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NSC review completed

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: [redacted] Saigon Cable [redacted] Dated 18 December 1971 25X1

Ambassador Bunker has reviewed 17 December NSC Staff message concerning prisoner exchange channel and has following comments:

1. Conversational scenario outlined in para 6 of NSC message poses no basic problems for us in terms of tone, style or technical details. Is our view, however, that given other side's past record on items of substance which discussed in this channel, we should not expect that they will be precise in identifying either names, nationalities or numbers of prisoners that they they would release in exchange [redacted] for [redacted] and others. Please note that conversations with other side's intermediary on 4 December and 27 November plowed essentially this same ground of specifics, i. e., our need for names, nationalities and numbers of prisoners to be released by them. Response from other side was negative. They simply would not discuss what interested us. Have no reason to believe it will be otherwise in next call, for other side has been fundamentally consistent throughout the use of this channel since 1967. For example, they rejected, as we expected they would, our 4 December request for face-to-face meetings and improvement of communications. This not surprising to us in Saigon, for other side rejected idea of face-to-face meetings previously and have never used more sophisticated communications facilities which were available to them for maintaining contact with us. They have always stuck to pattern of telephone calls. In essence, therefore, believe we must use formula for working this exchange channel which gives appropriate value factor to what we know of other side and its modus operandi. In short, while para 6 ploy could be implemented with ease in technical sense of conveying it to other side if they call, it has little prospect of success in our view, for other side not likely to spell out details we want. Without these details see virtually no prospect that Thieu would agree to release [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] As you will recall, Thieu let us know on 28 October via Colonel Binh that he would release [redacted] if [redacted] equal value could be obtained by our side. Unfortunately, in Vietnamese context, exchange [redacted] [redacted] is not equal exchange. In view of this it not likely Thieu could be persuaded at this time to alter his basic position. Without change in Thieu's position see no practical basis for implementing para 6 proposal, for without Thieu's agreement proposal has no meaning and should not be used.

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DPMO review(s) completed.

State Dept. review completed

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2. Recommend therefore that we pursue following near term tactics.

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A. Remain firm [redacted] if other side contacts us in next few days. If, in course of contact, other side remains adamant that exchange must be [redacted] for [redacted] others, we can try again to get specifics of who, how many, etc. and make point that without this data deal not likely to be put together. This should keep channel open while we work on trying to soften Thieu's position, or at least obtain his concurrence in [redacted] package approach along lines of para 6 scenario as interim negotiating tactic.

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B. If other side does not contact us by 29 December we should initiate action designed to elicit response from them. First move on our part would be to transfer [redacted] [redacted] to maximum security facility in Saigon area as yet unselected. Purpose of this action being provocation of other side by making them wonder what is happening [redacted] This move is predicated on plausible assumption other side has resources in GVN who can monitor [redacted] [redacted] we would discuss this tactic with Thieu as prelude to softening him up for eventual request that he go along at later date in negotiating sense of offering other side [redacted] as one package in return for [redacted] specific list of others. Given time to nudge Thieu in this direction, believe we can persuade him to use ref para 6 scenario as negotiating ploy. In using this maneuver we would remain clear, however, that in final analysis Thieu is not likely to release [redacted] unless other side has given us assurances in specific terms which will be persuasive to Thieu that equal value is to be received by our side in this exchange.

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C. If move [redacted] [redacted] does not produce responses from other side by 17 January 1972, we will run ads in Saigon newspapers which other side has identified to us in past. Ad would ask them to contact us. If they respond we would hope by then to have moved Thieu to point where we could get his agreement in para 6 ploy.

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3. Please advise concerning our para 2 proposal.

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