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FILE DESIGNATION

~~CONFIDENTIAL/LIMDIS~~ A-442  
 RECEIVED NO. DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
 Note returned process 9/9/12  
 SEP 5 4 33 PM 1974  
 FADRC DOCUMENT ANALYSIS  
 DATE: September 2, 1974

TO : Department of State  
 E.O. 11652: ADS, DECLAS 3/1/75  
 TAGS: AMGT VS

FROM : Amembassy BELGRADE

SUBJECT : Dissent Message

REF :  
 DISSENT CHANNEL

RELEASE IN PART B6

This message transmits a dissenting view submitted by [redacted] B6  
 [redacted] American Embassy, Belgrade.

SUGGESTED DISTRIBUTION

SUMMARY. A consistent distortion of the flow of foreign service reporting from Vietnam exists and is serious enough to call into question the Department's ability to reach any policy decisions based on this reporting. END SUMMARY

The war in Vietnam has been accused of much adverse influence on American society. It is my belief that, while the war has declined and much of this influence has disappeared, its effects continue on the Foreign Service and the Department.

I have recently completed a six-month TDY in Vietnam. During that period I served as a political reporting officer in the Consulates General in Can Tho and Nha Trang. I had access to a considerable proportion of reporting from the Consulates General to Saigon, and from Saigon to Washington. I myself prepared some of these reports.

I have concluded, on the basis of my experience and talks with other FSOs in Vietnam, that there were frequent, significant omissions from the reporting to Washington to which I had access. Furthermore, the language of the reporting that did go out to Washington was frequently slanted toward one interpretation of events. What I describe amounts to, in my opinion, a consistent distortion of the whole body of reporting from the Embassy to the Department. In my judgment, the distortion may be enough to

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seriously call into question the Department's ability to reach any policy decision based on this reporting.

This distortion manifested itself in many, individually insignificant instances. For example, in the report I drafted on the Four-Party ICCS investigation of the Cai Lay School mortaring in March 1974, I indicated a strong suspicion that local GVN officials had permitted or even planned the demonstration which brought the investigation to an abrupt end. Some revisions were made to this section in the Consulate General in Can Tho, softening the wording but leaving the meaning essentially intact in CAN THO 0113. When the Embassy relayed the report to Washington, the section was deleted entirely. Some weeks later the Embassy sent a follow-up telegram summarizing the incident which asserted among other things that the South Vietnamese spared no effort to ensure the success of the investigation. This ignored the Consulate General's analysis. This analysis--my analysis--was based on a long-standing acquaintance with the GVN officials involved, and thorough familiarity with the security arrangements for the investigation, as well as on eyewitness accounts gathered by another TDY FSO. My acquaintance with local officials was established during my service as a CORDS adviser in Dinh Tuong Province in which Cai Lay is located, from 1970 to 1972. My knowledge of security arrangements for the investigation was based on a number of long discussions with concerned district and province officials, and with members of the GVN delegation to the JMC as well as on two walks through Cai Lay District Town, one just before and one during the investigation, to actually observe security precautions. The Embassy decided on an interpretation diametrically opposite to my own.

For a second example, in preparing the Weekly Ceasefire Situation Report for II Corps in the Consulate General in Nha Trang, I was under instructions from the Acting Consul General to de-emphasize events which were or could be interpreted as GVN ceasefire violations. These instructions made it necessary for me to note at one point, for example, intensified action in the Eo Gio area of Kontum Province instead of reporting the actual division-sized GVN attack on NVA lines northeast of Kontum City.

Again, in reporting from Nha Trang, I was told to describe a series of operations by GVN units as taking place "in unpopulated areas adjacent to populated areas" in one coastal province. These were actually deep penetrations into Communist base areas from which VC/NVA units had been launching raids. But this latter description, I was told, could be interpreted as a South Vietnamese ceasefire violation.

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A general factor determining the shaping of all reporting was the tendency by higher-level officers to accept optimistic appraisals at face value, but to demand careful documentation of any unfavorable statement.

I can cite other examples of systematic alterations in reporting in my own experience, as well as examples from other FSOs with Vietnam service. I can also note the Moose-Meissner report to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which I have not read, but whose conclusions as reported by the International Herald Tribune seem quite correct.

