

INCOMING TELEGRAM

Department of State

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Action

Control:

25713

Rec'd:

AUGUST 30, 1963

1:59 PM

SS

FROM: SAIGON

Info

TO: Secretary of State

NO: UNNUMBERED, AUGUST 30

cy # 2  
4/8/64

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EYES ONLY

OPERATIONAL IMMEDIATE

ACTION DEPARTMENT, PASS EXCLUSIVE FOR RUSK, BALL, HARRIMAN, AND HILSMAN; WHITE HOUSE, PASS EXCLUSIVE FOR BUNDY; SSO ACSI DA, PASS EXCLUSIVE FOR MCNAMARA AND GILPATRIC--PASS EXCLUSIVE FOR GENERAL TAYLOR AND GENERAL KRULAK.

CIA 65072

FOLLOWING IS CAS SAIGON [REDACTED]  
RECEIVED IN WASHINGTON AS IN 10175

1. CAS OFFICER HAS BEEN HAVING SERIES OF CONVERSATIONS OVER PAST SEVERAL DAYS WITH LT. COLONEL PHAM NGOC THAO, FORMER CHIEF OF KIEN HOA PROVINCE AND NOW NOMINALLY AN INSPECTOR OF STRATEGIC HAMLETS STATIONED AT PRESIDENCY.

2. COL. THAO HAS FIGURED PROMINENTLY IN PAST REPORTING ON COUP PLOTTING, BOTH ON PART OF TRAN KIM TUYEN AND NUYNH VAN LANG. COL THAO HAS FOR SOME MONTHS EXPRESSED HIS DISSATISFACTION WITH THE DIEM REGIME QUITE OPENLY AND HAS EVEN WRITTEN NOTES TO THIS EFFECT TO CAS.

3. ON 30 AUGUST COL THAO REPORTED TO CAS OFFICER THAT HE HAD ATTENDED DINNER EVENING BEFORE WITH GENERALS KHIEM, KHANH, AND DUONG VAN MINH. MAIN POINTS OF CONVERSATION FOLLOW:

A. THEY STATED THAT IF SOMEONE ELSE TAKES INITIATIVE TO MOUNT COUP D'ETAT AGAINST GVN, THEY WILL SUPPORT IT.

B. GENERAL KHIEM POINTED OUT THAT GENERALS HAVE TOO MUCH TO LOSE BY INITIATING A COUP. BY THIS HE APPARENTLY MEANT IN THAO'S OPINION THE GENERALS' HOUSES POSITIONS AND MATERIAL POSSESSIONS.

C. THE GENERALS STATED THEY WOULD SUPPORT VICE PRESIDENT THO AS TEMPORARY INTERIM GOVERNMENT. THIS WOULD REPRESENT LEGALITY.

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SANITIZED
E.O. 13526, SEC. 3.5
NLK-17-476
By <i>MM</i> NARA, Date 3/7

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D. GENERALS KHIEM AND KHANH AGREED THAT THEY WOULD SUPPORT GENERAL MINH IF BOTH DIEM AND NHU ARE KILLED DURING A COUP ATTEMPT. THEY WOULD SUPPORT THO ONLY IF NHU SURVIVED A COUP ATTEMPT AND IN PREFERENCE TO NHU.

E. GENERALS FOR FIRST TIME OPENLY INDICATED THEIR OPPOSITION TO NHU. WHEREAS AS RECENTLY AS ONE WEEK AGO THEY WOULD PERHAPS PRIVATELY INDICATE THEIR OPPOSITION TO NHU, THEY NOW STATE THIS AS A GROUP.

F. GENERALS SAID THAT IF FIRST STEP OF ATTEMPTED COUP IS SUCCESSFUL, I.E., THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT DIEM, THEY WOULD THEN SUPPORT THE COUP OPENLY. GENERALS KHANH AND KHIEM PROMISED THEY WOULD DO THEIR BEST TO SEND UNITS IN WRONG DIRECTIONS IN CASE THEY WERE INSTRUCTED TO TAKE STEPS TO CRUSH COUP ATTEMPT.

