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SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY

December 21, 1972

TO: RICHARD CAMPBELL
FOR: HENRY A. KISSINGER
FROM: RICHARD T. KENNEDY

Attached is a brief memo from Carver on Thieu's attitudes. It refers to the longer memo of December 12 which I sent you this morning.

Also attached is a new yellow stripe mentioned in the Carver memo as YS-531.



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DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 13526, Section 3.5
REF HP. 1/8/14
By WJH/RJ NARA, Date 9/19/16
NIN 12-97/2123 [p.1 of 1]

21 December 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR: Dr. Henry A. Kissinger
Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs

SUBJECT : President Thieu's Attitude and Probable Behavior
with Respect to a Negotiated Settlement

REFERENCE : My 12 December 1972 Cable Sent to You in Paris

1. Mr. Kennedy relayed this morning (21 December) your request for an assessment of President Thieu's current attitude with respect to the whole subject of negotiations and of his probable behavior with regard to cooperating in the implementation of any settlement we may be able to negotiate with Hanoi. Actually, much of this ground was covered in the 12 December message responding to your request from Paris (relayed by General Haig) for a detailed assessment of Thieu's National Assembly speech. When I gave that 12 December memorandum to General Haig, and after we had discussed it, he indicated that he was going to relay it to you in its entirety via some White House back channel. I do not know the number or nomenclature of the cable by which it was sent to you in Paris, but a copy of its text is appended hereto.

2. In this general sphere, there have been two developments since 12 December that are likely to impact on Thieu's attitude or behavior: the resumption of U.S. aerial attacks north of the 20th Parallel (with attendant reseeding of the mines blocking North Vietnam's ports) and General Haig's visit to Saigon.

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DATE OF REVIEW: 12/21/72
REVIEWER: [illegible]
DATE IMPOSSIBLE TO DETERMINE
(unless information is available, exact date of event)

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3. We have not yet received any sensitive or covert reporting on Thieu's mood since the bombing was resumed, but he obviously will have welcomed this move. His resultant good humor may make him somewhat easier to talk to, but he will not necessarily become more substantively flexible. Instead, he will almost certainly feel that our acceptance of the advisability or necessity of such an action vindicates his earlier negative estimate of Hanoi's "seriousness" or good faith and that, in the event, he was wise not to let himself be stampeded.

4. I cannot profitably comment on the impact of General Haig's visit since I do not know what he said to President Thieu, or vice versa, the contents of President Nixon's letter or those of Thieu's reply. The one reflection we have so far received on the impact of this visit is contained in YS-531, 21 December 1972 -- our Station Chief's report of his 21 December conversation with Prime Minister Khiem. Khiem's comments to senior U.S. officials are always self-serving, but in this instance Khiem's remarks about Thieu and the latter's reactions have the ring of authenticity.

5. Khiem's comments provide a modest measure of independent support for the attached paper's central thesis: that Thieu is probably prepared (at least privately) to be cooperative -- eventually -- on all issues save one. Given his psychology, temperament and political position he cannot and almost certainly will not sign away the GVN's legal right to existence. Khiem covers this point with the somewhat misleading phrase of "the juridical presence of North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam." The troops, of course, bother Thieu and he obviously wants them out. The real issue, however, is not the northern troops but the juridical concept of "Vietnam" that defines their status. Thieu cannot, and will not, officially endorse the concept that at this moment in history there is only one Vietnamese state and hence, by definition, North Vietnamese troops in the south are not "foreign." The reasons why this is, and (to Thieu) has to be, a central issue on which Thieu feels he cannot budge are discussed in the attached paper. *(The attachment is the December 12th memo sent to you by L.A. [unclear] this morning)*

G. A. C. Jr.
George A. Carvor, Jr.

Attachment

12 December Message for Dr. Kissinger

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NIP 12-12-72 14 2.1

21 DECEMBER 1972

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH PRIME MINISTER TRAN THIEN KHIEM

1. I MET WITH PRIME MINISTER TRAN THIEN KHIEM FOR APPROXIMATELY 45 MINUTES ON 21 DECEMBER 1972 TO OBTAIN A FIRST-HAND REACTION TO THE MOST RECENT DEVELOPMENTS CONCERNING THE CEASEFIRE NEGOTIATIONS AND PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU'S ATTITUDES FOLLOWING GENERAL HAIG'S VISIT.

