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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Rural Affairs Meeting with Counselor Nhu on 29 May 1963

FROM : Office for Rural Affairs/USOM

1. The following are notes made on the three hour meeting with Counselor Nhu attended by Rural Affairs field personnel on 29 May 1963. The list of Americans present is attached to this memorandum. Counselor Nhu opened the meeting by welcoming the Rural Affairs personnel and saying that he would first like to comment on the Government's concept of the American presence in Vietnam. The following are paraphrased remarks and comments made during the meeting.

2. Counselor Nhu: Our concept is selfish.

- We believe Americans have a high sense of duty, a professional conscience. Work is a fulfillment of the human personality. - This is also personalism.

- The fact that you are here stimulates our own work by comparison.

- Through planting your feet in our mud, you will understand our problems better than in Washington or Saigon.

I have changed many of my ideas since the period 1954 - 1956. At the time of General Taylor's visit - the President summoned ministers, generals, etc., before accepting massive American Aid -- There were two viewpoints -- Against: That accepting massive aid was not good politically because of adverse VC and International propaganda. Also, there was a tendency to restrict Americans to one or two areas of the country. For: There was a pessimistic tendency to accept the disadvantages of the American presence because it was necessary for our survival. A sub-tendency within this was: the more Americans who died here, the more the US was committed in Vietnam. Under these conditions, the President asked me to explain to the Government the 3 points above which were his considered view.

Now, one year has passed - some new elements are now evident:

- Vietnam's situation has improved through the joint effort

- Some people now criticize the Government for continuing US presence throughout the country.

Why? Because:

- The situation is better, people have more time to think and therefore to criticize.

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- Some people now think about the future, the current danger is discounted. They are preparing for future elections.

- Officials who misbehave do not like outside observers.

Now, what about the American side? It is time to face facts and realities - only thus can we profit for the future.

3. Mr. Fraleigh: We are all very enthusiastic about the revolutionary effort the Government is making in the provinces. Regarding the Hamlet Development phase - we hope for continued close liaison and GVN emphasis on this part of the program.

4. Counselor Nhu: We seek to improve liaison - there are two things here:

- Report frankly what is not going well - we need to know more about what is not going well - that which goes well needs no solution.

- It is not enough to merely want to do this, you must have knowledge of the situation. In order to get this knowledge, you must mingle with the masses. This, however, raises a political problem - while you should conduct as complete a study as possible - this causes difficulties if you are indiscreet. I propose abstention from investigations which probe too deeply - the value of your opinions may be less - but we will not reproach you with that - don't go too deep - we will regard US opinions as alarm signals. However, we are particularly interested in any evidence of dishonesty and we would like to receive any report on this no matter how fragmentary. However, in regard to funding, once credits are earmarked by joint review - the channeling of money is most delicate.

I have asked the Government to take another attitude toward Americans - we have not always had a rational response to date -- being too defensive rather than receptive. (Citing an example of Vinh Long walls.) I was not aware of this plan. The Permanent Bureau did not report this, Mr. Phillips did. The Phillips report becomes historical. It did not at first meet a warm reception in the Government. On one hand people thought this was a point of conflict, a dirty trick by the American advisor. The Government thought the Chief of Province was doing a good job. We sent a survey group which was well treated by the Province; 20,000 piastres were spent to entertain them but they turned in an unfavorable report anyway. Since the Government had already expressed an opinion, my position was delicate. I said that the walls were not in accord with the Strategic Hamlet concept, it was not related to the people, it was militarily unsound. For these two reasons, we condemned it - and in the nick of time, because Saigon itself was beginning its own wall. Since the walls are now done in Vinh Long - they might be used as roads - especially to satisfy the Delegation and the ministers who approved this "project."

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--- I think frank opinions given, without determining them to be the absolute truth will be useful. Because you are here to work, you need a good climate. We will provide a hospitable ear. The Phillips report is the only one I have received, I hope to see more.

