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FROM: SAIGON

TO: Secretary of State

NO: 371, AUGUST 29, 1 P.M.

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HILSMAN FROM KATTENBURG

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Rec'd: AUGUST 29, 1963
3:17 A.M.

HAD THREE HOUR CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT DIEM AFTERNOON AUGUST 28. MORE THAN ON EARLIER OCCASIONS (1955, 1958) HE TALKED LARGELY TO HIMSELF. WHILE THERE NO DOUBT HE IS IN FULL POSSESSION HIS FACULTIES, IMPRESSION OF GROWING NEUROSIS CANNOT BE ESCAPED. WAS AS IF WORDS THEMSELVES HAD MAGIC WHICH MADE THEM BELIEVABLE AS THEY CAME OUT AND HE THEN ECHOED AND RE-ECHOED THEM FURTHER. IN MOMENT REAL EMOTION, TOWARD END OF CONVERSATION, HE SAID "I'M READY TO DIE, AT ONCE, IF SWEAT AND BLOOD OF LAST NINE YEARS NOW TO BE SACRIFICED TO SMALL GROUP OF AGITATORS IN BUDDHIST DISGUISE, WHOM POPULATION ANY CASE DESPISES."

DIEM MADE VIGOROUS AND IMPASSIONED DEFENSE HIS POLICIES SINCE MAY 8 HUE INCIDENT, DESCRIBED COMMUNIST INFILTRATION BUDDHIST CLERGY IN MINUTE DETAIL (MUMBLING LARGELY IRRELEVANT AND VERY HARD TO FOLLOW EXAMPLES, NONE OF WHICH WHEN FURTHER REFLECTED UPON CONSTITUTE ANY REAL HARD EVIDENCE -- THOUGH I ASKED HIM PROVIDE SAME AND HE SAID HE WOULD "WHEN INQUIRY IS COMPLETE").

HE ALSO PASSIONATELY DEFENDED BROTHERS NHU AND THUC, STATING IT WAS "CRIMINAL" THAT U.S. PRESS WOULD ATTACK A MAN OF SUCH TOTAL INTEGRITY AND HOLY DEVOTION AS THUC. DESCRIBED BROTHER NHU AS PURE INTELLECTUAL, A PHILOSOPHER WHO NEVER RAISED VOICE IN DEBATE, NEVER SOUGHT FAVOR FOR HIMSELF, SAID "WISH

/AMERICANS

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-2- 371, AUGUST 29, 1 P.M., FROM SAIGON

AMERICANS COULD PROVIDE ME WITH ANOTHER LIKE HIM." AS FOR MADAME NHU, HE HAD SAID THINGS TO HER BUT SHE HAD BEEN MIGHTILY PROVOKED BY U.S. PRESS. REPUBLICAN YOUTH OF BOTH SEXES, MAIN ACHIEVEMENT OF NHUS, HAD BEEN PERHAPS GREATEST BENEFIT BROUGHT TO COUNTRY SINCE 1954, SYMBOLIZED NEW, VITAL AND DEMOCRATIC GENERATION BROUGHT OUT OF VACUUM IN WHICH COUNTRY PLUNGED WHEN HE TOOK OVER. BROTHER LUYEN HAD SEEN RIGHTLY REASONS FOR GOVERNMENT POLICIES, WAS EXPLAINING THEM EFFECTIVELY IN LONDON, AND CONTRASTED WITH PERFIDY OF CHUONG WHO HAD NEVER FORGIVEN FACT SOME HIS RICELANDS TAKEN IN LAND REFORM.

DO VAN LY, WHO HAD BEEN WITH DIEM IN U.S. (AS I WOULD REMEMBER) WAS PHILOSOPHER AND CAPABLE PUBLICIST. PRINCE BUU HOI HAD LEFT SAIGON AND WOULD REPRESENT VIET-NAM IN UN IF DEBATE TOOK PLACE. (DIEM DID NOT SPECIFY WHEN HE WOULD ARRIVE NEW YORK.) BUU HOI HAD BEEN ILL AT FIRST WHEN SEEING CONDITION TO WHICH BONZES HAD BROUGHT HIS MOTHER, BUT HAD RECOVERED AND REALIZED INSANE ATMOSPHERE WHICH LEADING YOUNGER BONZES ("LES MENEURS") WERE CREATING IN PAGODAS AND BUDDHIST COMMUNITY.

