

MR 2  
DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP  
PRESENTATION  
THOMAS A. MOSER

21 January 1971

I am deeply concerned over the present and future direction of our efforts in Vietnam, a concern which I am sure is shared by all of you. At the moment, it seems that we are at, or are approaching, a crucial period in our relationships with respect to economic aid and that the decisions made during the next year will be far reaching in their consequences.

We have reached a period when we now have a little more time to sit back and reflect a bit on the nature and complexion of US assistance to Vietnam. Until recently, we could not afford this luxury because there were just too many VC around, too many fires to put out and too many hungry and displaced people to care for - while this is changing - my impression is that we might find it difficult to change with it.

It is a considerably more complex intellectual problem - and far less dramatic - to determine how we might best assist the GVN in solving their long term economic and social problems, than it is to rehabilitate refugees, or to rebuild destroyed hamlets, or to develop security and pacification systems to help stabilize the population and to defeat the enemy. Bombers don't develop new rice strains or teach literacy to the Montagnards. Nor do soup or bulgur lines necessarily contribute to the long term viability of the nation.

The natural inclination is to shift with the times from a military-security-pacification emphasis to one of development. But what is dangerous in this approach, it seems to me, is that we have grown so accustomed to massive involvement in Vietnam that we are hardly capable of thinking in any other terms. Our security forces might now be turned into development cadres - our guns into plow shares - and we will be just as active in helping - yes, even directing the GVN in their economic and social battle as we have been all these years on the military and political front.

I am not, a priori, saying this is wrong. But what I am suggesting is that I suspect that the conventional wisdom might lead us to an almost automatic, sub-conscious shift in this direction without really having taken the time to evaluate objectively if this really is in the best interests of either the US or the GVN.

It just might be that the Vietnamese people are so overburdened and overladen with our moral and material presence and support that we are stymying their own latent development potential. And I am not talking here about the obvious grist our presence provides for the Viet Cong propaganda mill. What I am concerned with is the effect our over-the-shoulder, big-brother-knows-best attitude, might be having on the problem we so often proclaim as the major enemy in Vietnam today...the lack of will and determination on the part of GVN leadership to see the battle through. Perhaps the time has come for us to be more relaxed in pushing our programs for their benefit, as well meaning as we might be. Perhaps we would be better advised to sit back awhile and let

the Vietnamese gain their second breath. In the military field, we have trained and equipped them well. We have been told by experts that ARVN now possesses all the capabilities necessary for military victory, at least against the VC. On the military front, we are disengaging. This is how it should be. On the pacification front, perhaps the GVN has not yet advanced quite so far and our support might be needed over the next year or so to help them stabilize internal and territorial security. But it is the development front that we are concerned with primarily here today. Just how should we approach this transitional period from war to peace? What would be in the best interests of both our governments in our mutual search for the development of a free and viable GVN society?

Precisely what this role should be, I don't know. What I do know, however, or at least believe deeply, is that fresh thinking is badly needed to free us from the approaches and thought patterns that have engulfed us over the years of our increasingly deepening commitment in Vietnam. We have deluged this country with men, money and machines, to a degree unprecedented in history, the long term consequences of which are yet to be realized. I am not saying this critically. Perhaps had we not, all of Southeast Asia would be Communist today which would hardly be in our best interests. But we must consciously endeavor, now that conditions are becoming more rational, to help the country return to its own values, its own life style, and its own pace. And I submit that this can only be done by reducing our presence and influence on virtually all fronts including our civilian efforts.

We should learn to be less uptight because our counterparts don't seem to be as enthusiastic or efficient over a particular program or reporting system as we are. If we examine it closely, we probably will find that the particular program or report was a US creation in the first instance. Perhaps the time has come when we might devote more of our efforts to truly communicating with the Vietnamese in an attempt to understand their attitudes, motivation and interests a little better, rather than to continue to lament over their failures or to cajole them to adhere to a particular system which might be counter to their own way of life. I cannot speak for our Saigon colleagues but most of us here in the Regional headquarters talk only to ourselves. We would hardly be more isolated from Vietnamese society if we were living in Oshkosh. This of course does not apply to provincial and district personnel.

There is another channel of communication that we might focus on more closely this coming year and that is the one between CORDS and USAID. My impressions from these past several months of travelling in the provinces, and talking to people here and in Saigon (and I admit to exaggerating this for effect) is that there is a USAID world and a CORDS world each with its own language, customs and frames of reference. In essence, AID has been nationally oriented, concerned with the problems of propping up the economy and laying the foundation for long term nation building. CORDS, on the other hand, has been closer to the war, out in the field where the fighting is or has been, reacting to emergencies, providing food and shelter, moving supplies and equipment, furnishing medical support and encouraging local people in the hamlets, villages, districts and provinces to become more involved in the affairs of their government through the provision of such programs as the village self development fund, the provincial development fund and more recently, the provincial council fund.

