

C O N F I D E N T I A L

MEMORANDUM

January 7, 1963

TO: The Committee on Provincial Rehabilitation

FROM: Assistant Director for Rural Affairs, USOM

SUBJECT: Some Thoughts on Resources and Population Control
in Vietnam

A. INTRODUCTION

1. This paper examines problems of resources and population control measures in Vietnam in the light of knowledge gained from experience with counter-insurgency here, and in other countries.
2. When faced with an insurgency the authoritative individual, be he policeman, soldier, administrator, or director, often sees in the institution of more and more controls the best, if not the only, solution to his problems. When a serious military threat posed by the insurgents has been contained, but final military victory seems far off, the great temptation is to establish control systems which, it is hoped, will cut off or attenuate guerrilla logistics by restricting the movements of persons and supplies among the civilian population (as well as among the guerrillas).
3. The reasoning is simple and logical, and programs for controlling the movement of people, food, and supplies can be very effective -- where government is substantially independent of the governed. An autocratic government with virtually limitless resources, and a political base outside the affected area (cf. the British in Malaya, or in South Africa during the Boer War) can achieve victory if its determination holds out. (A simpler and more effective system, under such circumstances, is mass extermination.)
4. A government which must depend, for ultimate victory, on the support (or, to some extent, the neutrality) of an overwhelming majority of the governed cannot effectively implement any program affecting this vast majority without their at least tacit cooperation. This means that the control programs of such a government must be adapted to this situation; must be integrated into programs which have popular acceptance; must be subordinated to the necessity for establishing a sound political base among the rural population especially; must, in short, be an harmonious part of what Sir Gerald Templer in Malaya so aptly called the struggle "for the hearts and minds of men."
5. Control programs which accept this reality are of limited effectiveness -- but may still be of considerable value in the counter-insurgency effort -- if they are not too costly. During the height of the "Emergency" in Malaya perhaps 200,000 men (and a few women) -- roughly one out of every 30 persons in the country -- were primarily engaged in controlling movement of people, food, and supplies. In this, as in many other fields in counter-insurgency, the point of diminishing returns is quickly reached.

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6. It is unquestionably true in Vietnam that, as the Strategic Hamlet Program and military operations against the Vietcong become increasingly effective, the Vietcong will intensify their efforts to secure food and supplies. Certain measures to deny them supplies in bulk should undoubtedly be taken, but not if they endanger the effort to "achieve political isolation." Better by far that the Vietcong receive small food supplies from intimidated individuals, or even capture substantial stocks by over-running strategic hamlets -- actions which will create or strengthen popular hostility to the Vietcong -- than that the government alienate larger numbers of people by its efforts to prevent food from reaching the Vietcong.

B. THE PROBLEM

How best to assist the counter-insurgency effort by attenuating Vietcong supply channels through controls on people and resources without alienating the population whose active support is absolutely essential to victory.

C. BASIC CONSIDERATIONS APPLICABLE

1. It must be assumed that basic principles learned from successful and unsuccessful counter-guerrilla operations elsewhere will hold true under similar circumstances in Vietnam. Among the most important, and the most pertinent of these are:

(a) The active support or passive acceptance of the government by the vast majority of the people is absolutely requisite to success in counter-insurgency.

(b) As a corollary, the consideration which should govern virtually every action is its probable psychological effect, both short and long range. "Lessons Learned No. 25," a recent MAAG-Vietnam publication, puts it this way: "At all times the requirement to ultimately separate the people from the insurgents and induce them to support the government must dominate every action."

(c) Controls on the actions of civilians, and on the movements of foodstuffs and other supplies are essentially defensive measures.

(d) Equally, they are basically military measures, for they affect the supply channels of the military enemy. Stopping food and communications from going to the guerrilla is on a par with shelling the rail or motor convoys of an enemy division in conventional warfare.

(e) Defensive measures in counter-insurgency should and must be implemented to the maximum extent possible by "home guard" units whose members have an immediate and vital interest in their success

as a defense of their own lives and those of their families. Obviously they must be backed up by organized military forces for major operations, whether these be active combat, or such things as the control of bulk inter-provincial shipments of foodstuffs.

