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LAST DAYS OF THEIU GOVERNMENT - May 1975

HISTORY OF THE VIETNAM WAR ON MICROFILM

SUBJECT COMMENTS BY FORMER GVN PRIME MINISTER
KHIEM ON DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM PRIOR TO THE
FALL OF THE GVN

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SUMMARY, ON 10 MAY, FORMER GVN PRIME
MINISTER KHIEM COMMENTED THAT HE RESIGNED HIS POSITION ON 4
APRIL AT THE SUGGESTION OF FORMER GVN FOREIGN MINISTER DO, AND
NOT AT THE REQUEST OF PRESIDENT THIEU. KHIEM CLAIMED THAT
NEITHER HE NOR THIEU EVER HAD ANY CONTACTS WITH THE VIETNAMESE
COMMUNISTS OTHER THAN THE FORMAL NEGOTIATIONS IN PARIS. GENERAL
"BIG" MINH, HOWEVER, HAD CONTACT WITH THE HEAD OF THE PROVISIONAL
REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT THROUGH A MUTUAL FRIEND, AND KHIEM OFFERED
HIS SUPPORT TO MINH WHEN MINH EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT HE COULD

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BRING ABOUT SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATIONS. KHIEM EXPLAINED THAT THIEU DECIDED TO WITHDRAW FROM KONTUM AND DARLAC PROVINCES FOLLOWING A SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING ON 13 MARCH AND A BRIEFING BY THE MILITARY REGION 2 (MR-2) COMMANDER THE FOLLOWING DAY. FOLLOWING A VISIT TO NHA TRANG ON 19 MARCH, KHIEM REPORTED TO THIEU THAT THE MR-2 COMMANDER WAS INCAPABLE OF COMMAND, BUT THIEU DID NOT REPLACE THE COMMANDER.

END SUMMARY.

1. ON 10 MAY 1975, FORMER GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM (GVN) PRIME MINISTER TRAN THIEN K H I E M AT HIS RESIDENCE IN TAIPEI COMMENTED THAT HE RESIGNED AS GVN PRIME MINISTER ON 4 APRIL AT THE SUGGESTION OF FORMER GVN FOREIGN MINISTER TRAN VAN D O. KHIEM CLAIMED THAT FORMER GVN PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN T H I E U HAD NEVER SUGGESTED THAT KHIEM RESIGN. KHIEM SAID THAT DO, AS SPOKESMAN FOR THE "MODERATE GROUP," IN EARLY APRIL ADVOCATED THAT THIEU RETAIN HIS POSITION AS HEAD OF STATE BUT RELINQUISH HIS POWERS TO A GOVERNMENT COMPOSED OF REPRESENTATIVES FROM ALL OF THE MAJOR PARTIES AND RELIGIONS. ACCORDING TO KHIEM, HE AGREED WITH DO'S POSITION. HE FORESAW THE NEED FOR NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE

COMMUNISTS, AND KNEW THAT HE, AS PRIME MINISTER, MADE NEGOTIATIONS IMPOSSIBLE AND THEREFORE HE RESIGNED. KHIEM COMMENTED THAT IN EARLY 1974, HE OFFERED HIS RESIGNATION TO THIEU IN THE BELIEF THAT A MORE REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT COULD BRING ABOUT SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE THE COMMUNISTS. HOWEVER, THIEU REMAINED ADAMANT THAT NO CHANGE IN HIS POLICIES OR IN THE GOVERNMENT WERE REQUIRED.

2. KHIEM SAID THAT NEITHER HE NOR THIEU HAD CONTACTS AT ANY TIME WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PROVISIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT (PRG), THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT OR THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM (DRV) OTHER THAN THE FORMAL NEGOTIATIONS IN PARIS. KHIEM ADDED THAT HE VISITED GENERAL DUONG VAN "BIG" MINH AT MINH'S RESIDENCE A FEW DAYS AFTER KHIEM'S RESIGNATION ON 4 APRIL. MINH TOLD KHIEM THAT HE HAD CONTACT WITH HUYNH TAN PHAT, HEAD OF THE PRG, THROUGH A MUTUAL FRIEND. MINH EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT HE COULD BRING ABOUT SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATIONS. IN ADDITION, ACCORDING TO MINH, THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR HAD PROMISED THAT HE WOULD ASSIST IN BRINGING ABOUT NEGOTIATIONS. KHIEM SAID THAT DURING HIS MEETING WITH MINH, HE PLEDGED HIS SUPPORT TO

MINH. KHIEM FURTHER RELATED THAT ON OR ABOUT 2 APRIL, GENERAL CAO VAN V I E N , CHIEF OF THE JOINT GENERAL STAFF (JGS), REPORTED TO HIM THAT MAJOR GENERAL NGUYEN CAO K Y , FORMER GVN VICE-PRESIDENT AND PRIME MINISTER, HAD APPROACHED VIEN AND ASKED HIM TO SUPPORT A COUP D'ETAT AGAINST THIEU. VIEN DECLINED TO SUPPORT KY, AND BOTH VIEN AND KHIEM REPORTED THE INCIDENT TO U.S. AUTHORITIES THE FOLLOWING DAY.

