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SECRET

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NLK-82-60
upheld VIA RACs 1/13

TO: WASHINGTON

17 SEPTEMBER 1963

FROM: SAIGON - 0940

This message was apparently authentic

1. FOLLOWING IS GIST 40 MINUTE MEETING OF MR. SPERA WITH GENERAL TRAN THIEN KHIEM AFTERNOON 16 SEPT. MEETING ORIGINATED BY KHIEM THROUGH MAJ. NHON WHO NOTIFIED SPERA ON MOMENT'S NOTICE THAT KHIEM HAD SOME TIME AVAILABLE AND WOULD LIKE SPERA TO DROP IN RIGHT AWAY. FROM START AND AT KHIEM'S INITIATIVE, DISCUSSION DEVOTED TO STATUS OF SITUATION SINCE KHIEM'S TALK WITH HARKINS 31 AUGUST. KHIEM VERY CANDID THROUGHOUT, WAS AS USUAL THOUGHTFUL, BUT APPARENTLY STRAIGHTFORWARD. ANSWERED QUESTIONS WITHOUT HESITATION.

2. THE GENERALS ARE STILL ACTING WITHIN LEGALITY AND PLAN CONTINUE DOING SO AS LONG AS POSSIBLE BUT BECOMING INCREASINGLY CONCERNED OVER ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE NHU NEGOTIATING FOR SETTLEMENT WITH NORTH.

3. SECOND WEEK OF SEPTEMBER GENERALS FORMALLY REQUESTED PRESIDENT DIEM TO TURN OVER TO MILITARY KEY DEPARTMENTS OF DEFENSE, INTERIOR, PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE, AND EDUCATION, PROPOSING SPECIFIC NAMES AS RELATED IN FOLLOWING PARAGRAPH. PRESIDENT HAS TAKEN PROPOSAL UNDER CONSIDERATION BUT HAS ALREADY NOTIFIED THEM THAT

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NO DECISION WILL BE MADE UNTIL AFTER ELECTIONS ARE HELD. SHOULD PROPOSAL BE TURNED DOWN, GENERALS PREPARED CONTINUE PUSH IN OTHER (NO AMPLIFICATION OBTAINED) DIRECTIONS.

4. FOR DEFENSE, THEY HAVE PROPOSED GEN. DUONG VAN MINH, OR TRAN VAN DON, OR NGUYEN KHANH. THEY ANTICIPATE THAT IF DECISION IS FAVORABLE, GEN. DON WILL BE CHOSEN. FOR INTERIOR, THEIR CANDIDATE IS TON THAT DINH. RATIONALE IS THAT DINH WILL BE ACCEPTABLE TO DIEM. FOR PSYWAR, EITHER GENERAL TRAN TU OAI OR LE VAN KIM. FOR EDUCATION, TRAN VAN MINH OR PHAM XUAN CHIEU.

5. COUNSELLOR NHU HAS DISCUSSED WITH SOME GENERALS (KHIEM STATED HE WAS NOT IN ON DISCUSSION AND ONLY MENTIONED BIG MINH AND GENERAL NGHIEM AS BEING AMONG THOSE WITH WHOM NHU DISCUSSED THE ITEM) HIS CONVERSATION WITH POLISH COMMISSIONER MANELI. HE TOLD GENERALS THAT MANELI HAD BROUGHT HIM A PROPOSAL FROM DRV PRIME MINISTER PHAM VAN DONG FOR START OF TRADE BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH VIETNAM. NHU HAD INFORMED THE GENERALS THAT HE HAD TAKEN THIS UNDER CONSIDERATION AND WOULD CONSULT WITH THEM IN ANY FUTURE MOVE. ACCORDING TO NHU, MANELI HAD STATED THAT HE WAS AT NHU'S COMPLETE DISPOSAL AND READY TO FLY TO HANOI AT MOMENT'S NOTICE. NHU HAD ALSO STATED THAT FRENCH AMBASSADOR LALOUETTE HAD ALSO OFFERED HIS SERVICES TOWARD SAME END.

6. IN CONNECTION WITH NECESSITY MAINTAIN UTMOST SECURITY AT PRESENT MOMENT, KHIEM STATED THAT THE KEY GROUP IS COMPOSED OF THREE GENERALS: BIG MINH, NGUYEN KHANH, AND HIMSELF WHO ONLY FULLY CONFIDE AMONG THEMSELVES. ALLIED GENERALS SUCH AS KIM, CHIEU, AND OTHERS ARE CONSULTED ONLY AS NEED ARISES BUT ARE NOT PRIVY OF ALL THOUGHTS AND PLANNING OF THE TRIUMVIRATE. KHIEM PLEASED THAT

AS FAR AS HE CAN DETERMINE, THERE HAS BEEN NO LEAK AS TO EXACTLY WHAT CONTACTS USG HAS HAD WITH ANY ~~MENYWR GO~~ member of TRIO.

7. IN A SIDE NOTE, KHIEM SAID THAT GENERAL DINH WAS ACTING UNDER INSTRUCTIONS FROM COUNSELLOR NHU WHEN CONEIN WAS CALLED IN FOR INTERVIEW. DINH HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED TO DELIBERATELY INTIMIDATE CONEIN, HENCE POINTED GUNS PROP DURING INTERVIEW. SPERA DID NOT ASK SOURCE OF KHIEM'S INFO.

8. IN ANOTHER INCIDENTAL COMMENT, KHIEM SAID THAT GENERAL DINH CLAIMS THAT AN AMERICAN OFFICIAL HAS OFFERED HIM THE AMOUNT OF 20 MILLION PIASTERS IF HE, DINH, WOULD OVERTHROW THE GOVERNMENT AND HAS SO REPORTED TO COUNSELLOR NHU.

9. IN CLOSING, KHIEM REITERATED THAT THE GENERALS WOULD UNDER NO CONDITION GO ALONG WITH NHU SHOULD HE MAKE ANY STEP TOWARD THE NORTH OR EVEN TOWARD NEUTRALIZATION A LA LAOS.

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