Many, if not most, of these activities are still underway, both in USAID and CORDS. But now that the emergency has lessened, it might be an appropriate time to examine whether these two worlds might not merge or at least get more into the same orbit; and in the process, we should look closely at the present relevance of some of our activities, on both sides of the house, how they might be modified, reduced or possibly, in some cases, even eliminated.

We have far too much invested to simply pull out and I am as interested as anyone in protecting this investment. But my notion as to how best to protect it is to reduce our protection over it; in a nutshell, less hovering and monitoring, less reporting, less pressure on virtually all fronts. From a practical point of view, one consequence would be the need for fewer of us in jobs like these. It would be necessary to question some of our sacred or semi-sacred cows like the relevance of the provincial and district teams in the future development effort, the need for a regional office, such as this one, at least in its present size and organization, the continued need for young generalist NLD type personnel who might be better geared to putting out fires than for long term nation building, and the like. More on the AID side, the question might be - just how much longer is it feasible for us to continue to prop up this economy with CIP and PL 480 consumable type programs?

I am sure all of this sounds very negative, which bothers me because it is not my nature to be so, especially in the area of aid to underdeveloped countries in which I have been engaged over the past twenty years. But perhaps we should consider returning to some of the more proven and tested principles of aiding other countries. And the first one is that traditionally we normally respond only to requests of host governments, rather than initiate them. Because of the war and the nature of our involvement, I am afraid the habit has formed here that we don't wait for the host government to recognize its needs, rather we anticipate them. We are quite often ready to solve a problem before it has emerged or to introduce a program before the GVN really is ready for it or even understands it. Our natural eagerness for progress and improvement is understandable but has it possibly become misguided and counterproductive? A corollary of this is that in other less developed countries where we provide advisors to host governments, it is done only upon their expressed written request, and in most cases the host government makes a significant contribution to the expense of maintaining the advisor in such ways as providing his base salary, or his housing, or transportation or some related cost. I wonder how many of us would be in Vietnam today, if these more normal world wide ground rules applied here?

Certainly we cannot shift overnight from the exigencies of the Vietnam of 1965-70 to the more peaceful, more stable and normal Vietnam of the future, but it is not too early to begin de-escalating our thinking in the development area and to return to a more rational approach, which in my view, would be in greater consonance with our own as well as the GVN's long term interests.

These observations challenge the future validity or relevance of the CORDS structure as now constituted. CORDS was set up to be responsive to the emergency that existed at the time. It has accomplished its tasks to a large extent, although possibly less so in our region than in others. As security improves and pacification becomes a less dominant force in the CORDS mission,

it will be only natural to turn to the development side to see how we might strengthen and expand it. I urge that we guard against this, unless or until we are a lot clearer than we are today as to where we are going and what is at the end of the road.

To close on a more positive note, history may well record that CORDS proved to be an extremely successful response to the Vietnam of 1967 to 1971. Much good work has been done, especially in humanitarian terms, and there is no reason why CORDS cannot be flexible and responsive enough to adjust to the changing situation and remain an effective instrument for carrying out US foreign policy in Vietnam. Let us all work toward making this possible in our deliberations during the course of this meeting.

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DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

MR 2

DISCUSSION PAPER

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It is hoped that these statements and questions will provoke your thinking. They are not intended to influence your attitudes. Please be prepared to reject them in part or in their entirety if you so believe. They are intended to assist you in organizing your thoughts with respect to the upcoming Workshop in order to maximize your participation and contributions.

As stressed in Mr. James' recent letter announcing the meeting, the primary purpose of the Workshop is to focus on whether the present CORDS approaches to development throughout MR 2 are as relevant today as in the past. If so, fine. If not, how should they be changed? It is hoped that all phases of our presence in the development sector be examined. (I am purposely - omitting reference to security in these notes since here we are talking about the development side although the two areas are quite inter-related and at times, difficult to separate.) One way to think about the issues might be:

(1) Conceptually - The main thrusts of our development efforts could be classified as:

(a) Assistance to groups of people temporarily or permanently disadvantaged because of the war, e.g., resettlement of refugees, emergency relief in foodstuffs and supplies, etc.

(b) Encouragement and support of programs designed to create confidence in the GVN among the Vietnamese population (primarily rural). A major emphasis here is in involving the people as much as possible in the decision-making process. The VSD program is the best example of this along with the Province Development Fund and the Province Council Fund.

