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COUNTRY SOUTH VIETNAM

DOI 11 - 12 NOVEMBER 1968

SUBJECT PRESIDENT THIEU'S COMMENTS ON PEACE TALKS (C)

IMPASSE AT PRIVATE DINNER PARTIES ON 11

AND 12 NOVEMBER 1968

ACQ

VIETNAM, SAIGON

SOURCE

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SUMMARY: PRESIDENT THIEU TOLD DINNER GUESTS ON 11 NOVEMBER 1968 HE HAD BEEN SURPRISED BY THE PRESSURE EXERTED ON HIM BY THE U.S. DURING THE PRE-BOMBING HALT DISCUSSIONS. HE TERMED THE U.S. ACTION A "BETRAYAL" AND SAID VICE PRESIDENT KY FULLY SUPPORTED HIS POLICY ON THE PEACE TALKS ISSUE, INCLUDING HIS TWO-DELEGATION PROPOSAL. HE INDICATED HE MIGHT RESHUFFLE HIS CABINET IN AN EFFORT TO PLEASE THE NEW U.S. ADMINISTRATION. AT ANOTHER DINNER PARTY ON 12 NOVEMBER, THIEU REITERATED HIS DETERMINATION NEVER TO TALK WITH NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (NFLSV) REPRESENTATIVES OUTSIDE OF SAIGON. THE ONLY FORMULA FOR THE PARIS TALKS HE WILL ACCEPT IS ONE WHICH REQUIRES THE NFLSV REPRESENTATIVES TO BE A PART OF THE HANOI DELEGATION. THIEU THINKS PRESIDENT-ELECT NIXON WILL LET PRESIDENT JOHNSON TRY TO SOLVE THE TALKS IMPASSE SINCE A SOLUTION BY JOHNSON WOULD MAKE NIXON'S JOB AFTER INAUGURATION EASIER.

END SUMMARY.

1. (FIELD COMMENT: OTHER INFORMATION [ ] INDICATES THAT BY 15 NOVEMBER PRESIDENT THIEU HAD RECOGNIZED THE NEED FOR AN ACCOMMODATION WITH THE U.S. AND FOR THE REVERSAL OF THE HARD LINE ON THE PARIS PEACE TALKS THAT HE TOOK IN HIS 2 NOVEMBER

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SPEECH TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. THIS REPORT IS, THEREFORE, ALREADY OUTDATED AS AN INDICATION OF THE PRESIDENT'S POLICY ON THE PARIS TALKS. IT DOES SERVE TO SHOW, HOWEVER, THE STRENGTH OF THIEU'S RESENTMENT OVER AMERICAN POLICY AND SEVERAL OF THE MISCONCEPTIONS ON WHICH HIS OWN STAND WAS BASED. IT ALSO SHOWS THAT, AS LATE AS 11 NOVEMBER, THIEU WAS STILL ENJOYING PLAYING THE POPULAR ROLE OF DEFENDER OF VIETNAMESE NATIONAL INTERESTS.)

2. DURING THE COURSE OF A DINNER ON 11 NOVEMBER 1968, AT WHICH HE PRESIDED AS A RELAXED AND GENIAL HOST AND SELF-ASSURED STRONG MAN, PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU SPOKE CRITICALLY OF THE UNPRECEDENTED PRESSURE TO WHICH THE U.S. GOVERNMENT HAD SUBJECTED HIM DURING THE PRE-BOMBING HALT DISCUSSIONS. ACCORDING TO THIEU, THE AMERICANS HAD CITED THE SIZE OF THE U.S. COMMITMENT IN BLOOD AND MONEY AS JUSTIFICATION FOR INSISTING THAT U.S. INTERESTS PREVAIL AND HAD CITED THE PRESENCE IN SOUTH VIETNAM (SVN) OF A HALF MILLION U.S. TROOPS. THIEU SAID HE HAD HAD TO REMIND THE AMERICANS THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM (GVN) CONTRIBUTION TO THE WAR WAS IN FACT, LARGER THAN THE U.S. COMMITMENT.

3. THIEU CHARACTERIZED THE U.S. GOVERNMENT ACTION AS A

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"BETRAYAL" COMPARABLE TO THE U.S. ABANDONMENT OF CHIANG KAI-SHEK AS A RESULT OF THE YALTA, TEHERAN AND CASABLANCA CONFERENCES. HE COMPLAINED THAT THE AMERICANS HAD SENT THE AUSTRALIAN AND KOREAN AMBASSADORS TO BADGER HIM INTO ACCEPTING THE U.S. POINT OF VIEW. THIEU OBSERVED THAT VICE PRESIDENT NGUYEN CAO KY, WHO WAS NOT PRESENT, WAS FULLY IN ACCORD WITH HIS POLICY ON THE PARIS TALKS QUESTION, INCLUDING HIS RECENTLY ENUNCIATED "OUR SIDE-YOUR SIDE" FORMULA.

