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Intelligence Information Cable

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GROUP 1  
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DIST 3 JULY 1967

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3.4(b)(1)-25Yrs  
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COUNTRY SOUTH VIETNAM  
DOI 2 JULY 1967  
SUBJECT AGREEMENT BETWEEN CHIEF OF STATE THIEU AND  
PRIME MINISTER KY THAT THIEU, AS PRESIDENT,  
WILL BE A FIGUREHEAD AND KY, AS VICE PRESIDENT,  
WILL RETAIN PRINCIPAL CONTROL AFTER THE ELECTIONS

*Robert*  
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ACQ VIETNAM, SAIGON [REDACTED]

SOURCE [REDACTED]

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1. (SUMMARY: IT IS AGREED AMONG PRIME MINISTER KY,  
CHIEF OF STATE THIEU AND THE ARMED FORCES COUNCIL (AFC)  
THAT THIEU WILL BE A FIGUREHEAD AS PRESIDENT AND KY WILL  
BE DE FACTO IN COMMAND. THIEU'S PERSONAL PRESTIGE HAS  
DECLINED CONSIDERABLY AMONG AFC OFFICERS BECAUSE OF HIS SELF-  
SEEKING BEHAVIOR DURING THE DELIBERATIONS WHICH PRECEDED  
THE DECISION TO FORM A JOINT THIEU-KY TICKET. KY'S BIGGEST  
PROBLEM NOW IS TO EXPLAIN, DISCREETLY, TO HIS BACKERS THAT

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HE WILL ACTUALLY HAVE BROAD AUTHORITY IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT AS THOUGH HE WERE PRESIDENT IN FACT, AND TO PERSUADE HIS CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION TO WORK FOR THE NEW THIEU-KY SLATE.)

2. CHIEF OF STATE THIEU AND PRIME MINISTER KY HAVE REACHED AN AGREEMENT ON WHAT THEIR RESPECTIVE ROLES WILL BE IF ELECTED AS PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT. THIEU WILL FUNCTION IN A LIMITED, FIGUREHEAD CAPACITY ONLY, WITH KY AS DE FACTO COMMANDER OF THE ARMED FORCES AND THE ONE WITH EXECUTIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE MINISTRIES OF DEFENSE, REVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT, AND INFORMATION, EACH OF WHICH WILL LIKELY BE HEADED BY A MILITARY OFFICER. KY WILL ALSO SELECT ALL THE CABINET MEMBERS. THE PRIME MINISTER WILL BE A CIVILIAN; AND ALTHOUGH HE HAS NOT YET BEEN SELECTED, HE WILL PREFERABLY BE SOMEONE WITH A BACKGROUND IN ECONOMICS AND WILL HANDLE THE OTHER MINISTRIES WITH PERHAPS OCCASIONAL GUIDANCE FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT. THIEU UNDERSTANDS THIS ENTIRE ARRANGEMENT CLEARLY AND IS WILLING TO ACCEPT HIS LARGELY TITULAR ROLE. TO AVOID MISUNDERSTANDING OR LATER MANEUVERING BY THIEU, THE AGREEMENT WILL BE PUT IN WRITING, KEPT ON AN UNOFFICIAL AND CONFIDENTIAL BASIS, AND WILL BE ACKNOWLEDGED BY BOTH

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THIEU AND KY IN PRESENCE OF THE SENIOR MILITARY OFFICERS OF THE ARMED FORCES COUNCIL.

3. THERE HAS BEEN A BROAD AND RATHER STRONG REACTION TO THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE THIEU-KY SLATE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY IN THE PAST TWO DAYS, AND MANY PEOPLE, INCLUDING THE "BABY-TURKS" MILITARY OFFICERS, HAVE FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT THIS COMBINATION. QUITE A NUMBER OF PEOPLE HAVE STATED THEY FEEL THAT THIEU MAY BE AN ALBATROSS AS THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE AND MAY MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR THE SLATE TO WIN DESPITE KY'S OWN CONSIDERABLE PERSONAL POPULARITY AND VOTER APPEAL. THERE IS ALSO THE DISTINCT PROBLEM OF THE GENERAL PERVERSITY OF THE VIETNAMESE, WHO IF FORCED TO ACCEPT SOMEONE THEY DO NOT FAVOR FOR PRESIDENT, SUCH AS THIEU, MAY CAST THEIR VOTES ELSEWHERE SIMPLY TO EXPRESS THEIR DISPLEASURE. KY'S PREVIOUSLY-ORGANIZED AND PERSONAL CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION HAS BEEN REQUESTING INSTRUCTIONS FROM KY; AND ITS UNITS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY HAVE INDICATED THAT THEY ARE FINDING IT DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND THIS SWITCH IN PLANS AND HAVE ASKED WHETHER THEY SHOULD CONTINUE PROMOTING KY FOR PRESIDENT DESPITE THE AGREEMENT REACHED

