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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Le Kha Phieu, Chairman of the  
Communist Party of Vietnam (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President  
Pete Peterson, Ambassador to Vietnam  
John Podesta, White House Chief of Staff  
Samuel Berger, Assistant to the President  
for National Security Affairs  
Gene Sperling, Assistant to the President  
for National Economic Affairs  
Gene B. Christy, Director for Asian Affairs,  
National Security Council (notetaker)

Le Kha Phieu, Communist Party Chairman  
Nguyen Dzy Nien, Foreign Minister  
Vu Khoan, Minister of Trade  
Nguyen Van Son, Head of the Central  
Committee for Foreign Affairs  
Nguyen Dinh Bin, Deputy Minister for Foreign  
Affairs  
Le Van Bang, Ambassador to the United States  
Nguyen Manh Hung, Director for Americas,  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Nguyen Trung (notetaker)  
Tran Thanh Huan (notetaker)  
Luong Van Ly (interpreter)

DATE, TIME November 18, 2000, 4:30-5:30 p.m.  
AND PLACE: Communist Party of Vietnam Headquarters,  
Hanoi, Vietnam

The President: I enjoyed my meetings yesterday with President  
Luong and Prime Minister Khai. Thank you for the warm reception  
you extended me and my family. The cultural performance last  
night was an excellent display of Vietnamese talent. (U)

(Members of the Press depart)

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Classified by: Robert A. Bradtke  
Reason: 1.5 (d)  
Declassify On: 12/1/2010

Chairman Phieu: Please begin. (U)

The President: I appreciate the work we have done together over the past several years. The normalization process is nearly complete. I was able to visit the excavation site where our people are working together to find the remains of missing American servicemen. This event is already running on American television networks. So there is a lot of good feeling toward the Vietnamese people in the United States now. (U)

The some 360,000 pages of documents I delivered to President Luong can assist you in the search for your own missing from the war. There will be more documents to come in about a month. I hope we will continue to work together. We need to share what is in our archives. Our efforts to find the missing are important because they bring our people closer together. (C)

I was also pleased that the United States has been able to work with you and provide disaster assistance for flooding over the past two years. USAID is funding a project through the UN Development Program to establish a disaster warning system in central Vietnam. (U)

I want to raise two points of some sensitivity:

We in the United States believe there is a close connection between stronger economic growth and greater openness. We hope in the future that our relationship will sustain a dialogue on human rights and religious freedom. Of course, your people need to do what is right for them. But, we want to continue to work together with you on these issues. (C)

Regarding China, I know there are some officials there who are troubled by the prospect of the United States and Vietnam getting closer. However, I have told President Jiang that our relations with you are not aimed at China. They are about building a better relationship with you. The United States wants a peaceful and prosperous Asia. That is the basis of all our activities in the region, and the basis for our progress with China. (C)

I have been very pleased with my trip. I welcome the progress made in the relationship over the past eight years. I will strongly encourage my successor to build on this relationship. Of course, this is something we will have to do together in accordance with your wishes, as well. (C)



Chairman Phieu: I welcome you and your family. The Vietnamese state and people highly appreciate what you have done over your two terms. You have made a valuable contribution to promotion of relations between our two countries. (U)

I was briefed on your talks with President Luong and Prime Minister Khai yesterday. The Vietnamese people followed your speech at Hanoi National University. You were welcomed at the university with applause and an invitation to return. I have also heard that people approached you on the street and asked you to come back again. (U)

I learned that in meetings with President Luong and Prime Minister Khai, you were straightforward in making your points. Naturally, to have better relations, we need to understand each other better. And, indeed, we have come to understand one another better during your term. This has permitted our relations to improve. And this gives hope for the future. (C)

We all have wishes to resolve the issues you just raised. For instance, it has been proposed to have annual economic meetings at high levels. Such meetings will permit discussions. And, from economic issues, it may be possible to move to other issues. (U)

Regarding the possible impact of U.S.-Vietnam relations on China, I do not think there was any impact. We now have diplomatic relations with 170 nations. Our party also has ties with Communist parties, socialist parties, and other political parties. We also trade with more than 150 countries. We have joined most international organizations except the WTO, which we will join eventually. We have ties with many nations, of which the United States is only one. (C)

We have even suggested to China that if they can offer high technology, they may work in our oil and gas sector. China is a big market, so our trade has grown. (C)

During my trip to France, Italy, and other European Union countries, it was agreed that where trade flourishes, there will be softer political feelings. We have agreed with these states not to link political conditions to trade. And, we have reassured China that our inviting you here has no impact on our relations. (C)

As I listened to your speech, I was struck by its straightforwardness and frankness. And I took note that you

contrasted Americans calling our war the "Vietnam war," while we call it the "anti-American war." We do not see it this way. We think we established peace in 1954. The country was not divided. There was a temporary demarcation line. However, Diem did not implement the Geneva Accords by holding elections in two years. In fact, there was no compliance ever, even though we called for elections under international supervision. (e)