G. COLONEL THAO TOLD GENERALS IT MIGHT BE NECESSARY TO MOVE MILITARY UNITS IN SAIGON. THAT IS, SOME UNITS INCLINED TO SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD BE MOVED AWAY FROM PALACE AND OTHER UNITS THAT MIGHT SUPPORT A COUP ATTEMPT WOULD BE BROUGHT INTO POSITION WHERE THEY COULD DO SO. GENERALS AGREED THEY WOULD DO THEIR BEST TO IMPLEMENT THIS SUGGESTION. THEY ALSO SAID THEY WOULD TRY TO MAKE SUGGESTIONS TO COLONEL LE QUANG TUNG TO HAVE THE LATTER MOVE SOME OF HIS UNITS OUT OF THE WAY. COL THAO CLAIMED THAT SOME UNITS HAVE ALREADY BEEN MOVED AND THAT THIS IS PROCEEDING WELL.

H. COL THAO CLAIMED THAT HIS GROUP NOW CAN COUNT ON THREE BATTALIONS. THEY HOPE TO HAVE A TOTAL OF FIVE BATTALIONS. HE SAID THAT THE PLAN IS TO USE THREE BATTALIONS TO HIT THE PALACE, KEEPING TWO BATTALIONS IN RESERVE. THIS IS BASED ON GROUP'S BELIEF THAT THEY MUST HAVE ENOUGH FORCES TO CONTROL THE SITUATION FOR THREE OR FOUR HOURS. THIS WOULD GIVE GENERALS TIME TO PROCLAIM SUPPORT AND COME TO THE ASSISTANCE OF THE COUP GROUP.

I. THAO SAID THAT HIS GROUP HOPES TO EXECUTE A COUP WITHIN ONE MONTH AND PREFERABLY SOONER. HE SAID THAT THERE ARE RISKS INVOLVED IN HASTY ACTION AND RISKS INVOLVED IN WAITING TOO LONG. THE GROUP IS ATTEMPTING TO DETERMINE THE BEST TIMING.

J. THAO SAID THAT THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS WOULD BE WELCOME IN A NEW GOVERNMENT: VU VAN MAU, TRAN VAN CHUONG, TRAN LE QUANG, VU VAN THAI, HUYNH VAN LANG, NGUYEN HUU CHAU. THAO ALSO SAID THAT OPPOSITION POLITICIANS, FOR EXAMPLE DAI VIET LEADERS, WOULD BE CONSIDERED IF THEY AGREED WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF THE GROUP. HE SAID THAT THE GROUP IS NOT NOW IN CONTACT WITH THE DAI VIET PARTY.

K. THAO SAID THAT HE WOULD WISH TO BECOME HEAD OF MILITARY SECURITY IN A NEW GOVERNMENT.

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L. THAO STATED THAT HE DID NOT KNOW IF HIS GROUP CONSISTED OF THE "BEST MEN" BUT HE WAS CERTAIN THAT IT CONSISTED OF THE "MOST DETERMINED".

4. CAS COMMENT: WE BELIEVE THAO IS TRYING TO PLAN AND ORGANIZE TOWARD A COUP AT SOME INDETERMINATE TIME. WILL ATTEMPT SOME ASSESSMENT OF THAO'S ACTIVITIES 31 AUG. REF PARA 3 G, THAO APPEARS UN AWARE THAT THE GENERALS HE WAS TALKING WITH LACKS THE CAPABILITY OF MOVING TROOP UNITS AROUND WITHOUT DIEM'S APPROVAL, THAT IS, AT THIS TIME AND IN THE ABSENCE OF A COUP ATTEMPT ON THEIR OWN PART.

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JTC

NOTE: ADVANCE DELIVERY S/S-O AT 2:19 PM, AUGUST 30.

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