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Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, CORDS

MACCORDS-CH

5 March 1969

The Honorable Ellsworth Bunker
American Ambassador
Republic of Vietnam
Saigon, Vietnam

Dear Ambassador Bunker:

In leaving Vietnam--for the time being at least--I would like to state again my appreciation for having had another opportunity to serve under your leadership. This tour was considerably different than the earlier one in India, but both were equally enjoyable in different ways. In both places I was very pleased with the Ambassadorial appointment under whom I happened to be serving!

Several things are on my mind as I look back over many years of service in Vietnam since 1956. Regarding the general situation, I do feel that the only thing that can be relied on to save the South Vietnamese is their own instinct of self-preservation which lay virtually dormant for years under the umbrella provided by repeated American commitments guaranteeing South Vietnam against defeat. Therefore, when President Johnson said he would not run again and the Vietnamese began to realize that "big brother" might no longer be around to provide an absolute guaranty, a new sense of urgency began to appear on the Vietnamese scene which may yet save the country. I hope that we Americans never again give the Vietnamese a "blank check," but, on the other hand, that our military disinvestment in Vietnam will proceed at a pace sufficiently gradual so as not to panic our Vietnamese allies or give unnecessary comfort to our enemies, but at the same time keeping the monkey very clearly on the Vietnamese back. Thus, I believe we are on the right track now and have faith that our cause will ultimately prevail.

Regarding our assistance to Vietnam over the years, I believe our greatest single failure has been adequately to recognize that no program can

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be any better than the Vietnamese officials who must conduct it, and that before you have a program, you must have trained and motivated cadre. Speaking of the civil service, one must have civil servants who are paid enough so that they are not virtually compelled to augment their incomes by corruption. In every program in Vietnam with which I have been associated, a good Vietnamese official at a particular level virtually guaranteed a good program at that level. The Communists are strong precisely because they have clear doctrine and thoroughly trained cadre--or used to--and these are the areas in which we have been weak. I feel our American genius has been perhaps more evident in building roads and providing material assistance than in helping foreign nations build themselves politically and ideologically. If we look to our aid program today and compare the amount of money budgeted for Public Administration with the sums invested in massive construction, equipment or commodities projects, we can see where our priorities in fact have been put. If one gives aid to Germans or Japanese, one knows that something productive will come of it precisely because the Germans or Japanese have the motivations and skills necessary to make use of the aid. Where such motivations and skills do not exist in sufficient measure, I believe we would be better advised to put more priority on this factor before we pour in the material assistance.

Half of my most recent tour here has been under the aegis of CORDS. The creation of this organization was intended to assure a closer concert of effort between civil "pacification" and military operations. I do not think it was intended that the civil disciplines and the personnel administering them be completely absorbed into the military structure, but that is in large measure what is happening. At the moment, CORDS must report to its commander--COMUSMACV--through the Chief of Staff, and as such becomes merely another J-staff within MACV. In fact, however, the CORDS mission as a whole is equal in importance, if not always in urgency, to that of the military effort in Vietnam. Unless the Vietnamese civil administration can fill the politico-administrative vacuum in the countryside, our military forces may cheerfully remain here for decades without attaining our overall objectives in Vietnam. The CORDS operating Divisions are unlike the other subordinate staffs of MACV in a most important respect--they necessarily must have their main focus on the Vietnamese Ministries with whom they work, and not on the US military establishment which is served by the other J staffs. Thus, the original balance or division of labor which existed at the time of the creation of CORDS has, I believe, been altered to one in which the military side is absorbing the civilian side to a degree unintended at the outset. This is unwise because structures and procedures which are designed to manage 500,000 Americans in combat are not equally well designed to handle Vietnamese civil Ministries.

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In a larger context, the proper purpose of the military is, in my humble opinion, to shoot at the King's enemies and the King will decide who the enemies are and when they should be shot at. In Vietnam, I believe that the proper function of the military is to operate our Corps and Divisions and to advise the Vietnamese forces on military matters. I think it is a regrettable default on the part of our civil agencies that we have seemingly turned over to the military many non-military functions with which I believe they should not be directly concerned. While military forces provide a screen at Corps and Division level which enables the process of "pacification" to take place from province level downward, that pacification process is basically a civil responsibility on the Vietnamese side--even if the province chiefs are military officers--and the Vietnamese seem to be moving towards a greater restoration of the civil authority in Vietnam, while the Americans are moving towards a greater expansion of the military role. I think this turning over of implementational responsibility for the civil aspects of foreign policy to the Department of Defense is wrong and is contrary to the long-term best interests of our country. Here in Vietnam we have in fact gone down this path and the direction is clearly irreversible at this time. I do feel, however, that a real occasion to put things in their proper perspective will take place during the ultimate post-hostilities transformation of MACV from a military command to its former role as a MAAG. If, at that time, the military role is firmly reduced to that of advising on military matters (and by this time the Vietnamese presumably know how to shoot in any case), and the MAAG is not encouraged to assume responsibility for Public Health, Education, Agriculture and inter-planetary planning, a salutary restructuring of our effort in Vietnam will have occurred.

None of the foregoing should be taken as any criticism of our military establishment, and still less of the admirable officers who serve within it. I am deeply moved by the sacrifice of our soldiers and profoundly impressed by the character and dedication of their commanders. In offering these humble views, I am talking about "roles and missions" and not about personalities. I would also be quick to add that General officers here in Vietnam with whom I have discussed these ideas are perhaps more convinced than I am that the military role should not be expanded into areas more properly handled by our civilian agencies.

One final aspect of our organization here occupies my thoughts. This is the problem presented by the bureaucratic expansion of the role of the Corps or Region in our effort. On the military side a Corps headquarters is needed to administer our combat Divisions. On the civil side, however, pacification has two main points of contact. One is Saigon from which money, personnel, policy and supplies are forthcoming,

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and the other is the province level downward where pacification actually takes place. With respect to the single matter of commodities, an exception should be made for Danang, Qui Nhon and Nha Trang because of their direct access to the sea, but in all the other aspects noted, the Regional civil empire operates more as a bureaucratic obstruction to operations rather than as an aid to operations. The proper role of the Region is to inspect and expedite, not to serve as an unnecessary bureaucratic command structure. If it is desired to reduce the large numbers of US personnel in Vietnam, the Region is the place where the pruning shears should be used. Such reduction would lighten the burdens of both the province and Saigon and would make for more rather than less operational efficiency. This theme has been more eloquently presented by senior officials of the Country Team on repeated occasions since 1964 when the first Regional empires were instituted by James Killen. To date, Parkinson's laws have more than outweighed their voices.

This letter proved to be much longer than I had intended, for which apologies. Please accept my sincere tribute for your leadership of our efforts, both in India and Vietnam, with which I have had the privilege to be associated, and my very best wishes for the future.

Respectfully,

OGDEN WILLIAMS
Director, Chieu Hoi

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