

99 B-39
MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

~~TOP SECRET~~/SENSITIVE
EXCLUSIVELY EYES ONLY

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS:

President Nguyen Van Thieu
Mr. Huynh Phu Duc, Special Assistant to the
President for Foreign Affairs
Mr. Hoang Duc Nha, Presidential Press
Assistant

Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the
President for National Security Affairs
Ellsworth Bunker, United States Ambassador
to the Republic of South Vietnam
Winston Lord, National Security Council Staff

DATE & TIME:

Thursday, August 17, 1972 4:35 p.m. - 6:40 p.m.

PLACE:

The President's Palace, Saigon

NOT RELATED TO
POW/MIA'S

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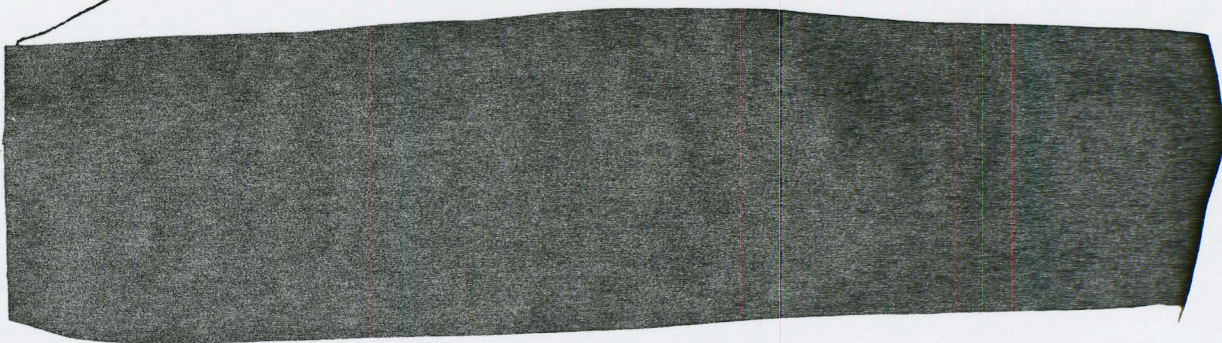
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DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12356, Sect. 3.4
NSC, Van Tassel authority 9/15/92
By ACH NARA, Date 9/15/92
(SA 99)

NOT RELATED TO
POW/MIA'S

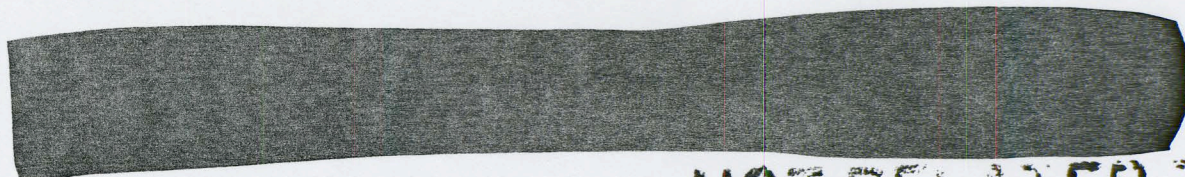
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-19-



Dr. Kissinger: We will send it to the President [Thieu] tonight. Let me send you what I sent to the Ambassador concerning what Le Duc Tho said. At our last meeting he went through their proposal. He said they had not accepted the January 25 proposal because you would still be in power -- this is not unreasonable from their point of view. Then he said that we wanted a ceasefire while the principles were being worked out; you remember that Ambassador Bunker proposed to you that we set a three-month deadline for the political negotiations and you agreed. They did not like this. They only want everything to be settled before a ceasefire. They are always afraid to release our prisoners. They have concluded that they cannot defeat you. Their only hope is that we overthrow you. For you it is essential that this Administration survive, because we will never overthrow you directly or indirectly. The only way they can get us to do this is to keep the war going -- they would rather pay the military price here. That's why they do not give the prisoners or agree to a ceasefire.

They are in a real dilemma. If there is no ceasefire, their military situation deteriorates, and if they don't give back the prisoners, we keep bombing them. So long as they talk to me, this confirms negotiations. I know you think that a ceasefire might come soon. I have that impression. As of our last meeting on Monday, they have totally rejected ceasefire. I have proposed every conceivable variation on May 8. There is no need to offer it any more; we have made a record. At the next meeting I would like to accept their proposal that there be no ceasefire until all is done.



