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March 21, 1966

TO: FOL - Mr. Habib
 FROM: FOL - Mr. Concoran

Consulate Hue - James R. Ballington

Notes on Quang Nam Pacification Program

1. My investigation of the Quang Nam pacification program, especially the five villages area where the effort is presently concentrated, was interrupted by the current political crisis, and consequently the following report is not as complete and well researched as I had hoped it would be. However, notes and impressions may be of some use to Ambassador Porter and his staff in assessing the situation in this national priority area.

Cadre

2. It seems that the most serious problem facing the pacification campaign is the poor quality of the cadre, who are most directly concerned with implementing it. I found general agreement in the province on this point, among both Americans and Vietnamese who are reasonably disinterested and in a position to know, and personal observation tended to confirm their reports.

3. One of the major shortcomings of the cadre, particularly the PAT members, is lack of discipline. This stems at least in part from the fact that most of them are either members or under the control of the VNQDD, and they tend to follow orders from the party and either accept or ignore orders from GVN officials as they choose, knowing that if they do not respond to GVN orders they will be protected by the party. For example, I was told that when the province financial chief was sent to investigate the PAT budget, he was unable to do so because his life was threatened. Moreover, the cadre tend to come and go generally as they please, they work or not pretty much as their fancy strikes them, etc. There are of course exceptions, but it seems almost certain that good discipline is the exception rather than the rule.

4. Many of the Vietnamese observers I talked to said that the cadre are poorly motivated and tend to have low morals, frequently stealing from the people, seeking bribes for assistance they give, seducing young village girls, etc. These charges, true or not, seem to be widely believed.

5. It is also frequently reported that the discipline and morale of the cadre are adversely affected by the confused command structure of the pacification campaign. Team leaders sometimes are given different, and occasionally conflicting, orders by all of the many GVN officials who have some degree of supervisory control over the program--the pacification commander, the district chief, the Special Sector Commander, the Province Chief, etc.

6. For five hours one morning, the Hoa Vang sub-sector advisor and I walked through a number of hamlets in the five-village area. During this time we were able to find only four cadre, and three of these were in a hamlet where a Marine platoon was stationed. A Consulate local who was along on the

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four questioned a number of peasants and could not find even one who knew the name of any GVN official higher than the village chief, or who seemed to have any comprehension at all about the Central Government, indicating that pro-GVN propaganda efforts of the cadre, if any, have been something less than successful.

Security.

7. Security has improved markedly in the five-village area since the beginning of the program last November. Villagers who used to warn the VC when friendly forces were coming now give intelligence information to the GVN officials or friendly military personnel; at least a few refugees have returned to the area; EF recruitment is progressing slowly; and there are fewer VC incidents. Furthermore, the new "County Fair" program, an intensified Marine-GVN effort to search hamlets and ferret out VC, has shown a great deal of promise and produced good results in its initial stages. Nevertheless, security is still a major problem. Many hamlet chiefs still do not live in their hamlets, for example, guerrillas and political cadre are still being discovered regularly, and the district chief still felt it was necessary to send along a whole squad of 12 to accompany the sub-sector advisor and me on our walk through one of the villages. One reason for the continuing security problems, of course, is that the campaign has attracted VC to the area to try and disrupt it.

Organisation

8. As of early March, the multi-headed organizational structure of the pacification campaign, reported in Dick Holbrooke's memorandum and elsewhere, had not been remedied. It was widely rumored that General Thi was about to sign an order streamlining the command structure in the province, but with his dismissal it is hard to predict when something will be done about this matter.

9. Another leadership problem emerged immediately after Thi's dismissal. Because of the ensuing unrest and demonstrations, the new civilian Province Chief, Dr. Nguyen Huu Chi, who had seemed to be getting off to an auspicious beginning in his job, unilaterally abdicated all authority in the province to the Quang Nam Special Sector Commander. This casts some doubt on Chi's forcefulness and leadership ability, and it remains to be seen whether or not he will be able successfully to reassert his authority.

VHQDD

10. Before Thi's dismissal and the beginning of the current Buddhist struggle movement, it appeared that at least some of the difficulties caused by the VHQDD (also reported by Dick Holbrooke) might be over. They were favorably disposed toward the new province chief and he toward them, and they had promised full cooperation in the pacification program. However, Thi's dismissal, Dr. Chi's performance in the crisis, and the current political instability in Central Vietnam, makes it questionable whether any pre-existing

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political attitudes or arrangements will long endure.

Assessment

11. When measured against the next original goals and time frames laid out for the Quang Nam pacification program, it seems obvious that the campaign has been a failure. The target date for completion of just the first phase of the program, the pacification of five villages, has constantly been postponed, and it seems likely that even the latest target date, April 30, cannot be met only with grave risk of pulling out prematurely. Moreover, most people believe these five villages are easier to pacify than the four villages of the second phase or the five of the third.

12. On the other hand, however, everyone agrees that there has been progress--very slow but real and measurable--in spite of the many problems which have been encountered and still not solved. If the April 30 target date cannot be met, it is still possible that phase II can begin in June or July.

13. The problem, it seems to me, is not one of no progress but of slow progress.

14. However, it is perhaps too much to expect in the current situation to look for relatively speedy results in the pacification effort, especially in a province such as Quang Nam. Pacification must be viewed as basically an offensive operation--it took the VC many months and even years to build up their guerrilla organization and political infrastructure, and it is basically unrealistic to expect the GVN, even with massive American assistance, to tear down VC control and fully establish its own in a matter of a few weeks. As one very able and very Southern MACV sector advisor in I Corps told a Yankee visitor, "Hell, you people won the war and started Reconstruction in 1865, and you still ain't too damn sure about Mississippi and Alabama."

15. It seems to me, then, that the only way to pacify Quang Nam Province is to provide good and long-range security to villages undergoing pacification. No matter what goals may be set forth on paper, they will simply have to be readjusted to conform to the realities of the situation. It is probably necessary to have such goals, but if we view them as much more than pious hopes, we are likely to be frustrated, disappointed and discouraged.

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cc: Ambassador Porter
Danang - Samuel B. Thomsen

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