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PRESS BRIEFING BY NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR SANDY BERGER

**Hilton Hanoi Opera Hotel
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5:25 P.M. (L)

MR. CROWLEY: Welcome to Hanoi, an historic day for the President and the American delegation. Our briefer joined the President earlier this afternoon the tour the Temple of Literature, and I think he found inspiration in the fact that he walked through the Gate of Great Synthesis and passed the Well of Heavenly Clarity. Great preparation to read-out the first day of the President's visit to Hanoi. And we give you the National Security Advisor, Samuel R. Berger.

MR. BERGER: Mr. Crowley will soon be joining the speechwriting staff at the White House, the NSC. This truly has been, I think, an extraordinary day, as we've witnessed the warm welcome of the Vietnamese people for the President and for the United States on the first visit of an American President to a united Vietnam, to Hanoi -- to Vietnam at all -- in 31 years.

Today culminates an effort that has been underway for eight years to rebuild our relationship with Vietnam, to normalize our relationship, but to do so in a way that is true to our values and with total fidelity to those who served here, and particularly to the families of those who have people in Vietnam who are unaccounted for and missing.

Today I think also changes the character of the relationship going forward. I believe that after today, after this trip, another dimension of that relationship will be possible.

Let me briefly go through the two meetings that the President had -- one with President Luong, and then with the Prime Minister -- and I'll do this really as the meeting unfolded. President Luong warmly welcomed the President and thought his trip was very important to Vietnam. The President expressed his gratefulness for the reception that we received since we've arrived here yesterday and said he hoped to use this trip to build the foundation for further progress.

He thanked President Luong for the cooperation that we have received in the past several years from the government of Vietnam for the fullest possible accounting, and provided to President Luong 350,000 pages of archival material -- I can describe for you later. This is now the second installment of documents that were provided to the Vietnamese, just as they have provided us with hundreds of thousands of documents to help locate 300,000 Vietnamese who remain missing.

The President also expressed his gratitude for Vietnam's cooperation with the immigration program that has provided for the relocation of a very large number of Vietnamese to the United States.

He talked about the trade agreement which was signed in July. This is a very important agreement, the bilateral trade agreement, really a blueprint for our future economic relationship, and represents a decision by Vietnam, not unlike the decision that China made in entering the WTO, to proceed in opening its economy to international investment, to trade. The President indicated that we would be

providing Vietnam with \$2 million a year over the next three years to help them implement this treaty. It has to be ratified, obviously, first by both Vietnam and by the United States Congress.

President Luong then proceeded to give a rather detailed report, briefing on the state of Vietnam today; described it as a developing country, overcoming a protracted war, and said that the most urgent desire of the Vietnamese people is for peace, so we can develop our country and our people.

He talked about the Doi-Moi policy the President referenced earlier. This is basically a policy of openness, economic openness in particular, that the Vietnamese adopted about 15 years ago. During the preceding 10 years, growth in Vietnam, according to President Luong, has averaged 7.2 percent and foreign trade has grown 20 percent a year.

He talked about the emphasis on social policy -- a million students in the country -- a million students enrolled in this country; family planning, birth rate down from 2 percent to 1.5 percent; health care, poverty level gone from 40 percent to 13 percent; relations with the outside world. This is a country, as, of course, you all know, that was quite isolated from the outside world, now not only a member of ASEAN, but the Chairman this year of ASEAN, part of APEC, and he indicated, prepared to go further down the road of becoming part of the international environment, international system.

He talked then about the bilateral relationship and the issues which, as he described it, would fully develop our normalization. Vietnam has gone through an unhappy and painful past, he said, and that is why we appreciate so much your President Clinton's effort to achieve normalization.

He spoke about the legacy of war, specifically the accounting for Vietnamese and American missing; the problem of unexploded ordnance that continues to be vexing; the issue of Agent Orange, which he spoke about as an urgent and distressing problem for the victims; and welcomed the additional cooperation, the scientific cooperation that will take a boost later this month in Singapore when our researchers and scientists get together. But he asked for, hoped that the United States would provide greater assistance going down the road in all of these areas of demining and the other things I've talked about.

He expressed his gratitude for the aid that we have provided -- I think about \$14 million-\$16 million a year it's averaged -- for education, training, AIDS. He basically concluded by saying that if we can expand our relations fast enough, that is the best way to address the legacy of war.

