

31 December 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR: Executive Director/Comptroller

SUBJECT : Vietnamese Affairs Staff Items for Inclusion in  
DCI Briefing Book

The following matters or topics may be of interest to the Director and are offered for inclusion in his briefing book.

1. 22 December Session with Secretary Laird: Laird expressed great appreciation for our help in drafting the strength figure statement and professed himself very pleased with both the statement itself and press reaction to it. He reiterated that he had given firm instructions that he would not issue any statements on enemy strengths that had not been previously blessed by the Agency. We discussed your letter on the PRUs, which he said he had found helpful, and the general topic of the Presidential directive to step up anti-morale operations. Laird seemed fairly relaxed on the PRU issue (but see para 2 below). On the anti-morale operation question, I explained -- and he agreed -- that pin prick operations, while feasible, really accomplished very little. I also explained, quite forcefully, that if we were asked to undertake anything larger, such tasks would carry an inevitable price tag in terms of manpower, money and material. Furthermore, any serious continuing operation -- e.g., work with potentially dissident tribal elements in North Vietnam -- would necessitate the acceptance of attendant political risks, since no continuing operation of consequence could be carried on without the North Vietnamese, and the press, eventually becoming aware of direct US/Agency involvement. Laird said he understood all this, was in complete agreement and would argue this case strongly for us if the occasion arose. One minor but interesting symbolic point: When I arrived, Laird's secretary expressed some surprise since Laird had cancelled all his 22 December appointments. On checking she discovered Laird's written instructions cancelled all prior appointments for that day except our meeting. In closing the session with a reciprocal exchange of holiday greetings, Laird again said how valuable he considered these weekly sessions and, with every outward sign of sincerity, expressed his high regard for the Agency and his appreciation of its splendid support to him.

2. PRU Matters: When finally held, the 303 session on the PRU endorsed the program but directed the Agency and the Defense Department to negotiate the matter of military assignees. The PRU matter was the opening topic at my 29 December session with Packard, who was Acting Secretary in Laird's vacation absence. Packard said he had relayed the 303 Committee's decision to Laird by phone and Laird was upset, since he wanted the military out of the program soonest. Laird and Abrams, said Packard, both shared the same concerns on this topic. I demurred, noting that while Laird was primarily concerned about the general possibility of a political flap, Abrams was primarily troubled (after the Green Beret affair) by doubts about his ability to discipline, i. e., court martial, any military personnel involved in a flap. I then reviewed the atmosphere of my own conversations with Laird the previous week, the importance of the program, and the reasonableness of the compromise Mr. Karamessines had proposed at the 303 meeting (down to 60 military personnel by March 1970 per present plans and down to 30 by October 1970 with complete phase-out by June 1971). I also stressed that too rapid a curtailment of the advisory effort would increase the risk of the very kind of flap we were all anxious to avoid. During our conversation, Packard veered around and at the end he said he would hold everything on ice in the Pentagon until he, Laird and I could go over the whole subject together.

3. The Route 65 Proposal: On 29 December, Ambassador Godley came in with a request to hit Route 65 (in north Laos, above Route 7) within the prohibited ten-mile buffer zone along the North Vietnamese border. I took a map of the area to the Packard meeting along with a preliminary OER analysis of the importance of this route segment and the heavy volume of traffic now moving over it. Packard and I discussed this matter for about twenty minutes, reviewing the self-imposed nature of the buffer zone and the fact that strikes within it might serve as a useful, low key signal to Hanoi that US patience was not infinite. Packard scribbled notes furiously during our conversation, said he liked the idea very much, would get in touch with General Wheeler immediately and wanted to push the idea. I later called Wheeler on the secure line to ensure that he got a direct account of my conversation with Packard from me before Packard's call to him and before he got a garbled account from someone else. Wheeler was cordial and grateful, said he had his staff working full bore on the project and thanked me for the Agency's assistance.

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5. [Redacted] Intelligence Collection: At the 22 December lunch with Zaslow, I expressed my serious concern over the fact that we were missing too many infiltration groups in North Vietnam (over 50%) and not actually spotting them until they reached south Laos. This made us very mushy in our current analysis of the rate of current input at the top of the pipeline, a matter of great interest to our political masters.

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Hence, I consider the ice on which we are skating dangerously thin. I have asked NSA to prepare a detailed study with proposals for corrective action in the form of augmented coverage and will pursue this vigorously within the forum of the collection procedures committee I chair at Kissinger's behest. This is a problem that we will have to solve for given the President's current concerns, this barn door must be locked while the horse is still inside.

6. Kissinger/WSAG Paper: On 22 December, Kissinger sent a note to the Secretaries of State and Defense and the DCI appending a 2 December (sic) memorandum to him (Kissinger) from Laird on "Planning US Reaction

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to Increased Enemy Activity in Southeast Asia." Kissinger asked for comments on Laird's paper, which he wanted to consider at an early WSAG meeting. The 2 December Laird memo covered substantially the same ground as the questions Laird gave us (via [redacted] on 17 November, which we answered in a memo sent to Laird by you on 4 December. After discussion with General Cushman and Tom Karamessines, I secured Packard's permission for us to send this 4 December memo to Kissinger and the other WSAG members, a step that will enable us to give Kissinger a good answer without redoing work already done.

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7. "The Thing": We have received a note from Kissinger saying the President and he both like "the Thing's" new format very much and want no further changes. This effort seems to be useful and is apparently very well received.

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