

The first 10 years of this program inevitably were devoted in considerable part to collection of data and feasibility studies. Little was known about this remote region. The studies have identified some 34 possible damsites on tributaries of the Mekong as meriting detailed engineering study. There has also been extensive work on the river's flow characteristics, the basin's soil conditions and topography, possibilities for irrigation, the existence of mineral deposits, and the educational and institutional needs for development of the basin. In addition, there have been completed the first two tributary dams in northeast Thailand, which now produce the only electric power ever to flow from the Mekong. Detailed studies are in process on three main stream dams.

I believe that the time has come to put the funding for this promising program on a firmer basis, to assess the progress made during the first 10 years, and to prepare a comprehensive and systematic development plan. There is a need to examine the question of the long-term relationship of the Mekong Coordinating Committee to the Asian Development Bank. The committee's executive agent has held exploratory discussions with the President of the Bank. We are hopeful the Bank will work out arrangements with the Mekong Committee under which the Bank will provide financial management and administration of agreed projects.

This is, roughly, the status of the various programs which would be eligible for support from the U.S. special fund contributions. All of them are the result of Asian imagination and initiative. All of them deal with priority needs of the area. They will undergo further changes as the Asians refine their thinking. The role of the United States is to offer sympathetic support and assistance as and when it is requested by the Asians, in partnership with other developed countries.

While these are the areas of cooperation in which Asian thinking is most advanced, there will no doubt be other proposals from the Asians which will merit our support. For this reason, we believe the legislation now before this committee, while placing emphasis on these three sectors of development, should allow for the possibility of contributing to projects which may fall outside the scope of these programs.

DEVELOPING REGIONALISM IN ASIA

Before outlining, briefly, some of the specifics of the proposal contemplated in the legislation now before you, I would like to place what I have already said about Asian Bank special funds in a broader context. I favor the proposal for such funds because I think the Asian Bank is a sound institution; the proposed programs are sound; and because these funds would support the historic trend toward Asian regional cooperation. This is the most promising way I can see toward peaceful progress in Asia.

President Johnson has called the growing interest in Asia in regional cooperation one of the truly constructive developments of our time. Under Asian leadership, programs designed to promote peaceful reform and development are moving forward more rapidly than many would have imagined 2 or 3 years ago. Asians are coming to know each other better; they meet more frequently to consult on common problems. They are increasingly conscious of the benefits of closer economic, social and political cooperation.