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6 September 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. R. Jack Smith
Deputy Director for Intelligence

SUBJECT : Origin and Genesis of McNamara Project

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1. Per [redacted] request, I have prepared this memorandum outlining how the McNamara Project came to be. This memorandum is designed to refresh your memory and is intended for your eyes only. As you will recognize, it contains certain elements of background and certain observations which should not under any circumstances be passed

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2. The Project had its origin in a 4 May 1966 luncheon meeting between Mr. Helms (then Deputy Director) and the Secretary of Defense. Mr. McNamara requested a paper on "the general state of Viet Cong ability and will to continue the war". He made it quite clear that he wanted an extremely thorough study similar in scope to the Allen report on the effectiveness of the bombing.

3. That afternoon (4 May) Mr. Helms convened a meeting attended by Mr. Kent, yourself and myself. He discussed McNamara's request and what lay behind it. The general concensus was that McNamara was concerned about the rising pressure of anti-war sentiment in the United States and over the possibility that at some point within the next year the U.S. Government might find itself politically compelled to disengage. What he wanted, in short, was a thorough study which, among other things, would ensure that if we should decide to throw in the towel, our towel would not hit the canvas a few seconds ahead of the Communists'.

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4. After the 4 May meeting we had a larger session which you chaired and which was attended by the heads of the various DDI offices, some working level types, Sherman Kent and myself. We discussed the scope of the paper and exchanged views on its terms of reference. I prepared a set of draft terms which were reviewed, modified, agreed upon and issued on 11 May under cover of a memorandum to Mr. Helms which you signed.

5. During our meetings which led to the terms of reference it was decided that to review the question of Viet Cong morale in proper depth, [] would arrange for a team [] to be sent to Vietnam. After further discussion, it was decided that Sam Adams would accompany the team. As you know, [] (for reasons best known to themselves) decided that what we were interested in was a detailed study of what the Station thought Viet Cong morale to be. They interviewed case officers, not defectors, and their statistical tabulations were based on Station rather than Communist opinion. As a result their report in itself was relatively useless to us though its conclusions were incorporated in Sam Adams' work which was very useful.

6. After the terms were prepared responsibility for answering the questions they raised was apportioned among appropriate DDI offices, with the understanding that draft inputs would be made available to me by 1 August. I was tasked, on your behalf, with overseeing the whole project, editing it, and writing the summary paper which would include its principle findings.

7. A massive amount of work was done by the contributing offices. They did not meet the 1 August deadline but I did have all of the essential material by 10 August. I then set to work going through it, forming my own opinions and determining various ways in which the separate contributions could be converted into complementary parts of a single whole. Once my own homework was done, I instituted a set of editorial sessions attended, principally, by Messrs. [] and Layton, as well as [] from my staff.

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8. The details of the way the final report was put together and the magnificent job done by the OCI Production Staff are well known to you and need not be repeated here. Our deadline for submitting the project to McNamara was more or less self-imposed and I think we got it to him as soon as we could under the circumstances. I also feel that it turned out reasonably well and that at least he believes it met the requirements he had levied on us.

George A. Carver, Jr.
Acting Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Distribution

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