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-26-

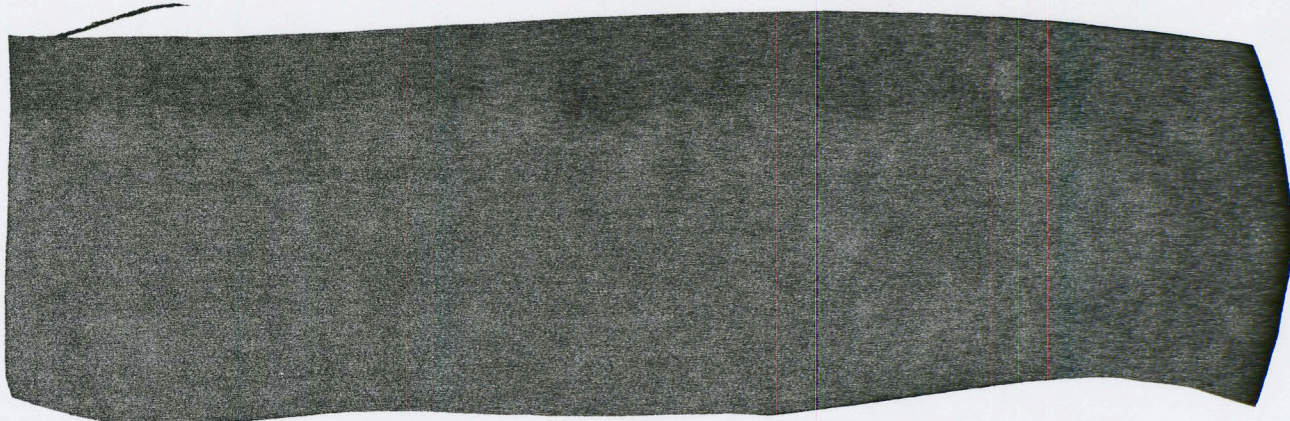
We want to go to the absolute limit of what is and looks reasonable, but defend the principle that the U.S. will not end the war in which it lost 45,000 men by joining our enemy against our friend, or destroying a government allied with us for 400 prisoners of war, or even to win an election. We would rather not win the election on that basis. The history books will last longer than the election.

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President Thieu: About the prisoners of war, you have nothing?

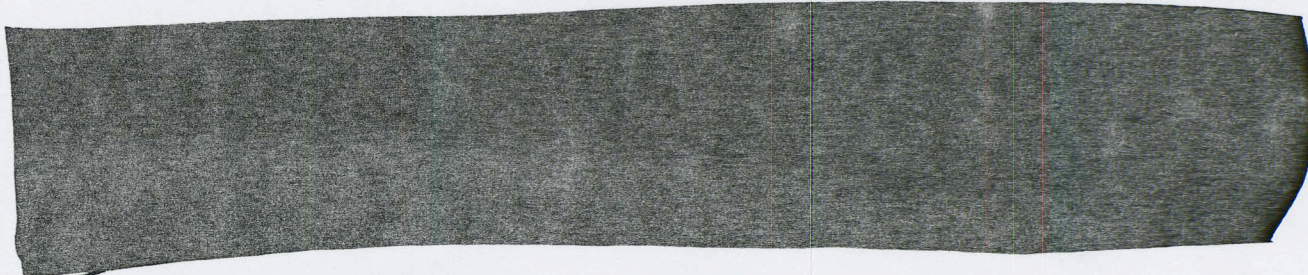
Dr. Kissinger: I think they are keeping the prisoners as blackmail. We will raise this issue brutally after November if they don't return them. They won't release them. They have made no proposal.

If they accept our May 8 proposal for ceasefire and prisoners, then we must withdraw. That is our official position, and we can't change that. But they won't accept it. There is no possibility.

President Thieu: If there is only one condition, only a ceasefire for North Vietnam, that is most advantageous to them. If we say throughout Indochina, they see no advantage to that.

What if they propose a ceasefire in North Vietnam for an exchange of prisoners? You would cease the bombing and pull out the blockade in North Vietnam in order to get a return of the American prisoners. So they would say the war is finished now for America and North Vietnam in South Vietnam. This would be the most unfriendly proposal.

Dr. Kissinger: I will be honest. If they propose this during the election campaign, we will be in a very difficult position.



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