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[REDACTED]

EO 12958 3.4(b)(1) (C)

DIST 5 APRIL 1968

COUNTRY SOUTH VIETNAM

DOI 31 MARCH-4 APRIL 1968

SUBJECT VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT REACTIONS TO IMPENDING PEACE TALKS AND MEASURES BEING CONSIDERED BY THE GOVERNMENT

ACQ VIETNAM, SAIGON (4 APRIL 1968)

SOURCE

[REDACTED]

NAME	ACT	INFO
WmL		
DC		

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SUMMARY: PRESIDENT THIEU AND VICE PRESIDENT KY HAVE BEEN MEETING PRIVATELY AND ALSO WITH CABINET MEMBERS TO DISCUSS THE QUESTION OF NEGOTIATIONS. SPECIFIC SUBJECTS CONSIDERED HAVE BEEN FULL MOBILIZATION; THE NEED TO STREAMLINE THE GOVERNMENT (GVN), INCLUDING THE CREATION OF A WAR CABINET; AND THE NEED TO DEMONSTRATE NATIONAL UNITY AND DISCIPLINE. THIEU AND KY SEEM TO AGREE THAT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

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MUST BE TOLD IN NO UNCERTAIN TERMS THAT IT CANNOT CONTINUE ITS PRESENT ROLE OF "NATIONAL IRRITANT". THE GVN IS UNPREPARED FOR NEGOTIATIONS; THE FOREIGN MINISTRY HAS NOT PREPARED POSITION PAPERS ON THE QUESTION, THE GVN HAS NOT DECIDED WHAT IT WOULD AND WOULD NOT ACCEPT, THERE IS A GREAT LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (NFLSV) AND NORTH VIETNAM MIGHT OR MIGHT NOT ACCEPT. HOWEVER, ALL GVN OFFICIALS AGREE THAT A COALITION GOVERNMENT WITH THE NFLSV WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE. THIEU HAS MAINTAINED HIS COMPOSURE, BUT HE IS RELYING TOO MUCH ON THINGS THAT MIGHT NOT HAPPEN. KY IS TAKING A MORE REALISTIC APPROACH AND IS INSISTING THAT THE GVN SHOULD PREPARE FOR THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE U.S. MAY BE DETERMINED TO EXTRICATE ITSELF FROM VIETNAM REGARDLESS OF THE PRICE. AS A RESULT OF THE CRISIS, THIEU AND KY ARE WORKING MORE CLOSELY TOGETHER THAN EVER BEFORE, AND KY HAS BEEN TELLING HIS FOLLOWERS THAT THEY NEED THIEU AND MUST GIVE THIEU ALL POSSIBLE SUPPORT AND EXCELLENT COUNSEL. ONE DANGER FACING THE GVN IS THAT THE VIET CONG MAY SUCCEED IN CONVINCING THE PEOPLE THAT THEY HAVE WON THE WAR, THUS CREATING A BANDWAGON MENTALITY. IN SUCH EVENT, THE GVN WOULD BE UNABLE TO FUNCTION. ONE POSITIVE ASPECT IS THAT THERE IS NO EFFORT BY ANYONE TO HARRASS THE GOVERNMENT. EVEN POLICE CHIEF LOAN HAS

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OFFERED THIEU AN ABSOLUTE GUARANTEE THAT HE WILL NOT CREATE TROUBLE FOR THIEU IN THIS TIME OF CRISIS. END SUMMARY.

1. PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU AND VICE PRESIDENT NGUYEN CAO KY HAVE HAD SEVERAL PRIVATE MEETINGS AS WELL AS GENERAL MEETINGS ALSO ATTENDED BY CABINET MEMBERS TO DISCUSS THE QUESTION OF NEGOTIATIONS. THE ONLY POSITIVE DECISION TO EMERGE THUS FAR IS THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM (GVN) SHOULD IMMEDIATELY TAKE STEPS TO SHOW THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH VIETNAM (SVN) AND THE WORLD THAT IT IS DETERMINED TO CONTINUE TO RESIST COMMUNIST AGGRESSION. THE STEP MOST OFTEN DISCUSSED HAS BEEN FULL MOBILIZATION SINCE THIS WOULD INDICATE THAT THE GVN WAS PREPARING TO CARRY ON ALONE IF NEED BE.