5. Mr. Phillips: We hope to provide you with reports on what is good as well as on what is bad.

6. Counselor Nhu: I prefer to see the bad things. We've organized many study sessions and seminars and our execution of the program is improving.

7. Mr. Burns: We would like to know if the already established simplified funding system will continue to be used by the Government.

8. Counselor Nhu: A good method has been settled on: Before it was too difficult to get funds through USOM (the counterpart agreements). But we should not accustom ourselves to getting funds too easily. However, they should be on time, and in sufficient quantity. The provinces have enough currently. While we are conducting a campaign in the country to destroy the VC infrastructure, we will need a reserve. But not a reserve for everything. As far as I see, the battle is in two stages - Phase 1, a "whitening." My thought is a whitening-out, province by province, countrywide. This brings up the question of prisoners - this is not a Rural Affairs question, but they will have to deal with it. We can't solve the prisoners and suspects problem - they have been questioned and left to the province authorities. There has been no legal follow-up, no "dossiers." The Government has, in effect, been setting up committees which give concentration camp sentences, or placing them in their own hamlets under the disposition of the hamlet committees. Plans are being made to correct this and this will involve Rural Affairs assistance.

9. Mr. Phillips: Would the Counselor clarify his point about limiting the depth of American investigations. Does the Counselor mean investigating discreetly, so as to avoid publically undermining local officials and making an obvious target for VC propaganda.

10. Counselor Nhu: Yes. Go on with your opinions and advice. For instance, you may report that in Kien Tuong there are 600 SDC who do not exist. Such a report would not be considered hostile - we will evaluate and investigate this ourselves. This would be an alarm signal report. It would not matter whether there are only 365 "phantom" SDC. We don't want to waste time on details, and we would take steps to improve our own discipline. If this were otherwise, we would have to require the US Advisors to prove their points in detail. That would be difficult. Americans should report what's not going well - we'll straighten it out. We know that the

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Delta is the richest area, that the Strategic Hamlet Program doesn't go well there - part of this is the easy-going Cochinchinois character.

11. Mr. Phillips: Would the Counselor clarify his statement in regard to funding. I believe Mr. Burns was referring to the procedures used to spend whatever funds are made available and not the amounts themselves. Our experience is that complicated paper procedures encourage rather than prevent corruption.

12. Counselor Nhu: Yes, procedures should be quite simple but with the condition that publicity is widespread so that the sums received by each province, district, etc., are widely known. Help us to spread this publicity. For instance, in the case of hoes for Lam Dong Province, there should have been publicity before the distribution so that people know what to expect. Publicity, this kind of publicity, is new for Vietnam. If correctly applied, it will be the most effective means of control.

Strictly between us, there was a distribution of rice seed in the Highlands. The responsible parties stole paddy seed from the Montagnards, then took the stolen seed and distributed it back to other Montagnards as a gift of US AID. The quantity proposed was 60T, and they only gave 19T. We had to hurry to repair this damage after the harm had been done. We would like you to help us with publicity to prevent this sort of thing.

13. Mr. O'Donnell: A major problem in the Delta is the dispersal of housing sites. Relocation is necessary - but this sometimes causes too great a separation from former rice fields. Please give us your view on the necessity for relocation - and on the solution to the problem of adequate farming land.

14. Counselor Nhu: I think the lesson to be drawn is that planning should be careful. There are two aspects:

a. How to keep production of the regrouped families up and improve it, - an economic problem.

b. The other is one of justice. In Binh Thuan Province, this is a question that was raised. Regroupees from Zone E were well located. Their ricefields could be cultivated and extended. The relocatees from Zone W (near a "C" Zone) were in bad shape and could not return to their fields. The province chief said there was no plan to abandon rice fields - that military patrols would protect them. I said: When? In the meantime, we need to take care of them as they have no rice fields - if we increase

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the farming area to the East - we can put the relocatees from Zone W to work there. This problem is one of justice as well. The problem may be solved by transportation. If people are three to five kilometers from the fields, a secure transport system must be organized. The Chief of District should take care of this but normally there is little planning.

