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SUBJECT

BUDDHIST POLITICAL PLANS AND DISCUSSIONS WITH
GOVERNMENT LEADERS

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FIELD REPORT NO. [REDACTED]

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1. (SUMMARY: PROFESSOR TRAN QUANG THUAN CLAIMS THAT THE BUDDHIST INSTITUTE (VIEN HOA DAO, VHD) HAS A PLAN FOR INSTALLING A NEW GOVERNMENT AND THAT THIS HAS BEEN DISCUSSED WITH PRIME MINISTER NGUYEN CAO KY AND DIRECTORATE CHAIRMAN NGUYEN VAN THIEU. ALLEGEDLY THIEU AND KY HAVE AGREED TO IT IN PART. THE PLAN CALLS FOR A NATIONALY ASSEMBLY (NA) WHOSE MEMBERS WOULD BE SELECTED BY THE PROVISIONAL COUNCILS, HOPEFULLY BEFORE 15 APRIL, FOR THE PURPOSE OF WRITING A CONSTITUTION AND ORGANIZING GENERAL ELECTIONS. KY AND THIEU "HALF AGREED" TO ABANDON THE PRESENT

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ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR BUILDING DEMOCRACY IN FAVOR OF THIS NA. AFTER THE CHAIRMAN OF THE NEW NA HAS BEEN CHOSEN, THE BUDDHISTS THEN INTEND TO PRESS FOR THE REALIZATION OF THE FOUR POINTS OF THE VHD COMMUNIQUE OF 12 MARCH, ESPECIALLY THE PART ASKING FOR THE RETURN OF THE GENERALS TO THEIR MILITARY DUTIES. THUAN CLAIMED THE VHD HAS THE SUPPORT OF FATHERS HOANG QUYHN AND HO VAN VUI IN THIS EFFORT. THE BUDDHISTS WANT TO PROVE THAT THEY HAVE NOT BEEN BOUGHT OFF BY THE KY GOVERNMENT. THEY CONSIDER KY CHILDISH AND IRRESPONSIBLE AND RESENTED THE RECENT REORGANIZATION OF THE GOVERNMENT WHICH THEY SAY WAS CARRIED OUT WITHOUT CONSULTING THEM. THUAN SAID HE BELIEVED STUDENTS WERE LIKELY TO STRIKE IN SAIGON IN A DAY OR TWO.)

1. ACCORDING TO PROFESSOR TRAN QUANG THUAN, THE BUDDHIST INSTITUTE (VIEN HOA DAO, VHD) IS SEEKING NEITHER A COUP NOR THE RESIGNATION OF PRIME MINISTER NGUYEN CAO KY FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

A. IN THE EVENT OF A COUP, EITHER ANOTHER PART OF THE MILITARY WOULD TAKE OVER, OR THE MILITARY WOULD INSTALL ANOTHER GOVERNMENT LIKE THOSE OF TRAN VAN HUONG (NOVEMBER 1964 TO JANUARY 1965) OR PHAN HUY QUAT (FEBRUARY 1965 TO JUNE 1965) WHICH OWED THEIR AUTHORITY TO THE MILITARY.

B. IF PRIME MINISTER KY SHOULD RESIGN, POWER WOULD REMAIN IN THE DIRECTORATE; THAT IS, IN THE MILITARY.

HENCE THE BUDDHISTS WANT KY TO REMAIN AS PRIME MINISTER UNTIL

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A NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (NA) CAN BE CONVOKED, HOPEFULLY BY 15 APRIL. SINCE ORGANIZATION OF A GENERAL ELECTION WOULD TAKE TOO MUCH TIME, THE PROVINCIAL COUNCILS, WOULD CHOOSE THE MEMBERS OF THE NA. THE NA WOULD THEN WRITE A CONSTITUTION AND ORGANIZE GENERAL ELECTIONS.

2. ON 14 MARCH VHD CHAIRMAN THICH TAM CHAU AND THICH THIEN MINH SAW PRIME MINISTER KY AND THEN DIRECTORATE CHAIRMAN NGUYEN VAN THIEU. ACCORDING TO THUAN BOTH KY AND THIEU AGREED IN PRINCIPLE WITH THE FOUR POINTS OF THE COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE VHD PRESS CONFERENCE ON 12 MARCH. THEIR VIEWS ON SPECIFIC POINTS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

A. POINT ONE (REINTEGRATION OF OFFICERS WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE REVOLUTION): THEY "HALF AGREED," SAYING THAT THEY WOULD APPOINT GENERAL TRAN VAN DON AND OTHERS AS MINISTERS OR TO OTHER CIVILIAN POSTS.

B. POINT TWO (RETURN OF GENERALS TO PURELY MILITARY DUTIES): THIS MOST DIFFICULT POINT WAS NOT DISCUSSED.

C. POINT THREE (CONVOCATION OF A NATIONAL ASSEMBLY): KY AND THIEU AGAIN "HALF AGREED." THEY AGREED TO ABANDON THE PRESENT ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR BUILDING DEMOCRACY, BUT THIEU, SPECIALLY, WAS HESITANT ABOUT THE IDEA OF USING THE PROVINCIAL COUNCILS TO FORM THE NA.

