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August 1963
Widely distributed

NOTES ON STRATEGIC HAMLETS

FROM

OFFICE OF RURAL AFFAIRS

USOM - SAIGON

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USOM/RA 15 August 1963

This paper presumes that the reader is generally familiar with the strategic hamlet program and the contemporary counterinsurgency activities in Viet-Nam. It is not intended to be either a descriptive or a quantitative report; it is an effort at interpretation and analysis of an extremely significant strategic approach to the major problem of counter-insurgency.

(Attached is a statistical summary, listing reported physical accomplishments to 31 July 1963)

INTRODUCTION

The strategic hamlet program is a daring, imaginative effort to build a nation and, in so doing, to defeat a long-continued, cancerous insurgency. The concept is clear, as are its purposes; the program is well advanced. Nevertheless one not infrequently finds less than clear understanding of aspects of the program, even at times among those who are charged with its implementation and support, Americans and Vietnamese alike. Only to a very limited extent are these misunderstandings rooted in cultural or language differences.

Perhaps another look at the concept, and at the essential components, material and psychological, of its implementation would be of assistance in promoting better understanding. In this look special attention should be given to the psychological realities; to the "thinking", "feeling", "believing", to the likes and dislikes, of the people who live in the strategic hamlets. Psychological realities, because the difference between guerrilla and counter-guerrilla, between supporters of the government and supporters of the enemy, is not at all a difference in ponderable physical attributes but a difference in opinion. Physical factors may form or alter opinions, may assist or hamper the execution of ideas, but the ultimate target is the human mind. It may be "changed", it may be rendered impotent for expression or it may be extinguished, but it still remains the critical target.

I. WHAT IS A STRATEGIC HAMLET ?

President Diem has said that a strategic hamlet is a state of mind. This is perhaps the most precise definition possible, for it expresses the basic concept, uncluttered by physical attributes. Nevertheless, if strategic hamlets are physically to exist, this concept must be translated into terms at least partly physical. It is in this translation, in the conception and creation of the physical and psychological attributes of an actual strategic hamlet, that failures in full comprehension become apparent.

A strategic hamlet is, obviously, a community with a finite, quasi-permanent location. To be viable and defensible in this place and time, it must have certain physical and social attributes--houses, streets or paths, water supply, defensive installations; it must have people and means by which they can gain

their livelihood; military and civilian organizations, etc. But these attributes alone will not make it a strategic hamlet, for they are attributes of every viable community. The essential, unique attribute of the true strategic hamlet is the commitment of the majority of its residents to resisting the Communist guerrilla, the Viet Cong (or to supporting the government, the other side of the same coin). This commitment is essentially a state of mind--a state of mind to be fostered and strengthened, to be reinforced by every available physical and psychological means.

II. WHAT ELSE IS A STRATEGIC HAMLET?

A strategic hamlet is many things besides a place where people, committed to the fight, live and defend themselves from the guerrilla enemy. Before seeking to define the elements which make a hamlet strategic, it might be well to discuss some of its characteristics which are at times erroneously thought to be major strengths or weaknesses.

The strategic hamlet has certain military attributes, so some see the hamlets as primarily defensive installations. Sometimes the building of walls and moats is emphasized, with little or no attention given to the popular reaction to the more or less forced labor involved. Others emphasize siting the hamlets on routes of communications, for the supposed protection so afforded to these routes, and in the hope of providing a rapid reinforcement capability. Too often this means forced relocation, and ignores alike the attitudes this creates in the people, and the possible military disadvantages of such positioning. Strategic hamlets have potential military value, perhaps a greater potential than is generally recognized; but military considerations must be subordinated to the essentially political consideration of securing the willing adherence of hamlet residents to the side of the government, and their commitment against the VC (the Viet Cong, Communist guerrilla).

The strategic hamlet offers an obvious opportunity to increase government control of the population--in fact such extension of control is erroneously seen by many as the primary purpose of the program. This view, which might be called the policeman's, and which owes much to the British experience in Malaya, totally overlooks the necessity for a power base within the country. Its fallacy may best be understood by its reductio ad absurdum, by hypothesizing a country where perhaps three-fourths of the population are in concentration camps, with the other fourth set to guard them.

There are essentially two ways in which control may be exercised. The positive control is that, implemented by the people themselves, of keeping them so well organized and busy on worthwhile efforts that any aberrant behavior is at once noticed and corrected. This is a valid approach, but, to be healthy and selfsustaining it requires tremendous skills and resources. Efforts at organization, and the stimulation of worthwhile programs are an integral and essential part of the strategic hamlet and supporting programs—and must be emphasized in the future. Care must be exercised in the organizational approach, which, of course, is the mainstay of Communist efforts, lest the common defect of demanding too much of the peoples' time makes the program counter-productive. Above all, the Communist practice of establishing secret elite and secret police "apparatus" must be avoided, if true popular support is to be won.

