

18 December 1962

This memorandum reports on a meeting I had with Mr. Nhu, the Political Counselor to the Presidency of Vietnam, on December 17, 1962. The meeting was held at the request of Mr. Nhu to discuss some of his ideas on guerrilla warfare, and was initiated by him at the suggestion of Mr. Dang Duc Khoi, the Deputy Director General of Information of South Vietnam, with whom I had become friendly during my stay here. Throughout the talk, Mr. Nhu expanded on his ideas of guerrilla warfare, and never asked me a question, and I volunteered no information, so that the entire conversation was one-directional.

Mr. Nhu first expanded on his theme that the way to beat the communists was to conduct guerrilla war just as they do. He argued that we can never have peace as long as they know they have one more weapon than we do, and we must let them know that we too can conduct guerrilla warfare, which is now their weapon, against them.

The immediate target of the war in SVN is to dry up the enemy's sources of supply. Heretofore, the goal has been the killing of the communist adversary, but now considerable emphasis is to be switched to their logistics, a change that generally has been accepted by the Army. The rewards and honors the Army is to give for destroying logistic targets are now to be as great as those to be given for combat honors or for killing achievements. The anti-personnel objectives have been a source of considerable frustration and dissatisfaction, to the Army because of their difficulty in finding such targets, and consequently to the people because they have been the butt of the Army's frustrations. Thus, the frustrated goal of destroying enemy forces has been replaced by a more generally satisfying and attainable one of destroying his logistics.

Heretofore, the frustration of the attempts at destroying the VC has been attributed to the corruption of the cadres (cadres being anyone who works for the government at any level), so that the cry has gone out for new and more honest cadres. But such cadres would never be found "until the end of the world." We must work with what is available.

This leads to a new theory of subversive warfare. After an extensive review of all the writers on guerrilla warfare, both Communist and American, it was found that all had made one major mistake - they all consider guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare the same phenomenon. But guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare are very different in nature, and the counter-guerrilla cannot fight only by being a counter-guerrilla. The new theory calls instead for using the methods of the enemy against him. In the case of Vietnam in particular, the communist theme is "consolidation in the North and revolution in the South."

In this sense, "consolidation" means "reinforcement of the police state" and "revolution" means "overthrow of the government for democratic principles." The government accepts and is ready to adopt this theme for its own purposes, and to sponsor a revolution in the South in a way not foreseen by the Communists - of which the strategic hamlets with their elective leadership represent a basic component - and to contribute to the reinforcement of totalitarian rule in the North, in this way throwing the enemy off balance.

Mao's theory envisions an ascendance of the guerrilla forces from small bands to regular armies, with the consequent descendance of the counter-guerrilla forces. The new theory breaks this process by cutting it at its base with the strategic hamlet, which cuts the logistic base on which the ascendancy must rely, making the growth process reach "senility instead of maturity." Similarly, the government accepts descendency curve, and responds by organizing its forces in the low-level strategic hamlets. The communist goal is to make the government's forces appear like an external expeditionary force, but the government turns the tables on the guerrillas and makes them appear like an expeditionary force, for they then are put in a position far from their bases of supply once the indigenous logistics is dried up. That this phenomenon is beginning to work is demonstrated by a captured VC diary, in which the man left Hanoi in the midst of a burst of enthusiasm and well-wishing, and then transformed into a despondent pessimist because of lack of popular support, lack of medicine, and lack of supplies. Previously, it was felt that the only way out of subversive warfare was to provoke a Korean-type war, but it is clear (from captured documents in particular) that the communists have carefully avoided such a situation because they know its consequences of a Korean-type war.

There is an important equation in the theory:

$$TT + TG = TN$$

In this equation, TT represents the three interdependent levels of self-sufficiency, which are:

- 1) ideological self-sufficiency.
- 2) logistical organizations.
- 3) technological self-sufficiency.

TG represents the three degrees of personal vigilance, all of which are interrelated, and each of which is necessary for the others; these are:

- 1) health
- 2) conduct and behavior
- 3) creative initiative

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And TN represents the three principles or dimensions of the human person, or "personalism;" these principles are:

1) ultimate reality, which is the depth dimension and the essence of the human being, and involves the faculties of reason, freedom of choice, and love

2) the existential aspects, which is the width dimension, and relates to the location of man in his society, a society from which he profits and to which he owes responsibilities

3) the transcendental vocation, which is the height dimension, is a necessary consequence of having attained the first two levels and results from the fact that man comes from God and goes to God.

In other terms, TN can be considered as:

- 1) respect of person
- 2) community distinction
- 3) collective rise

This is the basic formula of guerrilla warfare; the guerrilla starts out with only the basic assets of self-sufficiency and personal vigilance, and having achieved these then achieves personalism, or the destiny of a human being. The people of SVN need the vision embodied in such ideas in order to have enthusiasm for the conflict, for the Vietnamese people are romantic rather than practical. The Vietnamese people have the intelligence for absorbing such abstractions, and are willing to accept any sacrifice if inspired by such visions. Mr. Nhu's conception of the government's "guerrilla war" involves primarily this grand conception, but does not necessarily extend down into all the smaller details, although many of the latter are indeed transferable.

