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16b

18 October 1961

1. The following report has been received by CAS, Washington from CAS, Saigon:

"A. Dr. Tran Kim Tuyen raised the issues stated in TDCS-3/490,238 (18 October 1961) himself with CAS representative and made a very strong plea that it be handled discreetly but to determine what action could be undertaken. As alternative proposal to sending Ngo Dinh Nhu to talk with President Kennedy and bring back gospel, Dr. Tuyen suggested that General Lansdale in capacity of former old friend suggest to President Diem the desired measures, especially the delegation of authority in a friendly but firm heart-to-heart talk. Dr. Tuyen expressly stated that President Diem would not take such advice from Ambassador, and cited the example of the serious breach between Ambassador Durbrow and President Diem which was occasioned by the former's blunt insistence on the need for government reforms. Dr. Tuyen also ruled out any such recommendations by General Taylor as inappropriate and unacceptable to President Diem. Dr. Tuyen said that only the Presidential level should be used. (sic)

"B. Ambassador and political counselor briefed immediately following the conversation on the above as well as the information in TDCS-3/490,238.

"C. In view of TDCS-3/490,238 and the close link of political viewpoint of Dr. Tuyen and Col. Nguyen Van Chau, believe both may be singing different versions of the same tune. Will try to find out how President Diem's declaration of national emergency of 18 October, and particularly the means of implementation, affect both."

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ON THEIR OWN. ON RESUMPTION OF NORMAL UNIVERSITY LIFE, UNIVERSITY OF HUE HAS REOPENED EXCEPT FOR MEDICAL FACULTY WHICH EXPECTED OPEN THIS WEEK; HOWEVER, STUDENT ATTENDANCE FROM 60-70 PERCENT AND GENERAL ATMOSPHERE AT UNIVERSITY REMAINS SULLEN. NO FIRM INFORMATION WHEN UNIVERSITY OF SAIGON MAY REOPEN. APPEARS THAT GVN NOW RPT NOW ATTEMPTING ASSESS WHETHER STUDENTS ACTUALLY WILL ATTEND CLASSES IN SUFFICIENT NUMBERS TO GIVE APPEARANCE OF NORMALCY.

GVN GENERAL POSITION RE BUDDHISTS IS THAT BUDDHIST ISSUE SOLVED. WHILE OVER ONE HUNDRED BUDDHIST BONZES ARE FAITHFUL RELEASED FROM JAIL IN HUE RECENTLY, MANY REMAIN UNDER DETENTION INCLUDING TWO LEADING BONZES WHO NEGOTIATED JOINT COMMUNIQUE OF JUNE 16 AND RANKING LAY LEADER. SUCH ACTIONS TAKEN BY GVN TO DATE CAN BE INTERPRETED AS MOVES ON GVN PART TO DEMONSTRATE BUDDHIST PROBLEM SOLVED RATHER THAN AS CONCESSIONS TO BUDDHISTS. ALSO, SOME INDICATION THAT GVN WILL NOT RPT NOT MOVE QUICKLY TO REPEAL OR MODIFY DECREE LAW 10. IN MEANTIME BUDDHIST FAITHFUL STAYING AWAY FROM PAGODAS THROUGH FEAR OF GOVERNMENT REPRISALS. IN SUM, GVN APPEARS BELIEVE ANY PREVIOUS CONCESSIONS TO BUDDHIST UNDER US PRESSURE ARE INTERPRETED BY BUDDHIST LEADERSHIP AS WEAKNESS AND FURTHER CONCESSIONS NOT RPT NOT WARRANTED AND SELF-DEFEATING.

NOTHING SIGNIFICANT TO REPORT RE LAND REFORM. SIMILARLY FEW RECENT INDICATIONS (IF ANY) RE SPECIFIC RE-EMPHASIS OF POLITICAL ASPECTS OF STRATEGIC HAMLET PROGRAM, WHICH WOULD BE GEARED IN ANY EVENT TO TEMPO OF CONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIC HAMLETS. HAMLET ELECTIONS ARE PROCEEDING AS HAMLETS BUILT AND ORGANIZED. SELF-HELP PROJECTS AND ECONOMIC FOLLOW-ON ASSISTANCE IN DEVELOPMENT PHASE ARE RECEIVING GOOD RECEPTION BY HAMLET POPULACE. CONCRETE BENEFITS CAN BE EXPECTED TO RESULT IN PROGRESSIVE IDENTIFICATION OF HAMLET POPULACE WITH THE GOVERNMENT AT LEAST ON LOCAL LEVEL.