The other, essentially negative, concept of control is most often described as the physical separation of the people from the VC. This is certainly a useful intermediate step toward accomplishing the more important task of psychological separation of the people from the VC. Insofar as the strategic hamlet represents, in the thinking or experience of the VC, an enclave which they dare not approach to talk with, terrorize, or attack its inhabitants, there is undeniable value in the physical separation it offers.

Too often, however, the value of the strategic hamlet is thought to lie in an opportunity to prevent the people from contacting the VC; to control the flow of supplies, recruits, and above all, intelligence to the VC. This can be usefully achieved only if the majority of the people in the majority of the hamlets approve and assist in enforcing such controls. If imposed from above in a manner generating general resentment, controls may be fatal to development of the essential ingredient of the strategic hamlet. On the other hand, given existence of the essential "state of mind", the people need only guidance and assistance in imposing their own controls, for if the majority are themselves committed, they will, in their own interest and for their own protection, seek to ensure that all support the government and resist the VC.

(Some authoritarians feel that the strategic hamlet is virtually useless as a control mechanism, that no matter how much "attraction" effort is exerted, it will not insure the loyalty of all the people in every hamlet, and will not prevent support from reaching the enemy. This is certainly true, but the loyalty or venality of some hamlet residents is not a serious problem, provided that it is recognized

that strategic hamlets (like virtually all government organizations) will always leak supplies, recruits and intelligence to the enemy. The amount of this leakage will depend on many factors, the most significant being difficulties of contact created by offensive military action against the guerrillas. It will be significantly affected by the attitudes of the majority in the hamlet, and by the ability, training, and motivation of those charged with hamlet security. Next to the military situation, the most important of these factors is the desire of the hamlet residents to stop support to the enemy.)

The strategic hamlet unquestionably offers the best practical means of achieving some degree of physical isolation of the people from the VC. This can be effective only by gaining the voluntary action and cooperation of the people; only by their commitment for the government and against the VC; in other words, by achieving a psychological separation of the inhabitants from the VC. In this, as in most areas of counter-insurgency, physical measures may supplement, reinforce, implement or modify mental attitudes; they cannot usefully substitute for them.

The same is true of the other useful physical attributes which the hamlet provides. Once the "state of mind" is achieved, defenses and controls are established on the only sound and practical basis, the will of the governed. Given the will to resist the VC, the physical features become effective, and the hamlet becomes truly "Strategic".

III. WHAT MAKES A HAMLET STRATEGIC?

The incorporation of virtually all rural residents into strategic hamlets is a major program of the government. It is a costly program, and a daring one; a program which, if successful, should certainly end the insurgency—and if unsuccessful will certainly end the counter-insurgency. Only these two outcomes are possible, for the strategic hamlet program touches, often much like a hurricane, the life and activities of nearly every rural resident in its effort to commit him willy-nilly; in its mobilization of the nation. Accordingly, having sought to define the strategic hamlet and its purpose, and having considered some of its secondary functions, we should next examine its essential requirements and characteristics; determine what it must have if it is to develop the strategic hamlet "state of mind".

A strategic hamlet, since it is a state of mind, is, equally people. Without them, as without a finite location, a hamlet could not exist. Accordingly, it is essential to the concept that the people be willing to live in the strategic

hamlet. If the majority are not (given perhaps a month or two of a more or less voluntary trial period) there is no strategic hamlet—or it is a strategic hamlet of the VC. Normally the strategic hamlet is, and should be, based on an existing grouping of houses, which is augmented by new houses for scattered rural residents who move into the hamlet for their own protection. Sometimes (too often, in the Delta) it is an entirely new settlement of families more or less coerced into relocation in a hamlet sited, hopefully, centrally to their cultivated lands. The antipathy which forced relocation must inevitably engender requires major effort to overcome, and, if these efforts are unsuccessful, is likely to add another VC hamlet to the enemy strength.

Regardless of whether he voluntarily helped in its creation, or was forced to move into it, the peasant will not be willing to live in the strategic hamlet—will never develop the desired state of mind—unless the hamlet can better satisfy his needs and aspirations than can any alternative readily available to him. If we can identify and satisfy his basic desires, we have passed the first critical point (after its actual construction) in the creation of a strategic hamlet.

