

Vince P. 7
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MEMORANDUM FOR AAA/VN/ND

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Vietnam Alternatives

Yesterday's "brain-storming" session left me with a feeling of disquiet...From your own comments prior to the meeting, I had the feeling that we were not brain-storming in the classic sense - i.e. to seize upon any and every idea without pause or criticism - but to bring to bear the considerable weight of experience of the assembled group to search for some workable solutions. Workable in the sense that not only do they appeal to our own sense of good management and efficiency, but above all, they are solutions which can actually be implemented.

It goes without saying that we are on very safe ground to recommend that "corruption must be eliminated", "ARVN must fight more effectively", "the various elements of Vietnamese political life must work together in this time of national crises" etc. etc.

But the same recommendations can be made by Senator Fulbright or Peter Arnett of AP. The problem, as I see it, is to not only give the White House or the Mission some ideas, but also some reasoned advice on how they can be implemented. Washington has been sending mission-type orders to Vietnam since 1961, but they don't seem to have been the answer. Perhaps we need to send some how-to-do-it instructions as well.

Several factors are immediately apparent: there is no gimmick or brilliant stroke of imagination that will resolve the problem in anything less than a year. For example, even if we should be able to achieve a joint command (either/or in Saigon or down to the PF Combined Action concept) the implementation of the program and its eventual impact on the situation will take twelve months. I speak as one who has been in Vietnam during major U.S. and Vietnamese organizational "improvements". Pre-Diem, post-Diem; OCO, Rural Affairs, CORDS, they all resulted in an extensive period of disorganization and fumbling.

And, in addition, even if a thousand combined action platoons were authorized tomorrow, or ARVN companies or battalions assigned to U.S. units, the period of joint-training, smoothing out communications and logistics difficulties, and finding a strategy that would work against both the major and guerrilla units of the enemy would take the same length of time.

In short, if our recommendations are pointed towards methods, techniques and material changes, they will take time...Look at the time, money and violence that has accompanied our own efforts to change the civil rights situation here in the United States, and yet 14 years later we are still anticipating the most violent summer yet. I am afraid our own passion for "quick and easy" instant solutions may prove to be our own downfall.

To return to the main theme of this memorandum -telling the Mission how as well as what to do- I would propose another idea or two.

First, why not bring together some real experts in the various aspects of Vietnamese affairs, plus representatives of the Administration who know the national objectives and what is politically feasible here in the United States? For a starter, I would suggest the following individuals:

- Rufus Phillips - Utilization of AID resources in rural areas
- Gen. Lansdale - GVN personalities and politics
- Gen. Lewis Walt - Non-conventional military approaches/US military capabilities
- Everett Bumgardner - The Vietnamese peasant/ USIS capabilities
- George Carver - CIA capabilities and Vietnam realities
- William Bundy - Official US Government policies and requirements
- William Mazzocco - Economic subversion and infrastructure/corruption
- Douglas Pike - The Viet Cong and NVA
- Prof. Scallapino - Broad, historical and non-government background
- George Tanham - Techniques of Communist world-wide movements
- Robert Shaplen - Broad, deep historical, non-government background

Certainly many of these men are not popular. But they all have one thing in common; they know the situation within their own scope of interest as it is in Vietnam, not as we would like to have it. They know the possible. And the possible is what we need to know.

The groundwork or rules for such a conference would require that, with the exception of official Administration (White House/State etc) representatives, whose job it is to keep solutions within possible American utilization, given domestic and international political contexts, the entire body be removed from responsibilities to their own organization. They must be free to discuss, examine and criticize without reference to "company policy", or defending the role their own agency has or wants to play in Vietnam. The output of such a meeting could well provide some of the answers and means we need.

A second point is not so much an idea as a feeling of alarm. The desire for a new organization and increased American control offers two basic weaknesses from my personal viewpoint.

First, while the rationalization for combined U.S.-GVN/ARVN command is based upon the hypothetical case of the not-so-good American golfer who, when playing along with a pro, is motivated to the limits of his own performance, I submit that this reaction is not within the framework of the Vietnamese culture. All our past experience seems to show that the Vietnamese, rather than being motivated to competition with their American advisors, have gone the exact opposite course. I.E., when an American becomes involved, let him do it. This is true to an even greater extent when a unit of Americans (military or civilian) is involved. Once we have become involved in a program or project, be it military, medical or construction effort, the Vietnamese simply step back and let the Americans do it. If you question this, ask any of the technical division chiefs. When an American medical team moves into a hospital, the Viets abdicate their responsibility. Will not the same rational hold true if we assume "command"? They will now have a scape-goat, upon whom in the eyes of the world and their own people the onus for failure will fall. So they can just quit without further effort.

The second aspect which concerns me is that we seem to accept without question that a joint command would greatly improve the military situation. It obviously could have a beneficial psychological impact on the American people; but would it make that much difference in Vietnam that the benefits gained would outweigh the possible losses ?

U.S. military planning and operations did not seem capable of preventing the recent VC assault on the cities. Neither have we made a significant contribution to protecting the people in the hamlets; i.e. the infrastructure is still in place although 500,000 Americans are there. So would not a joint command which followed present concepts simply mean more troops doing things just as ineffectively as before ? Also, leadership in the Vietnamese armed forces is most lacking at the squad, platoon and company level. Do we propose to place Americans in these positions? Will placing an ARVN battalion in an American brigade make that much difference at the platoon level? I doubt it. Our success in Korea (where we had KMAG for years) was not that our advisors in 1950-1953 were able to guide Korean units, but that Koreans integrated into American units at squad level performed well. The Korean Army today is the result of a combination of political stability, national unity and freedom from their former Japanese masters, not an overnight change wrought by U.S. advisors in six months.