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INCOMING TELEGRAM *Department of State*

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Action

Control: 18536
 Rec'd: FEBRUARY 27, 1964
 5:59 AM

Info

FROM: SAIGON

ACTION: SECSTATE 1641

DATE: FEBRUARY 27, 5 PM

LIMDIS

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Saigon 1641

HEREWITH REPORT ON EXCURSION TO TAY NINH WITH GENERAL KHANH.

1. HE HAD CHANGED THE TIME FROM THURSDAY MORNING TO WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON, SAYING TO ME THAT HE DID THIS BECAUSE "THE FRENCH HAD PLANNED TO ASSASSINATE ME IN TAY NINH ON THURSDAY MORNING AND HAD PUT 100,000 PIASTERS INTO TAY NINH FOR THAT PURPOSE". I ASKED HIM HOW HE KNEW IT WAS THE FRENCH WHO PLANNED TO DO THIS, AND HE SAID HE WAS ABSOLUTELY POSITIVE, BUT GAVE NO DETAILS. HE HAD THE HEAVIEST GUARD THAT HE HAS EVER HAD SINCE HE HAS BEEN PRIME MINISTER, HAVING SENT AN ENTIRE COMPANY INTO TAY NINH IN THE MORNING.

2. WE WENT FIRST TO THE CAO DAI "CATHEDRAL" AND THEN WE HELICOPTERED OVER TO THE RACETRACK WHERE THERE WAS A CROWD OF ABOUT 2,000 -- NOT AS LARGE, I ESTIMATED, AS HAD BEEN PRESENT WHEN I WAS THERE WITH GENERAL MINH.

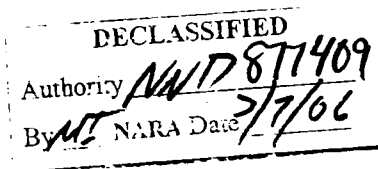
3. I THOUGHT GENERAL KHANH'S HANDLING OF THE CROWD WAS MOST COMPETENT. WHEN HIS TIME CAME TO SPEAK, HE BECKONED TO THE CROWD TO COME IN CLOSE TO THE GRANDSTAND. IN THE COURSE OF HIS SPEECH, HE ASKED A RHETORICAL QUESTION: "HAVE WE A RIGHT TO REMAIN INACTIVE AND IGNORE THE SACRIFICE OF THOSE WHO HAVE DIED FOR VIETNAM" AND GOT A GOOD ROARING ANSWER IN RETURN. HE ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT HE WOULD GIVE TITLE TO INDIVIDUAL LOTS OF LAND TO CAO DAIS HAVING A SHARE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR "HOLY SEE". HE TOLD ME PRIVATELY THAT THIS WAS A BIG STEP IN WHICH HE HAD GIVEN MUCH THOUGHT.

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4. I GATHER THERE WAS FEAR THAT THE CAO DAI SECT MIGHT START TO SLIP AWAY. TRAN QUANG VING, THE ACTING "POPE", A VERY YELLOW MAN OF ABOUT 60 DRESSED IN A LONG, WHITE ROBE WHICH WENT FROM HIS NECK TO THE GROUND, AND WEARING A WHITE CONICAL HAT SURMOUNTED WITH A BRASS SPIKE, TIED UNDER HIS CHIN WITH A BROAD BABY BLUE RIBBON, MADE A SPEECH DEALING ALMOST ENTIRELY WITH RELIGIOUS MATTERS AND WHICH GENERAL KHANH TOLD ME DID NOT GO AS FAR AS HE WOULD HAVE LIKED.

5. BUT CERTAINLY KHANH LEFT NO STONE UNTURNED. IN ADDITION TO GIVING INDIVIDUALS TITLE TO PARCELS OF LAND, HE ALSO LEASED THE LONG HOA MARKET PLACE TO THE "CHURCH" FOR ONE PIASTER A YEAR AND APPOINTED GENERAL LE VAN TAT, THE WELL-KNOWN CAO DAI GENERAL, TO BE PROVINCE CHIEF.

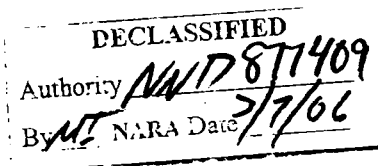
6. THE CROWD WAS OBVIOUSLY VERY MUCH PLEASED WITH KHANH; THEY HAD ALSO BEEN PLEASED WITH GENERAL MINH, BUT GENERAL KHANH DOES A BETTER JOB. HE IS REALLY MUCH MORE OF A MAN, AND IT SHOWS THROUGH.

7. THE TRIP GAVE ME AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE UP A NUMBER OF OTHER THINGS WITH GENERAL KHANH, AS FOLLOWS.

