

5 March 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR

Colonel Sam Karrick, J-5, JCS

Here are some thoughts on Vietnam, in the rough and at a distance of 10,000 miles from the scene:

1. What is the VN military's objective? It is high time that US military folks took a hard look at what they are advising the VN military folks to do. The object of the war is to win the allegiance of the people, which includes the military giving them some protection they can count on. As the people's allegiance is won, the VC will start getting uncovered. As they get uncovered, force is used to hit them. Using artillery, air power, armor, and other long-range weaponry against the VC hiding among the population -- as is done -- simply defines the VN military objective as: "to kill Vietnamese," which I trust isn't the current military objective, although it appears to be.
2. "Ink Blot." This is sound doctrine, if implemented soundly and not just talked about. I've pushed this idea the past four years and would be happily and appropriately amazed if any responsible American or Vietnamese did it right. As a realistic and practical suggestion, why doesn't J-5 take a look at the suburban map of districts immediately surrounding Saigon-Cholon and urge "clear and hold" operations which will actually hold these districts? Then, perhaps, J-5 can get real grandiose and figure out how to extend from these districts into "clear and hold" on the provinces surrounding Saigon-Cholon, and again putting the emphasis on the "hold." If the citizens in these districts get something tangible -- peaceful sleep at night, more abundant rice and consumer goods in markets, ability to work their fields and paddies in peace, and village elections -- and this is brought to the attention of the people throughout Vietnam by good psychological operations -- the morale of the people will start changing. (Also, our side should be set for really gung-ho counter-attacks by the VC, who will see how dangerous this fundamental action by SVN is to their cause.)
3. Bite-size Victories. With morale sagging like the mattress in a Bowery flop-house, some tangible victories are needed. I feel that our side should take a hard look at the situation map, pick out one or

two enemy bailiwicks that should be fairly easy pickings, and then hit them hard -- preferably with a night action. Afterward, let the participating troops do a bit of crowing, by moving them in small units into barracks or camps with other units as instructors in "new" tactics, on quick temporary duty tours. If there has been a real set-up and success, the confidence of the participating troops will be infectious and this needs to be spread by the quickest possible means.

4. Organization. I'm sure that the present organization of ARVN would delight Rube Goldberg as much as it evidently delights the VC, but why are the American military so satisfied with something designed to fight a war that isn't being fought in Vietnam currently? I'm sure that the American military folks can come up with ideas which would permit companies and battalions to react promptly and effectively to the enemy situation without the horrendous red-tape which now stifles initiative. I suspect ARVN is in an organizational straight-jacket made in USA and it is high-time we gave them an organization with which to win their fight. One key is to find a way to give initiative to battalion commanders. This whole subject deserves a new and critical look.

5. Unconventional Pros. The Pentagon helps compound the US tragedy in Vietnam by breaking the very same personnel rules it usually swears by as inviolable for success in combat. You take commanders, staffs, and units who have proved they can win the sort of battle to be engaged in, assign them the task, and then back them up. Not one US military man now assigned in Vietnam is assigned there because he was successful in fighting Communist insurgents similar to the VC. Korea permitted US experience in police action against guerrillas in a zone of Communications, which is far different than Vietnam. In Greece, the US gained experience against Soviet partisan tactics which are markedly different than the Mao tactics being employed in Vietnam. Admittedly, only a handful of Americans have ever proved they could lick Communist guerrillas who use Chicom strategy and tactics -- but why close the doors on their advice and counsel? Why do US military men who become deeply and personally committed to winning the fight in Vietnam, along with earning warm friendships with their Vietnamese counterparts, find that they jeopardize their US military careers if they try to extend their tours of duty in Vietnam or try to return there for second or third tours?

I suspect it is high time we stop looking at Vietnam as a combat lab to give some experience to as many Americans as possible, and concentrate on getting Americans into Vietnam who know the score and who can get results with the Vietnamese. Perhaps Personnel, with its career management satrapy, can figure out how to give proper weight to success in counterinsurgency so that highly qualified US military men won't have to face career sacrifices to help win a war that is going to wreck some vital parts of the US military if it is lost. Stated more simply, how do you cut down on quantity (as Sec/Def has promised) while upping quality (as needed for a win).

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