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CONCLUSIONS

in late '63 [redacted]

drafted early '64 before
[redacted] set to [redacted] by
[redacted]

1. The strategic hamlet program as conceived by the central government

and carried out in Kien Hoa province [redacted] under the leadership of Lt. Col. Tran

[redacted] [redacted] came close to meeting the requirements for defeating a communist

war of national liberation and achieving the political stabilization which

would allow economic and social development to proceed in a well-ordered

manner. However there were several weaknesses which, if corrected, would

have improved the program. A few of them are listed below:

a. The progress of the program depended too heavily on the attitude

and ability of a few individuals. If these individuals [redacted] e.g. Lt. Col. Tran

[redacted] Capt. Hoa [redacted] were removed from the scene, the program did not move forward

and often moved backward. [redacted] suggests two possible improvements:

(1) The entire program should have been spelled out much more

precisely so that individuals at all levels would have come to under-

stand and believe in the program. Once equipped with this understanding

and belief, a constant flow of encouragement, reaffirmation of purpose,

simple guidelines and instructions should have been passed on to them,

to help them keep their eye on the ball and to help them do those things

which would achieve the support of the people.

(2) Continuing attention should have been paid to careful selection, through indoctrination and maintenance of morale and motivation of all individuals involved in carrying out the program.

b. There was too much emphasis on physical accomplishments. Hamlets ^{with} residents were provided, the social and economic facilities i.e.g., schools,

health centers, newspapers etc, which are found in successful rural communities in other areas of the world and then were expected to commit ^{themselves} to the government. Too little emphasis was placed on

solving those problems which were really bothering them; mistreatment by government officials, lack of a simple system of justice, insufficient

lack of land, high land rentals, high interest rates charged by money-lenders. Many of these grievances are spelled out in the portion of the

Notes on the Peasant Movement in Vietnam. See Bernard Fall, The Two Vietnams, Appendix IV, pp. 439-443)

In areas where these basic problems were handled well by the local government officials, the people were willing to commit themselves to the government. In addition, they demonstrated their confidence in the government by providing the social and economic facilities through their own efforts with a minimum of government assistance.

2. The shortcomings of the Vietnamese strategic hamlet program might

be overcome by carefully applying the following broad concept of development

which is based on our own successful experience:¹ (For an interesting

discussion of this thought see Ideology and Organization in Counterinsurgency

by Eugene H. Methvin in ORBIS, a quarterly publication of the Foreign Policy

Research Institute University of Pennsylvania, Volume VIII Spring 1964.

pp. 106-124.)

a. The preparation and continual proclamation of a statement of the aims and ideals of the government to which all citizens can rally and for whose preservation they would willingly risk their lives. We have such a statement in our Declaration of Independence and Constitution, strengthened and reaffirmed by the words of Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and others.

The Vietnamese people have a good Constitution¹ (See Bernard Fall,

The Two Vietnams, Appendix II, Text of the South Vietnamese Constitution of

1956, pp. 417-431) and a rich tradition of heroism and sacrifice for country

which could serve as the basis for a declaration of aims and ideals which,

if properly presented and faithfully observed, could become the rallying

point for all the divergent interest groups, including the Viet Cong.¹

(With the probably exception of the hard-core communists, although there conversion would not be inconceivable.)

b. The designers of the U.S. constitution and government were well aware of the necessity to create an atmosphere in which struggle (between haves and have-nots, management and unions, black and white etc.) could take place with a minimum of violence.

This atmosphere was created and is maintained by our constitution and the body of law which has been developed over the years.

This atmosphere allows and encourages citizens to present their aspirations and grievances with the knowledge that they can be satisfied without resort to violence.

The Vietnamese government attempt^{ed} to more fully implement this concept when it included provisions for free elections of local officials, formation of social and economic action groups within the hamlets and majority selection of self-help projects in the strategic hamlet program. These measures were carried out fairly well in some areas, such as Kien Hoa province, but much more emphasis must be placed on translating this concept into practical, effective action programs.