The President raised with him his concern about and his belief that greater freedom for the Vietnamese people, greater human rights for the Vietnamese people, would be important to Vietnam's development. And later on, President Luong noted that we may have different definitions or different meanings for human rights.

President Luong talked about the importance of private sector investment and development, particularly in areas like information technology, where they very much would like to see foreign investment, foreign assistance to help their countries.

The President then, in response to President Luong's briefing, said first that he hoped our relationship would become more comprehensive over time, that we would address not only the issues we're addressing now -- MIA issues, education issues, et cetera -- but that we would also be addressing things like health and other mutual concerns.

On demining, he said that we would continue to provide assistance. On joining the WTO, something that President Luong had said they very much wanted to do, as well as obtaining PNTR, the President said we would be supportive of a process leading in that direction, but that needed to begin by implementing the bilateral trade agreement.

And on Agent Orange, the President said there's more we need to do in this area for our veterans at

home in the United States, as well as for those here, who may be suffering the affects. And one of the things that we are doing is providing to the Vietnamese a computer system which will assist them to provide -- a system with information on where Agent Orange may have been stored or present during the war.

In the later meeting with Prime Minister Khai, a fairly similar agenda. Prime Minister Khai described today as an important milestone for Vietnam. He talked about the significant changes in the country and their plans to try to become an industrial country by the year 2010. He said that their goals for our bilateral relationship were early ratification of the trade agreement. He was very, very pleased that we had reached agreement on a science and technology agreement. He described it as a very important agreement to Vietnam because it will set the basis for us to work together across a range of issues. For example it will allow NOAA, our National Oceans and -- whatever NOAA stands for -- to work with their disaster relief people more effectively on the flooding problems here in Vietnam.

The President again thanked him as well for the cooperation that Vietnam has provided on accounting for our missing, and encouraged and hoped that they would continue to provide that cooperation. This is an unfinished business; this is part of the old chapter in our relationship that we cannot close.

He said to the Prime Minister that, "while I recognize the progress that the people of Vietnam have made in some areas of human rights, I must encourage you to make greater progress. I honestly believe that the Vietnamese are great people and that greater openness and greater freedom will speed your development."

Excuse me, I guess it was Prime Minister Khai who said, well, we may have -- after talking about all of the things that are happening on the economic side, said we may have different conceptions on human rights, but that does not impede our ability to cooperate.

So that basically covers the two meetings. We will meet with Chairman Phieu tomorrow, as well as visit the Joint Excavation Site, which will be I think an important, powerful moment.

I'm happy to answer any questions about this or about the speech.

Q Sandy, the 350,000 pages of documents, can you tell us a little bit about it? Are these incident reports? What do they say? And also I think the President said there would be another million pages between now and the end of the year -- do you mean this calendar year, and what will that contain?

MR. BERGER: These documents, this is the second tranche of three tranches of documents that we're providing. Included in the documents we're providing today, for example, are records from medical units here in Vietnam that actually treated Vietnamese wounded soldiers who then died. So you would then have, presumably, the date and location of death. The Marines will be providing an accounting of all of their information about where battles took place, how many people were reported to have been killed on either side of those battles, what the location of those battles were, which will obviously enable them to have some better information about site, locating remains. And the other million documents is what DOD believes will be possible.

This has been an ongoing process. We started this over a year ago. As I said, the Vietnamese have I think given us 800,000 documents over the past several years, which have been very important to our recreating the records. And we have indicated that we would do the same.

Q And roughly any idea on how many missing Vietnamese would be encompassed in those?

MR. BERGER: They used the figure 300,000 missing. There are 1,400 American servicemen and women who remain unaccounted for in Vietnam. The figure that President Luong used was 300,000 Vietnamese -- civilians and soldiers, I took him to mean.

Q Sandy, a question on the speech. I'm sure you went through with some care how to deal with the discussion of the war period. And the President in the end said -- referred to that period as one of shared suffering. But he was very careful not to get into the discussion of ideology. And it sounds like your talks today were very non-ideological. What went into the thinking about not talking about why these two countries went to war or what lessons might emerge, other than the fact that brave people on both sides fought each other?

MR. BERGER: I think that the national interest now is not served by rearguing the debates surrounding the war. I think they are served by remembering, by using, in a sense, an accounting for what happened then as the bridge to the future, and turning with the Vietnamese toward building a new period in our relationship.

These are obviously -- these were searing days for America, searing days for the Vietnamese, but I think that, as Ambassador Peterson has said, we cannot change the past, we can change the future. And I think the President feels that it is in the best interests of the country to build the future.