3. KHIEM SAID THAT HE HAD ACCEPTED THE POST OF MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE, IN ADDITION TO HIS BEING PRIME MINISTER, AT THE INSISTENCE OF HIS FRIEND GENERAL NGUYEN VAN V Y , RESIGNED ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO. KHIEM SAID IT WAS BETTER FOR GENERAL VIEN TO HAVE FULL POWER AS CHIEF OF THE JGS WITHOUT INTERFERENCE FROM THE DEFENSE MINISTER. KHIEM SAID THAT IN ACTUALITY, THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE, BUU V I E N , WHO LATER WAS REPLACED BY TON THAT C H U O C , CARRIED OUT THE DAY-TO-DAY RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DEFENSE MINISTER. THE DEFENSE MINISTER WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR PREPARING AND DEFENDING THE MILITARY BUDGET AND FOR RECOMMENDING AND CARRYING OUT MANPOWER POLICIES. THE MINISTER WAS NOT CONCERNED WITH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OR THE SELECTION OF FLAG

RANK OFFICERS, OR FOR THE MOVEMENT OF TROOP UNITS, THE PRESIDENT ALONE, ACCORDING TO KHIEM, SELECTED SENIOR OFFICERS FOR COM- AND OR FOR PROMOTION, AT TIMES UPON THE RECOMMENDATION OF GENERAL VIEN BUT WITHOUT CONSULTATION WITH THE DEFENSE MINISTER. THE PRESIDENT ALSO APPROVED ALL TRANSFERS OF MILITARY UNITS FROM ONE MILITARY REGION (MR) TO ANOTHER.

4. IN REFERRING TO THE DECISIONS AFFECTING THE WITHDRAWAL FROM PLEIKU AND KONTUM PROVINCES IN MR-2, GENERAL KHIEM SAID THAT DURING A 13 MARCH BREAKFAST MEETING OF THE GVN SECURITY COUNCIL, PRESIDENT THIEU SAID THAT IT WAS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO HOLD BAN ME THUOT CITY IN DARLAC PROVINCE, BECAUSE IT WAS THE KEY TO THE DEFENSE OF THE POPULATED COASTAL PROVINCES OF KHANH HOA, PHU YEN, NINH THUAN AND BINH THUAN. GENERAL VIEN REPLIED THAT THE JGS HAD NO RESERVE FORCES, AND THAT MAJOR GENERAL PHAM VAN P H U , MR-2 COMMANDER, MUST REGAIN BAN ME THUOT WITH THE FORCES CURRENTLY AVAILABLE TO HIM IN MR-2. THEREUPON, THE PRESIDENT DECIDED THAT IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO SACRIFICE PLEIKU AND KONTUM AS BEING OF LESS IMPORTANCE AND TO WITHDRAW SVN FORCES FROM BOTH PROVINCES. THE SECURITY COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT AT THE

MEETING CHAIRED BY THE PRESIDENT WERE VICE-PRESIDENT TRAN VAN H U O N G , GENERAL VIEN, LIEUTENANT GENERAL DANG VAN Q U A N G , ADVISOR TO THE PRESIDENT FOR SECURITY MATTERS, AND KHIEM IN HIS CAPACITY AS PRIME MINISTER AND DEFENSE MINISTER.

5. ON THE FOLLOWING DAY, 14 MARCH, THE PRESIDENT, ACCOMPANIED BY KHIEM AND GENERALS VIEN AND QUANG, TRAVELED TO CAM RANH BASE AND WERE BRIEFED BY GENERAL PHU. AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE BRIEFING, PRESIDENT THIEU ASKED GENERAL PHU IF HE COULD SUCCESSFULLY DEFEND PLEIKU AND KONTUM. PHU RESPONDED IN THE NEGATIVE, SAYING THAT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY FORCES WERE TOO STRONG AND THAT HIS OWN FORCES WERE

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SHORT OF MANPOWER. THE PRESIDENT THEN DIRECTED PHU TO WITHDRAW HIS FORCES FROM THE TWO PROVINCES. KHIEM SAID THAT THE ACTUAL PLANS OF IMPLEMENTING THE WITHDRAWAL WERE NOT DISCUSSED AT THE BRIEFING AND THAT HE WAS NOT FAMILIAR WITH THE MILITARY PLAN, WHICH HE CLAIMED WAS KNOWN ONLY TO THE PRESIDENT AND GENERALS VIEN AND PHU.

6. KHIEM ADDED THAT ON 19 MARCH HE VISITED BOTH DANANG AND NHA TRANG AS THE HEAD OF A GROUP OF MINISTERS PLANNING FOR THE CARE OF REFUGEES. HE SAID THAT HE FOUND GENERAL PHU AT NHA TRANG TO BE INCAPABLE OF COMMAND. UPON HIS RETURN TO SAIGON ON THE SAME DATE, HE REPORTED TO PRESIDENT THIEU GENERAL PHU'S INABILITY TO COMMAND AND SUGGESTED THAT A NEW MR-2 COMMANDER BE APPOINTED. THE PRESIDENT HOWEVER, NEITHER RELIEVED NOR REPLACED PHU.