

~~SECRET~~

April 5, 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: Minutes of the Meeting of the Special Group (CI)
2 p.m., Thursday April 4, 1963

PRESENT: Governor Harriman, The Attorney General, Mr. Clipatric,
Mr. McCone, Mr. Forrestal, Mr. Coffin vice Mr. Bell,
Mr. Wilson vice Mr. Murrow, General Johnson vice
General Taylor

Mr. Thompson and Mr. Wood were present for Item 1.

Mr. Jordan and Mr. Cooper were present for Items 1 and 2.

Mr. Maechling, Mr. Koren, Mr. Janow and Mr. Wolf
were present for the meeting.

1. Discussion with Mr. Thompson on the Situation in Viet-Nam

Mr. Robert Thompson, head of the British Advisory Mission to Viet-Nam, discussed with the members his observations on the situation in Viet-Nam. He characterized the situation as one of requiring patience and exhibiting confidence. Relative to the latter, he believes that the Vietnamese have confidence in the ultimate success of the war against the Viet Cong. He cautioned, however, that there is the danger that we may be over-extending ourselves in the strategic hamlet program, leaving pockets of Viet Cong control behind to subvert and harass the peasants. He stressed the importance of consolidating areas prior to pushing forward into insecure areas.

Mr. Thompson observed that the infiltration is not a decisive factor in Viet Cong recruitment, and that only a relatively small amount of equipment comes into the country by this means. It is his opinion that the solution to the infiltration problem is to gain solid control at the village level with military forces screening in the border areas. Once solid control in the villages is gained, it will be possible to detect infiltrators as they attempt to enter these secure areas.

Mr. Thompson stated that it was his belief that U.S. forces in Viet-Nam are adequate for the task, but by the end of the year it could be possible to withdraw some of these forces. This move should be made as an indication that we are winning and tied into the achievement of a white area, free from Viet Cong attack. He also brought out that good relations exist between the U.S. and Vietnamese. However, he believes that reporting in the U.S. papers on the overall effort in Viet-Nam could be improved.

~~SECRET~~

S E C R E T

2.

He acknowledged that a weakness of the Vietnamese is that they have been unable to cope with Communist penetration efforts in the Government, labor, and student organizations. However, steps are being taken to build up an internal security service to improve their capabilities in this area.

In commenting on air strikes, Mr. Thompson stated that their utilization is essential, as the threat prevents the Viet Cong from concentrating to carry out operations. He agreed that large scale "clear and hold" operations, although they may have some value, have not obtained significant results to date. He emphasized that the most effective method of operations against the Viet Cong are extended operations of ranger or similar type units in areas under Viet Cong control.

Mr. Thompson remarked that President Diem is stronger in the provinces than in Saigon. However, the Government is very dependent on him, and if he were to fall, the whole Government would collapse. To counter this possibility, we must encourage the establishment of a stable administrative system operating from the Ministries down to the village level, which would eventually lead to a viable government when the insurgency situation abates. In conjunction with this effort, planning should be initiated for demobilization, as well as increased attention to programs to assist in the agricultural sector.

Mr. Thompson commented that the only valid bench mark to assess the effectiveness of our effort in Viet-Nam is "when we reach the level of having sufficient control of the population to deny their accessibility to actions by the Viet Cong." He believes we might reach this point by the middle of next year. In conclusion, Mr. Thompson stated that the key to success in Viet-Nam is the population and the existence of a strong government, which functions for the benefit of the people. He believes that this trend is now slowly developing.

2. Discussion with Mr. Jorden Concerning his Recent Trip to Viet-Nam

Mr. Jorden, Special Assistant to the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, presented a summary of his findings based on his recent trip to Viet-Nam. Mr. Jorden pointed out that he was unable to document and develop any hard evidence of infiltration from Laos into Viet-Nam after October 1, 1962. Mr. Cooper, who has just returned from Viet-Nam, stated that it was difficult to assess the extent of infiltration from Laos; however, he did observe that the Viet Cong are now infiltrating from the southern delta area into the northern provinces. In response to a question from the Chairman, Mr. Jorden stated it would be extremely difficult to interdict infiltration from Laos, but that reconnaissance and surveillance operations over the border should help in determining intelligence on the source of any infiltration.

S E C R E T

S E C R E T

3.

Mr. Jorden mentioned that he believes that present press reporting out of Viet-Nam is about the best that could be expected under the present circumstances. However, he pointed out that efforts should be made to provide more background briefings for the press in Saigon.

Mr. Jorden stated that despite progress and increased U.S. efforts in Viet-Nam, he did not detect on his recent trip any significant signs of enthusiasm on the part of the Vietnamese that the situation was getting better.

3. Report on Feeder Roads

As a result of the recent message (Bangkok 1498) from the Embassy in Thailand, which stated that we had reached an impasse with the Thais on the specifications for the Feeder Roads, the members agreed that this item should be considered at a later meeting, after further information is received from the Embassy.

4. Assessment of Communist Subversive Efforts in Thailand - Bangkok 1477, dated March 29, 1963

The members agreed that this matter should be referred to the USIB for evaluation. The Chairman requested both AID and DOD review their current programs in Thailand to determine their adequacy, responsiveness and to determine what additional steps, if any, should be taken.

The Group agreed that, if feasible, this item will be considered at the next meeting.

Miscellaneous

1. Mr. Coffin informed the Group that AID has authorized the missions in Chile, Peru, Guatemala, and Ecuador to establish a special fund of up to \$50,000 to be employed in support of economic and social development activities. This item was last discussed by the Group on March 21, in conjunction with a progress report on the Internal Defense Plan for Ecuador.

James W. Dingeman
James W. Dingeman
Executive Secretary

S E C R E T