINUED THAT PEACE NEGOTIATION ARGUMENTS DEFINITELY CANNOT DECEIVE ANYONE.

PRESIDENT THIEU IS PROCEEDING WITH HIS PLANS TO SEND A LETTER TO HO SOMETIME BEFORE CHRISTMAS AND HAS APPARENTLY DECIDED TO ASK THE JAPANESE TO TRANSMIT IT TO HANOI. THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT HAS NOT RESPONDED TO HIS REQUEST YET.

DTG: 250252Z NOVEMBER 1967

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