Obviously these basic desires include the basic animal necessities of life—protection from enemies, food, water, shelter—as well as some degree of social organization. More, there must be an opportunity for him to satisfy these wants on a continuing basis, and in a manner consonant with the customs of the society in which he has been reared. He has other wants, interwoven with these we have named; wants which are partly physical, partly emotional. Let us assume that, once his minimal physical needs are met, the average peasant desires for himself and his family, in approximately this order, what he conceives to be:

- a reasonable degree of safety;
- a reasonable livelihood;
- a reasonable amount of elementary justice;
- a reasonable chance for his children;
- a reasonable degree of status in his community; and not to be overlooked,
- a reasonable degree of opportunity;

—all by standards which are a combination of those traditional in his culture and those which have formed nebulously as a result of the more or less fictitious promises and enticements of the VC, the Government and to some degree, the press, radio, and the cinema. How may these wants be satisfied, or exacerbated, by the

strategic hamlet program? Let us examine each, in some detail.

A. A reasonable degree of safety: This the strategic hamlet seems to offer—in fact it is probably the primary and the most important inducement for the peasant to participate in the strategic hamlet program. This security cannot be, and should not be thought to be, even the limited security of a well-organized, well-manned, military defense system. Its walls or fences, unless covered by fire, are valuable chiefly for their psychological effect on would be attackers. They can and should form a position for defense; a defense which may be effective; but they can become a psychological liability if the hamlet residents regard the structures themselves as worthwhile protection.

For their psychological effect on the VC, and to provide maximum value in slowing attacks, preventing infiltration, and serving as defensive positions, the physical defenses should have certain characteristics. The walls or fences should be as close as possible to the dwellings, so that they may be quickly manned, and so that sentries at night are not too exposed to surreptitious attack. The walls or fences should not obstruct the vision or fire of the defenders, and should offer, as a minimum, clear fields of fire for at least 300 meters in every direction, with no significant covered approaches to the protective works. The shape of the perimeter should be generally circular or square. Too few hamlets meet those criteria. Some in the Delta are several kilometers long, but only one or at most two hundred meters deep. Many in the hilly areas of the country, are commanded by higher ground just outside the perimeter. Many have forests, or cane brakes, or swampy areas coming right up to the fence. Some have walls topped with cactus or other growth so the defenders cannot see over them, while others offer a clear field of fire inside, but not outside the defensive works.

Too little thought is sometimes given (in those cases where total relocation is required) to positioning the hamlet for defense in relation to other hamlets, or to route of communications. To have a reasonable chance for defense the hamlet, unless it is in a really secure area (in which case defenses are purely of psychological value) or is well covered by a patrol screen, should have other strategic hamlets within 3 to 5 kilometers in at least three directions. Roads or canals by which reinforcements can arrive are of more value psychologically than militarily, for it must be expected that as often as not these avenues will be ambushed or mined by the VC as a part of their attack on the hamlet.

There is in some areas a tendency to concentrate hamlets along, often astride, the highway in long narrow bands. This creates a perimeter which cannot possibly be manned, but may be penetrated at any time by the VC who roam the hinterlands which have been abandoned to them. The VC have already on several occasions taken advantage of the ambush sites thus created for them.

The real combat defenses of the hamlet are not its physical installations or its geographic location, but the abilities and actions of its own trained and armed security force—its militia. If there men are committed to the fight, and, in common with the other residents, thoroughly understand that the best defense for the hamlet is incessant patrol activity (largely at night) conducted on an irregular, almost purely random, pattern, the hamlet may be considered truly strategic. Such patrolling is at once its principal defense and the best possible evidence of its will to win.

These patrols need not go out far from the hamlet—perhaps at most two kilometers, nor need they take more than a third of the force out of the hamlet at any time. The purpose of these patrols is not so much to kill as to worry the VC and their supporters. It takes more determination than have most guerrilla squads or platoons (the usual VC hamlet attack force) to try to slip past such a patrol or ambush, with the possibility of being surprised en route, or attacked from the rear. However if the VC can approach the hamlet sure of being unmolested until they reach the fence, it is likely to be the counter-guerrilla who is the fish—as in shooting fish in a rain barrel.

There are other defense measures not to be overlooked. Guards should be posted at all openings of the perimeter. Ordinarily during daylight hours these should be auxiliaries—perhaps Combat Youth Girls—under supervision of a trained militiaman. A well thought out and rehearsed defense and evacuation plan, and thoroughly understood improvised signals are necessary. But, the defensibility of perimeter and the quality of the training and arms of the militia are relatively unimportant in comparison to their psychological value in inspiring a will to resist, in creating a belief that resistance can succeed.

B. A reasonable livelihood: This the strategic hamlet obviously must afford its residents if it is to be viable. More, it must do this nearly as well, preferably better, than did his former home. Hence, it must not be so far away from the peasant's fields that he cannot work them readily; or he must have made available to him new fields of equal size and productivity on terms at least as

attractive as those under which he held his old ones. Before relocation is decided this problem must be considered, and solved. If the peasant is to farm new fields, the problems of tenure must first be solved in a way equitable both to the farmer and to the landowner. If possible the new land allotted, or allocable, to those resettled should be more than enough to provide for the existing families, it should provide also for their natural increase.

