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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: DVIP, MOPS, VM, US
SUBJECT: CODEL SOLOMON IN HANOI

1. (C-ENTIRE TEXT)

2. SUMMARY. CODEL SOLOMON VISITED HANOI FEBRUARY 14-15 AND MET WITHD (#)
BRICOP HOANG BICH SONM A
SCHEDULED COURTESY CALL WITH MINISTER OF STATE VO DONG GIANG WAS CANCELLED BY THE DELEGATION WHEN THEY LEARNED THAT FOREIGN MINISTER THACH WOULD NOT BE AVAILABLE. THE CODEL EMPHASIZED THE LIVE SIGHTING ISSUE; SON REPEATED THE CLAIM THAT VIETNAM HAS NO AMERICANS UNDER ITS CONTROL, BUT SUGGESTED THERE MIGHT BE SOME LIVE AMERICANS IT DOESN'T KNOW ABOUT. WHEN ASKED IF AMERICANS COULD JOIN SRV TEAMS INVESTIGATING LIVE SIGHTINGS, SON SAID THIS COULD BE DISCUSSED AT THE TECHNICAL MEETINGS. SON ANNOUNCED TO THE CODEL THAT VIETNAM WOULD SOON TURN OVER ABOUT 14 REMAINS, ALTHOUGH HE WOULD NOT SAY THIS WOULD BE DURING THE UPCOMING FEB. 26-27 TECHNICAL MEETING. THE CODEL RAISED THE ORDERLY DEPARTURE PROGRAM AND URGED THAT TECHNICAL TALKS TAKE PLACE SOON; THE VIETNAMESE SAID THAT THE TALKS WOULD BE HELD IN BANGKOK BY EARLY MARCH. WHEN THE CODEL RAISED POLITICAL PRISONERS, SON SAID THAT THEY COULD NOT BE RELEASED NOW BECAUSE THEY WOULD BE USED TO SUBVERT VIETNAM. THE CODEL INVITED SON AND THACH TO MEET WITH THEM WHEN THE VIETNAMESE ARE NEXT IN NEW YORK; SON ACCEPTED AND SAID HE WOULD INFORM THACH. END SUMMMARY.

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3. CODEL SOLOMON (A LIST OF MEMBERS IS CONTAINED AT THE END OF THIS MESSAGE) ARRIVED IN HANOI AT 1400 ON FEBRUARY 14. THE DELEGATION FIRST MET WITH MFA ACTING DIRECTOR FOR NORTH AMERICAN AFFAIRS NGUYEN CAN TO GO OVER THE SCHEDULE. AT THIS MEETING, THE CODEL LEARNED THAT IT WOULD NOT MEET WITH FOREIGN MINISTER NGUYEN CO THACH, BUT THAT THE HIGHEST LEVEL MEETING WOULD BE WITH MINISTER OF STATE VO DONG GIANG. THE ONLY EXPLANATION OFFERED WAS THAT THACH WAS "OUT OF TOWN" OR "NOT AVAILABLE". (WESTERN JOURNALISTS TOLD THE DELEGATION THAT THEY WERE BRIEFED BEFORE THE CODEL'S ARRIVAL THAT THACH WAS PREVIOUSLY ON THE SCHEDULE.) REP. SOLOMON EXPRESSED GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTER WOULD NOT MEET WITH THE DELEGATION, AND SUGGESTED THAT THE GROUP MIGHT HAVE TO CANCEL THE REST OF THE VISIT. RE. SOLOMON LATER ARRANGED WITH THE SRV DELEGATION LEADER, DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER HOANG BICH SON THAT, IN LIGHT OF THACH'S UNAVAILABILITY, THE CODEL WOULD FOREGO THE SCHEDULED COURTESY CALL WITH GIANG AND LEAVE HANOI EARLIER THAN ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED 2000 DEPARTURE ON FEBRUARY 15.

4. ON FEBRUARY 15 THE CODEL LEARNED FROM THE BRITISH AND AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADORS THAT FOR SEVERAL DAYS RUMORS HAD BEEN CIRCULATING IN HANOI THAT PARTY GENERAL SECRETARY LE DUAN HAD DIED IN MOSCOW (INCLUDING ONE STORY THAT THE SOVIET EMBASSY HAD FIRST ANNOUNCED, THEN RETRACTED, THIS NEWS). BOTH SPECULATED THAT THACH WAS TIED UP DURING THE CODEL'S VISIT WITH THE ACTUAL OR IMMINENT DEATH OF DUAN.

