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ACTION

Wednesday
December 13, 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Pres. file
SUBJECT: Press release on US assistance to the troop-contributing countries

Citing the Freedom of Information Act, the press has formally requested the State Department to release the texts of agreements on assistance to countries with troops in Vietnam. They have also asked for details and dollar amounts of assistance.

The mischievous can obviously use this information to push the line that we are using "mercenaries" in Vietnam.

On the other hand, it is not feasible simply to ignore the request for information.

Attached is a statement we have worked out for release by State as soon as possible.

Frankly, I believe we will get some flak on this. But I also believe the attached statement is well calculated to keep the flak to a minimum.

I recommend that you approve its release by the Department of State. George Christian concurs.

W. W. Rostow

Att.

Approve _____

Disapprove _____

See me _____

MWright:wpt

STATEMENT TO THE PRESS

The Department has received requests from the press to release the texts of agreements entered into by the USG for assistance to the countries which have contributed forces in South Vietnam and to provide the items and dollar amounts of this assistance.

The Department has concluded that release at this time of certain of the information of the kind requested would be prejudicial to the defense interests of the United States and that the non-disclosure of this information is sanctioned by Section 552 (b), Title 5 of the United States Code (Freedom of Information law).

The Government of the Republic of Vietnam has 660,000 men under arms, and is in the process of increasing its forces by 65,000 men. It has asked for and received from five of its neighbor states military forces to help in the fight against aggression.

At the present time, the governments of Australia, Korea, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Thailand have responded to requests from the Republic of Vietnam by sending or undertaking to send military forces in the following numbers:

- A. Australia: Approximately 6,300 combat troops including a brigade and support, and a squadron of 8 Canberra bombers, are in Vietnam. Included is naval assistance and a guided missile destroyer, 100 combat advisers, and a 73-man transport aircraft unit. Australia is now in the process of deploying an additional 1700-man reinforced infantry battalion which will bring the total to 8000 men.
- B. Korea: Approximately 48,000 troops including 2 combat divisions and one combat brigade, a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital, and a 2,200-man engineer and support unit are in Vietnam.
- C. New Zealand: Approximately 400 troops in an artillery battery and an infantry company are in Vietnam. They are in the process of deploying an additional infantry company of approximately 170 men.
- D. The Philippines: A 2000-man civic action group, consisting of an engineer battalion with its own security support force, in Vietnam.
- E. Thailand: 2500 ground, air, and naval forces now in Vietnam. In addition, the Royal Thai Government announced on November 14 that its ground forces in Vietnam will be augmented to a light division of about 12,000 men.

Two of these five countries, Australia and New Zealand, are bearing the entire cost of their contributions.

The remaining three countries, Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand, have an average per capita GNP of \$133 per year. These countries have needed both economic and military assistance for many years. Although they wish to join in the Vietnam struggle, they clearly are not able to finance an overseas force without some support.

Accordingly, in the case of these countries, the US provides equipment, supplies and other direct within-Vietnam support for their troops in Vietnam. Base pay continues to be paid by the home country.

In addition, we have made adjustments in our assistance programs in each case. The guideline for such actions has been that the despatch of troops to Vietnam should not weaken the home defense forces of the country, nor interfere unduly with pressing and urgently needed economic development efforts.

In sum, we have provided the assistance needed to enable these developing countries to join a cause they support by reason of their own views of their own national interests and security.

The details of our continuing military and economic assistance programs to these countries have been disclosed to the appropriate committees of the Congress.