Reasonable livelihood means also that the demands of the strategic hamlet on his time and effort must not interfere unduly with his gainful occupations—unless these demands can be justified in his mind by the satisfaction of his other wants. It means that if the peasant is forced to leave, or move, his old home, he must receive compensation in some form for the cost of this move. Pig raising and similar projects can be of invaluable assistance in satisfying the need to make a reasonable, preferably a better, livelihood, and in helping to create the "Strategic Hamlet State of Mind"

C. A reasonable amount of elementary justice: Perhaps more than any of the other needs this is referred to a mental attitude; an attitude which is affected by the culture of its holder, hence susceptible to change, but nevertheless represents a nearly universal characteristic or Communist missionaries would not so universally emphasize it in their appeals. The emphasis they give it demonstrates its importance, yet the desire for justice is that basic drive of the human as a social animal which is probably most often overlooked by the administrator. This is especially likely if the administrator is under strong pressure to accomplish something—here, to build the largest possible number of strategic hamlets in the shortest possible time with the least possible use of funds.

The basic justice most needed by the peasant today is probably the concession to him of enough of his own time or of the fruits of his labor to enable him to feed, clothe, and shelter himself and his family. For years, the legitimate government, and the shadow government of the VC, have sought not only his loyalty but also his services. Often he has contributed to both governments, and has had little or nothing left for himself.

The peasant wants more than to be allowed enough of his labor or its fruits to permit existence. He wants what may be called political justice; he wants a "square deal". If he must contribute according to his ability, so should others. If he helps, through formal taxes or through "voluntary" contributions to support government cadres, or hamlet militia, he expects them to make a useful contribution,

to do the jobs for which they are supported. If those who feed at the public table, his table, enrich themselves at his expense or abuse him, deny him justice, he will refuse voluntary support to government, and the strategic hamlet becomes a farce.

Another side of justice, and it looms especially large in the minds of those close to the soil, is a reasonable freedom from harassment. Like justice, harassment is a state of mind, and one largely determined by the society to which the individual belongs. Certainly what seems undue harassment to a Montagnard, whether of Vietnam, Scotland, or Kentucky, might well appear almost neglect to the Vietnamese lowlander. Nevertheless, he can be, and is inevitably, harassed in the establishment and operation of a strategic hamlet. No amount of explanation of the necessity for this harassment can make him like it.

It has often been remarked by observers that hamlet dwellers are frequently seen going in and out of their hamlets carrying unexplained packages which are not questioned by the guards, and the conclusion drawn that the hamlet guards are ineffective. One must question if the guards were asked whether they knew the man, what he was carrying and why. If this question was not asked of the guards, the observation was not significant, for any peasant, engaged in his well-known activities among his neighbors to whom he is equally well-known will certainly, and properly, resent being questioned about them. No amount of propaganda can convince him that being searched or questioned under these circumstances is necessary to the war effort or a legitimate safeguard of his interests—he will regard the searchers and questioners as nosy neighbors, or presumably crooked cops.

D. A reasonable chance for his children: To a large extent, satisfaction of the other desires of the peasant will enable him to satisfy this desire himself, for much of the impetus behind the other desires is attributable to his wish that his children shall have more than he. There is reason to believe that many, perhaps most, peasants would prefer that the limited resources available, which could be used to make life better for them (beyond the provision of the barest necessities) be applied first to creating opportunity for their children through the building and operation of schools. Recent experiences confirm this belief, for when hamlet residents are asked what they want first in the way of public facilities in the strategic hamlets, they almost invariably ask for a school and teachers. Much has been done toward meeting this desire, but more could and should be accomplished. Providing schools and teachers perhaps does more than any other

single action to insure the loyalty of the residents to the government which makes this opportunity available to their children. For this they will endure much, and they will fight to protect it.

E. Status in his community: Far more than the average Westerner can appreciate, the peasant needs a feeling of "belonging", of assured and acknowledged position. However lowly this position may be, it gives him status, psychological security. This would seem to be one of the easiest things for the strategic hamlet program to grant, with its proliferation of overlapping community and age-group organizations and the multiplicity of offices and posts of honor which they can create. Intelligently exploited the program can give some kind of status to almost everyone in the hamlet and, by the creation of status, create also a vested interest in the success of the community. This identification of the individual with the hamlet may be strongly reinforced by securing, and acknowledging, his participation in hamlet elections, as well as in civic actions in which he may participate as a member of an organization.

How much attention is now being given at the operational level to the creation of status and identification of the individual with a group is difficult to judge, but it would seem a worth-while area for inquiry. One tends to feel that perhaps many government cadres and officials are not as sensitive to this aspect as they should be. Much of the program is clearly intended to achieve this solidarity, but the actual creation of solidarity may at times be overlooked in the desire to exploit it for control purposes.

