

TOP SECRET - SENSITIVE

CALCULATED-RISK BASIS IN ORDER TO CREATE THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SHOCK WHICH I BELIEVED ESSENTIAL AT THIS TIME. PRESIDENT MADE NO FURTHER COMMENT EXCEPT TO TELL ME THAT HE WOULD CONSIDER THE SUGGESTIONS I HAD GIVEN HIM.

I THEN AGAIN BEGGED HIS INDULGENCE AND ASKED IF I COULD BRING UP A MOST SENSITIVE AND DELICATE MATTER WHICH I FELT IN HIS INTEREST AND IN INTEREST OF VIETNAM I SHOULD DISCUSS VERY FRANKLY. FROM NOTES IN FRENCH WHICH I READ BUT DID NOT LEAVE WITH HIM, (COPY BY POUCH), I DISCUSSED GROWING CRITICISM OF HIS PROTER AND MADAM NHU, AS WELL AS DR. BUYEN AND SUGGESTED THAT THEY SHOULD BE ASSIGNED ABROAD. DIEM DID NOT INTERRUPT ME BUT ASSUMED SOMEWHAT GRIM, AND I DETECTED SLIGHTLY HURT MANNER. HIS ONLY COMMENT WAS THAT THESE RUMORS ABOUT THE NHUS WERE SPREAD BY COMMUNISTS. I REPLIED THAT I WAS SURE THAT COMMUNISTS WERE DOING ALL THEY COULD TO SPREAD SUCH RUMORS BUT I REPEATED THAT THE UNFORTUNATE PART ABOUT IT IS THAT MORE AND MORE PEOPLE ARE BELIEVING THESE REPORTS--VIETNAMESE LOYAL TO HIM, THOSE WHO MIGHT BE CONSIDERED IN THE OPPOSITION, FOREIGN CIVILIANS AND FOREIGN DIPLOMATS TO SAY NOTHING TO THE PRESS. I REPEATED, AS I HAD PREVIOUSLY, THESE REPORTS WERE SERIOUSLY DAMAGING PRESTIGE OF HIS REGIME.

AFTER DISCUSSING THE NHUS, I AGAIN APOLOGIZED, FIRST OF ALL FOR BRINGING UP THIS PERSONAL AND SENSITIVE SUBJECT, AS WELL AS THE OTHER SUGGESTIONS I HAD MADE. I AGAIN ASKED HIS INDULGENCE AND FORGIVENESS FOR SPEAKING SO FRANKLY AND ADDED I HOPED HE WOULD UNDERSTAND THAT I WAS TALKING AS A SINCERE FRIEND.

COMMENT: CONSIDERING THE FAIRLY FRANK CRITICISM I MADE OF HIS REGIME AND FAMILY, DIEM OUTWARDLY SHOWED NO REAL RESENTMENT. AFTER I APOLOGIZED FOR BRINGING UP THE NHU QUESTION, DIEM REMAINED SILENT FOR A BIT AND THEN WE DISCUSSED LAO DEVELOPMENTS IN A MATTER-OF-FACT REALISTIC WAY. I SAID I WAS SURE THAT PARSONS WOULD FILL HIM IN REGARDING LATEST LAO DEVELOPMENTS WHEN HE IS HERE ON 18TH. I THEN REITERATED MY CLOSING APOLOGETIC COMMENTS ON THE NHU QUESTION AND TOOK MY LEAVE, WHICH WAS QUITE CORDIAL.

DURBROW

TOP SECRET - SENSITIVE