(f) Close supervision and some support of "home guard" units is essential. Supervision should be effected by both military and civilian officials. (In this connection, supervision by elected local officials in the strategic hamlets should materially assist in preventing abusive actions, and in assuring effectiveness.)

(g) Tight control over the movements of individuals and small amounts of supplies is virtually impossible except under prison-camp conditions and impossible to establish or administer in Vietnam, or any other free country, without alienating the population.

2. No program in the counter-insurgency effort in Vietnam will be implemented by the persons most closely concerned with it in a manner wholly satisfactory to Western-oriented observers.

3. In considering the problem of material control, supplies, especially staple foodstuffs like rice, may be divided, on the basis of their purpose, into three categories:

(a) Wholesale - Those amounts held, or transported, in large quantities for resale.

(b) Retail - Those amounts held, or (less often) transported, in small amounts for resale to consumers, or for future personal use.

(c) Current personal - Those amounts intended for substantially immediate personal consumption.

4. Procurement of food means survival and the possibility of success for the guerrillas. This might be reduced to a formula, something as follows:

(a) Wholesale amounts of food give tactical mobility to large guerrilla units, strategic support to small units. Control of food in wholesale quantities is important.

(b) Retail amounts of food give tactical mobility to small guerrilla units, but, unless frequently available, do not make them effective fighting forces. Control of food in retail amounts is desirable, but not essential.

(c) Food, in current personal use quantities means bare survival to the individual guerrilla. Its control can be effected only by

voluntary cooperation, if the people are not to be alienated by undue restrictions on their actions.

5. Guerrillas seek to obtain supplies by soliciting voluntary donations; by use or threat of force; or by purchase.

6. Control of the movement of individuals has two alternative principal objectives:

(a) To prevent infiltration by units.

(b) To disrupt, or render more difficult, guerrilla communications.

D. PRESENT ASPECTS OF PRESENT SITUATION IN VIETNAM

1. Any acceptable population and resources control program must be fitted into the framework of existing programs and organizations, but may entail relatively minor expansions or modifications of these.

2. The present or projected total force level (including regular armed forces, Civil Guard, SEC, Force Populaire, and police, but not including hamlet militia) in Vietnam equals or exceeds that needed for victory in the present war.

3. The Strategic Hamlet Program and improved military reaction give greater protection to supplies stored in wholesale or retail amounts, while increasing the difficulty of procurement by guerrillas, even from current personal use stocks.

4. The operating procedures for the Strategic Hamlet security forces as presently constituted provide for identification of individuals entering or leaving the hamlets, as well as afford some control over the movement of supplies.

5. An excellent program for issuing individual identity cards and household group identification is progressing well.

6. Check points under military or, in some cases, police control operate in many places along communications arteries with little apparent result; curfews and road patrols are also in use with unevaluated results.

7. The National Police Force, even were it the appropriate agency to undertake the essentially military function of movement and resources control, is not in a position to do so. As stated by PSD/USOM, quoting the Director General of National Police - "...there are not any, nor is it likely that there will be, funds to pay the large numbers of personnel required for movement control tasks." Were more police available they

probably could best be employed in processing cases against the vast numbers of prisoners awaiting trial in the provinces and at Saigon.

8. Implementation of any effective control program will require:

- (a) Careful planning adapted to the local situation.
- (b) Training key personnel, especially in the psychological aspects of the program.
- (c) Close supervision.
- (d) Sustained efforts to convince the people of the desirability of various aspects of the program.

E. DISCUSSION

1. Since bulk foodstuffs, principally rice, are the primary supply requirement of the Vietcong; and since individual procurement is becoming increasingly difficult for them as a result of the Strategic Hamlet and other programs; it is apparent that they will increase their efforts to procure food, either by -

- (a) Attacks on storage areas (including isolated farms and hamlets) or
- (b) Diversion of bulk shipments.

