

SOME IMPRESSIONS OF VIET-NAM, JANUARY 10 - 20, 1971

In the 11 days I spent in Viet-Nam during January, I visited Saigon, MR-4 (Cantho and Ba Xuyen Province), MR-3 and MR-2. Senior personnel contacted in Saigon included Ambassador Colby, Mr. Mossler, Mr. Jacobson (by telephone) and a substantial number of officers working under them. In 4 CORP I personally talked with Mr. Vahn and ^(and others) the province teams at Ba Xuyen in MR-4. In MR-3 I met with Ambassador ^{Bien Hoa} Funkhouser ^(and also with) and the province teams in Binhai and Gia Dinh. In MR-2 I visited Mr. Long and attended Ambassador Colby's briefing of the assembled Province Senior Advisors on the 1971 Pacification and Development Plan. Obviously in such a short time, I could do no original research of my own, particularly since I was not in Viet-Nam for that purpose but to attend to certain matters for the Viet-Nam Training Center. The impressions I gained which are cited below ~~were~~ thus consisted either of "gut reactions" unsupported by statistics of any kind, ^{or} of opinions expressed by the many ^{and whom} people ~~in my talks~~. Obviously what follows are my own ^{overall} ~~total~~ impressions and do not necessarily reflect the stated views of any of the persons noted above.

My principal observations are as follows:

(1) Viet-Nam is much stronger than it was two years ago

The total impact of Saigon ^{and} ~~are~~ a road trip to Binhai, a brief visit to 4 CORP and an over-night stay in Nha Trang was that the level of activity, economic prosperity, observable morale and general viability were much more stronger than in the past. Some of the activity was

Saigon,

characterized by the worst traffic jams I've ever encountered in Viet-Nam, no doubt accentuated by preparations for TET, and also on the ~~Binh~~^{Reunification} Highway. Whereas two years ago there was substantial U.S. traffic on that highway, Now the traffic at 9:30 a.m. was entirely Vietnamese but just as heavy as it used to be when this highway was cluttered with American vehicles. To the left of the highway as one proceeded north, one could observe unmistakable evidence of increased economic activity such as one might expect ~~elsewhere~~ in the outskirts of Bangkok and other Asian cities. A few Vietnamese with whom I talked seemed convinced that their country was indeed stronger and more viable than in the past. Concern was expressed by one key individual that much of this strength could come apart if the present regime lost the presidential elections in October of 1971, causing a loss in continuity and momentum which the country seems to possess ~~at this time~~.

(2) There are too many Americans in Viet-Nam

This observation is largely a ~~corollary~~ of paragraph 1 (above). I had the instinctive feeling in the Saigon area, at least, that the American establishment was vastly in excess of what should be required. Vietnamese energy and strength seemed to render the presence of such a heavy American substructure somewhat irrelevant and anachronistic. U. S. military and civilian officers in the senior planning levels in Saigon indicated that they would welcome a 50 percent reduction at substantially all Saigon and regional levels, ^{in levels} ~~effector immediately~~. The proposed scale ^{and} of personnel, starting at the District and working up toward Saigon, left me ~~in some doubt~~ ^{with misgivings}. If the U. S. advisory element is to serve as the eyes and ears of the U. S. and GVN authorities (see below), one may question the wisdom of cutting off our

eyes and ears at the District and Province levels, while delaying the ~~reduction~~ of the excessive ~~staff~~ stages at the regional and Saigon levels. (These

would presumably become less effective, in any case, by virtue of having been deprived of their eyes and ears.)

~~It has been~~ ~~the~~ ~~last~~ ~~stage~~ ~~of~~ ~~bureaucratic~~ ~~development~~ ~~to~~ ~~find~~ ~~a~~ ~~refinement~~ ~~of~~ ~~physical~~ ~~plant~~ ~~and~~ ~~procedures~~ ~~in~~ ~~areas~~ ~~related~~ ~~to~~ ~~its~~ ~~substantive~~ ~~content~~ ~~of~~ ~~now~~.

perfect many of the incillary details, while the substantive content of the effort has already declined. In this connection I observe that, after

all these years, someone has seen fit to erect a tremendous wire grenade screen around the back of USAID #2, and that every telephone now religiously bears the warning that "Charlie is listening." Such phenomenon are sometimes the evidence of misplaced creativity reflecting the ~~of~~ ~~tearing~~ ~~down~~ ~~a~~ ~~bureaucracy~~ ~~so~~ ~~that~~ ~~it's~~ ~~form~~ ~~is~~ ~~consonant~~ ~~with~~ ~~these~~ ~~declining~~ ~~functions~~.