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FOR KY TO RUN AS VICE PRESIDENT. KY PLANS TO LET THE EXCITEMENT AND CONFUSION ABATE FOR A FEW MORE DAYS AND THEN INSTRUCT HIS SUPPORTERS EXPLICITLY TO WORK FOR THE THIEU-KY TICKET.

4. IT IS DIFFICULT FOR KY TO EXPLAIN HIS DECISION TO MOVE DOWN TO THE VICE PRESIDENCY, AND PARTICULARLY TO GET THE WORD TO HIS SUPPORTERS IN A SUBTLE FASHION THAT HE WILL HAVE A BROAD AUTHORITY IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT AND THAT THIEU'S ROLE WILL BE TITULAR. INFLUENTIAL VIETNAMESE, INCLUDING BUDDHIST LEADER THICH TAM CHAU, HAVE CONTACTED KY IN THE PAST TWO DAYS TO ASCERTAIN THE RATIONALE BEHIND HIS MOVE. ENLIGHTENING PEOPLE SUCH AS THIS AND LINING UP BROAD SUPPORT FOR THE NEW THIEU-KY TICKET WILL TAKE A GOOD DEAL OF PATIENCE AS WELL AS TIME. IF IT IS TO BE DISCREETLY DONE. GENERAL NGUYEN NGOC LOAN HAS EXPRESSED HIS BELIEF TO KY THAT THE LATTER MUST HAVE "LOST HIS MIND" ON THIS MOVE AND HAS SAID HE CANNOT UNDERSTAND HOW KY COULD "LET DOWN" HIS MANY SUPPORTERS WHO REALLY BELIEVE IN HIM AS AN INDIVIDUAL AND IN HIS QUALITIES OF LEADERSHIP. LOAN HAS ACCEPTED THIS TURN

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OF EVENTS, HOWEVER, MUCH AS HE DID HIS OWN RECENT REMOVAL AS CHIEF OF THE MILITARY SECURITY SERVICE, AND LOAN WILL ABIDE BY A RECENT ORDER FROM KY THAT HE STAY OUT OF POLITICS AND ELECTION CAMPAIGN ARRANGEMENTS.

5. KY'S DECISION TO STEP DOWN TO THE ROLE OF VICE PRESIDENT WAS NOT A "POLITICAL" DECISION, IT WAS ARRIVED AT PRIMARILY TO SAVE A BAD SITUATION FROM GETTING WORSE WITHIN THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT WHICH HAS BEEN DIVIDED OVER THE THIEU-KY CONFRONTATION. IT MAY DEVELOP HOWEVER, THAT IT WILL ADD TO KY'S POLITICAL STATURE AND INCREASE THE NUMBER OF HIS SUPPORTERS BOTH WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE MILITARY RANKS. THE ARMED FORCES COUNCIL (AFC) MEETINGS OF 29-30 JUNE WHICH RESULTED IN FORMATION OF THE THIEU-KY TICKET HAVE ALSO RESULTED IN A CONSIDERABLE LESSENING OF THIEU'S PERSONAL PRESTIGE AMONG ALMOST ALL THE AFC OFFICERS WHO HAD THIS OPPORTUNITY TO OBSERVE THIEU CLOSELY AT FIRST HAND DURING THESE MANY CRUCIAL HOURS. THESE OFFICERS GOT A CLEAR IMPRESSION OF HIS LACK OF REAL PATRIOTISM AND HIS TOTAL PREOCCUPATION WITH AND CONCENTRATION ON HIS OWN PERSONAL AMBITIONS, REGARDLESS OF THEIR DETRIMENTAL EFFECT ON THE UNITY OF THE ARMED FORCES AND FUTURE OF THE COUNTRY.