(c) In a more limited way, we assist however we can in increasing the economic viability of the region and the standard of living of the people, e.g., introduction of new grain varieties, improvements in agricultural practices, assistance in local infrastructure development in such areas as farm to market roads, irrigation schemes, etc.

On the other hand, USAID is more interested in economic stability (CIP program) and longer term institutional development and nation building programs that neither necessarily conflict with nor complement CORDS efforts. In general, CORDS functions are related, or have been related, to the immediate war torn situation, while USAID is concerned with macro-economics and the longer term future.

Questions: Has pacification progressed to the point where the CORDS approach in the development area is no longer valid, or as valid as it was three years ago? What changes could or should be made? Should our role in these efforts be diminished and gradually phased out? After all, is not the GVN really handling most of the responsibilities anyway and do

they really need (or want) us looking over their shoulder any longer? Is it possible that our presence might be marginal for the most part and perhaps even counter productive in some cases in that we might tend to inhibit our GVN associates from taking more initiatives, e.g., "Can will and determination be counterparted"? To paraphrase a statement made recently by Mr. Long, DEPCORDS, ... "How can we be concerned rather than involved?"

In a more positive vein, has the time come when we should be giving attention and thought to longer term, more AID-type development activities? Have responsible economic studies been made to determine the most feasible directions for MR 2 in the future? Perhaps more should be known of the economics of the situation. To begin with, is it feasible to look at MR 2 as an economic region or should we focus on sub-areas such as highland provinces and coastal provinces? Should private enterprise be fostered and encouraged? Cooperatives? Labor Unions? Have market studies been made to determine the most feasible cash crops for future development? How about industrial development, what is known of potential here? How is the labor market? Are sufficient numbers of skilled tradesmen being trained and if so, does the job market absorb them and what are the future manpower supply and demand projections? How about the general educational system? Is it responsive to the country's present and future needs? And how about the rapid trend towards urbanization and all the potential risks inherent in such major dislocations? Then there is the broad area of public administration, i.e., provision of responsible and responsive public services to the people to assure stability, viability and support of the existing government, and so on. The major question here is whether these are areas we should be concerning ourselves with in a serious way or would it be better to leave such fundamental issues to the GVN. As cautioned in the earlier letter, however, we should not be thinking in grandiose development terms nor beyond the next several years, given the present mood of the US Congress and public toward foreign aid.

#### Organizational and Staffing

For the most part, we are staffed with young generalists at the provincial and district level and with older, more experienced specialized support staff at the regional level. The typical province-type development officer might be characterized as a highly motivated ex-Peace Corps volunteer with a people-to-people grass roots approach; a practical, sensible and energetic generalist who assists the various service chiefs in a variety of ways to perform effectively in the interests of the GVN and the rural population. A good share of his time is spent collecting information and preparing reports and responses to requests from higher echelons. He is a monitor, reporter, scrounger, cajoler and coxer, a provider of goodies - to a rapidly diminishing degree - and perhaps occasionally he is even an advisor. The Regional Development Staff (ODO) spends an even greater amount of time collecting and disseminating information. The typical ODO officer is more a monitor and information processor than anything else. He would be a better advisor if he had a counterpart. The regional level is especially hampered by lack of a viable GVN regional civil organization, where counterparts do exist, often they are not mainstream GVN action officers.

Given this configuration, are changes in order? Of course, it is not possible to answer this question definitely until some of the questions raised above are answered with respect to program decisions. For example, if it is decided that the best approach would be to phase out our current efforts without undertaking new longer term activities, it might then simply be a matter of phasing out the development staff at the various levels. But even if no phase out were planned and we were to continue with our present activities, one might query just how valuable some of these services are at the moment. Would elimination or reduction of certain staffs have any serious effect on the GVN or on US interests? These are tough and perhaps somewhat embarrassing questions but we should face them head-on in our discussions during the Workshop.

### Workshops

These questions and others like them should be asked when you ponder the future of US related efforts in MR 2, whether in the highlands or the lowlands or how you think we should be organized and staffed to carry out whatever programs you consider appropriate. The assignment for those in either the highland or coastal workshop is fairly clear-cut, at least more so than that of the organization and staffing workshop. As a practical matter, it is suggested that this group focus on how best to organize and staff the US effort given the present functions and responsibilities in the development field in MR 2.

If you have not yet done it, please let me know immediately your choice of a working group; otherwise it will be necessary for us to make arbitrary assignments which we might have to do in some cases anyway.

Enclosed are guidelines excerpted from the FY 1972 AID PBS and a sneak preview of the 1971 Pacification and Development Guidelines that may be of help to you in formulating your thoughts on the future of our development activities in the region. I am looking forward to seeing you or your representative next Thursday, January 21st.



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