4. THIEU TOLD HIS GUESTS THAT DURING THE U.S. ELECTION CAMPAIGN HE HAD SENT TWO SECRET EMISSARIES TO THE U.S. TO CONTACT RICHARD NIXON. HE INDICATED HE MIGHT RESHUFFLE THE CABINET IN AN EFFORT TO PLEASE THE NEW U.S. ADMINISTRATION, MENTIONING SPECIFICALLY THE POSTS OF PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN MINISTER.

5. THERE WAS SOME CONFIDENTIAL TALK AMONG THE PRESIDENT'S GUESTS ABOUT ORGANIZING CATHOLICS "TO SUPPORT THE PRESIDENT THROUGH DEMONSTRATIONS WHEN THE TIME COMES." THIEU HIMSELF REFERRED ONCE TO HIS "KNOWLEDGE" OF AMERICAN-PLANNED DEMONSTRATIONS FOR PEACE BY THE AN QUANG BUDDHIST FACTION.

6. THE OCCASION FOR THE DINNER WAS THIEU'S CATHOLIC NAME

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DAY, WHICH SOME 40 PROMINENT CATHOLICS, INCLUDING WIVES, HAD BEEN INVITED TO CELEBRATE. THOSE PRESENT INCLUDED SAIGON ARCHBISHOP NGUYEN VAN BINH, INTERIOR MINISTER TRAN THIEN KHIEM AND DEFENSE MINISTER NGUYEN VAN VY.

7. ON 12 NOVEMBER, THIEU HOSTED ANOTHER DINNER PARTY, THIS ONE FOR SOME 20 MEMBERS OF THE SENATE AND LOWER HOUSE, SUPREME COURT AND INSPECTORATE. ASKED BY A DEPUTY TO EXPLAIN HIS "TWO-DELEGATION" FORMULA, THIEU SAID HIS IDEA WAS THAT ALL POLITICAL DISCUSSION IN PARIS SHOULD TAKE PLACE BETWEEN THE GVN AND HANOI REPRESENTATIVES, ALTHOUGH THE GVN WOULD DEFER TO THE U.S. ON SUCH MATTERS AS DISPOSITION OF MILITARY BASES AND TROOPS.

8. IN RESPONSE TO ANOTHER QUESTION FROM THE SAME DEPUTY, THIEU SAID HE WAS FIRM IN HIS DETERMINATION TO TALK ONLY WITH HANOI. HE WILL NEVER TALK DIRECTLY WITH THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (NFLSV) OUTSIDE OF SVN, THIEU SAID, ALTHOUGH HE CONTINUES TO HOLD OPEN THE POSSIBILITY OF DIRECT TALKS WITH NFLSV SPOKESMEN IN SAIGON. THE OFFER OF SAFE PASSAGE TO AND FROM SUCH TALKS STILL STANDS. THIEU SAID HE HAS A PARTICULAR OBLIGATION TO OLDER PEOPLE TO KEEP UP THEIR CONFIDENCE HE WILL NEVER RECOGNIZE THE NFLSV. TALKING WITH NFLSV REPRESENTATIVES

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OUTSIDE OF SAIGON WOULD AMOUNT TO SUCH RECOGNITION. HE EMPHASIZED HE WOULD WELCOME AS WITNESSES TO GVN/HANOI TALKS ALL COUNTRIES BELONGING TO THE UNITED NATIONS BUT WOULD REMAIN FIRM ON HIS STAND THAT THE ONLY FORMULA ACCEPTABLE TO HIM IS ONE WHICH REQUIRED THE NFLSV REPRESENTATIVES TO BE PART OF THE HANOI DELEGATION IN PARIS.

9. THIEU SAID THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO REACTION FROM WASHINGTON TO HIS TWO-DELEGATION PROPOSAL SINCE THE RECENT MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENT JOHNSON AND PRESIDENT-ELECT NIXON. HE EXPECTS NIXON TO LET JOHNSON TRY TO SOLVE THE TALKS CRISIS AND TO GO AS FAR AS POSSIBLE TOWARD REACHING A SETTLEMENT. THIS WOULD MAKE NIXON'S OWN JOB EASIER AFTER INAUGURATION AND WOULD LEAVE FOR THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION THE OBVIOUS MEASURES TO BE TAKEN TO DISENGAGE THE U.S. FROM SVN, THUS ALLOWING NIXON TO BE THE "HERO" WHO DE-AMERICANIZED THE WAR.

10. FIELD DISSEM: STATE (AMBASSADOR BUNKER, DEPUTY AMBASSADOR BERGER, POLITICAL COUNSELOR) USMACV (GENERAL ABRAMS, MR. COLBY, MAJOR GENERAL DAVIDSON) 7TH AIR FORCE (GENERAL BROWN) (ALSO SENT  )  
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