15. Mr. Harwood: On the question of completion schedules for Strategic Hamlet operations in the Delta, province chiefs tend to react to pressure to show good accomplishment, therefore, planning is often not adequate. There is also an over-extension of military forces.

16. Counselor Nhu: Deadlines were set to stimulate cadres - they are not absolute. However, we need the stimulus. If there are special problems - they will be provided for by discussion sessions and reports which can help to solve problems. Some deadline is needed. The Tactical Zone committee should be consulted on such problems.

We need a new concept --- combined operations are in use only militarily. We have not thought of combining military and economic operations. For instance, during crop periods - military work is stopped. We should seek a solution which permits economic and military operations not to hamper each other.

If under our new theory of warfare, we have two months of continued operations, this is a scheme which will be harmful to VC. Because the VC regulars usually carry ten days supply of food, 15 days operation against them will be very effective. This kind of operation should be carried out against the VC bases. Successful operations against VC territorial troops (local guerrillas) necessitates two months of continuous "waves" of operations. How can we do this during the crop season? Particularly since our best opportunities occur when the rice is being planted or harvested. We would like your suggestions on how to organize military - economic combined operations. This is our impediment in the Delta. During the crop season, we "surrender" to the enemy. The rewards of a solution to this problem will be great.

17. Mr. Davis: In Pleiku and Kontum, one of the best instruments the Government has against the VC is the Montagnard Commandos. They have recently been "lifted" from the province chiefs' control. Will they be returned?

18. Counselor Nhu: It is perhaps a budget problem. The Province Chief can't pay these teams. There is probably a plan to use the teams in the province. We have three kinds of Commandos. - Special Strategic Commandos with broad area operation responsibilities; - Special Regional Commandos -- these should be under the command of the Chief of Province.

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He will be given the means to pay them. - Commandos attached to each service. An example would be Public Works commandos to protect road construction sites. I will look into the problem you raised in these two provinces.

19. Mr. Hudson: What is your view on the possible utility of a new approach to An Xuyen and Chuong Thien, one which might involve a "softening up," period before the construction of Strategic Hamlets

20. Counselor Nhu: I think our strategy should call for the program in An Xuyen and Chuong Thien to be completed after the other provinces. These provinces include the U Minh Ha bases which finance the VC. They have been a point of attraction for our military forces. I think it is premature to operate in this Zone. The Navy operation "Waves of Love" was not successful. I think we must hold off here, but as you said, what can we do in the meantime. We may well try to spoil, or make rotten, VC control. As you know, the basic plan of the communist guerrillas is to spoil their victim country. We need to do this to them. We ought to hit their supplies. And make their area a Zone of lesser security for them, give them problems, make them raise their taxes, exert more pressure on the population, thus antagonizing them. Fortified hamlets in an area which cannot be secured are doomed. This is the fault of the "Waves of Love" hamlets, some of which are now abandoned. Even fortifications are not useful. We have always been attracted there (to Camau) because of the numbers of people and its riches. We need the guts to withstand this attraction. What are your views?

21. Mr. Hudson: Mr. Phillips has a paper which I have prepared on the subject.

22. Mr. Davidson: What are the economic possibilities of the Plaine de Jones.

23. Counselor Nhu: The Government has a plan for that.

24. Mr. Davidson: On the border (Cambodia) there are hamlets defending Kien Phong Province. What is the plan for Kien Tuong?