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THE CLINCHER WAS THIEU'S APPARENT AGREEMENT TO ABIDE BY WHATEVER DECISION THE AFC REACHED, EVEN IF IT WAS WITHDRAWAL OF HIS OWN CANDIDACY, AND THIS HE RENEGED ON ONLY A FEW HOURS LATER DURING THE DISCUSSIONS. THIS AFFORDED THE AFC OFFICERS A REAL INSIGHT INTO THIEU'S CHARACTER, AND THEY DID NOT LIKE WHAT THEY SAW. CURIOUSLY, DURING THE LATE EVENING SESSION OF 29 JUNE, CHIEF OF THE JOINT GENERAL STAFF (JGS) GENERAL

CAO VAN VIEN AND THE FOUR CORPS COMMANDERS HAD CONFERRED PRIVATELY AND RESOLVED TO PRESENT THIEU WITH AN ULTIMATUM EITHER TO ACCEPT THE POSITION OF CHIEF OF THE JGS IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT, OR TO RESIGN AS CHIEF OF STATE AND FROM THE ARMED FORCES IMMEDIATELY, AND TO PRESENT HIMSELF ENTIRELY AS A CIVILIAN CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT. WHEN GENERAL VIEN CAME INTO THE ROOM TO PRESENT THIS ULTIMATUM TO THIEU, THE LATTER APPARENTLY SENSED THAT IT WAS COMINT, AND IMMEDIATELY ANNOUNCED HE WOULD ACCEPT AND ABIDE BY WHATEVER DECISION THE AFC WOULD REACH. VIEN AND THE CORPS COMMANDERS WERE THUS CLEVERLY LED TO BELIEVE THAT THEIU WOULD WITHDRAW ENTIRELY FROM THE RACE IN FAVOR OF KY, AND THEREFORE THEY DID NOT CONVEY

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THEIR ULTIMATUM TO THIEU. EARLY THE NEXT MORNING THIEU REVERSED HIMSELF COMPLETELY WITH HIS ANNOUNCEMENT THAT HE WOULD ENTER THE RACE FOR PRESIDENT. THIS DUPLICITY, COUPLED WITH KY'S DEMONSTRATED WILLINGNESS TO SACRIFICE HIS OWN PERSONAL POSITION AND DO WHATEVER WAS REQUIRED OF HIM TO PRESERVE THE UNITY OF THE MILITARY, HAS CONSIDERABLY INCREASED KY'S SUPPORT AND INFLUENCE IN THE MILITARY. MANY OF THE SENIOR ARMED FORCES CO UNCIL OFFICERS PERSONALLY MADE A POINT OF COMMENDING KY FOR HIS DECISION TO STEP DOWN TO THE ROLE OF VICE PRESIDENT, WHILE THIEU WAS LARGELY IGNORED EVEN THOUGH SELECTED AS THEIR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. GENERAL VINH LOC, II CORPS COMMANDER, FOR EXAMPLE, EXPRESSED HIS ADMIRATION FOR KY AS A MAN, INDICATING HE HAD NEVER BEFORE USED THE WORD "ADMIRE" TO DESCRIBE HIS FEELINGS FOR ANOTHER OFFICER, AND GENERAL MINH, ACTING COMMANDER OF THE AIR FORCE, STATED THAT THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME HE PERSONALLY HAD FELT REAL ESTEEM FOR ONE OF HIS SENIOR MILITARY OFFICERS.

6. KY'S PRESENT DILEMNA IS THAT ALL OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS WILL MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO GENERATE BROAD POPULAR SUPPORT

