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SUBJECT : North Vietnamese Relations with Laos and Thailand

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

Australian Embassy First Secretary William Fisher called on DRV Embassy First Secretary Nguyen Van Thanh on April 5 for a general tour d'horizon. Fisher generally posed questions to Thanh on the Vientiane 1973 Agreement and other military and political issues in Laos. Thanh's answers by and large followed the LPF line which we have reported elsewhere. However, Thanh deliberately turned the conversation to the question of DRV relations with Laos and Thailand, and then made what appears to be an unusually open presentation on this subject. Fisher provided us with a copy of his memorandum of conversation with Thanh. The operative portion of this document is quoted below.

" Mr. Thanh said the North Vietnamese had felt that Thailand sought hegemony over Laos (and also that Thailand had revanchist claims to the west bank provinces of Sayaboury and Champassak) and this made North Vietnam concerned for the security of its own frontiers. For their part, the Thai leaders feared the North Vietnamese were seeking to exert hegemony

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over Laos and this made them concerned for Thailand's security. For a peaceful settlement both countries would have to be sure that neither side was trying to secure its predominance in Laos against the other. Thanh said that the Thais should realise that North Vietnam's priorities lay elsewhere; firstly, there was the task of reconstruction and development; secondly, there was the need to complete the democratic revolution in South Vietnam; thirdly, there was the reunification of all Vietnam. With all of these tasks, North Vietnam simply had neither the time nor the resources to try to dominate Laos. However, as long as American bases remained in Thailand, North Vietnam could not be sure that Thailand was similarly peacefully orientated.

" Mr. Thanh noted that nonetheless there had been positive developments in Thai policies recently which seemed to show that Thailand was gradually moving in the right direction. The North Vietnamese had been interested by Thanat Khoman's controversy some months ago with Lee Kuan Yew over American bases in Thailand; the North Vietnamese agreed entirely with Thanat's point of view. Again recently, Chartichai had looked forward to the eventual withdrawal of American bases from Thailand. Finally the Thais now wish to discuss with the North Vietnamese the issue of Vietnamese residents in northeast Thailand.

" I tried to get Mr. Thanh to elaborate on the issue of North Vietnamese refugees in Thailand, but without much success. He said there were two aspects to the problem - the humanitarian and the juridical. He could discuss the former aspect but not the latter. North Vietnam was concerned that the Vietnamese residents in Thailand should be well treated. There were four million Chinese and only a few thousand Vietnamese, but the Vietnamese seemed to have been put into a special category. Admittedly the Vietnamese

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