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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLYMEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: Dr. Kissinger
Mr. Sainteny

DATE AND PLACE: September 27, 1970
Mr. Sainteny's apartment, Paris

Vietnam

During the conversation, Mr. Sainteny made the following points regarding Vietnam:

-- The GVN is very weak and unpopular and may not even survive until the end of its mandate. He has learned this from his contacts among Vietnamese exiles in Paris.

-- The Buddhists are emerging as a very strong force in South Vietnam. They are nationalists, not Communists, and they would oppose any Communist takeover. (To which Dr. Kissinger remarked that their political thinking has not always been very clear.)

-- If the GVN fell, it would not be replaced by a Communist government but by some government in the middle.

-- Madame Binh is in touch with many Vietnamese exiles in Paris, including former ministers, and has suggested that some of them might take part in a coalition government. Many of the Vietnamese exiles in Paris are former ministers who still have political contacts at home.

- The other side might be interested in a cease-fire accompanied by a clear schedule for U. S. withdrawal.

-- The North Vietnamese, like the South Vietnamese, are very tired of the war. But North Vietnam was not ready to negotiate in the spring of this year, even though Le Duc Tho was in Paris.

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-2-

-- Regarding Colonel Borman, Mr. Sainteny had seen Mai Van Bo who said that he would not receive Borman. Bo told Mr. Sainteny that he knew the North Vietnamese position on POW's, and there was no sense in Bo's repeating it.

Dr. Kissinger made the following points:

-- We are prepared to be generous in working out political possibilities which would give the NLF a fair chance. But we cannot do what they ask, which is to leave and at the same time do their political work for them.

-- It is not Thieu or Ky or Khiem as individuals who matter. The Communists do not want to get rid of them in themselves but they want to get rid of the organized non-Communist opposition. Then they can form a coalition with the non-organized non-Communists who cannot possibly survive under those circumstances.

Cambodia

-- Mr. Sainteny's comments on Cambodia were confused. He began by saying that Cambodia had been a mistake for us. But he recognized that we had no part in the coup and said that once the coup had taken place we had done the only thing we could in going after the sanctuaries. However, we did not get everything.

-- Mr. Sainteny said he had lunched with Prince Sihanouk on the day that the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong missions in Cambodia were attacked. They had both agreed that Sihanouk should go back to Phnom Penh immediately (in which case, Mr. Sainteny believes, the government would not have fallen). However, the Prince decided to return by a long route, via Moscow, which doomed his government. He apparently did so because his wife wanted to see their children who are students in Prague and Peking.

Communist China

Mr. Sainteny said that he frequently saw the Communist Chinese Ambassador in Paris, Huang Chen. Dr. Kissinger said that we had tried to have conversations with the Chinese but that they seemed to get nowhere, even though we have no basic problems with the Chinese.

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-3-

Dr. Kissinger asked if Mr. Sainteny could set up a channel with Huang Chen. Our other channels were not satisfactory, and the one in Warsaw was much too much in the public (and the Soviet) view.

Mr. Sainteny said that he would try to arrange something. He was a little concerned because he did not speak Chinese, and whenever he talked with Huang Chen it was through an interpreter. The latter, of course, was an intelligence officer. However, Mr. Sainteny thought he might be able to arrange a channel through an associate who spoke Chinese and who, he thought, could speak to Chen privately. Mr. Sainteny said he would write to Mr. Smyser to let Dr. Kissinger know what happened.

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