2. Means for identifying individuals are being provided. Strategic hamlet check-points -- if the hamlet is indeed pro-government -- should provide adequate control over local residents, and detect attempts at unit infiltration. Check points on highways, etc., seldom show positive results under any circumstances, although they may create much ill-will toward those operating them, or responsible for them. It is extremely difficult to keep personnel manning check points from indulging in arbitrary behavior, extortion or other practices which defeat the basic endeavor to gain popular support for the government. The same is true of such measures as curfews, road patrols, etc. Properly conducted, however, the value of these measures for harassing guerrilla communication and supply channels is indeed substantial -- although seldom provable.

3. As pointed out earlier, the movement of personnel or supplies in ostensibly civilian channels is as much a matter of proper concern to the military in a counter-insurgency situation as would be the movement of military convoys supplying the enemy in a conventional war situation. It is this aspect of counter-insurgency, the true total war, which is probably the most baffling to the policeman or the orthodox soldier. Every

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person is a possible enemy, every item is possibly enemy supply; yet unless the vast majority of the people are convinced, by deeds more than words, that the counter-insurgency forces are their forces, their friends, the war will inevitably be lost. To attempt to employ police tactics and personnel as a major instrument in counter-insurgency is like considering a forest fire in the same category, and susceptible to the same tactics, as a wastebasket fire.

4. The existing system in Vietnam, where most province chiefs are officers, and in the military as well as the civilian chain of command, is well adapted to resources control. As members of the military, the province chiefs can assure appropriate military training and supervision to the para-military forces and hamlet militia who should implement this program; while as civilian officials they can insure that the rights of the civilians are respected; that the actions of the quasi-military are consonant with the predominant necessity for winning support for the government. Further, they are in an excellent position to control effectively the bulk inter-provincial shipments which are of primary concern to any well conceived control program.

5. (There is no consensus that controls in a guerrilla war are a police function. Current proposals that they should be so administered in Vietnam are based on the untenable proposition that conditions here are the same as those in Malaya. The main similarities between the problem in Vietnam and that in Malaya are:

(a) Both are more or less tropical areas, relatively under developed, with much difficult terrain.

(b) In both Communist guerrillas are, or were, trying to overthrow the de facto government.

Some of the differences are relatively minor, such as the difference in populations (less than 6,000,000 in Malaya proper at the height of the emergency); some are serious such as the difference, in terms of percentage of population, of the size of the guerrilla - perhaps .5% here*, .1% or less there; some are extremely serious, such as the difference in traditions, composition, size, and status of the armed forces and police here and there, and some are absolutely fundamental -- over-riding all others -- in Malaya the political base of the government was outside the country, here it is inside, resting on the very people whom the proposed program could alienate. Equally important is the fact that the guerrillas here are not from an unpopular, easily recognizable, minority element.)

* By July, 1964, approx 1 % of the population, or more.

F. CONCLUSIONS

1. Attacks on areas where food is held in quantity will increase.
2. Attempts to divert food shipments, either through use (or threat) of force, or through purchase and bribery, will increase.
3. Programs for countering attacks on food storage areas are the responsibility of the military, and fall within the framework of their present missions.
4. A program to control the movement of food in wholesale (and where feasible, in retail) amounts is needed. To the extent possible this should be implemented by local forces under military supervision and with military back-up.
5. Attempts to control movement of supplies in current personal use amounts should be strictly local, and based on the voluntary cooperation of the majority of the people.
6. Better control of the movement of personnel is desirable, but can be achieved through refinement of present efforts.

G. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That a small ad hoc committee of persons from various sources experienced in counter-insurgency be formed and directed to prepare a plan, consonant with the guidance herein, for the control of movement in or through rural areas, especially movement of bulk foodstuffs.
2. That this committee be assisted by persons thoroughly familiar with trade routes and practices in rural Vietnam; and by individuals with a thorough familiarity with the present capabilities of the Vietnamese army, Civil Guard, self-defense corps, and other forces.

Note: The COPROR sub-committee which was formed did not comply with any of these qualifications, nor was it able to prepare a plan.

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