Not only that, but Diem went further and claimed a border at the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel. It was irrational of him to say the border should be extended that far. We were thus freed to launch a war because a peaceful resolution was not possible. (e)

Over the past one thousand years, even though Vietnam is made up of 54 ethnic groups, we have all been born of one mother. We have to understand our roots, as well as the origins of the war. There were many American who opposed the war, and we enjoyed the support of the majority of the world's people. We need to draw lessons from the past. Even former Defense Secretary McNamara has come to appreciate this. We believe America will not repeat the past, and we should look to the future. (e)

Regarding reconciliation, after 1975, we needed to heal the wounds of war. I need to mention this, because this is our first meeting. We were at war for 30 years. We emerged from it with our economy in tatters. (e)

We have learned lessons from others about socialism. Now, we are embarked on a course to create a better socialism. And we have learned to promote social and other aspects of life. I think you can understand the situation in the 1980's when we had to import millions of tons of rice. We could only produce 4 million tons of rice annually in the Delta. Thanks to renewal, we now produce 20 million tons per year. We have even been able to supply rice to Cuba and North Korea to help them meet their food needs. Now, we can help others. And we are firm in our practice of socialism. The Eastern Europeans were not as successful. As I observed to Secretary Albright, our socialism has not only survived, but also prospered. (e)

We have been asked why we are privatizing. We have many sectors, like the state sector as in France. We have a cooperative sector, with farmers given more independence to own land. We also have a sector for private investment. All these sectors are treated equally, as long as they respect the law. We do not ban the private sector. And the economy is not



composed solely of the state sector. There is a 100 percent foreign investment sector. (C)

All of this is a kind of richness. It shows we have picked the correct way. (C)

And we rely on our own resources. We have a vast labor force, seventy percent of whom are engaged in farming. We have many natural resources. And we have strong maritime roots. Our level of education is not weak. All of these are the internal strengths we must promote. We must be masters in our own country. Our doors are wide open. We have relations with many nations. (C)

Regarding the current and future relationship with the United States, I believe that with continued understanding, relations will be fine. I believe we can have good relations. We can build on our Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement and cooperate in building a knowledge-based economy for Vietnam. (C)

I read that 300 companies have much of the world's wealth, and the gap between rich and poor countries is growing. The Bilateral Trade Agreement sees us as a developing country still at a low level. I think it would be better if the wealthy United States could give a helping hand to developing and least developed states. We need to ensure that a knowledge-based economy does not deepen the divide between rich and poor. When we are on an equal economic footing, then we will have political equality. (C)

It is possible to have good relations, even if we do not have the same system. You can visit here, even if we have a Communist Party leadership. I foresee even better relations between our two countries. And as for the American people, the Vietnamese people are grateful to them. We remember the images of anti-war protesters. As I watched television yesterday and saw Chelsea and Hillary in a village, I was reminded of the visit of the wife and daughter of the war protester Morrison (note: Norman Morrison, the man who self-immolated in front of the Pentagon). These activities symbolize the relations between our two peoples. (C)

I hope the Bilateral Trade Agreement will soon be ratified by both sides. I hope we will have the basis for further cooperation. (Points to his watch) I understand you are on a tight schedule and are due at a follow-on event. (C)

The President: I want to make a few brief points:

I think it is important that we continue to heal the wounds of war. I had detailed conversations with your president and prime minister about what we can do on Agent Orange and humanitarian demining cooperation. I assure you we want to continue to make progress. (C)

I agree the United States has a responsibility to try to close the gap between rich and poor nations. We have pioneered efforts to bridge the digital divide and to address the HIV/AIDS crisis. I believe these will help. (C)

Regarding the history of the two countries over the past 50 years, I know there has been much disagreement in the United States over the nature of the conflict in Vietnam. The people who fought in Vietnam, such as Ambassador Peterson, believed they were fighting for freedom and self-determination of the Vietnamese people. They were sure they were doing the right thing. But that is history, and the interesting thing is that now, we are making progress. We are free to discuss and to explore questions that were off limits before. It is possible to debate the right balance between the state and private sectors. And it is possible to discuss our differing concepts of the rights of the individual and the needs of the community. (C)

I hope our shared history will help us work on such problems successfully. (U)

Chairman Phieu: Exactly. But it is clear that Vietnam never brought troops to fight Americans on their soil, so it is not fair to say that we fought a war against the United States. I think these kinds of meetings are needed for deeper discussions. I would like to suggest that you are always welcome to come here. The warm welcome our people have afforded you shows how we feel. (U)

The President: When I am no longer President, I would enjoy coming back for a lengthier discussion. (C)

-- End of Conversation --