Q Sandy, can you explain why all the discussions of human rights seem to be couched in terms of its impact on Vietnam's economic success? Is it your sense it would not be productive to talk about the value of human rights in and of themselves?

MR. BERGER: Well, I don't know, I don't necessarily agree with that characterization of it. The President talked about freedom of religion and freedom of the press, freedom of -- root out corruption. Certainly, in the meetings he didn't put it in those terms.

I mean, obviously, we believe that -- the President talked about, I believe in the speech, how young people will have more confidence in their societies if they have the capacity to help shape those societies and make the decisions that shape their future. That's not an economic point; that's a point about how you look at stability versus how you look at instability. The argument is often made, here and elsewhere, that stability requires the status quo. I think the argument the President is making is that in today's world, a greater degree of freedom and personal control over their destiny actually provides greater stability. So I don't think the argument was only made in economic terms.

Q Sandy, again on human rights. The President said, let the days when we talked past each other be gone for good. But, as I gather from the meetings today, the Vietnamese said they have a different conception of human rights, quite possibly, than the President does. It sounds to me in that respect, at least, the two countries are still talking past each other.

MR. BERGER: Well, this is a country that has made progress, more progress in the economics sphere than in the political sphere, and we hope that they would make continuing progress. Their conception of human rights tends to be more in terms of economic rights, the rights of people to have an education, the right to not starve, the right to have an economic well-being.

But I think the President made clear that there is a larger context -- there's a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that those not only reflect our values and the values of most countries in the world, but also are the way in which societies -- those are the principles that societies need to adhere to today if they're going to be successful. I think that's the point the President was making.

And they may have -- I would say there was a minimum -- in the meetings today I was most interested in many ways when we talked about what they described as the legacy of war, Agent Orange, unexploded ordnance, those issues, it was not a polemic discussion, by any means. It was, in a sense, a humanitarian discussion -- we have these very substantial problems and we need as much help as you can provide for us.

Q Did the President get any sense that they may enlarge or change their definition over time of what human rights actually includes or represents to the people of this country?

MR. BERGER: I think the President can use his trip here to maximize the possibility that that -- I think that message certainly resonates with younger people in this country. You know, as the President said, 60 percent of this country is under 30 years old. If you've looked out in the streets, you've seen an awful lot of young faces. And I think that this generation wants more freedom.

The speech the President gave today was the first speech, as I understand it, that ever has been broadcast nationally in Vietnam, and will be re-broadcast later tonight. So that message will be out there and, hopefully, it will influence the way people think.

Q Sandy, do you mean first broadcast nationally, or the first speech by a foreigner ever broadcast?

MR. BERGER: Well, we should clarify that, because I asked that precise follow-up question, anticipating yours. I was told it was the first speech. Now, before I get -- maybe somebody can check that. It certainly was the first -- I mean, it goes without saying it was the first speech an American President in Hanoi. (Laughter.) But I was told it was the first time -- Ambassador Pete Peterson said it was an historic event. Maybe, PJ, somebody could check that.

Q Did Vietnam's foreign policy and regional security issues come up at all in either of the discussions?

MR. BERGER: Not much. There was some discussion of Vietnam's now participation in ASEAN, its desire to pursue a good relationship with its neighbors. This, of course, has been a very troubled region over the last 30 or 40 years. The fact that Vietnam now is the chair of ASEAN -- which at one point it was arrayed against -- I think reflects that change. But there was not an extensive discussion of it.

Q Was there any -- did the President get any sense of differences in the senior levels of the Vietnamese government about the value of economic reform?

MR. BERGER: No -- I'm thinking about the question, but not that I could detect. I think the message from the President and from the Prime Minister was quite similar, that they were committed to economic reform; they wanted to see Vietnam become what they described as an industrialized country by 2010; that they knew that that meant opening the country; that they wanted foreign participation. I think that was quite consistent between the two.

Q Did the President talk about how foreign investment had dropped off in Vietnam in the last five years or so? And did he talk about anything the Vietnamese should be doing to --

MR. BERGER: Yes, he did mention that. And he said that, I understand that some people in Vietnam believe that -- what happened here, as during the Asian financial crisis, as you know, Vietnam suffered less than some of the other countries, in part because its economy remains more closed. And some people thought at the time, believed that actually was a good argument against globalization, against integration.

