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INFORMAL MEMORANDUM

November 7, 1963

SUBJECT: Some Thoughts on the Strategic Hamlet Program

TO: General Le Van Kim

1. It has been learned that Bui Van Luong will take over the Strategic Hamlet Permanent Bureau which will be converted into a Commissariat and possibly placed under the Ministry of Rural Affairs. Also, that Colonel Lac will be relieved from his present post and transferred to the Ministry of Defense.

2. Having worked intimately in support of the Strategic Hamlet Program for over a year, and being chiefly responsible on the US-side for all support except MAP equipment, I believe I am in a unique position to give you frank and reasonably accurate opinions about the program and the people involved.

3. First, the only person (Minister or otherwise) with major responsibilities involved in the program at the central level who did an honest and competent job was Colonel Lac. He was trustworthy, honest, and truthful despite the difficulties of having to serve as a buffer between Nhu and the Americans. He was the only person who would tell Nhu even part of the truth about the difficulties of the program. He was a good administrator and, above all, he understood and tried to apply the concept that Strategic Hamlets were valid only if they existed as something the people wanted and would defend.

4. Concerning the organization for administering the program within the government, I would strongly recommend against organizing a Commissariat or placing it in Rural Affairs. The program's main elements are security and political improvement as well as economic and social development. Without the first two elements, the latter two are worthless and some means should be established to achieve them together. This is an interministerial function, not that of a single ministry.

5. I would suggest, instead, that a Special Committee for Victory, or something similar, be formed with General Minh as its head and composed of the Minister of Defense, Minister of Security, the Prime Minister (if he acquires Interior's functions other than security), and Minister of Rural Affairs, with you in charge as the Permanent Secretary.

6. This would give you a workable equivalent of the Trueheart or Inter-Agency Committee on the U. S. side. It is absolutely essential, believe me, that there be a Vietnamese coordinating body with authority deriving directly from the chief of state. Otherwise, the U. S. support effort will, to a large degree, be rendered ineffectual, reflecting in the results it achieves the

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lack of coordination on the Vietnamese side.

7. Moreover, such a committee, in practical terms, would give you and General Minh direct control over all essential elements necessary to win the war by winning the support of the people, and would allow you to give the overall inspiration, guidance and practical vision to the Government's pacification effort which has so long been needed. Without this, the effort is still likely to fail.

8. If such a Committee were established, I would recommend against setting up any special Commissariat. You do not need another special bureaucracy (you can see what happened to the Commissariat for Land Development). I would suggest more decentralization of responsibility for the hamlet program to the province chiefs (with new and better ones in office, it is hoped), with the Central Government providing inspection and coordination mainly.

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