VIET-NAM WAS STILL MUCH TOO UNDERDEVELOPED TO BE PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD BY MOST WESTERNERS. BONZES HAD FROM BEGINNING PLAYED ON TRADITIONAL PRIMITIVE PROCLIVITIES IN PEOPLE FOR IRRATIONAL ACTS, HAD CONSCIOUSLY DEVELOPED WILD ATMOSPHERE OF RAVING AND NOISE. ALL THIS CAREFULLY STIRRED UP BY EXTREMELY CLEVER VIET CONG CADRES. LATTER WERE STILL AT IT AND GVN KNEW WHO SOME OF THEM WERE AND WERE FOLLOWING THEM IN PRESENT WANDERINGS IN PAGODAS ALL ACROSS SVN.

DIEM SAID BUDDHIST ISSUE NOW ENTIRELY SOLVED. HE HAD MET MORNING AUGUST 28 WITH MEMBERS VIETNAMESE SANGKA, REAL REPRESENTATIVES VIETNAMESE BUDDHIST CLERGY WHICH SHUNTED ASIDE BY AGITATORS LIKE 24-YEAR OLD NGHIEM WHO DIGNIFIED IN U.S. PRESS AS "VENERABLE." MEETING HAD BROUGHT COMPLETE SOLUTION ALL POINTS AT ISSUE AND MUTUAL RESPECT BOTH SIDES. NOW THAT COUNTRY RID OF AGITATORS, IT COULD GO BACK TO WINNING WAR AND PRINCIPAL TASK BUILDING DEMOCRACY THROUGH STRATEGIC HAMLET PROGRAM

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-3- 371, AUGUST 29, 1 P.M., FROM SAIGON

ACTION NIGHT OF AUGUST 20 HAD BEEN UNANIMOUSLY REQUESTED BY GENERALS ON 19TH AND 20TH AND HE HAD AGREED, AFTER CAREFUL PERSONAL STUDY, THAT GOVERNMENT COULD NO LONGER TOLERATE IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION CREATED BY COMMUNIST CONTROLLED AGITATORS. HOW COULD AMERICAN PRESS AND EVEN OFFICIAL BROADCASTS ACCUSE COLONEL TUNG ("NOT A GREAT WARRIOR, BUT A GOOD MAN IN SPECIAL OPERATIONS AGAINST NVN") OF BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR ACTION WHICH ALL GENERALS HIS ARMED FORCES HAD PRESSED ON HIM OUT OF PATRIOTIC SENSE OF DUTY AND DEVOTION TO COUNTRY.

BUT U.S. PRESS WAS IN ANY CASE MOST IRRESPONSIBLE AND CREATING TERRIBLY DANGEROUS MISUNDERSTANDINGS. CONSTANT MISSTATEMENT OF FACT IN U.S. PRESS MUST BE CORRECTED, AND HE ASKED ME DO ALL I POSSIBLY COULD TO HELP IN THIS, "FOR SAKE ALL OUR YEARS OF WORK" AND ALL THAT HAD BEEN BUILT UP, AND IN MIDST TERRIBLE WAR AGAINST CRUEL AND IMPLACABLE ENEMY. HE REALIZED LATTER WOULD STOP AT NOTHING, NOT EVEN AT ORGANIZING ATTACKS IN U.S. AGAINST HIS GOVERNMENT. BUT AT LEAST "TECHNICAL CADRES" AMONG AMERICAN SERVICES HERE WHO WERE ORGANIZING U.S. PRESS CORPS AGAINST HIM SHOULD STOP THEIR INSANE ACTIVITIES. HE MADE THIS LAST PLEA IN STRONG AND IMPASSIONED LANGUAGE.

I WAS UNABLE TO BREAK IN MORE THAN ONCE OR TWICE, BUT DID MANAGE CONVEY TO HIM, I THINK (SPEAKING FRANKLY AS FRIEND, HAVING KNOWN HIM 10 YEARS), THAT HIS IMAGE ABROAD, AND I THOUGHT IN VIET-NAM TOO, HAD DETERIORATED CONSIDERABLY. I ASKED WHETHER HE INTENDED CONVOKE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY EXPLAIN GOVERNMENT ACTIONS AND WHETHER AND WHEN HE WOULD HOLD NEW ELECTIONS. HE RESPONDED HE WAS STUDYING POSSIBILITY MEETING ASSEMBLY, FAILED TO RESPOND TO QUESTION ON ELECTIONS. WHEN I WAS FINALLY ABLE BREAK MONOLOGUE AND LEAVE, HE SAID WITH GREAT SINCERITY "TRY HELP US." I SAID "PLEASE TRY TO DO SAME FOR US."

GP-3

LODGE

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