F. A reasonable degree of opportunity: For what? For any of a myriad things, real or imagined. It may be to improve his mundane lot, to have a better water supply, or greater convenience in purchasing the daily necessities. In these things, the strategic hamlet certainly should, and usually does, offer greater opportunities to the peasant.

But a reasonable degree of actual opportunity to obtain material things is of far less importance than the idea of opportunity, of a chance for advancement, in whatever terms, and however vaguely, the individual may conceive of its expression. This is the sine qua non in the present era of the "revolution of rising expectations". Today, a system which does not offer to the peasant an opportunity to progress toward what he may consider a better way of life is doomed to fall before the attacks of agitators, be they communist, populist, or fascist. One might

almost say that a "reasonable degree of opportunity" is, like the strategic hamlet, a state of mind; and go on to say that the more closely one can relate the two in the peasant's mind, the greater success this nation will achieve in its efforts to create a state which offers both security and opportunity to its citizens.

One could go on almost indefinitely, detailing and discussing the known or assumed wants of the peasants, and the requirements which these impose on the strategic hamlet, and those responsible for its creation. Surely, the foregoing is enough to indicate the importance of both material and psychological factors—and the validity of the "state of mind" definition of the strategic hamlet. Unfortunately, under existing pressures for "accomplishment", for achievement of countable actions, the importance of this "state of mind" is too easily overlooked by those responsible, for the creation, governance, or protection of strategic hamlets. This is natural, for one usually looks at problems in terms of one's own interests and training, and too often lets these factors obscure the importance of other elements to the accomplishment of the mission. Natural as this obscuration may be, it cannot be tolerated; those who fail to see the requirements, like those who fail to see either the urgencies or the challenges of the strategic hamlet program—fail also to see the black future which faces them, and Vietnam, if the program fails.

What makes a hamlet strategic? It is the decision of the majority of its citizens to support and defend the legitimate government of their country. It is also the willingness of these citizens, of this hamlet, to resist by force the attacks of the VC; and it is the provision to them of knowledge and means to make this resistance effective. Even after the decision is made, the will developed, the means of resistance provided, the hamlet cannot be expected to maintain them effectively unless, better than any readily available alternative, it indeed enables its residents to pursue and achieve their legitimate needs and aspirations.

IV. WHY "STRATEGIC" HAMLETS?

The brief and obvious answer is that the proliferation of these hamlets is a major element, perhaps even the basic element, in the national strategy of the Government of Vietnam. This is true, yet it is less than an adequate answer, for it conceals, rather than explains, the strategic purposes of the strategic hamlet program. To understand these one must consider both the purposes and the problems of the Government of Vietnam.

By derived definition, it could be said that the government of a "democratic" country exists only to satisfy and to protect the legitimate aspirations and needs of the people. To satisfy these requirements in the individual hamlet is tactical—to do so on a national scale is strategic. There is more than this to the strategy, for here, as in all countries, the government must, in the interest of all the people, implement programs, efforts, and policies which may not seem wholly consonant with the interests of a given individual, group, hamlet, or province.

To exist, Vietnam must accomplish two herculean tasks, in each of which few countries have as yet succeeded. These are the defeat of a major communist insurgency; and the creation of workable self-government. For Vietnam to succeed in these two tasks will require great effort and great sacrifice; as well as strategy of the highest order. A suitable strategy, that of the "strategic hamlets" has been found, but, like any strategy, it imposes sometimes onerous requirements. Too often, the basic considerations of strategy, as well as the requirements they impose, are not entirely understood by those who implement or observe them; or by those whom they affect. Some examination of these basic requirements appear in order:

A. The most important special requirement of government which the strategic hamlet must serve is the establishment of workable self-government. This is, above all, a matter of education in its meaning and its processes; in its relationship to the conduct of everyday life and to the satisfaction of the aspirations and the needs of the people.

Self-government, like self-control, can be learned only by "doing"; never by precept alone. Precept and example have their value in inspiring the idealistic to dry to make democracy work, but without the understanding which comes from experience with its techniques, its strengths, and its weaknesses, self-government soon becomes self-deception, and self-destruction before the onslaughts of a better disciplined enemy.

In Vietnam, as in too many parts of the world, well-meaning people, indigenous and alien, have urged the institution of "democracy", the great catchword of our century, without realizing the lack of understanding of its basic requirements. The strategic hamlets represent the basic training camps for workable, viable, self-government. If the practices, the ideals, the strengths and weaknesses of democracy are well-learned in the strategic hamlets, no oppressive or alien

government can long endure in Vietnam--neither can an insurgency inspired by an alien ideology and officered by its dupes.

