

**The original documents are located in Box 22, folder “MIA/POW - Presidential Task Force (2)” of the John Marsh Files at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.**

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*Russ - 741*

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OCT 22 1976

October 22, 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR:

JACK MARSH

FROM:

MILT MITLER

Jack, attached is a suggested press release to announce the establishment of a Presidential Task Force on the missing in action, a response sheet to satisfy questions which might be raised, and preliminary thoughts on the actual formation of the Task Force.

I do think that the Vice President should be contacted before the announcement is made and probably "Sonny" Montgomery as well.

ATTACHMENTS

PROPOSED PRESS RELEASE

PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE ON MISSING IN ACTION

The President today announced the formation of a Presidential Task Force on the missing in action in Southeast Asia to be headed by the Vice President.

This action is the result of the President's continuing determination to secure an accounting of our missing in action and his deep concern for the families of those men who have waited far too long for word of their husbands and sons and brothers.

In making this announcement the President said, "There is nothing to be gained by the Vietnamese holding back on the accounting we seek of our missing in action and prisoners of war. I have made my position very clear and reiterate that there can be no normalization of relationship between the government of Vietnam and our government while they refuse to give us the information we seek.

The President also said that the Department of State, through diplomatic procedures, has been attempting to break through Vietnamese intransigence on this matter and will continue to seek Vietnam's cooperation.

President Ford has asked the Vice President to convene a planning meeting of the Task Force as quickly as possible in order to determine membership and basic requirements.

## PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE ON MISSING IN ACTION

Chairman: The Vice President of the United States

Members: Retired Military Officer with experience in Southeast Asia

Retired Member of the Diplomatic Corps

Distinguished Member of the legal profession

Distinguished Member of the medical profession

Civic Leader

Advisory Committee: Member of Department of State  
Member of Department of Defense  
Member of National League of Families  
John O. Marsh, Jr. or representative

Guidelines: To be developed by Task Force at initial meeting.

Meetings: Initial meeting, following announcement, to discuss member selection. Attendees: The Vice President or his designated representative, Counsellor John O. Marsh, Jr., Brent Scowcroft, Frank Sieverts, Roger Shields, and Milton E. Mitler.

Second meeting during early part of November with President in attendance to establish basic purpose.

Further meeting schedule and reporting dates to be established at first Task Force meeting.

Meeting to be held in the Old Executive Office Building.

Phasing of Activity: The first phase, after formation of Task Force, should be to review past actions with Department of State, Department of Defense and the House Select Committee.

Phase Two, a report to the President with recommendations of actions which should be considered.

Phase Three, response to additional Presidential guidance.

## BACKGROUND INFO

Q: Is it intended for this Task Force to negotiate with the Vietnamese?

A: Negotiations of this nature require the explicit capability of trained diplomats on a continual basis. The involvement of the Task Force in that specific area will have to be determined after it has begun to function.

Q: What will be the mandate of the Task Force?

A: The prime mandate is the accounting of our missing in action. It is not the President's intention to tie the Vice President or the members down with specifics at this point. Instead, the Vice President has been asked to recommend Task Force members and to suggest how the Force should operate.

Q: Who will be on the Task Force?

A: Membership will be achieved through input from the President and the Vice President. An exploratory meeting will be held shortly to set forth guidelines.

Q: Do you envision this group pouring through records?

A: Initially, yes. This is the only way they can become conversant with the problem.

Q: Will the Task Force have one of the Missing in Action family members on it?

A: Again, this is something to be determined by the Vice President.

Q: What made the President decide to do this now?

A: The possibility of a Presidential Task Force on Missing in Action was considered early in 1975. However, when the House Select Committee, under the able direction of Congressman C. V. "Sonny" Montgomery, it was decided to wait. Since then, the National League of Families has asked on several occasions for the President to consider this. In addition, the Republican Platform adopted a plank in its platform calling for such a Task Force. Weighing all of these reasons in balance, it was decided to form the Task Force as another positive step toward achieving an accounting of our Missing in Action.

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

10/26/76

DONNA

YOUR BOSS PLANS TO  
CETEAL WITH BUD  
MCFARLANE RE TASK  
FORCE ABOUT 10:00  
THIS AM AND THEN  
WE'RE TO MEET.

Wet



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WASHINGTON

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October 28, 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: DICK CHENEY  
BILL NYLAND

FROM: JACK MARSH

The attached relates to the MIA Task Force.

If Passkey approves, we will develop a press plan here.

We recommend Houston as a good place for the announcement. Please advise if you concur and any suggestions you may have for the press plan.