2. FOLLOWING MY INTRODUCTORY REMARKS, THE PRIME MINISTER RESTATED HIS PREVIOUSLY EXPRESSED POSITION THAT HE VIEWS THE CONTINUATION OF THE AMERICAN - SOUTH VIETNAM ALLIANCE AS THE MOST VITAL CONSIDERATION, COMPARED TO WHICH ALL OTHER MATTERS INCLUDING THE CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT, ITS SPECIFIC PROVISIONS, AND EVEN THE CONTINUING PRESENCE OF NORTH VIETNAMESE FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM WERE DECIDEDLY OF MINOR IMPORTANCE. HE SAID HE HAD NO ILLUSIONS WHATEVER REGARDING SOUTH VIETNAM'S ABILITY TO CONTINUE THE WAR ON ITS OWN. ON THE COLD GROUNDS OF LOGISTICS ALONE HE WOULD HAVE TO SUBORDINATE ALL OTHER PROBLEMS TO THE NECESSITY OF MAINTAINING CONTINUED AMERICAN SUPPORT. HE SAID HE HAD DISCUSSED THIS IN DETAIL WITH PRESIDENT THIEU. HE ALSO SAID

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THAT HE RECOGNIZED AND ACCEPTED AS A FACT OF LIFE THE DOMESTIC AND CONGRESSIONAL PRESSURES WHICH WILL CONFRONT PRESIDENT NIXON IN THE NEAR FUTURE AND THAT THESE WOULD HAVE TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT BY SOUTH VIETNAM. (I MADE A FEW REMARKS EMPHASIZING THE CORRECTNESS OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S VIEWS AND ALSO ELABORATED ON THE POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SITUATION DEVELOPING IN THE UNITED STATES.)

3. PRIME MINISTER KHIEM SAID THAT I NEED WASTE NO TIME IN CONVINCING HIM, AS HE WAS COMPLETELY ON OUR SIDE BECAUSE OF THE INHERENT LOGIC OF THE SITUATION. THE PROBLEM WAS HOW TO BRING ALONG PRESIDENT THIEU TO OUR WAY OF THINKING.

4. ACCORDING TO THE PRIME MINISTER, PRESIDENT THIEU HAS REACTED NEGATIVELY TO GENERAL HAIG'S MOST RECENT PRESENTATION AND HE RESENTED WHAT HE REGARDED AS AN ULTIMATUM TO HIM. KHIEM REMINDED ME OF OUR PREVIOUS CONVERSATION IN NOVEMBER WHEN HE SAID THAT ONLY A "SOFT SELL" SHOULD BE USED WITH PRESIDENT THIEU. THE LATTER SIMPLY WILL NOT DECIDE TO MOVE ON AN ISSUE UNLESS HE HAS REACHED A CONCLUSION AS TO THE DESIRABILITY OF THE ACTION ON HIS OWN. ONE CAN INFLUENCE HIS DECISION BUT THIS IS BEST DONE SOFTLY AND OBLIQUELY. KHIEM SAID THAT AMBASSADOR KOMER AND AMBASSADOR COLBY CAN CONFIRM THAT IT OCCASIONALLY

TOOK FROM TWO TO EIGHT MONTHS TO OBTAIN THIEU'S CONSENT ON MEASURES OF SIGNIFICANCE IN CONNECTION WITH THE PACIFICATION PROGRAM OR PHOENIX, AND THE CURRENT PROBLEMS ARE, OF COURSE, OF FAR GREATER IMPORTANCE. PRESSURE TACTICS SIMPLY WILL NOT WORK. WHENEVER PRESSURES ARE APPLIED, THIEU FEELS CHALLENGED AND REACTS ACCORDINGLY.

