MEMORANDUM
RM-4400/2
DECEMBER 1964

SOUTHEAST ASIA TRIP REPORT
PART II—SIAT: THE SINGLE INTEGRATED
ATTACK TEAM
A Concept for Offensive Military Operations
in South Vietnam
W. B. Graham and A. H. Katz
SUMMARY

This report proposes a tactic for close air support in COIN operations and in particular for the war in Vietnam, involving small aggressive ground units, closely supported by airborne visual reconnaissance and strike air, and termed the Single Integrated Attack Team (SIAT). The object of the SIAT operation in Vietnam is to deprive the Viet Cong of the initiative in local areas and take effective offensive action.

The ground operations are carried out by special units of about 60 to 80 men each. Such a unit is small enough to maintain security of movement, but large enough to defend itself against enemy units, even larger than itself, at least until help arrives. Successful experience in counterinsurgency warfare indicates that the units be divided into patrols of 8 to 10 men each. These patrols are in the field night and day, operating individually but always able to support one another. The certainty of quick, effective assistance from the air permits these special units to operate aggressively in forward areas, harassing the enemy, and setting up enemy units as targets for air strikes.

The control of air support is provided through the use of visual reconnaissance units flying in liaison-type aircraft at low altitudes. Each reconnaissance unit is permanently assigned to an area of about 1000 sq mi, and thus can quickly become expert in the patterns of activity to be observed daily. The unit is in constant communication with its Sector Intelligence and Operations Center, sending and receiving
information on the status of friendly and enemy units within its area. The reconnaissance unit is also in direct radio communication with friendly ground units below. Since it is never more than a few minutes from any point within its observation area, the unit can respond quickly to a request from the ground for help. It calls for air strikes as needed, and marks the targets for the A-1 strike aircraft. These aircraft can respond within minutes to a strike request, especially if some are maintained on an airborne alert status.

It is proposed that a SIAT operation be set up on a trial basis in two adjoining provinces in South Vietnam, with the expectation of expanding the operation if the trials are successful.
PREFACE

The authors, with Leon Gouré, also of RAND, spent approximately ten weeks in the Far East and Southeast Asia (26 July to 15 October 1964). The trip, sponsored by the U.S. Air Force, was intended to be "...in support of Project RAND investigations of COIN problems, with emphasis on, but not confined to, the role and utility of airpower. Specifically, the group will study [1] instruments and techniques for, and the effectiveness of, air strike...operations, as well as air-ground cooperation techniques, [2] the role, utility and techniques of reconnaissance, communications, and intelligence. Possible improvements in enemy identification and in timely intelligence analysis, processing, and utilization will be sought...."

Military and government officials and installations were visited in Japan, Okinawa, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Australia and wholehearted cooperation was obtained at every point.

The authors believe that the tactic to be described can make a significant difference in the war in South Vietnam. The proposal has been discussed with hundreds of hard-working, dedicated Americans from all ranks and services, and with British, Australian and Malay experts as well.

Probably none of the ideas presented are new. For example, some operational practices of Special Air Warfare Center forces are strikingly similar to those proposed. Nevertheless, no person or group revealed the integrated concept discussed in this report, even though the individual components are familiar to various persons.
This is the second of a series of reports on various aspects of this trip. The first report, by L. Gouré, is entitled Southeast Asia Trip Report: Part I: The Impact of Air Power in South Vietnam (U), RAND Memorandum RM-4400-PR (Confidential).
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The suggestions put forth in this Memorandum are the result of some detailed observation and much discussion of military operations in South Vietnam. Particular attention was paid to three aspects of those operations: reconnaissance; the Tactical Air Control System in its relationship to strike air support; and ground actions. Systematic review of these aspects indicates that each of them can be changed in certain important respects, toward the common goal of a Single Integrated Attack Team (SIAT). The SIAT concept of small, aggressive forward ground units, closely supported by airborne visual reconnaissance directing air strikes, offers an advantageous and feasible means for carrying out successful moves against the Viet Cong.
II. RECONNAISSANCE

The photo reconnaissance performed in South Vietnam by RF-101s produces superb pictures that are used to inspect hamlets; check the status of road and rail networks; select drop, extraction, or landing zones; make approach charts for airfields; delineate fixed military emplacements; and satisfy other familiar reconnaissance needs. But in South Vietnam this form of reconnaissance has had only limited success in producing the one commodity in shortest supply—timely and accurate information on the location, numbers, deployment, and movements of the Viet Cong.