5. AFTER THE ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING WITH CAN, THE CODEL VISITED THE WELL-KNOWN SITE OF A B-52 CRASH OUTSIDE HANOI AND A HANDICRAFTS FAIR. THEY MET WITH SRV DELEGATION LEADER SON FOR ONE HOUR BEFORE A DINNER HOSTED BY SON. ON FEBRUARY 15 THE CODEL MET FOR BREAKFAST WITH UK AMBASSADOR RICHARD TOLBOYS (HOST) AND THE AUSTRALIAN, ITALIAN AND BELGIAN AMBASSADORS. FOLLOWING BREAKFAST THE CODEL HELD A FORMAL TWO HOUR SESSION WITH SON, CAN AND FOUR OTHER MFA OFFICIALS (NGO HOANG AND DO VAN MINH OF THE NORTH AMERICAN DEPARTMENT, INTERPRETER HA HUY THONH, AND MFA "SPECIALIST" TRAN KIM

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NGA). THE CODEL HOSTED A RETURN LUNCH FOR THE SRV DELEGATION, VISITED THE FORMER POW CAMP AT 17 LY NAM DE STREET, AND DEPARTED HANOI AT 1600. THE FOLLOWING SUBSTANTIVE ACCOUNT IS DRAWN LARGELY FROM THE FORMAL MEETING WITH HOANG BICH SON, WHICH COVERED MOST OF THE MATERIAL DISCUSSED DURING THE OTHER MEETINGS WITH THE VIETNAMESE.

6. THROUGHOUT THE VISIT, HOANG BICH SON EMPHASIZED THE POINT THAT VIETNAM CONSIDERS THE MIA ISSUE A HUMANITARIAN ONE NOT LINKED TO THE POLITICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN VIETNAM AND THE U.S., PARTICULARLY THE CONTINUED HOSTILITY OF THE U.S. FOR VIETNAM (INCLUDING, INTERESTINGLY, A NEGATIVE REFERENCE TO THE JUST-RELEASED "STATE DEPARTMENT HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT".) HE REAFFIRMED VIETNAM'S INTENTION TO WORK WITH THE U.S. TO RESOLVE THE MIA ISSUE WITHIN TWO YEARS.

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7. THE CODEL AFFIRMED AT EACH MEETING THAT ITS FIRST PRIORITY AND THE FIRST PRIORITY OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE IS TO RESOLVE THE QUESTION OF LIVING AMERICANS WHO MIGHT STILL BE IN VIETNAM. REP. DORMAN STATED THAT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE WOULD REJOICE AT THE RETURN OF LIVE AMERICANS AND WOULD BE GRATEFUL FOR VIETNAM'S HUMANE POLICY IN FINDING AND RETURNING THEM. HE ALSO ASKED FOR VIETNAM'S HELP IN LOCATING AND TURNING OVER THE NAMES OF AMERICANS WHO MIGHT HAVE DESERTED FROM THE U.S. FORCES, IN ORDER TO EASE THE MINDS OF THEIR FAMILIES.

8. SON REPEATED THE POSITION THAT THERE ARE NO AMERICANS UNDER SRV CONTROL IN VIETNAM, NOTING THAT VIETNAM HAD RETURNED PILOTS AND HIGH-RANKING OFFICERS AND HAD NO REASON TO KEEP "LESS IMPORTANT" LOW RANKING OFFICERS AND ENLISTED MEN. HOWEVER, HE SUGGESTED THERE MIGHT BE AMERICANS WHO ARE UNKNOWN TO THE SRV AUTHORITIES, SAYING, "IF THERE ARE ANY AMERICANS LIVING HERE, THEY ARE BEYOND OUR CONTROL." SPECIFICALLY, HE SAID THERE ARE TWO CATEGORIES OF AMERICANS WHO MIGHT BE IN VIETNAM: A) PERSONS LEFT BEHIND BY THE USG TO TAKE PART IN POST-WAR SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES AGAINST VIETNAM; AND B) PERSONS INFILTRATED INTO VIETNAM BY THE USG FOR THIS PURPOSE AFTER THE END OF THE WAR. SON SAID THAT VIETNAM HAD NEVER FOUND ANYONE IN THE FIRST CATEGORY AND THAT IT HAD FOUND THREE PERSONS IN THE SECOND, ALL OF WHOM HAD BEEN TURNED OVER TO THE USG, THE LATEST IN 1985 (PRESUMABLY REFERRING TO THE GRAHAM AND MATHERS CASES).

9. SON STATED FURTHER THAT THE SRV WILL INVESTIGATE ANY INFORMATION IT RECEIVES ON POSSIBLE LIVE AMERICANS, NOTING THAT IT HAS ESTABLISHED THREE TEAMS FOR THIS PURPOSE. HE CITED THREE EXAMPLES OF SUCH INVESTIGATIONS: A) AN INVESTIGATION IN MINH HAI PROVINCE, WHICH PRODUCED NO AMERICANS; B) AN ENGLISH-SPEAKING INDIAN IN TAY NHAYEN HIGHLANDS; AND C) A DARK CAMBODIAN WHO WAS MISTAKEN FOR A BLACK AMERICAN IN THE MEKONG DELTA. SON SAID THAT VIETNAM WOULD GIVE THE U.S. ANY INFORMATION IT RECEIVED FROM SUCH INVESTIGATIONS AND WOULD TURN OVER ANY AMERICANS IT FOUND. AFTER MEETING CONCLUDED, CODEL WAS INFORMED BY FOREIGN PRESS THAT SON HAD SAID AMERICANS, IF INDEED IN VIETNAM, MIGHT BE IN THE HILLS OR IN CAVES.

10. IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SON STATED THAT VIETNAM HAD NEVER ASKED LAOS OR CAMBODIA ABOUT LIVE AMERICANS, NOR HAD IT RECEIVED ANY INFORMATION FROM THEM; BOTH ARE SOVEREIGN STATES. WHEN ASKED IF AMERICANS COULD JOIN THE THREE TEAMS INVESTIGATING LIVE SIGHTINGS, SON SAID THIS COULD BE DISCUSSED BY THE U.S. AND SRV TECHNICAL TEAMS. WHEN ASKED BY REP. ROBERT SMITH HOW VIETNAM COULD BE TRUSTED ON THE LIVE PRISONER QUESTION SINCE IT

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HELD ROBERT GARWOOD FOR SO MANY YEARS, SON SAID THAT GARWOOD "HAD JOINED THE VIETNAMESE SIDE" AND WAS NOT A PRISONER; HE WAS THE ONLY SUCH PERSON FROM THE U.S. (UNLIKE THE MANY FRENCHMEN WHO JOINED THE VIETNAMESE). WHILE HE WAS HELD, VIETNAM STATED IT HELD NO PRISONERS OF WAR. IT RESPECTED GARWOOD'S WISHES, BOTH WHEN HE WANTED TO STAY AND WHEN HE WANTED TO LEAVE.

11. AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE FEBRUARY 15 MEETING, SON TOLD THE CODEL THAT VIETNAM HAD GATHERED A TOTAL OF 70

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"REPORTS" ON MIA'S IN RECENT MONTHS (UP FROM THE 50 "INFORMATIONS" ANNOUNCED AT THE ARMITAGE-WOLFOVITZ MEETING), THAT IT HAD "INVESTIGATED" 20 "CASES" (AMONG THE 70 "REPORTS"), AND THAT ABOUT TWO THIRDS OF THOSE 20 CASES WOULD RESULT IN THE TURNOVER OF REMAINS. SON NOTED THAT INVESTIGATIONS CONTINUED AND MIGHT RESULT IN A FEW ADDITIONAL REMAINS, SO IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE TO BE SPECIFIC ABOUT THE TOTAL NUMBER OF REMAINS. THE VIETNAMESE SAID THAT THE NEXT TECHNICAL MEETING WOULD TAKE PLACE ON FEBRUARY 26-27 IN HANOI. IN RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONING, THE VIETNAMESE WOULD NOT SAY THAT THE REMAINS WOULD BE TURNED OVER AT THIS MEETING.

ORDERLY DEPARTURE PROGRAM

12. REP. CHRIS SMITH BEGAN DISCUSSING ODP BY NOTING ITS ORIGIN AS A HUMANE ALTERNATIVE TO THE SUFFERING OF THE BOAT PEOPLE. HE NOTED THAT THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING ESTABLISHING ODP IN 1979 WAS A POSITIVE STEP AND HAS LED TO OVER 100,000 ODP DEPARTURES, ALMOST HALF TO THE U.S. SMITH EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT THE SRV HAS ABRUPTLY STOPPED U.S. INTERVIEWS AND ORDERED THE U.S. INTERVIEWERS TO LEAVE HO CHI MINH CITY. HE NOTED THE SRV CONCERN ABOUT A BACKLOG OF INTERVIEWED PERSONS WHO HAVEN'T YET LEFT, BUT SAID THAT MANY OF THESE ARE INADEQUATELY DOCUMENTED. HE SAID THAT THE U.S. HAS PROVIDED TENS OF THOUSANDS OF NAMES OF PERSONS WHO ARE ALREADY QUALIFIED TO ENTER THE U.S. UNDER THE PROGRAM. HE URGED THAT VIETNAM AGREE TO TECHNICAL TALKS SOON IN HO CHI MINH CITY OR BANGKOK TO HELP RESOLVE THIS IMPASSE. SMITH ALSO NOTED THAT OTHER COUNTRIES HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT THEIR ODP PROBLEMS. FINALLY, SMITH REITERATED THE USG OFFER TO TAKE ALL THE AMERASIAN CHILDREN AND URGED THAT MORE BE PRESENTED FOR INTERVIEWS.