This is the key to the future of Vietnam; the most forward-looking element of the strategy of the strategic hamlets—and the most difficult element for those charged with its implementation. They are administrators and commanders, under great pressures for immediate accomplishments; for immediate victory over an implacable foe. They feel that there is no time for the slow processes of self-government, and to a certain extent they are right. Yet, if they do not administer, govern, command, in a way that wins the support of the governed as surely as if they were dependent on re-election—they will lose the war in their sector.

B. The second special requirement of government which the strategic hamlet must serve is the destruction of the Viet Cong insurgency,—the psychological and physical commitment against the Viet Cong of the majority of the population. This cannot be effectively accomplished by imposing restrictions—or by talk. Merely offering the people more than is offered by the Viet Cong is not enough—neither is satisfying their basic wants. This last is important, but the insurgency will not be ended until a sizeable percentage, perhaps a majority, of the peasants are convinced that they must help to end it.

In the days, and country, of the writer's youth the saying was still current: "God hates an innocent bystander". In a sense, so must any man with counter-insurgency responsibilities; yet he must never let it show, for he represents the government which is claiming the support of a people who are mostly innocent bystanders.

Every effort must be made to commit the people to the fight against the VC—but every effort must seem consonant with the expressed purpose of government, the well-being and safety of the governed. Obviously then, the most desirable, and perhaps the easiest way of securing their commitment is to bring them to believe that the VC and their sympathizers offer a threat to their safety and well-being; and that this is a threat they can effectively counter by action,—and only by action.

Evidence that this commitment is spreading is seen every day—not least in the Chieu Hoi program under which thousands are leaving the VC forces. The danger that these newly committed supporters may become disillusioned must not be overlooked. The best precaution against this will be the effective implementation of the economic and political features of the strategic hamlet program.

V. THE STRATEGY:

Essentially, the strategic hamlet strategy has two tasks and a final objective; an objective which can only be attained after the tasks have been accomplished.

A. The first task:

To commit the peasant to the struggle by convincing him that he should, and can successfully, oppose the VC..

To this end it must and does offer him:

1. Reasonable satisfaction of his wants;

2. Organization and facilities for self-defense; and, most important,

3. Motivation to defend himself and his community

It also offers a challenge and a threat to the VC. Reaction of the VC, by the use of force against strategic hamlets is, in its effect, desirable—since this further commits the strategic hamlet resident against the VC.

B. The second task:

To teach through experience, the practices and processes, the requirements and rewards, of self-government.

This task must never be obscured by the battle-fog arising from the attempt to accomplish the first. It is the high ground commanding the present battle field. Unless we move steadily to pre-empt this high ground our positions will be untenable.

C. The final objective:

The establishment of a stable, prosperous, self-governing nation, offering adequate and equal opportunity and protection, under law, to all its loyal citizens.

Toward this ultimate objective, all efforts must be directed. The more that the efforts to accomplish the first and second tasks are oriented toward this final goal, the more effective they will be.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The strategic hamlet program is a daring strategy, based on the unassailable premise that one must win the people to win a counter-insurgency war. Like all strategies, it suffers from errors of interpretation and from faults in execution. Like any good strategy, the greatest risk it entails is the risk that it may not be resolutely pushed to final victory.

The strategic hamlet program is not yet a success even though 8,000 out of a projected 11,000 hamlets are listed as "completed".

It can be compared to the Normandy landing operation, at the time when most of the troops but few of the supplies were ashore. If the supplies not landed; if the arduous and tedious follow-up needed to make the strategic hamlets truly viable building blocks of a free nation is not accomplished, this war is lost.

To continue the metaphor, the coastal defenses have been beaten down, and most of the combat troops are safely ashore. If they are adequately supported, if stormy seas (of budget difficulties), surprise dive bombing attacks (by journalists, etc.), major tactical errors (by members of the command) and, above all, the grinding monotony of hedgerow warfare, do not cause the Allied forces to settle for less than complete victory, we may, in from three to five years, be able to chalk up a third victory of democracy over communist insurgency. If we allow ourselves to become discouraged; if we fail to provide adequate support or give adequate emphasis to the full development of the strategic hamlets, the war—and, probably, South-East Asia, are lost. Parenthetically, it should not be inferred that completion of the strategic hamlet program necessarily means either the inclusion of all rural residents in the strategic hamlets; or the physical construction of any fixed number of hamlets. This would be to make of the program not a strategy but a strait jacket. There are areas, especially in the Delta, where substantial modification of the program seems desirable. What must be completed is the development of the hamlets already initiated into viable defensive units substantially supporting the government. Some new hamlets unquestionably should be built, perhaps the two or three thousand now planned, or perhaps fewer. The crucial requirement, which some in authority seem not adequately to appreciate, is insuring support for the government by the people now in hamlets. This can be accomplished only by providing these people with continuing concrete evidence of government concern for their welfare; with convincing evidence that the government is their government.