25. Counselor Nhu: The Plain of Reeds straddles the Kmer-VN border - it is an area abandoned by the French - a long-time VC base. We have taken the Vietnam portion of this plain and developed it economically. We had to take it to protect ourselves. The French, with all their means, could not control it. I proposed, in 1957, that the rainy season be used to our advantage. We begin with the muddy season. When fighting in the mud, we are equally matched. The water level then rises but not enough to cover the reeds. The VC can then hide, this is a bad season for us. The water then rises so that it is in our favor - the VC cannot hide. Then the water level goes down, then into mud, and so on. Using this pattern we hit the enemy

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hard. We can now control the Plaine de Jones. As for economics - the problem is the acidity of the soil. We need to wash out this acid. We have found a solution. Now the duty is to defend this area - make cordons of hamlets along canals - that is why we need canals in the Plaine de Jones. Canals drain soil acidity, the population will be attracted to the canal banks, we can then fortify the hamlets and defend the border. Before we also built roads - this is expensive and who is to defend them. I developed the concept of the 3-dimensional road. Before we spoke only of roads of a certain length - now we must consider its width, i. e., Strategic Hamlet's on the bank or special commandos patrolling it; and the height as secure by aerial observation.

26. Mr. Glaser: Mr. Counselor, I would like to comment on some of your points. I came to Vietnam in April 1961. What I knew about Vietnam was little and much of it was not accurate. I sat in an office for a year and did not learn much either. Then I took a helicopter ride to Phuoc Vinh and this and trips thereafter gave me a much different conception. Afterwards, I became involved in Rural Affairs work and my experiences in the provinces have given me an entirely different concept and a good understanding of your country.

Secondly, I feel that for relations with the provincial authorities to be healthy, the provinces must have word from Saigon as to what the advisory role of the Americans is.

27. Counselor Huu: That is one of the subjects of our study sessions. (Referring to the Lo-O Strategic Hamlet Training Sessions). In countries like ours, it is difficult to know where the truth stands. Because when people see me they talk one way, with you, another. A nationalist feeling sustains people here - the deepest feeling now in fighting against the Communists is nationalism - but there are other motives. The upper cadres tend to neglect nationalism - they tend to fight the Communists to preserve their own privileges. They fight communism, not because it is bad, but because it threatens their privileges. In the beginning of the Strategic Hamlet program I specified "hamlet" rather than "village." I did this to emphasize its distance from the centers of power. If you want to establish democracy, you must take away some privileges. If you do this (take away privileges) too quickly, the upper classes say, why fight the Communists?

In the underdeveloped world - the masses are nationalist, the upper classes wish to preserve privileges, often obtained during colonialism. Their concept of freedom is liberty - not for justice, but to maintain unjust privileges. The Buddhists are seeking privileges, but they were not too impassioned about the fall of Tibet. There was no great response of Asian Buddhists to the fall of the Dalai Lama. This is the phenomenon of underdevelopment. The Government is the weakest government in the world, sailing

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on a sea full of shoals. Our problem is how to take advantage of all these varying and conflicting motives to fight communism. This is why we build our democracy from the base. The fault is really in ourselves. In fact, the VC help us build Strategic Hamlets. Some "militarists" see the Strategic Hamlet as only providing security - they do not accept the other concepts, and that is why some Chiefs of Province view the Americans as an irritant. This is why we need our psychological study sessions. All our cadres, with whom we must work, are not revolutionaries. The U. S. thinks, correctly, that we have no economic planning. But if we were to plan, we would need to industrialize in order to revolutionize the society, in the first stage particularly. We do want to plan, but cannot because we fear that our cadres could not carry out such a "revolution." This again is why our sessions are needed to make cadres aware of industrial revolutionary needs. Tomorrow, 250 professors will open their training at the Sui-Le-0 Center. Our task now becomes less difficult. The intellectuals have come to understand that they must do something connected with our historical struggle. Two weeks of steady discussion will help. I feel a change in the intellectuals - they come freely to these sessions. In these sessions we will take up frankly such problems as the American presence. The Government is full of good will but is shy as a young girl. I wonder why some people talk of a dictatorial Government. Like a child sometimes we strike out hard, but then we stop.