FOR THE THIEU-KY TICKET. SINCE IT REQUIRES SUCH A MENTAL

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SHIFTING OF GEARS ON THE PART OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN WORKING IN HIS BEHALF AS A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE AND WHO NOW HAVE TO BE PERSUADED THAT THEIR EFFORTS MUST BE REDIRECTED TO SUPPORT THIEU FOR PRESIDENT INSTEAD. KY'S CIVILIAN SUPPORTERS WILL HAVE TO BE PERSUADED OF THE WISDOM OF HIS MOVE, AND THE YOUNGER "BABY TURK" MILITARY WILL HAVE TO BE MADE TO UNDERSTAND THIS THIEU-KY COMBINATION IS A FACT OF LIFE THEY MUST LIVE WITH. WITHIN THE PAST TWO DAYS THERE HAVE ALREADY BEEN RUMORS OF COUP PLOTTING AMONG THE BABY TURK MILITARY. THERE IS NO SUBSTANCE TO THIS, BUT THIS SORT OF TALK DOES INDICATE HOW MUCH CONSTERNATION THERE IS AMONG SOME OF THE MILITARY OVER THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS OF THE LAST SEVERAL DAYS. KY WILL WORK HARD AT THE TASK OF ELIMINATING THESE TENSIONS AND PERSUADING HIS SUPPORTERS TO GO ALONG WITH THE NEW ARRANGEMENT ON GROUNDS THAT THERE IS NO LEGAL ALTERNATIVE SINCE THE OFFICIAL FILING DEADLINE IS CLOSED.

7. THE MULTIPLICITY OF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES (17) AND SENATE LISTS (66) SHOW QUITE CLEARLY THE DIFFICULTIES A PURELY CIVILIAN ADMINISTRATION WOULD FACE IF ELECTED IN

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VIETNAM. THE VARIOUS CIVILIAN POLITICAL GROUPS OR WOULD-  
BE GROUPS ARE POORLY ORGANIZED AND ARE SO SELF-SEEKING THAT  
THEY CANNOT GET TOGETHER EVEN TO INSURE THEIR OWN  
SUCCESS AT THE POLLS. THE MANY SENATE LISTS ARE IN-  
COMPREHENSIBLE EVEN TO EDUCATED, INTELLIGENT VIETNAMESE,  
AND TO THE AVERAGE CITIZEN THEY ARE ALMOST USELESS AS A MEANINGFUL  
LIST FROM WHICH HE CAN SELECT OUR QUALIFIED CANDI-  
DATES OF HIS CHOICE. CONSEQUENTLY, THE SENATE ITSELF  
WILL PROBABLY BE A DISORGANIZED AND INEFFECTUAL BODY. FOREIGN  
MINISTER TRAN VAN DO AND DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER NGUYEN LUU  
VIEN RECENTLY STATED TO KY THAT THEY NOW REALIZE THE FALLACY  
OF EXPECTING PURE UNLIMITED DEMOCRACY TO WORK IN  
TODAY'S VIETNAM, AND CITED THE MANY CUMBERSOME SENATE LISTS  
AS CASES IN POINT. ANOTHER INTERESTING PROBLEM IS HOW TO  
PROVIDE EQUAL FACILITIES SUCH AS AIRCRAFT, RADIO-TELEVISION  
AND NEWSPAPER COVERAGE FOR ALL OF THE 17 PRESIDENTIAL CAN-  
DIDATES. ALTHOUGH KY WILL ATTEMPT TO ACCOMPLISH THIS, IT  
WILL BE NEXT TO IMPOSSIBLE TO ARRANGE FROM A PRACTICAL POINT  
OF VIEW.

8. KY'S PERSONAL CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION WHICH HAS FORMED

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TO PROMOTE HIS OWN PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN WILL LIKELY BE USED TO SUPPORT THE THIEU KY SLATE SINCE THIEU HAS NO ORGANIZATION OF HIS OWN AND WILL PROBABLY NOT MAKE ANY CONCERTED EFFORT TO PUT ONE TOGETHER. ALTHOUGH THIS DECISION HAS NOT YET BEEN REACHED, FULL USE WILL PROBABLY HAVE TO BE MADE OF THE KY CAMPAIGN MECHANISM SINCE THE THIEU-KY COMBINATION WILL REQUIRE AN EVEN MORE EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION THAN IF KY HIMSELF WERE RUNNING FOR PRESIDENT.

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9 [REDACTED] DISSEM: STATE (AMBASSADOR BUNKER, DEPUTY AMBASSADOR LOCKE, POLITICAL COUNSELOR) USMACV (GENERAL WESTMORELAND, GENERAL ABRAMS, AMBASSADOR KOMER, CHIEF OF STAFF, J-2) DIR/JUSPAO [REDACTED] CINCPAC (ADMIRAL SHARP AND POLAD)

REPORT CLASS ~~SECRET~~ [REDACTED]

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