2. THERE HAS ALSO BEEN CONSIDERABLE DISCUSSION OF THE NEED TO STREAMLINE THE GOVERNMENT SO THAT IT CAN FUNCTION MORE EFFECTIVELY. THE MOST COMMONLY DISCUSSED STEP IN THIS DIRECTION IS THE CREATION OF A WAR CABINET. ONE PROPOSAL IS TO BRING FIVE POWERFUL NEW FIGURES INTO THE GOVERNMENT TO HEAD FIVE NEW SUPER-MINISTRIES--WAR, SECURITY, ECONOMY, POLITICAL WARFARE, AND ONE OTHER--UNDER WHICH THE PRESENT MINISTRIES WOULD BE GROUPED, AT LEAST IN TERMS OF POLICY DIRECTION.

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ANOTHER PROPOSAL IS TO KEEP THE PRESENT MINISTRIES BUT BRING IN MORE

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DYNAMIC FIGURES TO HEAD SOME OF THEM. THEN, A HALF DOZEN OR SO OF THESE KEY MINISTERS WOULD BE SELECTED TO RUN THE GOVERNMENT ALONG WITH THIEU, KY AND PRIME MINISTER NGUYEN VAN LOC.

3. DURING THESE MEETINGS THERE HAS ALSO BEEN MUCH TALK OF THE NEED TO DEMONSTRATE UNITY AND NATIONAL DISCIPLINE. THIEU AND KY SEEM TO AGREE IN PRINCIPLE THAT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MUST BE TOLD IN NO UNCERTAIN TERMS THAT IT CANNOT CONTINUE IN ITS PRESENT ROLE OF "NATIONAL IRRITANT". THIS MESSAGE WOULD BE PASSED DISCREETLY BUT THERE WOULD BE AN "IRON FIST IN THE VELVET GLOVE". COMMENT: MOST VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS AGREE THAT THE ASSEMBLY WAS SET UP ONLY BECAUSE THE AMERICANS INSISTED ON IT, THAT IT SERVES A VERY LIMITED PURPOSE IN TIME OF WAR AND THAT SVN IS NOT PREPARED FOR THE LUXURY OF PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT IN A CRISIS. AS LONG AS THE U.S. WAS PREPARED TO CARRY THE BURDEN, THE VIETNAMESE COULD AFFORD IT. NOW, HOWEVER, THE ASSEMBLY MUST BE WILLING TO SUBORDINATE ITSELF TO THE NATIONAL INTERESTS, I.E., IT SHOULD BECOME A RUBBER STAMP.)

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4. IN GENERAL, THE GVN IS COMPLETELY DISORGANIZED AND UNPREPARED FOR NEGOTIATIONS. THE FOREIGN MINISTER HAS NOT PREPARED ANY PAPERS ON NEGOTIATIONS THAT SET FORTH POSSIBLE OPTIONS AND ALTERNATIVES. ALTHOUGH THE QUESTION HAS BEEN DISCUSSED BY THIEU AND KY, THE FACT

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REMAINS THAT THE GVN HAS NOT DETERMINED ITS POSITION, THAT IS, WHAT IT WOULD BE WILLING TO ACCEPT IN ANY NEGOTIATIONS. THE ONLY FIRM POSITION IS THAT NONE OF THE PRESENT GVN OFFICIALS WILL AGREE TO A GENUINE COALITION GOVERNMENT WITH THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (NFLSV). MOREOVER, THE GVN KNOWS VERY LITTLE ABOUT ITS ENEMY-- LITTLE ABOUT THE NFLSV AND VIRTUALLY NOTHING ABOUT NORTH VIETNAM (DRV). IT DOES NOT HAVE A CLEAR IDEA OF WHAT THE NFLSV WANTS AND WHAT IT MIGHT SETTLE FOR; WHAT THE DRV MIGHT OR MIGHT NOT AGREE TO. IN ADDITION, THERE IS LITTLE OR NO AGREEMENT AMONG SENIOR GVN OFFICIALS NOW AS TO WHAT PEACE NEGOTIATIONS SIGNIFY.