In any case, at all levels below the top officials ~~maintained~~, I could scarcely find a dissenting voice to the conclusion that there are too many ~~in~~ Americans in Viet-Nam. I was told that, in MR-2, there are ~~now~~ ~~now~~

four battalions of U.S. troops with no less than three ~~of~~ ~~generals~~ pyrimided above them. It appeared that there ~~were~~ ^{are now} approximately 60 U.S. Army Generals in Viet-Nam, in Viet-Nam not counting additional flag officers from the

Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps. It would be interesting to compare this number with the ~~number~~ ^{of} Vietnamese flag-rank officers. In any case, one got the impression that the day of the massive ~~wreckage~~ ~~of~~ ~~300~~ ~~and~~ ~~staffs~~

of 300 ~~in~~ ~~main~~ ~~provinces~~ ~~teams~~, not to mention massed Saigon bureaucracy, is really over, and that ~~plans~~ ⁱⁿ ~~are~~ ~~already~~ ~~underway~~ to reduce such numbers seem ~~should~~ ~~to~~ ~~accelerate~~, ~~to~~ ~~be~~ ~~slower~~ ~~than~~ ~~they~~ ~~should~~ ~~be~~.

The changing role of the US Advisor

The changing role of us

(3) A primary purpose of my visit was to ascertain CORDS philosophy as to the role of a U.S. "advisor" in Viet-Nam at this stage in the conflict. Ambassador Colby had very clear views on this subject. He stated that in 1971 the role of the generalist advisor would increasingly be that of a monitor. Certain technical advisors would, of course, be required, but *they should* operating increasingly from the Saigon level. Several thoughts occurred to me as I reflected upon Ambassador Colby's exposition. If our "advisors" are now to function more as monitors *rather than before*, we should recruit and train monitors. I *would* assume that a State Department officer would find the role of monitoring and reporting developments *upward* for action by high authorities, perhaps at the CPDC level in Saigon, more congenial and consistent with his *prior* experience than would a hard-charging U.S. Army Major, whose *active* background and training have emphasized his role as a "doer." The fact is, however, that we are sending out four or five such Majors for every civilian at this time. Again, when U.S. personnel *really* begin to practice the role monitors, *their measure* how acceptable will that still be to the Vietnamese officials with whom they have worked in the past? Obviously the *ultimate nature* matter of the "monitor role" remains to be tested on the ground. ~~WHAT~~ Old habits do not die out easily, as the *exposition* of the monitoring philosophy and of the 1971 Plan revealed in Nha Trang, it *were* to revert, possibly to earlier ways of operating, as Province Senior Advisors were asked what *advisory* ideas "they could *fit* into their plan. In *any case* I sense that the U.S. effort is already engaged in attempting to group out *new* *problems* to *take* *over*, and a relatively new problem, namely the present *leaves now to let go* of *taking hold* but of

letting go. For years we have been saying that a U.S. advisor's duty was to work himself out of a job. Many advisors have done just this, the most recent ones should logically find themselves in Viet-Nam but virtually out of a job. How does one train people for this role?

CONCLUSIONS:

Unless we lose the ball game in the ninth inning because of possible complications arising from the elections, of some developments elsewhere in the world outside of Viet-Nam, it would seem as though that tunnel which people use to talk about may actually have some light at the end of it after all. If the Vietnamese, despite the continuing ~~inaccuranisms~~ ^{anachronisms} of corruption and indiscipline, are as strong as they seem to be and as responsible as they ^{seem} ~~are~~, then we are close to achieving our objectives in Viet-Nam. One reported incident stands out in my mind. I was told that during a relatively recent flood in Vinh Dinh Province, the Vietnamese in Ninh Thuan Province organized and dispatched on their own initiative a team of voluntary relief workers to Vinh Dinh without U.S. assistance. The implications of this incident in terms of Vietnamese motivation and administrative capability struck me as enormous. Such a development would have been virtually unthinkable only a few years ago. I was told that village and provincial counsels are now much stronger than ever before, largely because people are now getting into them ^{who had} which previously served in some part of the GVN establishment and who thus know something about how to assert leverage, the existence of Government programs, etc. The reported new confidence of the ARVN apparently outweighs its counter ^{productive} ~~productive~~ contact in Cambodia. There are those who have believed in the past that the South Vietnamese have some sort of "death wish" which enable them to lose the

war if there is any possible way to do so. That thesis is still not totally disproven, but today it is harder to justify than I've ever seen it before in Viet-Nam. When I first visited Nhan Trang in 1956 it was a Vietnamese city of particular attractiveness. In 1966-68 it seemed to be turning rapidly into a slum overrun with GI trucks, barbed wire, and honky tonks. Today it is a Vietnamese city again.