No one remedy can fill this deficiency, and multiple intelligence sources and techniques are, as always, desirable. Troops on the ground in Vietnam need better intelligence from ground sources, but they also desperately need the benefits of visual reconnaissance from low-flying aircraft.

To be effective, visual reconnaissance must be performed systematically, by the same crew always flying the same area. Such a reconnaissance unit, consisting of a pilot and an observer, quickly becomes expert in its area. In SIAT operations it not only observes, but also helps direct action against the enemy.

Visual reconnaissance is not used systematically in South Vietnam, although it was well developed in World War II, in Korea, in Algeria, and in Malaya.

In World War II, visual reconnaissance by the Ninth Air Force held the Western Front under continuous observation by pairs of P-51s,
flying at 3500 to 6000 ft, each pair covering a 10 mi section of the front to a depth of 100 mi forward into enemy territory, spotting targets such as tanks, trucks, and railroad cars.

In South Vietnam the military targets are primarily people, and visual reconnaissance crews should fly at 2000 ft or lower in order to be effective. Such missions may be dangerous, but even at elevations below 2000 ft, attrition on L-19-type aircraft in South Vietnam appears to be acceptable. (If attrition becomes unacceptable the missions would be flown higher, and observers could use wide-field low-power binoculars.)

If a systematic visual reconnaissance program were initiated in South Vietnam, the reconnaissance units would soon be able to spot Viet Cong activity. They could then serve as Forward Air Controllers (FACs), marking targets and relaying communications between friendly ground forces and strike aircraft.

Every officer interviewed in South Vietnam who served as either Air Liaison Officer or Forward Air Controller,* and many other more senior Air Force officers and many Army officers as well, quickly concurred in this suggestion. They agreed that the absence of systematic visual reconnaissance inhibits air operations and greatly reduces their effectiveness.

Visual reconnaissance in South Vietnam should be started with pilot and observer units flying L-19 or equivalent aircraft, each

*See Appendix.
unit flying the same area--about 1000 sq mi to a unit. This
operation may require diversion of some L-19-type aircraft from
other functions, or the introduction of additional light aircraft.
Since at least 50 L-19s can be obtained for the cost of one equipped
RF-101, for practical purposes all the needed L-19 or other appropriate
types should be readily obtainable.*

* Aircraft superior to the L-19 in this role are presently available, for example, the U-10B (piston). The U-10C (turbo prop) can also be procured.
III. CONTROL AND EMPLOYMENT OF STRIKE AIR

Both U.S. and Vietnamese air units operate in South Vietnam. Those belonging to the U.S. Air Force include various types of combat, logistic, training, and transport aircraft, as well as RF-101 photo recce aircraft. However, no USAF-marked strike aircraft are used for ground support. About 100 strike aircraft marked VNAF, consisting of single-place A-1Hs and two-place A-1Es, are in the area. The A-1 is a large single-engine aircraft, well suited for use in Vietnam. It can carry up to five tons of ordnance, enough to be extremely effective against a ground force. To be most useful, however, an air strike in response to a ground call should be delivered within minutes. In practice in Vietnam, strikes are too often delivered hours after a request is initiated.