5. NEVERTHELESS, AND DESPITE THIEU'S RESPONSE TO PRESIDENT NIXON, THE PRIME MINISTER FELT THAT THIEU HAD SOFTENED AND WAS BEGINNING TO MOVE IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. I SAID THAT I DID NOT KNOW WHAT WAS IN PRESIDENT THIEU'S LETTER. KHIEM REPLIED THAT HE HAD READ THE LETTER TO PRESIDENT NIXON AND THAT HE COULD ASSURE ME THAT THERE WAS ONLY ONE POINT IN THAT LETTER ON WHICH PRESIDENT THIEU NOW STOOD FIRM, NAMELY THE JURIDICAL PRESENCE OF NORTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS IN SOUTH VIETNAM. ALL OF THE OTHER DIFFERENCES WITH THE U. S. POSITION REFLECTED IN THE LETTER HAVE BEEN INCLUDED AS POINTS ON WHICH THIEU WAS PREPARED TO YIELD TO SHOW HIS GOOD FAITH. ON THE NORTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS, HE STILL WAS FIRM, HOWEVER.

6. THERE WAS NO DOUBT IN KHIEM'S MIND THAT PRESIDENT THIEU HAS NOT YET FACED UP TO THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE SITUATION AND PERHAPS DOESN'T FULLY UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEMS

WHICH ARE LOOMING BETWEEN THE U. S. CONGRESS AND PRESIDENT NIXON ON ONE HAND AND BETWEEN THE U. S. GOVERNMENT AND THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM ON THE OTHER. WHILE THIEU SAYS HE UNDERSTANDS THESE MATTERS, KHIEM DOUBTS THAT THIS IS, IN FACT, SO. HE SAID THAT WE MUST REMEMBER THAT THIEU COMES FROM A VERY NARROW BACKGROUND; THAT HE HAS BEEN A SOLDIER ALL HIS LIFE, THAT HE HAS NEVER LIVED ABROAD EXCEPT FOR A SHORT TIME IN THE U. S. IN A PURELY MILITARY MILIEU, AND THAT HE TENDS TO THINK IN TERMS THAT IF HE, AS PRESIDENT OF A SMALL COUNTRY, HAS A GREAT DEAL OF POWER AND AUTHORITY, THEN PRESIDENT NIXON, AS THE PRESIDENT OF A VERY LARGE COUNTRY, MUST HAVE THAT MUCH MORE POWER.

7. KHIEM COMMENTED THAT ANOTHER NEGATIVE FACTOR IN THE PRESENT SITUATION IS PRESIDENT THIEU'S DEEP RESENTMENT OF DR. KISSINGER'S NEGOTIATING TACTICS. THIS RESENTMENT WAS INCREASED MOST RECENTLY BY GENERAL TRAN VAN DON, WHO RETURNED FROM PARIS FROM A MISSION ON PRESIDENT THIEU'S BEHALF. TRAN VAN DON REPORTED (WHETHER ACCURATELY OR NOT THE PRIME MINISTER HAS NO WAY OF KNOWING) THAT IN A CONVERSATION BETWEEN DR. KISSINGER AND MONSIEUR JEAN SAINTENY THE FAIRNESS OF THE PROPOSED CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT

WITH RESPECT TO SOUTH VIETNAM WAS RAISED. SAINTENY REPORTEDLY EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT THE AGREEMENT DID NOT TAKE INTO FULL CONSIDERATION SOUTH VIETNAM'S VITAL EQUITIES. DR. KISSINGER REPORTEDLY REJECTED THIS ARGUMENT WITH A GESTURE THAT WAS INTERPRETED AS CONTEMPTUOUS OF SOUTH VIETNAM. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT TRAN VAN DON HAD DONE A DISSERVICE BY RELATING THIS INCIDENT AND ALL OF ITS DETAILS TO PRESIDENT THIEU, PARTICULARLY BECAUSE TRAN VAN DON IS "BASICALLY ON OUR SIDE." (THE PRIME MINISTER ALSO SAID THAT IF THIS INFORMATION LEAKED IT WOULD REALLY CUT HIS THROAT.)