5. THIEU HAS NOT LOST HIS COMPOSURE AS A RESULT OF THE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS, WHICH IS A DECIDED ASSET SINCE LOC SEEMS TO BE COMPLETELY AT SEA. HOWEVER, THIEU IS LABORING UNDER SEVERAL HANDICAPS. FOR EXAMPLE, HE IS STILL SAYING IN THE PRESENCE OF MINISTERS THAT HE THINKS JOHNSON'S RENUNCIATION OF RENOMINATION IS A POLITICAL MANEUVER AND THAT JOHNSON WILL EVENTUALLY RUN FOR REELECTION. THIEU ALSO THINKS THAT JOHNSON IS A VERY SHREWD MAN WHO WILL GET THE BETTER OF THE COMMUNISTS, AND HE IS TAKING SOLACE IN THE STATEMENT THAT THE U.S. HAS NEVER LOST A WAR AND IS NOT ABOUT TO LOSE

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THIS ONE. ([REDACTED] COMMENT: SUCH THINKING IS BAD NOT BECAUSE IT SHOWS

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A LACK OF APPRECIATION OF AMERICAN POLITICAL REALITY BUT BECAUSE IT INDICATES THAT THIEU IS COUNTING HEAVILY ON SOMETHING THAT MAY NOT EVENTUATE. THIEU IS ALSO HAMPERED BY THE FACT THAT HIS STAFF IS NOT UP TO THE NEGOTIATION QUESTION.)

6. KY'S APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM HAS BEEN QUITE REALISTIC. HE HAS TOLD THIEU HE THINKS JOHNSON'S DECISION NOT TO SEEK RENOMINATION IS IRREVOCABLE, THAT JOHNSON IS LOOKING TOWARD HIS PLACE IN HISTORY WHICH HE CAN ASSURE BETTER THROUGH LEAVING THE PRESIDENCY THAN THROUGH SERVING ANOTHER FOUR YEARS, ASSUMING HE COULD WIN REELECTION. KY BELIEVES THAT THE GVN MUST FACE UP TO THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE U.S. IS DETERMINED TO EXTRICATE ITSELF FROM VIETNAM REGARDLESS OF THE COST. KY SAID HE WAS NOT SAYING THAT JOHNSON WOULD GET OUT AT ANY PRICE BUT ONLY THAT THE GVN MUST PREPARE ITSELF FOR SUCH A POSSIBILITY. HE INDICATED HIS BELIEF THAT JOHNSON MIGHT WELL BE REGARDED AS A NATIONAL HERO IF HE GETS THE U.S. OUT OF VIETNAM, NO MATTER HOW HE DOES IT. IN THAT CONNECTION, HE REPEATED SOME COMMENTS BY GVN AMBASSADOR TO WASHINGTON BUI DIEM ABOUT THE STRONG PRESSURES IN THE U.S. AGAINST A CONTINUATION OF THE WAR.

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7. KY SAID IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT THE GVN DEMONSTRATE TO THE SVN PEOPLE THAT IT WAS ON TOP OF THE SITUATION AND WORKING CLOSELY

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WITH THE AMERICANS. IF THE PEOPLE GOT THE IMPRESSION THAT THE U.S. WAS GOING IT ALONE, HE CONTINUED, MOST EVERYONE WOULD THINK THAT ANOTHER 1954 GENEVA AGREEMENT WAS IMMINENT. KY SUGGESTED THAT A GVN REPRESENTATIVE GO TO GENEVA IF THAT WAS WHERE THE NEGOTIATIONS TOOK PLACE. HE EXPRESSED CONCERN, HOWEVER, THAT THE U.S. MIGHT AGREE TO HOLD THE NEGOTIATIONS AT SOME PLACE WHERE THE VIETNAMESE COULD NOT BE REPRESENTED. THIS WOULD BE BAD SINCE IT WOULD SUGGEST THAT THE VIETNAMESE WERE BEING EXCLUDED FROM DECISIONS OVER THE FUTURE OF THEIR OWN COUNTRY. THIEU SUGGESTED TO KY THAT HE MIGHT SEND BUI DIEM TO GENEVA. ([REDACTED] COMMENT: THIEU PROBABLY WOULD LIKE TO RID HIMSELF OF DIEM'S PRESENCE.)