There are a number of explanations which are advanced among Foreign Service Officers in Vietnam to account for such instances as the above. One was that the Embassy reporting to which we lower-level officers had access was designed for the lower levels of the Department, where most leaks to the press occur. According to this theory, the most highly classified reporting included a large part of what we saw camouflaged or omitted in lower-level reporting. Thus the Ambassador might attempt to avoid press leaks which would harm the South Vietnamese position.

A second explanation seems more reasonable: that the Ambassador directs the content and tone of reporting to Washington on the basis of his own determination as to what should be reported. This occurs to some extent in every foreign service post as an obvious derivation of the Ambassador's position as the head of the US mission. But this factor becomes harmful when the Ambassador's determination results in the exclusion of a coherent body of information, that is, when it results in a substantial distortion of the entire flow of reporting available to the Department from his post.

The existence of a substantial flow of distorted information to the Department has serious effects on two levels, in my opinion. On the institutional level, it can only harm the Department's efforts to maintain an influential position in foreign policy management. On a personal level, it wastes the services of the Foreign Service Officers assigned to deal with it. Furthermore, it is a direct attack on both the morale and the integrity of the officers required to participate in its production.

The question of the content of the Ambassador's personal communication with the Secretary of State is relevant here. If this communication adds the dimension that was lacking/the communications to which I had access, the detrimental effects on policy of lower-level distortion

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would not be as severe. But these effects continue on material produced by levels of the Department which do not have access to this communication. The effects on the individual Foreign Service Officers required to deal with distorted reporting are just as serious as they are if no Ambassador-to-Secretary communication is taking place.

I use general terms here because I suspect that similar situations have existed in reporting from other missions, though perhaps none as serious or as long-lasting as Vietnam.

To correct this situation, I strongly urge that the Department reaffirm to all posts its commitment to insuring an accurate flow of reporting from the field. This commitment would be made most clear in a message similar to the following: "The Department wishes to remind each Head of Mission that it is his responsibility to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the flow of reporting from his mission to the Department. If, in the judgment of the Secretary of State, this responsibility is not fulfilled and significant shortcomings are found to exist in reporting to the Department through the fault of the Embassy, the Chiefs of Mission and senior Foreign Service Officers of the mission are reminded that this is sufficient reason to recommend or effect their censure and/or removal from post. This flow of reporting must include, as a matter of course, dissenting views of any significance from members of the mission staff. The inclusion of these dissenting views is the responsibility of the Chief of Mission and of the senior Foreign Service Officers of the mission."

I further recommend that the Department form a panel of FSOs to investigate cases where substantial inaccuracies may exist in Foreign Service reporting. The panel, which would be constituted at regular two-to-three year intervals (or as special occasions arise), would consist of a small number of officers, including junior and middle-grade officers. The Under Secretary would designate, at the time the panel is constituted, a list of posts from which reporting is most critical and/or posts where there is a controversy regarding reporting. At present, for example, such a list might include Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, Vietnam, and any or all of the countries involved in the Arab-Israeli confrontation. On reaching a finding that there are shortcomings in a post's reporting through the fault of the post, the panel will recommend action to the Under Secretary of State. The Under Secretary will then contact the Ambassador and other officers concerned and, in the presence of the panel, request their answer to the charges made. When the

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Under Secretary reaches a decision in the matter, he will transmit his decision and recommendation for action, along with a transcript of the inquiry proceedings, to the Secretary of State. A finding of neglect will include recommendations for censure and/or removal of the responsible officers. If the Secretary does not concur in the finding, the procedure ends. If he does concur, he will forward any recommendations for censure or dismissal of an Ambassador to the President for his action. Action against lower ranking officers will be the responsibility of the Secretary of State.

I have designed this procedure with consideration to the regular system of inspections, as a useful and necessary supplement.