3. The Viet Cong in Kien Hoa province and in South Vietnam in general.

of the struggle; in understanding and exploiting the grievances and aspirations of the peasants. The images they presented to the people were not those of a theoretical Marx, a dictatorial Stalin or a power-hungry Mao; (In fact, the Viet Cong leaders (communist party members) studiously avoided telling the people much about communism) but more those of an inspiring Patrick Henry, a brave Robin Hood, or a just Abraham Lincoln. The statement of ideals and aims which they prepared had great popular appeal among the rural population.

Once they had seduced the people with inspiring slogans, they then maintained and strengthened their hold by continuous indoctrination, firm discipline and the application of terror as needed.

Discussions with former Viet Cong leaders (communist party members) revealed that they knew very well that they would have to seduce the people by presenting themselves as the champions of their aspirations and grievances. But once they gained complete control they fully intended to turn South Vietnam into a communist state.

This duplicity, carried out so well by the Viet Cong leaders, has

resulted in the real commitment of a substantial percentage of the rural

population. This belief and spirit cannot be defeated by military measures.

The Viet Cong can be killed individually by bombs, machine guns and artillery

but more will come forward to replace them because the reasons for which

they are fighting cannot be suppressed by firepower.

4. The people of Kien Hoa who had never lived under communism were vulnerable targets for Viet Cong propaganda; those who had experienced communist control, such as the resettled Catholic refugees from North Vietnam, resisted the Viet Cong fiercely. More emphasis should have been placed on explaining the workings of and conditions in a communist state such as North Vietnam, in terms that could be understood and believed by the peasants of Kien Hoa.

5. U.S. participation in the Strategic Hamlet program was a major departure from conventional A.I.D., MAAG and U.S.I.S. programs and should provide valuable lessons for future development programs.

The major features of the program were:

a. Decentralization of responsibility and authority.

b. Close coordination between U.S. government agencies and the

Vietnamese government at central, regional (ARVN Corps - Country

divided into four Corps areas) subregional (ARVN division, tactical area composed of several provinces), provincial (ARVN sector, comparable to U.S. state) and, in some cases, district (ARVN subsector, comparable to U.S. county) levels.¹ This extension of coordinated U.S. activities to the lowest levels helped to assure that the policies and plans developed jointly in Saigon were translated into action programs at the grass-roots level.)

c. American follow up of downward and upward governmental communication which resulted in the breaking of many bottlenecks and the expediting all aspects of the program.

d. The immediate and continuing availability of substantial amounts of money, PL 480 foodstuffs, and materials with sufficient U.S. participation in administration to:

(a) Serve as a check on misuse of the support provided.

(b) Provide a legitimate reason for offering advice on the use of the support provided.

6. A people's war and a people's army cannot be fought from the Capitol

of the country alone. Responsibility and authority must be decentralized.

Sufficient flexibility must be allowed at the lower levels of government to

provide rapid and adequate response to local needs. Trust must be placed in carefully selected leaders. Mistakes will frequently be made but the structure of government will be strengthened rather than weakened through this process.

7. The presence of Americans at the lower levels was an essential ingredient in any success the program achieved. Fighting a (centuries old) tradition of tight central control, they gave confidence to local leaders and encouraged the central government to proceed with a decentralized program. The Americans both military and civilian, wore many hats in the provinces first, they were observers and students -- taking graduate course in a people's war and in broader terms in political/economic/social development in general. Second - they were friends and supporters -- encouraging their Vietnamese allies. Third -- they were reporters -- helping to shape U.S. understanding of the complex struggle. 4th -- they were watchdogs -- (as much as a foreigner can be in an alien culture) -- as much for the GVN as the U.S.¹ (When the majority of the U.S. purchased local currency had been spent and had been replaced by GVN controlled currency, the practice of a three man sign off on expenditures was continued because the GVN officials knew that the U.S. personnel were honest and weren't convinced

that their own men were. A side effect of the three man sign off was that the province chief felt that he could go ahead with programs because he had two people to share the blame or back him up if he got in hot water with the Saigon bureaucracy.) 5th they were advisors - occasionally in guerrilly warfare and political/psychological struggle, but more often in those things that Americans know best -- hardware, procedures, bookkeeping, etc. The Americans were all of these things and more and, as such, served as the catalyst which started and maintained the momentum of the program.