8. WITH RESPECT TO THE FUTURE, KHIEM REPEATED THAT THERE MUST BE CONTINUING STEADY BUT GENTLE PRESSURE ON PRESIDENT THIEU. HE SAID THAT AMBASSADOR BUNKER WAS THE LOGICAL PERSON TO CARRY THE ARGUMENT TO THIEU AND THAT HE SHOULD EMPHASIZE BOTH THE INEFFECTIVENESS OF THE NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY ELEMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM AND THE NEED TO COME TO PRESIDENT NIXON'S AID, TO HELP HIM FEND OFF HIS OPPONENTS IN CONGRESS WHO ARE ALSO OPPONENTS OF SOUTH VIETNAM. KHIEM ALSO RECOMMENDED THAT SIMILAR APPROACHES BE MADE TO VICE PRESIDENT TRAN VAN HUONG, JOINT GENERAL STAFF CHAIRMAN GENERAL CAO VAN VIEN AND TO THE PRESIDENT'S

BROTHER, AMBASSADOR NGUYEN VAN KIEU IN TAIWAN. KHIEM SAID THAT THERE WAS NO NEED TO WASTE TIME ON OTHER GENERALS, BECAUSE HE FELT THAT HE AND VIEN WOULD HAVE NO TROUBLE LINING UP THE MILITARY TO SUPPORT ANY CONCESSIONS WHICH THIEU COULD BE PERSUADED TO MAKE. KHIEM EMPHASIZED THAT GENERAL VIEN HAD CONSIDERABLE INFLUENCE WITH THE YOUNGER GENERALS.

9. KHIEM SAID THAT HE WOULD PURSUE IDENTICAL LINES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH PRESIDENT THIEU. HE SAID THAT ABOUT A WEEK AGO, THE PRESIDENT HAD A LONG MEETING WITH HIM ALONE WHERE THE CEASEFIRE PROBLEM WAS DISCUSSED IN DETAIL. ON THE BASIS OF THAT DISCUSSION, KHIEM FELT THAT THE PRESIDENT'S POSITION WAS BY NO MEANS FROZEN AND HE HAS ALREADY MOVED QUITE A WAY IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. THE PROBLEM WAS WHETHER HE CAN BE PERSUADED TO MOVE FAST ENOUGH TO MEET THE PRESSURE OF EVENTS OVER WHICH HE HAD NO CONTROL AND WHICH HE DID NOT FULLY APPRECIATE.

10. IN MY CONCLUDING REMARKS, I AGAIN EMPHASIZED TO THE PRIME MINISTER THE NECESSITY OF REGAINING PSYCHOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL INITIATIVE IN THE CEASEFIRE NEGOTIATIONS. I SAID THAT OUR CONTINUING COOPERATION WAS FAR MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE SPECIFIC TERMS OF THE CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT, WHICH

IN THE LONG RUN WILL COUNT FOR LESS THAN THE DE FACTO
POWER SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM. FROM THE POINT OF VIEW
OF THE AMERICAN DOMESTIC SITUATION, PRESIDENT NIXON HAD
TO HAVE AN AGREEMENT AND SHORT OF THAT IT WAS IMPERATIVE
TO MANEUVER THE COMMUNISTS INTO A POSITION OF INTRANSI-
GENCE AGAINST A UNITED AND IDENTICAL GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM
AND U. S. POSITION. KHIEM SAID THAT HE UNDERSTOOD ALL OF
THAT AND SUGGESTED THAT WE REMAIN IN CLOSE TOUCH IN
DEVELOPING TACTICS.

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