

MEMORANDUM

TO: DR. NORTON

FROM: ROISMAN

SUBJECT: Briefing on Vietnam by Mr. Bill Jordan, Special Assistant on Vietnam to Ambassador Harriman

COPY

4/1/65

This morning I attended a briefing sponsored by the Foreign Relations Committee for Senate legislative staff personnel on the Vietnam situation. Mr. Burton very concisely, yet completely, outlined our policy in Vietnam, its reasons, and its goals.

His opening remarks revealed little more than the President and the Secretary of State have been saying to the press for the last several months. His answers to the excellent, probing questions from the more than fifty staff members present, however, went far toward indicating the strengths and weaknesses of the present policy.

Premised on the notion that the North Vietnamese are currently carrying out military aggression of a new type in South Vietnam, our policy seeks to prove to Hanoi that the cost of continuing this surreptitious aggression will not justify the current unfulfilled goal of a united Vietnam under a Communist government. Mr. Jordan countered the standard question of our illegitimate role in that essentially indigenous military conflict with two different, though related, answers:

- 1.) Regardless of any hypothetical moral judgement, we are currently committed to the struggle. Pulling out at this point would have international ramifications of considerable magnitude. His most poignant example was the probable effect it would have on American-German relations which depend so heavily on the U.S. commitment to defend Germany and Berlin from Communist military and diplomatic pressure;
- 2.) Although the Vietnam war is in many ways a domestic political struggle, its importance in the Asian and international power balance requires the ^{due} attention which the major powers have for twenty years given to the division of Germany, also an essentially indigenous political problem.

^{Jordan} Mr. Burton was quite adept at parrying incisive questions without delving into a frank rationale of our policy. He most often resorted to the platitudes and generalizations normally employed for public consumption when asked questions which sought concrete proof of popular South Vietnamese support of U.S. policy in that country. He demurred when asked why the U.S. failed to insist on the promised free elections of 1956 and on what indications we now had of popular support: "We have no Gallup Polls," "The hamlets which we control change hands daily," "Three hundred South Vietnamese soldiers are killed each week," etc.

Questions seeking to determine the possibilities for negotiations invariably elicited answers which left the impression that the ^{cm's} is on Hanoi and Peking. The monthly ambassadorial contact with Red China in Warsaw have thus far been non-productive and limited to "name calling".

Asked about the use of non-lethal gas, Mr. Jordan admitted that the high-level policy makers in the State Department were not really aware before its use, although they had been routinely informed. The decision was a military one which was made oblivious to the possibilities of foreign and domestic criticism, which subsequently developed. He said that there had been two schools in the Vietnam Task Force at State. One was satisfied with the military decision and thought that there was little reason to ask for higher-level approval. The other, more concerned with political contingencies, had wanted a decision from the Secretary of State or the White House. The former school prevailed and gas was utilized in rather routine fashion. Although gas may be used again, the decision to do so will probably be made by higher-level, political officials.

In summary, Mr. Jordan's remarks left much to be desired. It was apparent that he was not in a position to reveal the full thinking of State Department policy makers regarding the ultimate ends we are seeking in Vietnam and the non-military means we are using to attain these ends.

cc: Leshner