

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON
April 13, 1971

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ACTION

MEMORANDUM FOR JOHN EHRLICHMAN

FROM:

BUD KROGH *BK*

SUBJECT:

VIETNAM AND THE DRUG PROBLEM: JOINT
WHITE HOUSE WORKING GROUP

Two weeks ago the Attorney General expressed deep concern about the problem of returning Vietnam veterans addicted to heroin. As you know, this subject has been around since the Senator Dodd hearings of last summer and probably will not go away.

It strikes me that we should initiate an effort to solve the problem at the highest level. I have had difficulty in convincing certain officers in the Department of Defense that their problem is a real one and deserving of their closest attention. We will be receiving soon the results of a preliminary urinalysis test which will give us some general idea of the scope of the problem. Getting them to conduct even this kind of test required more than simple pressure.

If such a group were initiated, I would recommend that we pinpoint the following areas:

(1) Treatment of addicted Vietnam veterans

- a. DoD and the VA currently disagree over who should receive VA treatment. VA treatment is currently only available to those who are honorably discharged; DoD discharged addicted soldiers who do not offer themselves for amnesty with a general discharge or lower.
- b. Organized church activities to continue rehabilitation process begun by chaplains in Vietnam. At our religious conference, a chaplain from Vietnam provided a very good report on how

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he had succeed with heroin addicts in his unit by constant availability and concern. The religious leaders who came to the White House indicated strong interest in continuing treatment of this nature back in the United States once a soldier has been discharged. This type of activity could be coordinated through the Chaplain's office in DoD. Work has started on this already.

- c. The status of the returning addicted veteran who does not want treatment must be resolved. Civil commitment legislation is a possibility, but it has, as you can see, serious political overtones.

(2) Law enforcement - Vietnam

- a. Upon our return from Vietnam last year, we pushed through a quick supplemental of \$100,000 for the Provost Marshal's use in Saigon. The Criminal Investigation Division (CID) up until that time had not funded the Vietnam law enforcement program adequately. This needs to be checked carefully.
- b. Smuggling of heroin into Vietnam. We have received an alarming report from a U.S. Bureau of Customs agent in Saigon indicating that smuggling is being actively engaged in by members of the Vietnam legislature, Executive branch, or their close friends and relatives. This report is attached at Tab A. We need to consider establishing a special unit in Saigon, under U.S. control, which would not be neutralized by the corrupt Vietnam National Police. A collateral issue is the smuggling of heroin from Vietnam into the United States.
- c. The diplomatic effort, which you began with President Thieu, should be stepped up if we confirm allegations that Vietnamese officials are directly involved.

If the President felt that this issue deserved the highest consideration, I would suggest that the following agency heads be included:

Attorney General John Mitchell
Secretary Rogers
Secretary Laird
Secretary Richardson
Donald Johnson - Administrator of the VA
Richard Helms - Director, CIA

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Staff support would come from you and Henry Kissinger and whoever else would be designated by you and the Cabinet Secretaries. It seems to me that Jack Ingersoll and Myles Ambrose should be definitely included in addition to Col. Hobson, the DoD Drug Task Force commander, and myself.

One threshold question is whether it is politically acceptable to publicly display the drug problem in Vietnam and the fact that the President is doing something about it.

My view is that it is publicly acceptable because many people, sensitized to the scope of the issue by Senator Dodd and subsequent CBS and other media disclosures, are aware that it is there and expect it to be handled. The President has been winding down the war, and I think he is in a good posture if he is determined to wipe out the social scourge that goes with it. Also, and perhaps most importantly, we want to stop the crime problem that goes with discharging an untreated heroin addict from the military into the civilian population. We need to be careful that we are not in any way maligning the typical Vietnam vet, and we can do this by stressing treatment and our desire to make his transition back into civilian life as easy as possible. It would be a natural type of discussion following on his meeting yesterday to encourage returning GI's to make full use of the GI Bill's benefits.

I would appreciate your letting me know whether we should proceed with developing a high level working group and preparing a specific plan of action.

_____ Approve

_____ Disapprove

Comment:

Attachments

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