The causes of the delays are clear enough: Two languages are used in South Vietnam. The rules of engagement require that an authorized target-marking aircraft precede an air strike, and this complicates the problem of identifying targets. A number of authorities must approve an air strike, from local officials on up the chain of command. The radio messages requesting a strike may be held up at a number of points in the request system, which is operated by the Vietnamese ground forces (ARVN). Requests for air strikes are often not fulfilled, and for this reason the ground forces often negotiate in advance to find out whether they will get a strike if they ask for one.
A partially successful attempt to solve some of these problems is the Direct Air Request Net, which was operating in III Corps in mid-summer 1964. This system has an Air Liaison Officer (ALO) or Forward Air Controller (FAC) on the ground with each Battalion in direct communication with the Corps Air Support Operations Center (ASOC). Thus the message by-passes Regiment, Division, and Corps (they listen in, and unless they veto, the request goes through).
IV. DEVELOPING THE SIAT CONCEPT--AIRBORNE ASPECTS

The difficult problems of control and efficient use of strike air would be greatly eased by a solution of the reconnaissance problem. A reconnaissance unit—which could be a USAF pilot and an authorized Vietnamese observer—would always be airborne within its 1000 sq mi area, and hence close to any trouble spot within that area. The reconnaissance aircraft would also be the target-marking aircraft. This procedure would eliminate the problem of the target-marker arriving late or not at all. The recce-FAC unit, being familiar with its area, would also mark targets more reliably than would a random unit sent in for one mission.

In this war, which has no front, various friendly paramilitary forces operate over wide areas and may appear in unpredictable places. Locating friendly units is difficult when they are out of sight and out of touch. The need to discriminate and identify these units often delays commitments of air or ground support. The airborne visual reconnaissance unit could take over and effectively solve a good part of this problem.

The Province or Sector Chief, who is in the chain of command, operates a Sector Intelligence and Operations Center (SIOC), which is required to know the current status of all forces operating within its area of responsibility.* This center would become the key to the

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*The SIOC was new at the time of our stay in Vietnam. We understand that not all Sectors or Provinces operate such a formal operations center at present.
activities of the airborne recce-FAC unit. Center and unit would
exchange daily status and plans briefings, and would more or less
continually pass information up and down for checking, coordinating,
seeking strike authority, etc., via radio during flight. The recon-
naissance unit would thus be receiving information from Sector (or
Province), Division, and Corps. It would know the locations of
friendly units, and be able to check these locations directly. It
would have the most complete and current picture of ground disposi-
tions, and because of this it can be expected to acquire authority
to commit air strikes, in accord with its demonstrated performance.

The SIAT concept would profit if part of the A-1 force were
placed on airborne alert in areas where it is likely they would be
called. This would save time in getting the force airborne from
30-minute ground alert, as well as some of the time spent in getting
from airfield to target.

If the strike sorties made available* to the visual reconnaiss-
ance unit were used effectively, significant gains could be expected. More
strikes would be mounted as the reconnaissance units acquired experience.
More requests would be made if it were known that they could be ful-
filled. The strikes would be more effective, since they would be

*The term "made available" is intentionally imprecise. In some
instances, Special Air Warfare forces could be assigned to this mis-
ion. In other situations, the Air Support Operations Center or Air
Operations Center could commit a few sorties daily to the airborne
recce-FAC unit. Strike sorties could also respond to requests from the
unit without being specifically so assigned in advance. The operational
method chosen would depend on policy, on other actions underway, the
aircraft available, mission priorities, etc.
laid on within minutes after a request, against targets marked by an airborne unit always close to the ground situation. Since air strikes are already highly effective in favorable situations, far greater overall results can be expected by the more efficient application of this capability.
V. THE ROLE OF SMALL GROUND UNITS

Changes in ground operations in Vietnam are also indicated. Counterinsurgency specialists are agreed that a successful anti-guerrilla campaign must be based on offensive ground patrol operations with small units. The size of the patrols would depend on the enemy units likely to be encountered, and on the assistance that can be brought in quickly when the patrol engages a stronger enemy force. Such small aggressive units can be the basis for major improvements in the military situation in South Vietnam, when supported by and integrated with the previously described recce-FAC unit and rapidly responding strike air.