13. SON DEFENDED THE SRV DECISION TO SUSPEND INTERVIEWS IN LIGHT OF THE LARGE BACKLOG AND THE FACT THAT PERSONS INTERVIEWED QUIT THEIR JOBS AND SELL THEIR HOUSES. HE SAID THE BACKLOG MUST BE CLEARED UP BEFORE INTERVIEWERS CAN RESUME. SON FIRST RESISTED COMMITTING THE SRV TO A SPECIFIC DATE FOR ODP TECHNICAL TALKS, BUT AFTER REPEATED QUESTIONING FINALLY SAID THAT THE TALKS WOULD TAKE PLACE IN BANGKOK EITHER THE LAST WEEK IN FEBRUARY OR THE FIRST WEEK IN MARCH.

POLITICAL PRISONERS

14. REP. DORNAN URGED THE VIETNAMESE TO KEEP ITS PLEDGE AND RELEASE THE THOUSANDS OF "OUR ALLIES" WHO ARE STILL IN REEDUCATION CAMPS. SON NOTED VIETNAM'S HUMANITARIAN POLICY IN NOT EXECUTING FORMER GVN SOLDIERS AND OFFICIALS, AS WAS DONE IN EUROPE AFTER WORLD WAR II. HE SAID THAT VIETNAM PLANS TO RELEASE THE 7,000 STILL HELD IN REEDUCATION CAMPS, BUT CANNOT DO THAT NOW IN LIGHT OF THE THREAT POSED BY CHINA'S CONTINUED HOSTILITY AND THE POSSIBILITY THAT THOSE FREED WOULD JOIN SUBVERSIVE GROUPS IN VIETNAM. SON SAID THAT SEVERAL YEARS AGO VIETNAM INTENDED TO FREE TO THE U.S. THE 10,000 PRISONERS THEN HELD. THIS, HOWEVER, LED MANY VIETNAMESE IN THE U.S. TO PLAN ORGANIZING THOSE ABOUT TO BE

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RELEASED TO WORK AGAINST VIETNAM. HE SAID VIETNAMESE PUBLIC OPINION AND WORLD PUBLIC OPINION WOULD NOT

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TOLERATE FREEING THESE PEOPLE TO BE USED AGAINST VIETNAM OR OTHER COUNTRIES, E.G., IN LATIN AMERICA. WHEN CHALLENGED ON THE LATIN AMERICAN ALLEGATIONS, SON SAID HE DID NOT BELIEVE THE REPORT HE HAD HEARD OF VIETNAMESE BEING USED THERE, BUT SINCE SUCH A REPORT WAS PUBLISHED IN U.S. MEDIA, MANY PEOPLE DID BELIEVE IT. REP. DORNAN SUGGESTED TO THE VIETNAMESE THAT THEIR CONCERNS ABOUT SUBVERSION BY RELEASED INMATES MIGHT BE MET BY ASKING THE VIETNAMESE COMMUNITY IN THE U.S. TO REFRAIN FROM CRITICISM OF HANOI FOR SEVERAL YEARS AS A CONDITION FOR THE RELEASE OF THE INMATES. THE VIETNAMESE SAID THEY WOULD THINK ABOUT THIS IDEA AND DORNAN SAID HE WOULD TRY IT OUT ON HIS VIETNAMESE CONSTITUENTS.

INVITATION TO MEET IN NEW YORK

15. REP. DORNAN CONCLUDED THE FORMAL MEETING WITH SON BY INVITING SON AND F.M. THACH TO MEET WITH THE POW/MIA TASK FORCE IN NEW YORK WHEN THEY ARE NEXT IN THAT CITY. SON ACCEPTED THE INVITATION AND SAID HE WOULD INFORM THE FOREIGN MINISTER.

DELEGATION MEMBERSHIP

16. CODEL SOLOMON CONSISTED OF MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE POW/MIA TASK FORCE. BESIDES CHAIRMAN GERALD B. SOLOMAN (R-NY), IT INCLUDED CO-CHAIRMAN BENJAMIN GILMAN (R-NY), ROBERT DORNAN (R-CA), CHRISTOPHER SMITH (R-NJ), WILLIAM HENDEN (R-NC), ROBERT SMITH (R-NH), DAVID DREIER (R-CA), FRANK MCCLOSKEY (D-IN) AND JOHN ROWLAND (R-CT). ACCOMPANYING THE DELEGATION WERE FAC STAFF MEMBERS TERESA CUNAN AND HILLEL WEINBERG, SOLOMAN STAFF MEMBER COLEEN HELM, EAP/VLC DEPUTY DIRECTOR JOSEPH SNYDER, OSD/ISA OFFICER LTC HANK LAND, USAF ESCORTS COL J.O. MCFALLS AND MAJ. NICK PUGH, AND DR. LEE MANDEL.

17. THIS MESSAGE HAS BEEN COORDINTED WITH OSD AND APPROVED BY CODEL SOLOMON. BROWN
END OF MESSAGE

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