

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20508

September 9, 1986

Dear Ross:

I found our exchange useful and I hope you did likewise. The enclosed article from the Thursday Dallas Morning News reminded me of our conversation concerning divisiveness in this country and the effect on the Vietnamese.

Without knowing the accuracy of the quote (and from personal experience, I know the media), the implication of the bracketed statement makes the job more difficult. We are not sitting on our hands, we may believe someone is there, but we don't know it and we have a positive mindset reflected in not only our negotiations, but official public statements. I see a world of difference between a hostage problem and this problem as well.

The general public could believe from such a statement that at best we are all Washington bumpkins without any moral courage or at worst engaged in a cover-up. Such allegations obviously cut deeply on both a personal and professional level, but more importantly, it fuels the irrational element, creates additional divisiveness and plays into Hanoi's hands. I'm an eyewitness to it from across the table.

As I reflected further on my conversation, it became clear, and logically so, that your focus was on the private sector input and sources who have come to you in one fashion or another. Many of these sources are the origin of the charges of debunking so easily thrown about in the media and Congress. One of my personal concerns is that this public pressure will turn some dedicated public servants, who are Vietnam vets and returned POWs working on the effort, into the faceless "whimps" and bureaucrats they are accused of being now. Even DIA has been forbidden to label someone a fabricator, a liar, a fraudulent fund-raiser, a political opportunist or a crook. The families call when provided an evaluation and say: "Is he lying or not?" They deserve a yes or no answer -- not "His story does not correlate with other information." But the nuts are causing this -- make no mistake. Essential for resolution is naming truth and fiction and operating on fact, not fantasy. Much of the private sector who didn't give a whit for this issue in 1982 is operating on fantasy and listening to a small band, armed with new data from FOIA (in the hands of the families since 1979), fabricated adventure stories from Thailand, and speculation about the perfidy and motives of government officials.

The trick of their trade is to combine facts, known and accepted, with fiction -- such tactics are in the intelligence manuals of every intelligence agency and the political manuals of less than honorable politicians. They have founded a network of less than 15 persons who cross-fertilize sources, orchestrate attacks on the government, pass information until it is stale or distorted, raise incredible amounts of money and call themselves patriots. Some, unfortunately even believe it.

Should they be given credibility over the serious efforts now in train, the issue is over. Politicians will run, call for another write-off and we will have a noble effort, but no resolution. The Vietnamese will win again because of naive American impatience for the simple solution. I sometimes regret putting public awareness in the strategy since it brought all of the fringe madness about, but if prisoners were alive in 1982, we had to signal their importance to us or Vietnam would see no reason to keep them. The final chapter is yet to be written. I hope and pray that the ending is what we both desire, the return of live prisoners. If that is not to be, the least we can do is end the uncertainty of the families through the return of remains. If it all fails, the reasons for failure will be crystal clear from my vantage point and at some point, this country needs to understand the entire story.

Before you leave, I believe another session may be useful. I hope you agree. There is much serious work yet to be done.

(b)(6)



Enclosures

Mr. Ross Perot
Dallas, Texas

ADDRESS TO VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA ANNUAL CONVENTION

(b)(6)

DIRECTOR, POLITICAL-MILITARY AFFAIRS
WHITE HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
NOVEMBER 22, 1985

The purpose of my coming is to address the POW/MIA issue and I truly welcome the opportunity. But there are also some broader questions involved for us as Vietnam veterans. Relatively few Vietnam veterans were actively involved in this issue until the Reagan Administration began pursuing it as a matter of highest national priority and adopted a public awareness program which increased attention. The increased interest is indeed welcome. But we must recognize this issue has become a symbol of sorts and appears to fulfill some basic need among our fellow Vietnam veterans. The vast majority responsibly look at the process and ask the League of Families or consult with us on how they can constructively help, but some discharge their interest through Hollywood fantasy, such as Rambo; others publicly advocate private rescue operations, still others make a career out of spreading misinformation for a variety of reasons. They are few in number, but they are around.