A small unit in South Vietnam might consist of about 60 to 80 well-armed men. This unit would be small enough to move without intelligence leaks, but large enough to defend itself against even larger units, if it knew that help were available. The unit would be divided into a headquarters group and into day and night groups with each of the latter divided into small patrols, of say, eight to ten men each. The patrols would operate separately but not in isolation; they would be mutually supporting. Their function would be to harass the enemy. When they encountered units too large to defeat with their own resources, they would engage and try to keep the enemy confined as a suitable target for air strike or ground unit reinforcements.
VI. SIAT IN OPERATION

When ground patrols called for help, the visual reconnaissance unit, always in the area and in communication with the ground unit, could summon an air strike quickly and mark the target. An A-1 aircraft on alert could respond by delivering three to five tons of ordnance—more ordnance than even a large ground unit can carry.

Several such small units operating in a province could make a significant difference in the war in that area. A small number of visual reconnaissance units, with sufficient strike aircraft on call, could provide support. These small ground units would make up the forward force only; they would not replace the main body of the ground forces.

It is advocated that small units of this character be organized and operated in conjunction with the reconnaissance and strike air elements described, with the goal of seizing the initiative in local areas. Local success is sufficient to start getting intelligence from the largely uncommitted villages, and this intelligence of Viet Cong activities is needed for combat forces to operate most effectively.

Strike air is, of course, not the only support such ground units may need or desire. It might often be preferable to bring in more troops via Eagle flight. Such troop movements are likely to require support by heavy fixed-wing aircraft, both before and after landing. In these operations, the visual reconnaissance team would also request help and assist in directing the subsequent movements.

A Note on Night Operations

Night operations are also possible. At present in Vietnam, villages and outposts under attack at night often summon help, and
it is frequently supplied and often effective. It usually consists of transport aircraft which drop flares, followed by strikes by A-1 aircraft.

In SIAT operations, friendly ground units engaging the enemy at night could call for air support. In this situation the reconnaissance aircraft would be primarily a communications relay. It could call for air strike support, and would verify and authenticate messages and positions, since the Viet Cong are increasingly using deceptive radio signals to confuse strike aircraft sent against them. Visual reconnaissance aircraft could also carry some flares.

**Flying Weather**

Weather will sometimes interfere with low altitude flying. The limitations actually imposed by weather in South Vietnam do not appear to have been studied in detail. However, people experienced in that area indicate that even in the worst seasons of the year, bad weather will curtail flying only to a minor degree. For example, a recent review of weather data for South Vietnam reveals the percentages shown in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1**

**PERCENTAGE OF TIME CEILING IS LESS THAN 1000 FT AT SAIGON**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time (local standard)</th>
<th>January</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>October</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0700</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1300</td>
<td>&lt; 0.5</td>
<td>&lt; 0.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

ANNUAL AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF DAYS WITH VMC\textsuperscript{a} FLYING WEATHER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region and Station</th>
<th>Time (local standard)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0600</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mekong Delta:</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saigon</td>
<td>71.6</td>
<td>95.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can Tho</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td>96.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Highlands:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalat</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Lowlands:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nha Trang</td>
<td>97.6</td>
<td>98.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Da Nang</td>
<td>91.1</td>
<td>94.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{a}Visual meteorological conditions (ceiling $\geq$ 1000 ft and visibility $\geq 2\frac{1}{2}$ n mi).

Source: The University of Michigan, Office of Research Administration, Ann Arbor, Analysis of Geographic and Climatic Factors in Coastal Southeast Asia, Report No. 04231-1-F, March 1962, Table 12.
VII. A PROPOSED OPERATIONAL TRIAL

An operational trial is suggested as a preliminary to extensive SIAT activities. Such a trial might proceed as follows:

1. Select two adjacent provinces as the area of trial operations.
2. Form and train, say, six ground units (about 360 to 480 men).
3. Form and train the air elements required to support this operation.*
4. Name a SIAT Commander, and give him the necessary authority and support to carry out his assignment. Perhaps the SIAT Air Commander should direct both reconnaissance and strike air. The SIAT Air Commander, with the Ground Commander in the field, would then form the combat team. A competent command, adequately supported, is essential to the success of the trial, and indeed, of any SIAT operation.

