

Saigon, Vietnam

December 8, 1966

Professor Henry Kissinger
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Professor Kissinger:

I feel constrained to write you this letter about National Reconciliation and my place in it, because, by an accident, I have become aware of your views on both these things.

You were here for some 10 days, and were under considerable pressure to come up with a report in a short time. You were also largely dependent on the opinions of people, some of whom may have had their own purposes in mind.

You felt, after the best evaluation you could make in the time allotted, that I was not well qualified in certain respects to run Chieu Hoi, or National Reconciliation as the case may be. Your view was an honest one, but I am not sure you were able to collect all the evidence which you would have liked. I raise these issues because it is damaging to me to leave these judgments unquestioned, unless in fact they are fully valid. Even then it would be damaging, but I would have no basis to object.

I therefore want to place certain thoughts before you and feel it is not inappropriate to do so.

First, let me dispose quickly of the references to my past experience. You felt, on the basis of what some individual may have told you, that my reputation was based on small operations run largely as one-man shows. Actually, my reputation in Vietnam, such as it was, derived primarily from my management of the Rural Affairs (now Field Operations) Division of USAID in 1964. This involved not only running a U.S. organization having representatives in each Province throughout Vietnam, but more important, persuading a divided GVN governmental structure to act, to release funds, to delegate authority, to assume risks. The Rural Affairs operation was almost certainly the

most important and highest priority civilian activity going on in Vietnam at that time. It was certainly not a small one-man show. The "Mission Liaison Group" equivalent at that time was a Committee consisting of David Nes (Embassy DCM), Maj. Gen. Stilwell (MACV Chief of Staff) and myself.

You also gathered from some source that I had no experience in Vietnamese political affairs - or no expertise. Ten years ago, when I was working on a daily basis with Wolf Ladejinsky and others, I recall being authorized by Ambassador Reinhardt to conduct, alone and in French, the U.S. negotiations with President Diem on the question of the Chinese minority in Vietnam. I worked for a year with U.S. officials whose stock in trade was Vietnamese political operations. (Later I served in the political section of the Embassy in New Delhi, conducted covert operations in West Africa, Mexico and elsewhere.) In any case, if you know Ladejinsky, ask him to name some of the people who have had political savvy about Vietnam and mention my name.

During the Diem government crisis in 1963, one of the present Cabinet level GVN officials came to hide in my apartment to escape the Diem secret police. In 1964 I was decorated by Gen. Nguyen Van Thieu, now the Chief of State. In short, you may legitimately question my "expertise", but you could form a more accurate impression by discussing Vietnamese politics with me directly, or with certain Vietnamese, instead of with whomever you ran into during a 10-day temporary duty tour.

But we are all more interested in the present than in the past. Regarding Chieu Hoi, you felt quite correctly that Chieu Hoi was spread across several agencies, and that this was not only a bad thing, but represented a failing on my part: When I arrived here - as I told you - I recognized the possibility of withdrawing Chieu Hoi from USAID, setting up a separate organization with participation from JUSPAO (which has no separate Chieu Hoi section as such) and MACV, but I deliberately rejected this approach for three reasons:

- (1) It would have caused severe dislocation in established command lines and logistical support arrangements, with no adequate justification except my own administrative convenience.
- (2) I felt I could get the job done - at greater personal inconvenience, to be sure - without such a drastic reorganization.
- (3) Most important, I am sophisticated enough in Vietnamese

operations to know that U.S. organizations or reorganizations, while they are the total concern of some, are of only indirect importance in the winning of the war. The ultimate key to all civilian operations, and to all military operations on the advisory side, is Vietnamese performance. Thus, if I could help to assure an ever better Vietnamese performance, Chieu Hoi would ultimately succeed in Vietnam whether or not the U.S. side was perfectly structured. I therefore believed, still believe, and will continue to believe regardless of pressures from Washington or elsewhere, that my first priority contribution must be in the role of guide to the GVN offices concerned. For these reasons, and as a matter of deliberate choice, I left Chieu Hoi in several agencies, awkward as that might sometimes be both for me and for them.

Now that the U.S. Mission as a whole has come under the unitary management of Deputy Ambassador Porter, our task obviously becomes much easier, but I did not deem it necessary to take such action for Chieu Hoi alone, even assuming my superiors would have approved of it.

Finally, National Reconciliation. Although responsibility for this operation is vested in others, the draft action plans of the GVN to implement it, the U.S. guidance paper submitted to Premier Ky, and in short the basic content of the program here in Vietnam have in fact been written by me, or by me in conjunction with the Vietnamese. Others to date have presided or coordinated, but the basic content is primarily mine and that of the Vietnamese. I carry the basic burden on the U.S. Saigon side - although not the ultimate responsibility - as a result of which both Colonel Anh and I have been unable to carry on field operations as we were doing before.

In conclusion, and in view of all the foregoing, I do feel I have been done an injustice. I feel no rancor, because I know you had a job to do and only a short time to do it, and you were necessarily dependent on informants who may have had their own purposes in mind. Still, you are a man who has faith in the rational process and pride in accurate application of the intellect. I believe the foregoing comments both serve the truth and permit me to assuage somewhat my admittedly hurt professional pride.

Sincerely,

Ogden Williams
Assistant Director for Chieu Hoi
Office of Civil Operations