I specifically recommend that such a panel be constituted immediately to investigate the accuracy of political reporting from the US Mission to the Republic of Vietnam. Specific attention should be paid to reporting of military actions, possible South Vietnamese ceasefire violations, instances of corruption and any other occurrences which might be seen as reflecting adversely on the South Vietnamese effort. In view of the demonstrated interest of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in this matter, and with a view toward maximizing the Department's credibility with Congress, I further strongly urge that the Committee be kept informed of the progress of this inquiry.

I request distribution of this message to be made to the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Management, the Director General of the Foreign Service, the Inspector General, and the Chairman of the Secretary's Open Forum Panel, in addition to the minimum distribution in State A-3592, May 2, 1974. Signed

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TOON

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DISSENT CHANNEL

E.O. 11652 AOB, DECLASS 3/1/75

TAGS: DGEN

SUBJECT: DISSENT MESSAGE FROM [REDACTED]  
REF: A-442 BELGRADE  
199382 STATE  
FOR [REDACTED]

B6

1. WE HAVE CONSIDERED CAREFULLY YOUR DISSENT MESSAGE AND HAVE CONSULTED FULLY WITH KEY OFFICERS IN THE DEPARTMENT ON IT. WE APPRECIATE RECEIVING YOUR VIEWS ON THIS IMPORTANT MATTER. THE DISSENT CHANNEL WAS CREATED FOR THIS PURPOSE AND SHOULD BE USED IN TIMELY FASHION WHENEVER APPROPRIATE.

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2. AS WE SEE IT, YOU HAVE RAISED TWO SEPARATE BUT RELATED ISSUES. FIRST, THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE REPORTING FROM OUR MISSION IN VIETNAM AS TO ITS THOROUGHNESS AND ACCURACY IN

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PERMITTING WASHINGTON POLICYMAKERS TO REACH SOUND POLICY JUDGMENTS; AND SECOND, THE NEED TO SUPPLEMENT THE REGULAR INSPECTION SYSTEM WITH SPECIAL INVESTIGATORY PROCEDURES TO REVIEW POLITICAL REPORTING FROM KEY MISSIONS.

3. IN CONSIDERING THE MOOSE-HEISSNER REPORT, DEPARTMENT OFFICERS RESPONSIBLE FOR VIETNAMESE AFFAIRS RECENTLY REVIEWED THE CONTENT OF REPORTING FROM THE SAIGON MISSION. THEY OBSERVED--AS YOU ALSO NOTED IN YOUR MESSAGE--THAT THERE IS A HEAVY MASS OF REPORTING FROM THE MISSION THROUGH

A NUMBER OF CHANNELS--STATE, CIA, USIA, DOD, AID. WHILE THERE IS SOME OVERLAPPING IN COVERAGE, THERE IS ALSO A CONSIDERABLE "DIVISION OF LABOR" BETWEEN THE VARIOUS AGENCIES NECESSITATED BY THE PERSONNEL AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE. IN ADDITION TO A WIDE VARIETY OF OFFICIAL REPORTS, POLICYMAKERS HAVE THE BENEFIT OF EXTENSIVE PRESS COVERAGE OF EVENTS IN VIETNAM, AND PERIODIC DEBRIEFINGS OF THE LARGE NUMBER OF OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL VISITORS TO THE AREA. IN OUR JUDGMENT--AND VIEWED FROM THE VANTAGE POINT OF THE CONSUMER--WE BELIEVE THAT THE GAPS THAT YOU PERCEIVED WHILE IN VIETNAM ARE ADEQUATELY COVERED THROUGH OTHER REPORTING CHANNELS WHICH WERE UNAVAILABLE TO YOU IN THE FIELD. IN SHORT, WE BELIEVE THAT THE TOTALITY OF INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO WASHINGTON POLICYMAKERS ON VIETNAM IS SUFFICIENT TO AFFORD THE DEPARTMENT AN ACCURATE PICTURE OF EVENTS AND TRENDS IN THAT COUNTRY.