The ground units would probably need the longest time to become ready for operations. However, several elite units are available, and these could quickly be operational.

The visual reconnaissance units could begin learning immediately. They should be quite effective within a month, and fully so within three months.

If the trial is successful, the Vietnamese air and ground forces should be able to expand and continue SIAT activities.

* Discussions with SAWG personnel suggest that something like the following would provide continuous support for a highly effective SIAT trial operation in two adjacent provinces: 12 liaison-type aircraft, 16 strike aircraft, 5 CH3 emergency reaction helicopters, 52 USAF pilots, 42 VNAF observers, and a total of about 200 other USAF personnel for support, command, etc.
Appendix

Forward Air Controllers (FACs) and visual reconnaissance units involved in SIAT operations in South Vietnam will have two problems, as has been mentioned: First, can airborne FACs see guerrilla-type targets? Second, what is the best altitude for the aircraft?

1. ABILITY TO SEE TARGETS

For example, a report from a USAF Forward Air Controller sheds some light on the ability to identify Viet Cong from the air:

The following reports might have been submitted if I had been flying an armed aircraft instead of an L-19 over our jettison areas on these dates (assuming 50% kill of VC sighted): 9 March, 11 VC; 24 March, 20 VC; 1 April, 4 VC; 5 April, 8 VC; 19 April, 11 VC.

Another USAF officer reports:

All of my ALO's who have been in their area for a few months (that is, not newly assigned) can ferret out large numbers of VC by low-level (100-200 ft altitude) visual reconnaissance. We know the sightings are VC because they throw weapons to shoulder and fire at once, and they are living in identified VC areas.

An officer of III Corps stated:

During December alone, flying an average of 2 VR missions a week over the hard core areas of Thuct-Thuy province, I sighted groups of 20 to 25 VC on each mission. They were caught in the open and would scramble for the woods.

An additional comment:

3. Visual Reconnaissance
   a. Discussion. Nonexistent. At the present time there is no Daily Province Visual Reconnaissance Plan. The Viet Cong, when denied of movement, cannot conduct operations. Without daily visual reconnaissance of critical areas of each Province the VC can continue to operate unhampered without fear of being observed.
Many Viet Cong prisoner interrogation reports reveal that one of the most dreaded possibilities was discovery from the air and the ensuing air strike. It has also been observed that the local force VC guerilla usually displays a guilt complex for he believes that he is observed when an aircraft passes overhead. His erratic behavior many times reveals his position.

b. Recommendations. Observational aircraft should be assigned to each Province Headquarters on a daily basis. The same crew (pilot and observer) should always cover the same area. The missions should stage out of Province and Regimental TOC with Pre and Post Mission briefing with the Sector and Regimental B-2 and S-3. After a short period of time the air-crew will be as familiar with their respective areas as the people residing in them.

Field reports are agreed that if visual reconnaissance is successful (1) it must be done by a man familiar with the area, (2) it will require low flying, and (3) the Forward Air Controller or observer should fly over his area often. One officer bluntly said, "FACs who cannot fly often over their area have doubtful value."

Another officer pleaded

Liaison aircraft should be made available in the Tay-Ninh area on a daily basis until this threat subsides. The area should be observed by the same individuals daily to detect small day-to-day changes in trails, grouping of people, sampans, etc. The Tay-Ninh ALO would be an ideal person for this observation.