D. POINT FOUR (SOCIAL REVOLUTION): KY AND THIEU FILL AGREED, CLAIMING THAT THIS WAS ALSO THEIR POLICY.

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THUAN SAID HE HOPED THE GVN WOULD SOON HOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE TO ANNOUNCE ITS INTENTION TO IMPLEMENT THE ABOVE PLAN.

3. ASSUMING GVN ACCEPTANCE OF THE ABOVE PLAN, THE BUDDHISTS WOULD ORGANIZE NO DEMONSTRATIONS OR MEETINGS UNTIL AFTER THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY HAD CHOSEN ITS PRESIDING OFFICER. ORDERLY DEMONSTRATIONS WOULD THEN BEGIN AGAIN TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE GVN AND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TO REALIZE THE FOUR-POINT PROGRAM, ESPECIALLY POINT TWO (RETURN OF GENERALS TO MILITARY DUTIES.)

4. THUAN SAID HE WAS VERY PLEASED THAT THE BUDDHISTS HAD CATHOLIC SUPPORT AT THIS TIME. HE SAID THAT ON 15 MARCH AN EMISSARY REPRESENTING FATHER HOANG QUYNH AND FATHER HO VAN VUI, AND ANOTHER REPRESENTING THE CAO DAI APPROACHED HIM AND SUGGESTED THAT THE FOUR RELIGIONS JOIN IN SIGNING A CENSURE MOTION AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. THUAN REJECTED THIS PROPOSAL ON THE GROUND THAT IT WOULD THEN APPEAR THAT THE RELIGIOUS LEADER WERE MERELY SEEKING TO REPLACE THE GENERALS.

5. THUAN OFFERED THE FOLLOWING REASONS TO EXPLAIN WHY THE BUDDHISTS HAD DECIDED TO ACT NOW RATHER THAN ADHERE TO PREVIOUS PLANS TO CONCENTRATE ON LONG TERM ORGANIZATION:

A. THE PUBLIC BELIEVED THAT THE VHD SUPPORTED THE KY GOVERNMENT AND THAT TAM CHAU AND THIEN MINH HAD BEEN BOUGHT OFF BY KY. [REDACTED] COMMENT: THIS BELIEF HAS

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APPARENTLY BEEN QUITE WIDESPREAD, ESPECIALLY OF TAM CHAU.)

B. THE GVN HAD BEEN TRYING, CONSCIOUSLY OR UNCONSCIOUSLY, TO CORRUPT THE BONZES.

C. KY IS CHILDISH, IRRESPONSIBLE, LAZY, AND A "COWBOY," AND THE PEOPLE DO NOT LIKE HIM MUCH. THUAN COMMENTED THAT KY IS HONEST, HOWEVER, AND A GOOD AIR FORCE COMMANDER.)

D. NEITHER THE VHD NOR THE LAY BUDDHISTS CONNECTED WITH IT WERE CONSULTED ABOUT THE LATEST REORGANIZATION OF THE GOVERNMENT.

E. THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT BY GENERALS HAS RESULTED IN A WAR-LORD SYSTEM.

F. PARADOXICALLY, THE BUDDHISTS ARE ACTING IN ORDER TO SAVE THE GOOD GENERALS--SUCH AS KY HIMSELF AND GENERAL LE NGUYEN KHANG, COMMANDER OF THE CAPITAL MILITARY DISTRICT--FROM DISASTER.

6. THUAN EMPHASIZED THAT HE LIKED KY PERSONALLY AND THAT THE BUDDHISTS DID NOT HATE ANY GENERAL. EVEN EXILED GENERALS TRAN THIEN KHIEM AND DO CAO TRI COULD RETURN, PROVIDED THEY STAYED OUT OF POLITICS. CONVERSELY, THE BUDDHISTS RECOGNIZED THAT THI COULD NOT BE REAPPOINTED TO THE COMMAND OF I CORPS AND THAT IT MIGHT BE WELL FOR HIM TO GO ABROAD "AFTER HIS HONOR HAD BEEN SAVED." SIMILARLY, THEY RECOGNIZED THAT TRAN VAN DON

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COULD NOT BECOME COMMANDER IN CHIEF AGAIN, BUT AS A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE HE SHOULD BE REINTEGRATED INTO THE ARMY.

7. THUAN BELIEVES STUDENT STRIKES ARE LIKELY IN SAIGON WITHIN A DAY OR TWO. HE SAID DEMONSTRATIONS WILL BE HELD ONLY IF ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY, BECAUSE IN SAIGON THEY ARE TOO HARD TO CONTROL. IN ADDITION TO THE DANGER OF VIET CONG INFILTRATION, THERE ARE OPPORTUNIST AND EXTREMIST FACTIONS WHICH TRY TO EXPLOIT THEM.

8. FIELD DISSEM: STATE USMACV 2ND AIR DIV CINCPAC ARPAC CINCPAC ARPAC PACFLT PACAF.

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