4. WITH RESPECT TO YOUR SUGGESTION THAT A SPECIAL PANEL BE CREATED TO INVESTIGATE FOREIGN SERVICE REPORTING, WE ARE NOT PERSUADED THAT IT IS WISE OR NECESSARY TO CREATE A SPECIAL PANEL WHEN THE MANDATE OF THE OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL ALREADY INCLUDES PRECISELY THE SORT OF ISSUE YOU HAVE IDENTIFIED. A REVIEW OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REPORTING IS ONE OF THE NORMAL FEATURES OF POST INSPECTIONS, AND SPECIAL ATTENTION IS GIVEN TO EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS AND CONTENT OF THIS REPORTING. A REGULARLY SCHEDULED INSPECTION OF OUR PDSTS IN VIETNAM WILL TAKE PLACE IN JANUARY-APRIL 1975. DUE TO THE SIZE OF OUR OPERATIONS IN VIETNAM AND THE UNIQUE FEATURES OF OUR INVOLVEMENT IN THAT COUNTRY, THE INSPECTION WILL BE

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CARRIED OUT BY AN AUGMENTED TEAM OF SIX INSPECTORS. AS WE INDICATED TO YOU IN THE REFERENCED TELEGRAM, A COPY OF YOUR DISSENT MESSAGE WAS TRANSMITTED TO THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL.

5. WE WOULD NOT EXPECT THE INSPECTION REPORT TO BE FINISHED BEFORE MID-SPRING. THEREAFTER, IF YOU WISH, THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL WILL BE HAPPY TO DISCUSS THOSE ASPECTS OF THE REPORT WHICH BEAR ON THE CONCERNS OUTLINED IN YOUR MESSAGE WHEN YOU ARE NEXT IN WASHINGTON.

6. YOU URGED THAT THE CONGRESS BE KEPT INFORMED OF THE PROGRESS OF THE REVIEW OF FOREIGN SERVICE REPORTING FROM SAIGON. THERE ARE WELL ESTABLISHED PROCEDURES THROUGH WHICH INTERESTED MEMBERS OF THE CONGRESS REGULARLY ARE GIVEN ACCESS TO THE FINDINGS IN POST INSPECTION REPORTS. NATURALLY WE WILL OF COURSE ADHERE TO THOSE PROCEDURE IN THIS CASE.

7. WE RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF ASSURING OPEN CHANNELS FOR CONVEYING A FULL RANGE OF VIEWS ON IMPORTANT POLICY ISSUES. WE THINK WE HAVE MADE SOME PROGRESS ON THIS THROUGH THE CREATION OF A VARIETY OF CHANNELS FOR IN-HOUSE DISSENT AND THROUGH REMINDERS TO THE FIELD THAT THE POLICY DIALOGUE IN WASHINGTON IS ENHANCED THROUGH THE RECEIPT OF DIVERGING VIEWS FROM THE FIELD. AS YOU PROBABLY KNOW THE GUIDELINES SET FORTH IN FAM 243,2 WERE DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY TO ASSURE REPORTING OFFICERS AN OPPORTUNITY TO TRANSMIT THEIR VIEWS ON CONTROVERSIAL QUESTIONS IN UNUSUAL CASES. THOSE REGULATIONS PROVIDE THAT "WHEN THERE ARE CONFLICTING DIFFERENCES OF OPINION ON RELATIVELY IMPORTANT MATTERS WHICH CANNOT BE RESOLVED TO THE MUTUAL SATISFACTION OF THE DRAFTING AND REVIEWING OFFICERS, THE DRAFTING OFFICER'S REPORT SHALL BE SUBMITTED AND ACCOMPANIED BY WHATEVER COMMENTS OTHER OFFICERS MIGHT WISH TO MAKE." IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO SEE THAT THESE PROVISIONS ARE BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF CHIEFS OF MISSION AND MEMBERS OF THEIR STAFFS AT FREQUENT AND PERIODIC INTERVALS, AND WE WILL SEE THAT THIS IS DONE.

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8. IF YOU WISH TO COMMUNICATE FURTHER ON THIS SUBJECT AT THIS TIME OR FOLLOWING THE COMPLETION OF THE POST INSPECTION, WE WOULD WELCOME ANY ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS YOU MAY HAVE, EITHER THROUGH THE DISSIDENT CHANNEL OR THROUGH DIRECT CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL, THE DEPUTY UNDERSECRETARY FOR MANAGEMENT, OR THE DIRECTOR GENERAL, INGERSOLL.

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