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NSC review completed

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Text of CAS/Saigon Cable [redacted] Dated 23 December 1971

1. In sixty minute session with President Thieu on 23 December, Ambassador Bunker reviewed full scope of recent dialogue with other side over issue of prisoner exchange [redacted] President Thieu indicated he understood and endorsed all actions taken to date. President Thieu was sympathetic to idea of trying to move negotiations on this exchange forward to successful conclusion as rapidly as possible. In this spirit President Thieu made following points.

A. If exchange takes place it must be outside of village of Ta Gang Robon so that other side cannot subsequently claim they occupy this area and thus had used it as site for implementing exchange transaction. (COMMENT: We see no difficulty with this point.)

B. Whatever actions were required to reopen dialogue with other side could be taken as promptly as we desired. Other side could be told in next contact that in principle our side was prepared to release [redacted] for [redacted] others. In this context President Thieu stressed that other side should be pressed to identify how many others would be involved, for it essential we receive fair value for exchange [redacted] If other side would not spell out what others would be included in exchange, then we were to make clear that exchange would be at least two chopper operation. [redacted] [redacted] If others came [redacted] fine. Then [redacted] others would board first chopper and lift off. Second chopper would then bring [redacted] him. If on first chopper landing [redacted] was exchanged for [redacted] then after lift off of first chopper with [redacted] on it was completed, second chopper would come in. It would not contain [redacted] This approach envisions that if others do not come out on first chopper, second chopper that went in would not [redacted] [redacted] it would land and if no others appear it would take off. If others appear, third chopper [redacted] it would subsequently land and exchange would be completed.

DPMO review(s) completed.

State Dept. review completed

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C. When final exchange details were worked out with other side, these should be reviewed with General Quang and Colonel Binh who would brief President Thieu on the arrangement. At that time Thieu would give his final blessing to the exchange.

2. In terms of atmospherics it worth noting that Thieu did not like idea of exchanging [redacted] for others who unknown in terms of numbers, names or nationalities. He finally agreed to para 1 scenario, however, out of sympathy in humanitarian and political terms for dilemma which POW issue poses to United States Government.

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