It is especially important for Vietnam veterans to understand why they are now aware of this issue and the complex nature of getting it resolved. Then, there is a blueprint on how to proceed in the future and help us resolve this tragedy.

Upon our return from Vietnam, we were branded by some public media as crazed killers, drug dependent vegetables or as mentally disturbed and socially marginal. We knew it wasn't true, and the American public has begun to realize in the last 2-3 years that they can safely walk the streets with us. Much of this change in attitude is due to veterans' efforts to welcome themselves home and, I personally believe, President Reagan's public recognition of us for what we really are -- Americans who answered the call to duty in an unpopular war. The message is some may blame the war, but don't blame the warriors.

But with this support also comes responsibility. The President's priority to return our missing men to this country, alive and dead, is consistent with his support for Vietnam veterans at home. Now, more than ever, he needs your help and support to get the job done. The Reagan Administration's efforts are not rhetoric, but serious action based upon an integrated strategy fully developed in 1982 and now being implemented. It is greatly dependent upon a united and informed citizenry backing the effort.

As this strategy developed, the issue became more visible and although millions of Americans are now in full support, there is a vocal minority involved with a variety of motivations unrelated to returning our missing comrades. I have met and spoken with a few politicians, who have never seen a shot fired in anger, who attempt to exploit this issue for personal ego or political gain -- it is reprehensible. I have seen Vietnam veterans giving us all a bad name by spreading misinformation at the expense of our missing comrades and claiming the buddy syndrome is somehow superior even to family ties. The families rightfully ask -- Where were these guys before? Hollywood has made millions fantasizing over the issue -- a sign of successful public awareness as long as you, Vietnam veterans, make clear to others that fantasy is not reality. Others have been convinced to believe there is a conspiracy and cover-up. This despite all of the evidence to the contrary, internal audits, IG investigations, and two Congressional investigations that clearly concluded such charges are patently false. On its face, it is a ridiculous charge anyway. The next time someone says the Reagan Administration is trying to bury the issue, ask them: Why then did President Reagan declare it a matter of highest priority? Why is the Administration asking for public awareness? Why are they conducting negotiations? Why have they raised intelligence priorities? The issue was buried when the Administration took over. We exhumed it and it will not be reburied by this Administration.

Please note that the majority of those of us in government now guiding the developed strategy are Vietnam veterans also. Although it would never happen under Ronald Reagan, if I ever believed there was a conspiracy or cover-up in progress, I would leave the White House and ask you to join me in the streets. In a speech to the National League of Families in 1983, President Reagan said:

"The government is large. It's possible sometimes you'll hear voices that will sound contradictory or insensitive, but we're doing what we can to eliminate that. So, please, don't let it shake our larger faith."

He was referring to voices in government. We are hearing voices now, but most are coming from a minority in the private sector -- so please don't let these voices shake our larger faith. But that message is strictly domestic and personal. Now I would like to turn to our official strategy -- the serious side of the issue. How we set out to resolve it.

We knew from the beginning that the government itself, the Vietnamese and Lao Governments and the American people generally had little knowledge that a problem still existed. It was imperative, therefore, to increase awareness among Americans and signal the Vietnamese and Lao Governments that despite perceptions they may have had from the past, the issue was still

very much alive. Thus, at the recommendation of the National League of Families, we formally endorsed a national public awareness program, increased our media contacts to provide them with factual information and began a series of high-level policy addresses. The President has made three major speeches, along with speeches or statements by the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the VA Administrator and countless other government officials. This effort has had a major impact on the perceptions in Vietnam and Laos and United States public opinion.

We also realized that our obligation in this entire effort was to the men still missing as represented at home by their families. We naturally turned to the National League of Families, the only organization comprised solely of family members. The League told us straight. The United States Government's past record on the issue is abysmal, and if the Reagan Administration wants to restore our faith in the government, you need to do a lot of work. We took up the challenge. In addition to adopting a strategy to resolve the issue, we made Ann Mills Griffiths a fully functioning member of the POW/MIA interagency group, opened the individual case files to the families, began publishing a next of kin newsletter and provided sensitive briefings to the League Board of Directors.