8. I STRESSED THE TREMENDOUS IMPORTANCE OF QUICKLY CLEARING AN AREA, HOWEVER SMALL, PRESENTLY HELD BY THE VIET CONG. I TOLD HIM THAT WHEN SUCH AN AREA HAD BEEN CLEARED, I WISHED TO VISIT IT WITH THE AMERICAN JOURNALISTS, SO THAT WE WOULD START GETTING AT LEAST ONE CHEERFUL NEWS STORY BACK IN THE UNITED STATES, ON WHICH THE COLUMNISTS AND THE ORATORS COULD CONSTRUCT COLUMNS AND SPEECHES. EVERYTHING COMING OUT OF VIETNAM WAS SO GLOOMY. WHAT WAS NEEDED WAS NOT A TRIP TO AN AREA THAT IS QUIET AND LAW ABIDING, OF WHICH THERE ARE A GREAT MANY; WHAT IS NEEDED IS A TRIP TO A PLACE WHICH HAS BEEN CLEARED DURING THE TIME THAT GENERAL KHANH HAS BEEN IN POWER. HE SEEMED TO UNDERSTAND THE POINT, AND I HOPE FOR PROMPT RESULTS.

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9. I DISCUSSED THE POSITIVE ACTIONS WHICH HE HAD TAKEN TO IMPROVE THE POLICE PROTECTION IN SAIGON. HE SAID HE FELT SURE THAT THE VIET CONG WOULD TRY TO OUTFLANK THE STEPS WHICH HE HAD TAKEN AND THAT HE WAS ANTICIPATING MORE TROUBLE NEXT WEEK. BUT HE FELT HE WAS GAINING.

10. I ASKED HIM WHEN HE EXPECTED TO REACH A DECISION ABOUT GENERAL DON AND KIM. HE SAID HE WAS STILL LOOKING FOR "AN ELEGANT SOLUTION" AND HOPES TO FIND IT WITHIN A MONTH. THERE WERE CONFLICTING FACTORS: FIRST OF ALL, THE TRUTH AS TO WHAT THEY HAD DONE, THE PUBLIC OPINION OF WHICH WOULD BE IN HIS (KHANH'S) OWN INTEREST AS JUSTIFYING HIS SEIZURE OF POWER. BUT ON THE OTHER HAND, THE "HONOR OF GENERALS" WAS INVOLVED, AND HE WAS A GENERAL HIMSELF AND A "MEMBER OF THE FAMILY". I SAID I DID NOT PRESUME TO ADVISE HIM ON WHAT WAS OR WAS NOT EXPEDIENT IN VIETNAM BUT THAT I FELT IT WOULD STRENGTHEN HIS POSITION ABRTAD IF HE REALLY MADE A SHOWING AND, AS A MATTER OF JUSTICE TO THESE INDIVIDUALS, DISPOSED OF THEIR CASE EXPEDITIOUSLY.

11. WE HAD A DISCUSSION OF THE RUMORS OF ASSASSINATION AGAINST HIMSELF AND MYSELF. HE SAID: "AS WE DO BETTER AND BETTER, THE ATTEMPTS TO ASSASSINATE ME WILL INCREASE."

12. I CONTINUED TO BE FAVORABLY IMPRESSED BY HIM. HE IS INVARIABLY GOOD HUMORED, INTELLIGENT, UNRUFFLED AND QUICKLY COMPREHENDING. HE IS REALLY VERY MUCH MORE ABLE THAN THE MINH, DON KIM GROUP AND, OF COURSE, HE IS SO FAR ABOVE DIEM AND NHU THAT THERE IS NO COMPARISON.

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LODGE

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TO : CSAF WASH DC FOR: DINTA

INFO: COMFEAF TOKYO JAPAN

NR : C-55

281140Z Apr 55

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Maj fighting broke out at approx 1330 hrs today between Bien Zuyen Forces and Vietnamese National Army. Best info available at this time is that fighting started when Bien Zuyen Soldier fired on truck load of Vietnamese National Army Troops in vicinity of Ruegallien in Cholon area. At about 1340 hrs Bien Zuyen forces fired 5 rounds of 81 MM mortar fire at Independence Palace in Saigon, home and office of President Ngo Dinh Diem. 1 round reported to have caused some damage to corner of palace itself; other 4 shells are reported to have fallen in palace grounds and in immediate surrounding area. Any casualties not known at this time. At approx 1430 hrs, 4 additional 81 MM mortar shells were fired at place by Bien Zuyen. Fighting which broke out concurrently along waterfront in Cholon created 2 large fires which were actively burning 2 hours later. Additional sporadic firing occurred in Dakao section of Saigon (Native Qtrs). Although it is still too early for reports of results of fighting to be known, it appears to observers here that Vietnamese National Army are now actively pressing their attack with objective of destroying or driving out Bien Zuyen forces in Saigon-Cholon area. Comment: Situation is recognized to be serious here but no panic exists. Air attache, Saigon will watch situation closely and will provide further reports on initiative basis.

ACTION: OIN ADDED DISTR: ARMY, NAVY, STATE, CIA, OSD (SDLU), JCS, NSA, OSD

CAF IN: 75161 (29 Apr 55)

SDM/NAVE 19591

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