

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTONDECLASSIFIED
PER E.O. 13526
2023-0466-M(1.04)
KBN 11/8/2024

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with President Tran Duc Luong of
Vietnam (U)PARTICIPANTS: The President
John Podesta, White House Chief of Staff
Samuel Berger, assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
Gene Sperling, Assistant to the President
for Economic Policy
Douglas Peterson, U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam
Stanley Roth, Assistant Secretary of State
for East Asian and Pacific Affairs
Jack Pritchard, Senior Director for Asian
Affairs, National Security Council
(Notetaker)
Sean Son Lam, Interpreter

President Tran Duc Luong
Nguyen Dzy Nien, Foreign Minister
Vu Khoan, Minister of Trade
Nguyen Canh Dinh, Head of the President's
Office
Chu Tuan Nha, Minister of Science,
Technology and Environment
Nguyen Dinh Bin, Standing Deputy Foreign
Minister
Nguyen Huy Hieu, Deputy Minister of National
Defense
Le Van Bang, Vietnamese Ambassador to the
United States
Nguyen Manh Hung, Director of the Americas
Department
Nguyen Trung, Notetaker
Tran Thanh Huan, Notetaker
Luong Van Ly, InterpreterDATE, TIME November 17, 2000, 11:30 a.m. - 12:50 p.m.
AND PLACE: Presidential Palace, Hanoi, Vietnam~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Classified by: Robert A. Bradtke

Reason: 1.5 (d)

Declassify On: 11/30/2010

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President Luong: Welcome to you and your distinguished guests. I wish you success during your stay in Vietnam. I consider the trip a milestone in the normalization of relations during your eight years as President. I hope this is a new beginning of the relationship, moving toward full normalization of relations.
(U)

The President: Thank you for making my delegation feel welcome. I was moved by the arrival ceremony. The Vietnamese people have given me a great welcome. My wife arrived several hours before me and also received a great welcome. I am delighted to make the trip. It completes a crucial phase that we have been working on for eight years. In nine weeks, we will have a new President. We have built a firm foundation he can work with in the future. I hope I can build on the progress we have made during my visit. It is important to keep moving forward as we have in the last eight years. We have some things we disagree on, such as free expression. One encouraging thing to raise is the response I received in the United States by the Vietnamese-American community to this trip. Most felt estranged from their native land, but strongly support efforts to build relations. Many said that they hoped to be permitted to contribute to this relationship. (X)

First, I want to thank you on behalf of all American people for the work that that has been done in the last eight years on the fullest possible accounting of our POW/MIAs. I hope we can continue that effort. I hope we can do more to help you to account for those you have lost in the conflict. I brought with me 360,000 pages of documents that may be useful to help in your accounting. I also want to thank you for your cooperation on migration issues. Ninety-nine percent of the resettled ROVRs have been approved. This is important for our NGOs, and I thank you for that. (X)

I believe the trade agreement will boost Vietnam's economic growth. Your leadership took risks in signing the agreement, but benefits can be very large in an open economy. Both sides will need to ratify the agreement. USAID will provide \$2 million per year over the next three years to support implementation of the agreement. I hope that Vietnam will support maximum growth of the private sector to get the most benefit from the capacity of the nation. I want to do all that I can to get investors here, but I need your support. American companies here are excited; many have sent representatives on the trip. Their success will help us in our endeavors. (X)

Thank you for making our Ambassador so welcome. We have been friends for a long time. He is a symbol of my personal commitment to the relationship. His good reception made it possible for him to give a good impression of the relationship in the United States. (U)

President Luong: Thank you for speaking on issues of common interest. Thank you for accepting my invitation to visit Vietnam and to exchange views on our two countries and to review the progress of the last eight years. As the representative of the host country, I want to brief you on recent economic and social developments in Vietnam. Vietnam is a developing country with a low development level. It has been the victim of protracted conflict. Therefore, our most urgent task is to have peace, the most favored condition to build up a country and develop its economy. We have been carrying on our *Doi Moi* policy for the last 15 years. In the last decade, we have been happy to record significant achievements. Over 10 years the average growth rate has been 7.2 percent; in the highest period it reached 9-10 percent. Foreign trade has grown 20 percent over the last ten years. Thanks to the national economic potential, living conditions of the people has increased significantly. In addition to economics, social policy is very important to the government. (U)

