

FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTE

October 5, 1970

Robert W. Komer, Esquire
The Rand Corporation
1000 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Bob:

I read with great interest your two articles concerning CORDS and the pacification program in Viet-Nam, showed them to Ev Bumgardner and discussed them with him. You might be interested to hear from me on some of my reactions, and I believe his also although I would not wish to put words in his mouth. Your review of the historical development and activities of CORDS was, of course, unimpeachable. On the other hand, some of the lessons you draw from CORDS and some of the philosophy flowing from your articles leave me in doubt.

Some might draw the conclusion that the CORDS concept is a blueprint on how to handle other similar situations. Regarding Viet-Nam, your articles would also give support for those historians who will say, one day, that it wasn't until the Army took over pacification that things started to go right. I would submit that both these generalizations could be misleading and dangerous. In the first place, CORDS' success can no doubt be attributed in part to getting military resources behind the effort (although the merger often meant that military personnel could use civilian assets, more than the reverse). Certainly in budgetary terms the military input was highly important. That much I would concede. With respect to leadership, however, CORDS tended to work specifically because men like yourself and Colby (both certified civilians) were bringing their personal influence to bear all the time. Suppose CORDS was used as a blueprint for some future organization and Townsend, or some other General, was named DEPCORDS? How well would CORDS work then? Putting it another way, did pacification work because it was turned over to the military, or because it was not turned over to the military? I think a more plausible case could be made that CORDS was successful because the military were obliged to join the civilians, rather than vice versa. As one prime example, was it military or civilian influence that upgraded the RF/PF? Do you think that Chieu Hoi tended to work because it came

under military command, or because it did not, in fact, come under military command? Would the military have ever come up with a Chieu Hoi Program in the first place? Was it military or civilian initiative that accounts for the fact that there is now a Kit Carson program? Take CORDS minus Komer, Colby, and a long line of us lesser lights, and what have you got? I think the CORDS staff made a much greater contribution in enlightening the military bureaucracy in Viet-Nam than the other way around. In short, my critique of your articles is simply that they may be used in the future to perpetuate a myth, namely that nothing worked in Viet-Nam until the Army took over, which may make it more difficult to bring civilian insights to bear the next time, if we are ever presented again with a foreign policy problem like Viet-Nam.

I can imagine a different scenario which would have ended up with a CORDS-like establishment, but which would have been much more effective over the years. I can remember when General Sam Williams was training the Vietnamese Army how to shoot, and was reinforcing its sense of being a professional force apart from the people, and not training it in how to treat the people so as to create a real "peoples' army." At that point the U.S. Ambassador should have been in a position to re-direct the efforts of his military. Later, when the buildup came, we would not have sent U.S. Divisions to Viet-Nam to operate as virtually independent entities, with the commanders rotated at rapid intervals to assure appropriate "command time" for everybody. The whole thing would have been under firm political control by knowledgeable civilians who realized that it was not a war for territory and to destroy an enemy (like World War II), but rather a war for people. When CORDS came about, Robert W. Komer would operate out of the office of the U.S. Ambassador and an appropriate combined command structure of military and civilians would work under him. Such a CORDS would have been at least as effective, and a great many mistakes could have been avoided. I do not think that placing CORDS under military command was logically necessary, nor was it desirable in principle. Still less was it desirable as a precedent for future Viet-Nams, if any. The virtue of CORDS was getting the military together with the civilians, rather than vice versa, and it has partially succeeded only because the ultimate military command was never exercised sufficiently strongly as to squelch the civilian initiatives of Robert W. Komer, William E. Colby, John Paul Vann, and a long line of others, lastly including

yours sincerely,

Ogden Williams