We will pre-advise Dole, and I will see Vice President Rockefeller tomorrow morning.

JOM/d1

October 28, 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: BRENT SCOWCROFT

FROM: JACK MARSH

Once we have a go on this, would NSC please advise  
Defense and State.

Many thanks.

JOM/dl





October 28, 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: HILT HITLER  
FROM: JACK MARSH  
SUBJECT: MIA Task Force

Once we have a go on this, will you pre-notice:

1. League of Families.
2. Key MIA leaders.
3. Veterans groups.
4. Others you feel should be made aware.

Legislative Affairs can handle Congressional contacts  
except Montgomery, should you wish to call him.

Also, we should have a meeting tomorrow morning to work  
with the press plan and a pre-notice plan on the MIA Task  
Force. Would you begin to develop a press plan to  
accompany this announcement. It should be broken into  
two parts:

1. The Texas plan.
2. The Washington plan.

JOM/dl



THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

October 28, 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT

THROUGH: DICK CHENEY

FROM: JACK MARSH 

SUBJECT: MIA Task Force

Attached is a draft of the memo prepared by the NSC in reference to the establishment of a MIA Task Force to be chaired by the Vice President. This memo has been approved by Marsh, Scowcroft and Milt Mitler.

I plan to meet with Vice President Rockefeller tomorrow morning to advise him of this proposed action should you approve the same.

If you approve of this approach, it is recommended that you announce establishment of a Task Force in Texas at the Houston stop.

It is our understanding that Dole, in response to questions on this subject, has indicated that you have discussed this matter with him and that he will be the Task Force Chairman. The designation of the incumbent Vice President as Chairman will enable transition to Dole after the election.

Approve Task Force Memo \_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

Approve announcement in Texas \_\_\_\_\_

Announce at other place \_\_\_\_\_

cc: Jim Cavanaugh  
Brent Scowcroft  
Milt Mitler  
Bill Hyland

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

October 28, 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR

THE VICE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Establishment of a Presidential Task Force on the Issue of Men Still Unaccounted for in Southeast Asia

The problem of obtaining a full accounting for the more than 2500 men not accounted for in Southeast Asia remains a matter of great concern to all Americans and to me personally. I believe that these men, who sacrificed so much, deserve our constant efforts, as do their families and loved ones who have suffered so long uncertain of their fate. We will not abandon them and we will not rest until the fullest possible accounting of them has been obtained.

To facilitate that process and to coordinate efforts within the Executive Branch addressing this problem, I ask that you immediately form a Special Presidential Task Force on Americans Unaccounted for in Southeast Asia.

The responsibilities of this Task Force will include:

- reviewing previous actions of the Executive Branch, and considering recommendations of the Congress, the public and the agencies within the Executive Branch regarding approaches to resolving this problem;
- liaison with the appropriate members and committees of the Congress; coordinating Executive Branch actions with them as appropriate and providing assistance to them as they request;

- periodically making recommendations to me as to possible measures for improving the effectiveness of efforts to account for those men listed as missing as well as those listed as killed but whose bodies have not been recovered, and changes in their status.

The Secretary of State will retain responsibility for negotiating with foreign governments and dealing with international organizations on this issue.

MIA's

October 28, 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR

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WHITE HOUSE

Draft - 10/28/76

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The responsibilities of this Task Force will include:

- reviewing previous actions of the Executive Branch, and considering recommendations of the Congress, the public and the agencies within the Executive Branch regarding approaches to resolving this problem;

- providing a central point of contact within the Executive Branch for the families and relatives of these missing men, private organizations and groups concerned with this problem and the general public;
- liaison with the appropriate members and committees of the Congress; coordinating Executive Branch actions with them as appropriate and providing assistance to them as they request;
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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

October 28, 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: JACK MARSH

FROM: MILT MITLER *fuel*

Jack, this letter to the Vice President looks fine.

I have just been informed that Senator Dole, in response to a question from an MIA family, said he was the Task Force and had discussed the matter with the President. This supposedly took place in Omaha. I don't believe that should stop us from going ahead as planned right now. It may be, however, that following the election, Vice President-elect Dole should be moved into the Task Force position so that he can pick up on the reigns.

Attachment

WHITE HOUSE

Draft - 10/28/76

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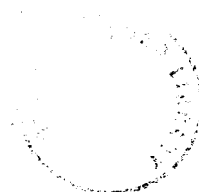
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Approve Task Force Memo \_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

Approve announcement in Texas \_\_\_\_\_

Announce at other place \_\_\_\_\_

cc: Jim Cavanaugh  
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