

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

January 29, 1971

SUBJECT: Conversation with John Paul Vann,  
Approximately January 15, 1971.

Regarding the proposed military reorganization of CORDS, Vann said that MACV J-3 had always resented civilian control of the RF/PF, civilian "lack of discipline" and the absence of a "conventional command structure" in CORDS. In response to queries to the regions, Vann had come up with the attached proposed organization (classified Secret) which placed the DepCords as number two in the direct line of command and much resembled the organization of CORDS/Saigon. I told him that his plan would be workable as long as a strong personality like himself was the DepCords, but be fraught with danger if such were not the case. I told him I still thought the best fallback solution was for USAID to point out that there was an agreement in writing at the time of the formation of CORDS which said that the civilian component (OCO) would not have its basic integrity tampered with. AID should simply invoke this agreement to insist that CORDS stay the way it is.

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Vann feels he has too few civilians and too many military personnel in IV Corps. He notes that he has 2200 military advisors of whom 1400 are enlisted men. He thinks the enlisted men seldom have a truly advisory role and should go. He wants to concentrate his over-all advisory effort in making the village work. He noted that the cutback of U.S. personnel must begin at the district level and work back up to Saigon. Regarding the diminishing role of the MAT teams, he had been putting them into village development work because they did little actual training of GVN military forces. Each village is suppose to have a MAT team for three months, and the functions of the teams are described in a booklet which Vann said he had already sent to VTC. Again, regarding reductions of personnel, he proposes to reduce his military contingent from 2200 to 1200 in 1971. He said that he understood Abrams would leave around July 1, and Colby would leave in October.

After talking with John Vann, I proceeded to Ba Xuyen Province and then out to a District (Thuan Hoa) where Major Ribera was the District Senior Advisor. The team had about six people on it and claimed that there was a good deal of security activity in the area. Indeed, artillery pieces fired intermittently outside the door throughout lunch. Major Ribera was very satisfied with his VTC training. During my visit, the District Chief came in. He spoke little English but

fluent French so I was able to converse with him very frankly. I asked him what he saw the role of the American advisor in the district to be. He replied, "As a political advisor, zero. I have no need of political advice. As a military advisor, a little bit, but as a supply advisor, very useful indeed." I asked what type of supplies he had in mind. He said, "Oh, things like rockets, file cabinets and office furniture." I mentioned to Major Ribera Colby's theory that the role of the U.S. advisor should be one of monitoring to higher headquarters and in doing the job themselves for the Vietnamese. He said that was all good in theory, but that if anything went wrong, the advisor tended to be blamed. Therefore, it was inevitable that he would go out and become more involved than he should. I suggested he anticipate a forthcoming "crisis," advise his counterpart and then notify province offering two solutions: (1) to let the Vietnamese stand or fall on their own feet, or (2) take action to insure solution of the "crisis." This would put province on the line, as well as higher headquarters as to whether they really believed their own propaganda.

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Attachment

cc: Mr. Jones  
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O/FSI/VTC:OWilliams:d