

~~S E C R E T~~ 200819Z MAR 76 STAFF

CITE TEHRAN [REDACTED]

TO: PRIORITY DIRECTOR.

RYBAT EYES ONLY OGC

FOR WARNER FROM HELMS

REFS: A. DIRECTOR [REDACTED]
B. DIRECTOR [REDACTED]

APPROVED FOR RELEASE HR70-14
DATE: MAR 2008 (U)

PLEASE PASS THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE TO WILLIAM MILLER AS MY ANSWER TO HIS INQUIRY CONTAINED IN REF (A): BEGIN TEXT:

FOR MR. WILLIAM MILLER FROM AMBASSADOR HELMS.

REGRET THAT THERE HAS BEEN SOME DELAY IN RESPONDING TO YOUR INQUIRY BUT HAVE BEEN ON BRIEF HOLIDAY AND RETURNED HERE TO A FULL DESK.

UNFORTUNATELY MY MEMORY HAS BECOME HAZY ABOUT THE REASONS FOR DECISIONS ON THE PAPERS YOU IDENTIFY. I WOULD HOPE THAT YOU AND YOUR STAFF HAVE TALKED WITH GEORGE CARVER AT CIA SINCE HE WORKED AS MY SPECIAL ASSISTANT ON INDOCHINA MATTERS DURING THE PERIOD IN QUESTION. HE IS YOUNGER AND HIS MEMORY WOULD BE BETTER THAN MINE. ALSO HE HAS AVAILABLE FILES WHICH I DO NOT HAVE IN TEHRAN. FURTHER, I WOULD TRUST HIM TO REPRESENT ME FAIRLY AND ACCURATELY IN A MATTER OF THIS KIND.

IN A MORE GENERAL WAY LET ME TRY TO BE HELPFUL TO YOU. (I WILL ASSUME THAT YOU HAVE OR WILL TALK TO CARVER AND THAT YOU WILL GIVE REASONABLE WEIGHT TO HIS COMMENTS). IN THE FIRST PLACE IT IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE AT THIS LATE DATE TO RECREATE ALL THE RELEVANT CIRCUMSTANCES AND CONSIDERATIONS WHICH WENT INTO DECISIONS OF THE KIND YOU ARE EXAMINING, MADE SIX YEARS AGO. SECONDLY, IT IS DANGEROUS TO EXAMINE EXHAUSTIVELY ONE BEAD TO THE EXCLUSION OF OTHER BEADS IN THE NECKLACE. SCORES OF PAPERS AND ASSESSMENTS ON INDOCHINA WERE GOING TO THE WHITE HOUSE FROM THE AGENCY DURING THE PERIOD IN QUESTION. IT IS MY RECOLLECTION, I HOPE

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~~SECRET~~

CORRECT, THAT THE JUDGEMENTS IN THE TWO DOCUMENTS YOU CITE WERE MADE STRONGLY AND AT SOME LENGTH IN SEVERAL OTHER ASSESSMENTS, INCLUDING FORMAL ESTIMATES, BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER THE APRIL-JUNE 1970 PERIOD UNDER DISCUSSION.

IT IS NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR TO ME WHY JAMES GRAHAM FEELS COMPETENT TO SPEAK FOR ME AND MY THOUGHT PROCESSES. I HAVE NO RECOLLECTION WHATEVER OF SAYING TO HIM THAT THE SENDING OF THIS ASSESSMENT WOULD BE "MOST COUNTER PRODUCTIVE". I QUESTION THE ACCURACY OF HIS MEMORY SIX YEARS LATER. I WAS CONSTANTLY SENDING TO THE WHITE HOUSE PAPERS, ASSESSMENTS, ESTIMATES WHICH THE POLICY MAKERS DID NOT RPT NOT LIKE. THAT IS THE STORY OF THE AGENCY'S ASSESSMENT ROLE IN THE INDOCHINA SAGA OF THE JOHNSON-NIXON ERA. PRESIDENT JOHNSON WEIGHED MY ASSESSMENTS ALONG WITH OTHER ADVICE HE WAS GETTING. PRESIDENT NIXON DID THE SAME THING I BELIEVE. THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES HAD NO CLAIM TO SPECIAL INSIGHTS OR PRESCIENCE. AND IF THE TRUTH MUST BE TOLD, TO THIS DAY NO ONE KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IN THE VIETNAMESE WAR IF PRESIDENT NIXON HAD IN FACT DONE WHAT HE SAID HE WAS GOING TO DO I.E. CLEAN OUT THE CAMBODIAN SANCTUARIES. YOU WILL RECALL THAT HE STOPPED THE MILITARY INCURSION IN MID-STREAM. HE DID THE SAME THING DURING THE LATER OPERATION AGAINST THE LAOTIAN SUPPLY ROUTES. IN OTHER WORDS THE WAR WOULD HAVE HAD A DIFFERENT EMPHASIS IF THESE TWO MILITARY OPERATIONS HAD BEEN BROUGHT TO A SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION. INCIDENTALLY, I AM NOT ATTEMPTING TO DEBATE THE MILITARY OUTCOME OF THE WAR OR TO DEFEND ANY PARTICULAR OPERATION OR POINT OF VIEW. I AM SIMPLY TRYING TO POINT OUT THE SIMPLISTIC THEORIES ABOUT ADVICE TO PRESIDENTS RUN AFOUL OF THE HARD REALITIES WHEN ONE IS ATTEMPTING TO WORK IN REAL TIME AS CONTRASTED WITH HINDSIGHT.