There are two guerrilla bases in SVN: 1) the population and 2) the maquis or guerrilla strongholds. For each there is a guerrilla answer by the government: 1) the popular guerrillas against the population, and 2) the Biet Cach or technical guerrillas or special commandos to conduct operations into the enemy area. These latter are guerrillas very much like the conventional conception, organized into 8-12 man squads to go into enemy territory, where self-sufficiency is clearly demanded.

The "popular guerrillas" take their theme from the Vietnamese word for guerrilla, "du Kich," which literally means "marching fight," so that the concept of mobility becomes paramount. Static defense forces should be replaced by mobile ones. For instance, the district chief's house is now defended by fixed soldiers in fixed positions inside the compound, and the enemy, with his

extensive planning, can easily plot the defenses and overcome them. In the new concept, only the strategically important points will be so defended, but the defense will be different from the classical concept. The new defense will break up the now-visible force and place them in a number of "secret" spots outside the compound, the secrecy being maintained by having a number of such spots and using different ones each night. The district chief will also be mobile and will sleep in different places frequently. Even the radio in the district chief's house, which is often a prime VC target, will be mobile within the house to prevent the VC from knowing exactly where it is. Under this defense concept, which also includes many hazards to the VC such as spikes and traps, the VC will enter the target area and then will be surrounded from behind, and their losses will be considerably higher than in defense from a fixed point.

The guerrilla concept in the strategic hamlets is achieved by the defence forces withdrawing to secret positions outside the hamlet as the attack begins to appear overwhelming, and then to harass the enemy forces as they withdraw. (In some provinces, this concept has been mistakenly interpreted to imply evacuation of everybody in the hamlet, which is bad because danger to the evacuees hampers the defense and becomes a matter of concern to the defenders and because an important source of motivation for the defenders is thereby removed.) (In one particular hamlet where this tactic was used, the VC took cover inside the strategic hamlet, and held it for 4-5 days until they were finally smoked out with tear gas.) In addition to the defenders who move out, there is a stay-behind guerrilla force which harasses the enemy when they are inside the hamlet, extracting what casualties they can.

The basic purpose of the concept is to force the enemy to practice the unprofitable "counter-guerrilla warfare," as characterized by forcing him to attack during the day (because his losses at night are so great) or to operate with conventional methods. Any ideas that might make life difficult for him at night, such as traps or smecing powder that might make him sneeze and reveal his position, would contribute to forcing this change. As operations become more difficult, they will occur less frequently, and it is difficult for a communist who is not participating in meetings and other activities to continue to be a loyal communist.

In addition, there should be a general program of harassing the communists. The helicopter assault operations have been extremely effective, for they have considerably strengthened the communists' feeling of insecurity, for they never know when they might be hit; they can no longer enjoy their former feeling of impunity from government harassment in their own areas. Similarly, aircraft circling over their areas makes them run or seek caves, and when they are doing this they cannot be fighting effectively. The VC strongholds should similarly have a couple of bombs delivered every night for the psychological harassment it would create.

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The strategy in the Delta, or in other areas where the VC constitute a majority of the population, is primarily one of cutting the supply lines to the VC-controlled areas, forcing the VC to demand more from the local population, thereby building up popular antagonism against the VC. Even among the VC, supply shortages have resulted in serious disagreements, especially between the military and political commanders of the units.

The civic-action cadres are an important part of the strategic hamlet program, and the increased security the strategic hamlets can offer them is making recruiting more easy. Finding the money to pay them is a particularly difficult task, and they are expected eventually to be paid out of the hamlet budgets. Currently many of them are paid by US aid funds, and if the U.S. sets their salaries too high, then the Vietnamese will be unable to continue at that level after U.S. aid stops in 3-4 years.

Mr. Nhu points out that the war in Vietnam is now in a period of transition, and that the US and VN are now practicing two concepts against the VC, one being the "obsolete counter-guerrilla" concept and the other the "guerrilla" concept. One represents an attempt to "break" the enemy and the other an attempt to "upset his process." There has been confusion created both on the Vietnam and the US sides by the changes, and time and conditioning will be needed before the new theory is fully applied. To this end, the US has accepted Mr. Nhu's proposal that US people take courses on the strategic hamlet program. The people on the Vietnamese side who do not understand the ideas are the "highly placed" ones.

Mr. Nhu hopes that the US can develop some new strategies of subversive warfare as it applies to the underdeveloped countries of the world. He believes that the US considers the underdeveloped countries dead weight and unable to contribute, but he hopes that the Vietnamese example can contribute to this new strategy. Only when the communists can be made to realize that they have nothing to gain by subversive warfare, as they have already learned with respect to nuclear warfare, can we have peace, and not before.

Mr. Nhu views the recent Cuban situation from the subversive warfare viewpoint as a tactical withdrawal for Russia but a strategic withdrawal for the US because we promised not to invade Cuba and therefore created a secure base for subversive warfare.

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