To suppress the active insurgents will be no more meaningful in this war than was the German drive to the outskirts of Stalingrad; victory can be achieved only by welding the people into an effective political base for the government of free Vietnam. The strategic hamlets have become the most critical, and the irreplaceable, element of such a base.

USOM/VIETNAM OFFICE FOR RURAL AFFAIRS
MONTHLY PROVINCIAL STATISTICAL REPORT
ON STRATEGIC HAMLETS

According to best available figures as of July 31, 1963.

PROVINCES	STRATEGIC HAMLET CONSTRUCTION								REFUGEES		CHIEU HOI			RELOCATION & RESETTLEMENT INTO SH'S DURING PERIOD				S.H. CONSTR. TEAMS		HAMLET MILITIAMEN				S.H. COMMITTEEMEN				SECURITY				SELF-HELP			
	Total now planned	Total approved by IMCSH	Total USOM funded	S.H. completed during period	Total completed EOM	Under construction EOM	Population in completed Strategic Hamlets (in thousands)	% Population of province	Total during month	Cumulative in province	Total Qui Chanh returned during period	Total returned to date	Qui Chanh at provincial Center EOM	Highlanders	Cumulative	Lowlanders	Cumulative	Cadremen trained during period	Total acremen operating EOM	Trained during period	Total trained to date	Armed during period	Total militiamen in hamlets trained and armed EOM	Number hamlet Committees selected (cumulative)	Number Committeemen completing trained during period	Total elec. chiefs and committeemen trained EOM	Total No. hamlets with elected trained officials	No. VC incidents reported during period	No. S.H. attacked during period	Attacks successfully repelled	Hamlets overrun	Application approved during month	Self-Help projects started during month	Completed	Total of SII having commenced one or more
FIRST REGION:																																		
QUANG TRI	498				441					3500	4	4					600														100	36		
THUA THIEN	464	464	464	27	395	42	388.6	85									70	144	144	545	2364	150	1340	174		533	151	12	3	3	9	5	6		63
QUANG NAM	537	537	243	41	332	173	369.2	63	1	64	5	10	3	1	56	467	3107		526	1255	6058	420	2019	322	312	1152	288	30	20	5					
QUANG TIN	292	292	172	243	243	49	184.2	40	883	883	1	70	4	170	170		2500	240	240	164	1655	607	607	192	657	657	192	30	5	5		8			
QUANG NGAI	430	419	419	43	316	95	537.8	87.5	1016	31781	10	985	140	196	311		2328		160	780	7791	780	4690	389			367	10	2	2		6	6		98
SECOND REGION:																																		
BINH DINH	675	675	675	27	623	52	742.7	88		50835	8	85	19		128		10506		317	370	7516		4599	623	100	1146	573	9				9	12		
PHU YEN	260	242	242	3	221	21	282.5	85	386	21346	13	423	20	100	4219	300	3352		180	200	4526	300	3500	221	15	645	221	26	23	23		16	19	5	169
KHANH HOA	286	286		12	234	52	194.2	70	356	4546	162	163			638		958		480	1343	3398	758	3082	244	59	741	244								
NINH THUAN	127	127	127		127		135.3	99		321	1	3	2	189	702	244	1121		160	172	1908			127		448	127	8					39	39	39
BINH THUAN	180	180	160		180		231.8	99	360	605	120	578	31	330	485	30	3228		56	162	546	162	210	720		343	160	26	4	2	2	27			49
KONTUM	272	272	192	10	213	29	80.6	80		2650		9		224	5000				280	584	3096	584	2840	213		852	213	47	1	1					
PLEIKU	247	247	162	13	127	63	82.1	61		3153									160	810	1650	205	640	130		390	130	24	2	2					
PHU BON	147	147	100	12	47	53	21.5	35		23383	9	101	44		4200		60		80		1921		1921					1							
DARLAC	367	316		57	280	36	148.8	84.7	3459	14746		68	12	651	3620		88		446	1560	18464		10081	280		353	353	17	8	5	3	316	2		2
THIRD REGION:																																		
QUANG DUC	76	60	60		60	16	33.3	92	868	13330	4	43	8		3198		80		78	293	879	138	512	240		204									
TUYEN DUC	136	69	69	10	59	52	37.2	56.7	18	15060	3			100	2820		429		74	364	818		529	59		112									
PHUOC LONG	105	105	93	27	103	2	60.1	92		117	2	5	3		5150		332		160	301	1126		400	103		168	42	7	1	1			5		9
LAM DONG	101	101	101	4	59	28	37.2	61	81	6658	3	30			3347		653		160	227	1113		533	59		186						10			
BINH LONG	91	91		8	48	41	49.8	80	2900	13102	3	62	3	500	3500	250	601		52	94	352	56	176	240		66	14	1							3