Development of human resources and educational training are important targets in 2000. Training and education at the university level have expanded satisfactorily. There are about one million students throughout the country. Medical care and public health are very important. Family planning efforts have resulted in a reduction of the birth rate from 2 percent to 1.53 percent. The number of medical doctors and staff has increased considerably over the last few years. We have succeeded in eradicating social diseases such as malaria, leprosy, and TB. We have achieved almost 100 percent of child vaccinations against the six most serious diseases that threaten children. We are moving to the next step in our vaccination program to safeguard children's health. We have a successful program to fight poverty and hunger in Vietnam. In the past, 40 percent of the population was under the poverty line. In 2000, that has been reduced to 13 percent, an achievement recognized and appreciated by international organizations. In short, the *Doi Moi* policy in political and economic fields has been successful and has the approval of the people. In the years ahead, we will continue the policy to try to amplify the achievements we have achieved so far. It has made it possible to overcome several difficulties in the past ten years. In the 1980s, economic

difficulties caused inflation to be in the three-figure range at times. In the last ten years we have put an end to hyperinflation, stabilized the currency, and achieved economic results. (U)

Our Doi Moi policy mitigated the negative impact of the 1998-1999 financial crisis, and we have fully recovered from the financial crisis this year. We have been integrated into ASEAN and APEC, and we are trying to cooperate with other organizations for peace, stability, and economic prosperity for us and the region. We are determined to go further down the Doi Moi road and seek further renovation. It will enable us to achieve further and bigger results. We hope to make Vietnam an industrial country by 2020. In foreign relations, we want to be a friend to all. We attach great importance to neighboring countries and big powers. Relations with the United States are very important. We have tried to pursue normalization and full development of relations in order to create favorable conditions for the future. We are committed to talk about the future without going through the painful past. We appreciate the efforts of the last eight years to achieve normalization of relations. Since normalization and the establishment of embassies, I am happy to note both of our ambassadors are working hard to contribute to the furtherance of relations. (U)

With regard to the past, the issue of biggest concern is the legacy of the war. In line with our cultural traditions, Vietnam appreciates the preoccupation of America with the MIA issue. We have extended a large degree of assistance, which has resulted in significant and positive results. I am glad you have acknowledged and expressed appreciation for these results. In Vietnam, we also have our own preoccupation with the legacy of the war. According to our statistics, we have 300,000 MIAs unaccounted for. I want to thank you and the American government for your cooperation to address the issue. Thank you for bringing 360,000 pages of documents, which will help very much. (U)

The second problem is clearing of unexploded ordinance. They are still threatening the normal life of the people. I am also pleased to note that the United States and NGOs have started to help us to address the issue. There is a huge amount of work ahead of us. It is a dangerous program. We are looking forward to receiving more assistance from U.S. organizations and agencies. (U)

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The third problem is much more sensitive: victims of Agent Orange. We have not yet obtained many results. This is an issue of grave concern and emotional concern. I want to mention two problems: the existence of former U.S. bases contaminated during the war and the individual victims. Disease is being transferred to children and grandchildren; I have visited many families in the past few years. There are no words to express how distressing this is. We urgently need your help. You have been examining the cases on the U.S. side. The Administration has adopted measures to assist Americans, so you fully appreciate the distressing character of these victims. I am also glad to see that our scientists are starting to cooperate and will be meeting in Singapore in November. I hope we can have concrete action, which can be implemented right away without waiting for research results. (C)

It has been thoughtful of your Administration to assist victims of natural disasters in the last two years. You have also provided assistance to address the AIDS problem. We are also interested in education and training, which will help in our strategy of industrializing the country and modernization of the economy. I hope the new administration will continue to give consideration in addressing these humanitarian fields. (C)