Although Viet Cong cannot be distinguished from other Vietnamese by clothing, stature, or color, they behave differently from the peasants and these small differences permit trained observers to distinguish friend from foe. For example, one Forward Air Controller reports:

At the present time, VC fire discipline (cooking fires) is very poor. There are areas where we know the general location of VC units but are unable to pinpoint them during the day. During the first hours of darkness, the VC build fires which reveal their location. I believe some effective air strikes can be made after dark.
He described the Forward Air Controller's duties:

...I mean an individual in the area of operation who is so familiar with the local scene and the plan of ground movement that he can identify friend from foe and actually mark accurately for close proximity targets. This will require low flying near the enemy positions. It will require designation of certain VNAF FACs for geographical areas of prime responsibility and will require FACs to receive daily face-to-face briefings from ARVN officers at forward command posts.

Certain areas in Vietnam are wholly occupied by Viet Cong—for example, the notorious Zone D. Here Forward Air Controllers can call strikes without fear of hitting loyal civilians. The III Corps ALO commented:

There are large areas of III Corps that the responsible authority (province chiefs) will guarantee contain only VC forces.

2. FLIGHT ALTITUDE

The flight altitude will be a compromise between the observer's ability to see targets and the vulnerability of the aircraft. Estimates of flight altitudes from which Viet Cong can be observed vary from 150 to 1000 ft above the terrain. Most officers feel that 500 ft is the maximum, but that altitudes of 100 to 200 ft are necessary over wooded areas.

An ALO stated:

Neither my ALO/FACs nor I have been able to find a VC from altitudes above 500 ft over wooded areas. Indeed, 150 ft over wooded areas is a safer altitude and one from which concealed VC are more likely to be discovered.

Current VNAF policy requires that observation aircraft be flown at 2000 ft or above to avoid anti-aircraft fire. Fire from .30-caliber shoulder weapons, such as the M-1 or light machine gun, can be effective to 2000 ft. Heavy machine guns (.50-caliber) are effective at
higher altitudes. This has led to two tactics by pilots to reduce the vulnerability of light aircraft. One is to fly above 2000 ft. The use of binoculars at this altitude or higher has been suggested. The second tactic is to fly very low and make a single pass. This exposes the aircraft to fire for only a very short time.
SUPPLEMENT

This supplement consists of two charts which in effect summarize this report. The first shows the findings of the present study in tabular form. The second is a diagram of, and commentary on, the relationship and functions involved in SIAT operations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem area</th>
<th>Current status</th>
<th>Suggested improvements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reconnaissance</td>
<td>Photo reconnaissance is too slow and too decoupled from the tactical intelligence problem. Need reliable, faster, continuous flow of tactical intelligence.</td>
<td>Continuous, contiguous airborne visual reconnaissance over same areas by same crews. Suggest 1000 sq mi can be covered per crew (depending on the tactical situation).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strike Air, the Tactical Air Control System and the Army Request System</td>
<td>The system is too slow, too stifled by rules of engagement. Strike air requires target-marking aircraft, which too often are late or missing.</td>
<td>Partial airborne alert, with response and direction by visual reconnaissance team, who will do Forward Air Control and target-marking function.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground Operations</td>
<td>Characterized by defensive posture. Most present offensive operations are too large, &quot;noisy,&quot; and thus give away surprise.</td>
<td>Small unit aggressive offensive patrol actions. Can work if adequately, reliably, and promptly supported by on-call air, via the airborne reconnaissance team and strike air.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WHAT HE IS</td>
<td>WHAT HE DOES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G</strong></td>
<td>Ground element: armed, sub-company unit</td>
<td>Locates, harasses, engages enemy units.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td>Airborne FAC/visual reconnaissance team: USAF pilot, plus VN observer in L-19 type aircraft</td>
<td>Continuous monitoring of activity in 1000 sq mi. Receives information on location of all friendly forces. Covers potential ambush areas, watches for changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S</strong></td>
<td>Strike aircraft: A-1s</td>
<td>Responds to call from visual reconnaissance aircraft, who is the FAC for the strike aircraft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P</strong></td>
<td>Responsible Authority in a given area</td>
<td>Provides intelligence data, force dispositions and plans. Authorizes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>