28. Mr. Fistick: In Quang Ngai - regardless of how much production is increased, there is a need for more land. Could you comment on this?

29. Counselor Nhu: Central Vietnam lacks arable land, so we do two things: (a) promote local industries; and (b) land development. I think there will be an automatic redistribution of population. Industries will attract population out of areas with too little land. The image of Central Vietnam as a carrying pole between the baskets of the Northern and Southern Deltas influences the psychology of the Central Vietnamese - they are tough and hard - in history this area has produced many leaders.

30. Mr. Bohanan: Concerning your statement about isolated strategic and combat hamlets being untenable - I hope your views on this will be made known to the Interministerial Committee and the province chiefs. The establishment of isolated "C" Zone hamlets will work only if you have unlimited resources - both military and economic.

31. Counselor Nhu: I think that in the Government there are cadres who have not been well versed in the Strategic Hamlet concept. The concept of advance by "rayonnement" (radiating out along the axes of communications) is not effective. The spokes can be easily cut. The progressive expansion by leap-frogging bands (cordons) of Strategic Hamlets, never out of artillery range or other means of immediate intervention, is best. For

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this reason, I am in favor of mobile artillery. With this, we can make the leap-frogged space longer. It has been tested in Quang Nam and Quang Tin, and has shown good results.

32. Mr. Phillips: The problem is, perhaps, that some officials apply the Counselor's ideas mechanically. This leads to the establishment of untenable C Zone hamlets.

33. Counselor Nhu: We should proceed rationally, with specific solutions for each area. We seek to push the VC into "C" Zones, and have them exert more pressure on the population. Once the population gets sick of this, we should act on their request to establish Strategic Hamlets. I think Mr. Bohannon has a good point, our cadre should concentrate much more on psychological preparation of the population and should proceed in a rational way.



Rufus C. Phillips

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List of USOM Rural Affairs Representatives attending Meeting

with

COUNSELOR NHU

on 29 May 1963

USOM Rural Affairs Headquarters

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Rufus Phillips | Assistant Director for Rural Affairs |
| Albert Fraleigh | Deputy Assistant Director for Rural Affairs |
| Lt. Col. (ret.) C. T. R. Bohannon | Consultant |
| Thomas Luche | Program Operations |

Regional Representatives

| | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| Leonard Maynard | I Corps (+) |
| John Perry | II Corps (+) |
| George Melvin | III Corps (-) |
| Ralph Harwood | IV Corps (|

Provincial Representatives

| | |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| Robert Burns | Phu Yen |
| Ronald Davidson | Kien Phoc, Kien Tuong |
| Dwight Davis | Kontum, Pleiku |
| Harvey Doughty | Binh Dinh |
| Stanley Fistic | Quang Ngai |
| Robert Friedman | Ba Xuyen |
| Clifford Gardner | Binh Yang, Phuoc Long, Phuoc Thanh |
| Sidney Glaser | Gia Dinh, Bien Hoa, Binh Duong |
| David Hudson | Chuong Thien, An Xuyen |
| Neil Jamieson | Tay Ninh |
| William Nighswonger | Quang Nam |
| John O'Donnell | Kien Hoa, Long An |
| Timothy O'Keefe | Long Khanh, Phuoc Tuy, Binh Tuy |
| Earl Rhine | Darlac |
| Edward Ruoff | Binh Thuan (Ninh Thuan) |
| W. Robert Warne | Vinh Binh |
| Don Wadley | Tuyen Duc |
| Paul Worthington | An Giang |
| Earl Young | Phu Bon |
| Robert Zollars | Quang Tin |
| Kitty Hay | Vinh Binh |
| Thomas Crooke | Dinh Tuong |
| Leslie Small | Kien Giang |
| Danny Whitfield | Quang Tri |
| Bart Cleveland | Vinh Binh |
| Harvey Neese | Central Vietnam |
| Robert McNeff | Phu Yen |
| Jeanne Wright | Central Highlands |