The families clearly have the most to gain or lose by our efforts, so their collective opinion is a litmus test of sorts about how we are doing.

Negotiations on this issue were also nonexistent when we began, so, through Ann Griffiths, we began soundings for serious negotiations with the Vietnamese and Lao. The first high-level trip to Hanoi was in 1982. This has been followed by sustained policy-level contact since that time with both governments. Through these negotiations, we were able to reach agreement that this issue was humanitarian and separate from other political issues that divide us. From the beginning, they have never raised war reparations with this Administration and when I was in Hanoi in August, not one word was mentioned about aid, trade or diplomatic recognition. Such talk in the current environment simply misleads Hanoi that delay would be to their advantage and erodes four years of hard, hard work.

In order to help create the conditions for significant movement, we also contacted other governments to request they inform the Vietnamese of our serious intention to resolve this issue and urge their cooperation.

On the domestic front, we have worked hard to forge a bipartisan and united approach to the issue, for it is not a Republican issue, a Democratic issue, but an American issue. We also contacted veterans groups and other private POW/MIA groups to solicit support for our strategy. Some private groups, because of the lack of visible government priority in past years, were

engaged in private rescue proposals and other irresponsible activities. We tried to convince them of the futility of such activities. With some we had success, and they came to back our national effort. Yet others have emerged due to the visibility of the issue who trash crash sites which hampers identification and destroys valuable intelligence information. Private rescuers contact us and ask for a target and money and they will then do the job. We have assured them that we have no shortage of diplomats, intelligence agents or soldiers.

Concurrent with our diplomatic efforts, we have raised our intelligence priorities across the board in an effort to confirm whether prisoners are still being held captive in Indochina. The result has been better information and more information and although we have yet been unable to prove prisoners are being held, we operate under that assumption. That is our mindset and we will hold this position until the question can be answered.

Given this interlocking strategy and the difficulty of the problem, I hope you can now see how simplistic solutions will not work. Calls for premature diplomatic recognition, aid or trade are counterproductive and play into the hands of those in Vietnam who might wish to exploit this issue. These things may come in due time, but resolution of this issue, as the last vestige of the war between our peoples, will ensure that such developments will not be temporary or hollow.

Similarly, simplistic calls for special commissions to solve the issue could provide the Vietnamese with the impression that once again the American people are too impatient to stick with it -- such a development now would be particularly counterproductive. It would rightfully give Vietnam the motivation to pause and wait to see if concessions are coming without the fullest possible accounting. We have looked at the concept of a commission on several occasions -- each time it was rejected. We don't rule it out for the future, but our guiding criteria will be in terms of whether it will really help get the job done.

We began in 1981. For over two years prior to that, none of our missing men had been returned. Today, we have joint crash site excavations in Laos and Vietnam. The Vietnamese are recovering and returning men in all categories; POW discrepancy cases; died-in-captivity cases; and those listed as killed in action, body not recovered. We have, for the first time since the end of the war, been provided a written plan by the Vietnamese to resolve this issue and they solicited our comments. Dialogue on live-sighting reports is now two-way. We believe they have made a high-level decision to cooperate with us and we welcome it. We will not falter in our priority. The strategy I described is now paying off with the help of the League, veterans and an army of concerned citizens.

There is a lot more work to do. I genuinely hope that what I have told you today will help you appreciate our seriousness and our need for your support. As you, I am a Vietnam veteran. The war meant different things for each of us, but we share a uniqueness that is sometimes unspoken. Together, in support of the current strategy, we can make a historic contribution that future generations at peace or war will remember with wonderment and gratitude.

Thank you.

Perot

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

(b)(6)

DO NOT HAS SEEN

- Indonesian mission on MIA is ON. General Achmad, NSC chief in Jakarta called me today direct and wanted Dr. (b)(6) to come next week. Trip to Vietnam from there probable given no hitches.
- Have managed to get private funding for now. Will write up guidelines for (b)(6) this weekend.
- Ollie North says Perot is still impatient to implement his own direct bribery scheme despite my phonecall. He needs to stand down for now. Hope you could help on this without telling him details of what we are now trying.

(b)(6)