And the President indicated that while Vietnam may have suffered less from the effects of the Asian crisis, that it would also benefit less from the growth in this region and the growth in Asia unless it opened its economy more. And I think there seemed to be a recognition of that on the part of the Vietnamese leaders.

Q The President seemed careful not to offend in his speech, couching -- and I'm wondering, then, is the relationship delicate in a way that the wrong word could quickly send it backwards? How strong is it now?

MR. BERGER: You ordinarily don't go to another country to find ways to be offensive. I thought the President in the speech was very straightforward on human rights. He talked about freedom of the press, freedom of religion, fighting corruption. Those are all issues that are not widely -- that are sensitive

here. And I thought he raised them in a very straightforward way, in a way designed to be effective, which I think you've seen from this President before, which is, rather than scoring points, he wants to make change.

Q Did the President get the impression from his discussions that the Vietnamese government sees the U.S. as having any financial responsibility for the war in the form of reparations?

MR. BERGER: No, there was no discussion of reparations and no discussion of kind of some aggregate responsibility.

As I said, when they talked about individual problems, like unexploded ordnance, like the continued mining problem, like the Agent Orange problem, they did ask for further assistance from the United States to help solve those problems. But there was no discussion of reparations or compensation or anything like that.

Q Was there some discomfort that the bust of Ho Chi Minh was up there on the stage with the President and images that might --

MR. BERGER: I hardly noticed it. That little statue there? (Laughter.)

Q It was there at the welcome, too, wasn't it?

MR. BERGER: You know, when you go to a country, when you meet with the President of Vietnam, you meet with the President of Vietnam in that room, as has every American leader who has come before over the past decade. Ho Chi Minh is obviously an historical figure of great importance in this country and you don't ask your hosts to change their sense of history by virtue of the fact that you want a different picture.

Q Was the President surprised by the warmth of his visit, by the warmth of his reception, given the fact that there was no coverage in the official press?

MR. BERGER: Yes.

Q Did he detect any uneasiness about this from his hosts? I mean, crowds are normally avoided with paranoia by these kind of regimes.

MR. BERGER: I think we've all been very struck by this reception. This is, I don't know, maybe the 75th country I've been to with the President. This is one of the warmest and most spontaneous receptions I think we received. And, as you pointed out, the state media downplayed the President's arrival here. It wasn't like this was a generated crowd.

And I think as you looked into the faces of people, they were very genuinely warm and welcoming and eager to see the President and in very substantial numbers. I couldn't begin to estimate the crowd. It was very moving, I think, for the President to see that reaction. The excitement that particularly the young people of this country have for the United States I think is quite an extraordinary thing.

Q Do you know how the students were selected to get into the auditorium? At some point, we understand there was supposed to be a -- the President was supposed to go out and greet the overflow crowd and work a rope line afterward?

MR. BERGER: That was the original plan. I don't know the answer to that question. There was a -- this was going to -- if you were in Beijing, there was a similar kind of event, which was the overflow crowd was going to be outside and we were going to go then afterwards and the President was going to say a few words. I don't know why that changed.

Q Was it the Vietnamese authorities who changed it, though, or was it our guys that changed it?

MR. BERGER: I don't know the answer to that, but I will get you the answer.

Q What's the state of play on a visit to Korea, North Korea, before January 20th?

MR. BERGER: We've not made a decision. We will go back to Washington next week and I think look at this very, very hard in the days ahead when we get back. I think that we would need to be quite certain that such a trip would be productive and would advance America's national interests, but we've not made that decision yet.

Q Does that include being sure of what sort of written agreement could be reached by the President going?

MR. BERGER: Well, I think it would be having a high level of confidence that there would be a result from the visit that would lead towards greater stability on the Korean Peninsula. And I think if we could -- that is the critical question and we have to evaluate that.

Q Sandy, going back to the opening ceremony this morning, the President said he found it very moving. Obviously, you can't get inside his head, but could you tell us what thoughts were going through your mind as you stood in that presidential palace courtyard and saw the American flag, listened to the Vietnamese military band playing the National Anthem?

MR. BERGER: Well, it was an extraordinary event. Vietnam is a very big part of the lives of America and particularly Americans over a certain age. A lot of history and a lot of strong memories. I think that, to me, I felt very satisfied as I stood there that I think we've done this right. We set out eight years ago -- we could have done this in a month or a year, but we said at the very beginning that we would do this in a way that was true to the families and true to the missing, and that the accounting for the past would be the bridge to the future. And I felt very pleased that we'd succeeded.

Thank you.

END 5:57 P.M. (L)