PROVINCES	STRATEGIC HAMLET CONSTRUCTION								REFUGEES		CHIEU HOI			RELOCATION & RESETTLEMENT INTO SH'S DURING PERIOD				S.H. CONSTR. TEAMS		HAMLET MILITIAMEN				S.H. COMMITTEEMEN				SECURITY				SELF-HELP			
	Total now planned	Total approved by IMCSH	Total USOM funded	S.H. completed during period	Total completed EOM	Under construction EOM	Population in completed Strategic Hamlets (in thousands)	% Population of province	Total during month	Cumulative in province	Total Qui Chanh returned during period	Total returned to date	Qui Chanh at provincial center EOM	Highlanders	Cumulative	Lowlanders	Cumulative	Cadremen trained during period	Total cadremen operating EOM	Trained during period	Total trained to date	Armed during period	Total militiamen in hamlets trained and armed EOM	Number hamlet committees elected (cumulative)	Number committeemen completing trained during per.	Total elec.chiefs and committeemen trained EOM	Total No. hamlets with elected trained officials	No. VC incidents reported during period	No. S.H. attacked during period	Attacks successfully repelled	Hamlets overrun	Applications approved during month	Self-Help projects started during month	Completed	Total of SH having commenced one or more
THIRD REGION:																																		
PHUOC THANH	44	28	19			41					3	29	11				1903		180		340			18				5	1	1					
LONG KHANH	118	118	118	1	72	30	85.7	78			2	14	10		82		661		53	214	1829	8	330	68		240	60	10	4	2	2	14	42		70
BINH TUY	63	63	63		47	16	36.5	61			13	215	5		209		889		64	429	3765	45	49	47		123	40	2	3	2		12	6	8	29
TAY NINH	157	154	154	1	101	22	216.8	79			48	438	28			765	8585		192		1751		1236	101		297	100	15	12	12					
BINH DUONG	205	205	154	9	107	39	158.7	52			94	335	54			7806	31782		177	227	2079	80	1040	96		181	60	55	12	10	2				6
GIA DINH	307	307	307	18	307		741.2				41	242				1670	9675		192	357	2486		278	307	271	763	191	15	7	7		1	1		1
BIEN HOA	180			30	141	39													480		2525			162		1035	668								
PHUOC TUY	162	162	162	14	135	26	121.	87	690	2757	16	357	15	130	455	560	2302		200		1711	71	118	155		564	112	9	2	9		28			29
FOURTH REGION:																																		
LONG AN	450	400	282	33	224	50	217.4	44			41	339	82				1200		288	386	2856		1565	224		634	177	153	75	8	69				31
KIEN TUONG	70	70	70	2	61	6	50.5	90			18	129	18			597		8	160	288	488	200	200	61	58	58		14	1	1		2			
DINH TUONG	426			11	171										1660						1307			171		224					2			67
KIEN PHONG	216	216	216	15	170	15	233.	75			46	242	143				3003		1214	60	2366			160			273	17	2	2		1			
AN GIANG	521	521	521	14	439	52	700.4	83.3	27	1410	54	233	12			6	1930		251	334	3127	334	2415	415		249	249	10	2	1		6	4		23
VINH LONG	247	114	133	17	219	24	436.7	81			103	1828	25				1335		410	400	4941	100	4941	219	201	201	195	12	7	7	3		7	3	7
KIEN HOA	582	582	166	7	200	72	244.5	46			28	390	52				4163		256		4541		1899	200		436		54	31			7			
VINH BINH	647	647	570	6	451	62	408.9	76.8			51	239				1440	4947		350		5875	227	4121	327		567	567	48	21	20		197	63	20	95
KIEN GIANG	223	193	189	18	185	38	237.2	65			20	91	43				800		26	400	1390		980	188	51	541	109	78	4	2	2	40	20	16	6
PHONG DINH	257	257	257	10	169	23	264.1	66			147	374	51				2495		381		1679	200	630			327	169	59	2	2		20			1
CHUONG THIEN	137	78	71	10	112	25	154.1	53				285	7				1000		71	252	930		582					16	2	2					
BA XUYEN	570	570	244	49	201	112	235.2	43	5	75	61	585	120			779	3929		378	404	1996	180	1690	259		255	64	3	30	9	3				
AN XUYEN			45		49	1	58.9	25													611		329												
TOTALS..... (in thousands) (not complete)	10.8	9.	37.	802	7.6	1.4	8,217.		11.	235.5	1134	9.	965	2.5	39.9	14.9	120.6	392	9.	14.6	113.7	5.6	62.	7.5	1.7	14.6	6.1	793	287	146	95	835	268	91	797


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