I want to be very honest. The leaders are under pressure by the people to address the consequences of the war. For the sake of reconciliation, we need to cooperate to address all issues. I also think that if we can expand relations fast enough with concrete results that will be good (enough) to settle the legacy of the war. (C)

I earnestly hope the Bilateral Trade Agreement will be ratified by both sides. It will help businesses on both sides to be successful. I want to thank you for the technical assistance in the form of \$2 million per year for three years. I would like to reiterate what we have said during the BTA negotiations. I hope you can grant support for our entry into the WTO. It is our desire to integrate into the world economy. We are members of ASEAN and APEC and have applied for WTO membership. These are bold decisions with risks as well as benefits attached. The decision is made, and we are determined to overcome obstacles to bring about industrialization and modernization programs. (C)

You are interested in private sector development. Our policy is to encourage and facilitate all participants in our economy. We want the private sector to invest in the national economy. Contributions from the private sector are very important. The reality in Vietnam is that the private sector is small. Entrepreneurs have not received the proper training in the field of management. We need to encourage that development in the future. In our economic development strategy, we give importance to the development of new and sophisticated sectors such as biotechnology, new materials, and Information Technology (IT). We are now developing a bold program for IT, aiming to bring the capacity of the Vietnamese people and science together. There are only a few thousand technicians and experts in the field of IT. We want to develop this field to meet our needs. We have 200 colleges and universities with one million students. Among these, we hope to train a significant contingent of IT technicians. We also have 300 companies involved in IT. We are looking forward to cooperating with your technology sector and getting positive results in the future.

(C)

We have 80 million people that represent an important market. Our industrial program needs machinery to carry it out. Vietnam is endowed with natural resources; the most important of which is its people. We have a young population that is studious and hard working. It can be developed satisfactorily. The United States is among the leading economic powers with a huge capacity in the field of education and training. In the spirit of goodwill and friendship, transparency and noninterference, the prospect for cooperation is very bright. It is the most positive way to settle the legacy of the war. (C)

With regard to the Vietnamese community in the United States, I am happy with their successful integration into American society. I am happy to note they are doing quite well in the United States, particularly in advanced scientific work. Vietnamese children are successful in school. I am also careful to mention the value of culture and traditions in Vietnam. Many keep in touch with their families in Vietnam. They can be very helpful in the process of developing relations of our two countries. Unfortunately, there is a small portion that is hostile to Vietnam. We practice the policy of reconciliation and natural entente. I would ask that the United States assist in explaining that policy to the Vietnamese-American community.

(C)

The President: That was a good review of the situation and issues of concern. Time is constrained so let me respond briefly and then get back to you in more detail later. First, your summary of health and education was impressive. I hope we can be supportive in any way we can with regard to demining. I want to do more and will follow up. With regard to your application to join WTO and your desire to have PNTR with us, I find this encouraging and would like to set up a system to be supportive of the implementation of the agreement. The capacity of the nation of Vietnam to achieve rapid growth for an extended period is great and I would like to support you. As far as Agent Orange goes, I hope you will forgive me, but I need to be straightforward. I am going beyond my talking points by saying that I believe we should do more, not only for the people of Vietnam but the people of the United States that were hurt. Our ability to do more is directly related to what we have done for our veterans. I ask your support in the meeting in Singapore and in joint research on dioxins. This is not a way of avoiding the issue, but it lays the foundation to do more. My successor will not be able to do more if we do not meet our obligations to our own veterans. If this is translated as a backdoor approach, it will lose in Congress. I sympathize with the suffering because of Agent Orange. I ask you to be part of the process. This is meant to lay the foundation for the future. One other point. I have also instructed our officials to give you a computer database of information that indicates where Agent Orange was handled or spread. This will help to locate intense storage sites. The ability of my successor to be more helpful on Agent Orange depends on the ability to do right by our own people. We need to be able to act on facts. (C)

President Luong: Thank you for your ideas. Time is running out. You will meet the Prime Minister and be received in audience by the General Secretary. We should move to witness the signing of the Science and Technology Agreement. (U)

-- End of Conversation --