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8. ONE GOOD THING TO COME OUT OF THE PRESENT DEVELOPMENTS IS THAT ALTHOUGH THIEU AND KY MAY NOT BE UNITED, THEY ARE WORKING MORE CLOSELY TOGETHER THAN EVER BEFORE. KY HAS BEEN EMPHASIZING TO HIS FOLLOWERS THAT "THEY" MUST GIVE HIM AS MUCH PRESTIGE AND EXCELLENT COUNSEL AS THEY CAN. WITHOUT THIEU, ACCORDING TO KY, A WEAK GVN HAND WILL BE EVEN WEAKER. THIEU SEEMS TO BE COMING AROUND SOMEWHAT AND LOWERING HIS GUARD, BUT NOT AS MUCH AS HE SHOULD.

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9. EVERYONE AT THE PALACE ON 4 APRIL SEEMED TO AGREE THAT WHAT THE GVN DID AND SAID DURING THE NEXT TEN DAYS WOULD

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BE VERY IMPORTANT. THE VIET CONG (VC) CAN BE EXPECTED TO TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION TO SOW DOUBT AND DISCORD AMONG THE PEOPLE. A MATTER OF CONCERN IS THE FACT THAT IT IS FAIRLY EASY TO GET A BAND-WAGON MOVEMENT ROLLING AMONG THE VIETNAMESE, AND THE VC WILL BE TRYING TO DO JUST THAT, I.E., TO MAKE THE POINT THAT THE WAR IS OVER, THAT THE U.S./GVN HAS LOST AND THAT THE VC WILL SOON BE TAKING OVER. IF SUCH A FEELING SHOULD BECOME WIDESPREAD, IT WILL BECOME VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE GVN TO FUNCTION. THE CHIEU HOI (OPENS ARMS) PROGRAM WILL END, THE REVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM WILL GO OUT OF EXISTENCE, THE NASCENT SELF-DEFENSE MOVEMENT WILL BE A THING OF THE PAST, ETC.

10. TO SUM UP, THIEU AND KY HAVE NOT PANICKED AND SEEM TO BE VIEWING THE SITUATION AS CALMLY AS CAN BE EXPECTED. EVEN DIRECTOR GENERAL OF NATIONAL POLICE BRIGADIER GENERAL NGUYEN NGOC LOAN HAS SAID CALMLY THAT HE IS WILLING TO DO WHATEVER THIEU AND KY DECIDE HE SHOULD DO AND THAT HE IS WILLING TO GIVE THIEU AN IRONCLAD GUARANTEE THAT HE WILL NOT CAUSE THIEU ANY PROBLEMS DURING THESE CRITICAL TIMES. TO DO SO WOULD BE HIGHLY UNPATRIOTIC, AND LOAN APPEARS HIMSELF FIRST AND FOREMOST A PATRIOT. HOWEVER, DESPITE A LACK OF PANIC AT THE TOP, THERE IS WIDESPREAD CONCERN AND NEAR PANIC

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AT THE BOTTOM OF THE GVN HIERARCHY. AMONG THE MASSES, THE OPINION IS RAPIDLY GROWING, PROBABLY FANNED BY THE VC, THAT THE U.S. IS GETTING READY TO STAB THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE IN THE BACK. ALSO, THAT THE LACK OF PANIC AT THE TOP DOES NOT MEAN THE EXISTENCE THERE OF A COHERENT POLICY. AT PRESENT, THERE IS, RATHER, A TOTAL LACK OF PREPAREDNESS FOR NEGOTIATIONS AS WELL AS A REALIZATION THAT THE GVN IS OVERLY CUMBERSOME AND DESPERATELY IN NEED OF STREAMLINING. SOME SORT OF WAR CABINET WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY EMERGE. ON THE POSITIVE SIDE, THERE IS NO EFFORT ON THE PART OF ANYONE TO OVERTHROW THE GOVERNMENT AND THE KY FORCES SEEM READY TO GO OUT OF THEIR WAY TO IMPRESS ON THIEU THE NEED FOR CLOSE COOPERATION. EVERYONE AGREES THAT A COALITION GOVERNMENT IS TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE, BUT PEOPLE WILL ACCEPT SOMETHING THAT EXCEEDS THE ONE MAN-ONE VOTE CONCEPT.

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11. [REDACTED] DISSEM: STATE (AMBASSADOR BUNKER, DEPUTY AMBASSADOR BERGER, POLITICAL COUNSELOR) USMACV (GENERAL WESTMORELAND, GENERAL ABRAMS, AMBASSADOR KOMER) 7TH AIR FORCE (GENERAL MOMYER ONLY) CINCPAC PACFLT ARPAC PACAF
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