GVN HAS NOT RPT NOT ABANDONED EXTREME POLICE MEASURES AND SHOWS NO RPT NO INCLINATION DO SO IN IMMEDIATE FUTURE. NIGHT ARRESTS CONTINUE ALTHOUGH ON REDUCED SCALE. SIMILARLY, NO RPT NO ACTION HAS BEEN TAKEN BY GVN TO RESTORE CIVIL LIBERTIES. ON CONTRARY, ACTIONS TO DATE SEEM DESIGNED TO IMPRESS ANY POTENTIAL OPPOSITIONISTS AMONG EDUCATED CLASSES THAT THEY CAN

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NOT COUNT ON ANY GUARANTEES OF CIVIL LIBERTIES AND ARE AT MERCY OF SECURITY ORGANS OF THE REGIME.

WITH REGARD TO REFURBISHING GVN IMAGE THROUGH BROADENING OF GOVERNMENT, ETC; NO CONCRETE ACTIONS HAVE BEEN TAKEN. RUMORS PERSIST THAT DIEM WILL ANNOUNCE CABINET CHANGES AND REALIGNMENT CERTAIN GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONS. HOWEVER, SHOULD THIS OCCUR IT LIKELY TO BE MERE WINDOW DRESSING SINCE MOST UNLIKELY DIEM NOW CONTEMPLATES ANY ACTION WHICH MIGHT UNDERMINE POWER POSITION AND SOLIDARITY OF NGO FAMILY. WHILE WE CANNOT DISCOUNT POSSIBILITY OF CABINET SHUFFLE FOR OPTICAL PURPOSES, WE SEE NO SIGNS THAT ANY REDUCTION OF INFLUENCE OF THE NHU'S IS IN THE OFFING. IN FACT, HARASSMENT OF AMERICANS BOTH THROUGH NEWSPAPER ATTACKS, ARRESTS OF EMBASSY AND USOM LOCAL EMPLOYEES, AND GENERAL FREEZE ON NORMAL CONTACTS BETWEEN AMERICANS AND THEIR VIETNAMESE COUNTERPARTS WOULD INDICATE THAT FAMILY STILL BELIEVES IT HAS STRONG CARDS TO PLAY.

AT THIS JUNCTURE LITTLE PROSPECT FOR PUBLIC AND OFFICIAL STATEMENT BY DIEM BEFORE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SETTING NEW TONE FOR GOVERNMENT. DIEM'S SPEECH ON OCTOBER 7 CHARACTERIZED BY AMBIGUOUS POSITION TOWARD US, A CALL FOR SELF-SUFFICIENCY WITH XENOPHOBIC OVERTONES, A CATALOGUE OF NATIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS, AND AN EFFORT TO BLAME NEGATIVE FACTORS ON COMMUNISTS AND OTHER MACHINATIONS FROM OUTSIDE SVN.

6. US/GVN RELATIONS: NO RPT NO GENERAL IMPROVEMENT HAS BEEN NOTED IN GVN CAMPAIGN OF DIVISIVE PRESS ATTACKS ON CIA, USIS, EMBASSY, ETC. RECENT TREND IS TO PLACE BLAME ON US GOVERNMENT RATHER THAN SINGLING OUT SPECIFIC AGENCIES. WHILE CAMPAIGN WAXES AND WANES, MAJOR THRUST IS STILL ONE OF CONFRONTATION WITH US POLICY AS GVN WISHES TO INTERPRET IT.

GVN APPEARS TO HAVE FOCUSED ON PARAGRAPH IN WHITE HOUSE STATEMENT OF OCTOBER 3 ON SERIOUSNESS OF POLITICAL SITUATION AS INDICATION US WILL CONTINUE APPLY PRESSURE FOR POLITICAL CHANGES WHICH THEY NOT PREPARED GRANT. WE BELIEVE US PROGRAM OF PRESSURES HAVE PUT DIEM/NHU OFF-BALANCE AND THEY ATTEMPTING ASSESS STRENGTH OF US RESOLVE; HOWEVER TOO EARLY JUDGE ULTIMATE /OUTCOME.