DURING MY TERM AS DCI WE IN CIA DID OUR VERY BEST TO BE OBJECTIVE IN OUR ESTIMATES AND INDEPENDENT OF OTHER AGENCIES IN THE ASSESSMENTS WE MADE. I OBVIOUSLY HAD TO USE MY BEST PERSONAL JUDGEMENT IN EVERY CASE OF HOW MATERIAL WAS TO BE PRESENTED, WHEN, UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES, AND IN WHAT FORMAT. PRESIDENTS MAKE JUDGEMENTS BASED ON A WIDE VARIETY OF ADVICE AND

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CONSIDERATIONS. IT IS NAIVE TO BELIEVE THAT ANY DCI IS GOING TO
HAVE A PRESIDENT'S EAR EXCLUSIVELY. IN ANY EVENT THAT WOULD BE
WRONG. THE AGENCY DID A POOR JOB IN ESTIMATING THE AMOUNT OF MILITARY
EQUIPMENT WHICH WENT TO NORTH VIETNAMESE AND VIETCONG FORCES THROUGH
THE PORT OF SIHANOUKVILLE. WHEN THE TRUTH BECAME KNOWN, IT DID NOT
MAKE THE AGENCY ANALYSTS LOOK GOOD IN THE EYES OF THE POLICYMAKERS.
IT DID NOT HELP MY STANDING EITHER. NO ONE HAS A LOCK ON THE BOARD
WHEN IT COMES TO ADVICE. A PRESIDENT SHOULD SEEK IT WIDELY, WHILE AT
THE SAME TIME GIVING DUE WEIGHT TO THE ESTIMATES OF THE INTELLIGENCE
COMMUNITY.

IN MY OPINION THERE IS NO WAY TO INSULATE THE DCI FROM
UNPOPULARITY AT THE HANDS OF PRESIDENTS OR POLICYMAKERS IF HE IS
MAKING ASSESSMENTS WHICH RUN COUNTER TO ADMINISTRATION POLICY.
THAT IS A BUILT-IN HAZARD OF THE JOB. SENSIBLE PRESIDENTS
UNDERSTAND THIS. ON THE OTHER HAND THEY ARE HUMAN TOO,
AND IN MY EXPERIENCE THEY ARE NOT ABOUT TO PLACE THEIR FATE IN THE
HANDS OF ANY SINGLE INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS. IN SUM, MAKE
THE INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATES, BE SURE THEY REACH THE PRESIDENT
PERSONALLY, AND USE KEEN JUDGEMENT AS TO THE QUANTITY OF
INTELLIGENCE PAPER TO WHICH HE SHOULD BE SUBJECTED. ONE DOES NOT
WANT TO LOSE ONE'S AUDIENCE, AND THIS IS EASY TO DO IF ONE OVERLOADS
THE CIRCUIT. NO POWER HAS YET BEEN FOUND TO FORCE PRESIDENTS OF
THE UNITED STATES TO PAY ATTENTION ON A CONTINUING BASIS TO
PEOPLE AND PAPERS WHEN CONFIDENCE HAS BEEN LOST IN THE ORIGINATOR.

SIGNED RICHARD HELMS
END OF TEXT.
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