

26 July 1964

MEMORANDUM

COUNTER-INSURGENCY EVALUATION - - - RAND Report R-430-AID

Considered as a whole, this report is an extraordinarily perceptive and useful document, especially if allowance is made for the limited time which the authors had in the field. It is far better than many of the papers prepared by supposed "experts" in counter-insurgency. From the counter-insurgency standpoint, it is generally sound, and, with some modifications in emphasis and expression, and, of course, with considerable elaboration of details should be implemented.

Determination of priorities in a counter-insurgency situation such as exists in Vietnam today resembles the old "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" dilemma raised to the nth degree. The fundamental conclusion reached in this report that a stable effective government is prerequisite to success, is absolutely sound. Yet it is equally true that this cannot be achieved without effective military action, and without other actions to win at least a degree of general support for the administration. This dilemma is but one facet of one of the major psychological stumbling-blocks to successful counter-insurgency, the fact that the establishment of categorical priorities is seldom productive.

The Urban Areas :

The counter-insurgency importance of the urban areas, in the situation as it exists in Vietnam today (and in their importance relative to the importance of the rural areas) seems somewhat over-emphasized. This is far better than neglecting them, as in the past. The RAND argument would be strengthened by a more clear distinction between the essentially different C-I problems posed by the "enlarged elite" (including the petty functionaries, etc.) and those posed by the urban proletariat and refugees. The support of the enlarged elite is absolutely essential to the existence of the government, because to a large extent they constitute the administration is a

factor too often disregarded. The proposed measures seem both appropriate and feasible for increasing the needed support.

The urban proletariat, especially the casuals and refugees, present a major problem which can be only partially solved by the proposed measures. For some years they will retain the capability (as will the Viet Cong retain their capability for exploiting it) for wreaking widespread destruction by mob violence, especially in the Saigon-Cholon area. An important advantage of the proposed housing measures would be the opportunity which their implementation would present for the infiltration of GVN intelligence agents and for improving the effectiveness of block organizations. It must be noted also that the urban development plan cannot realistically be expected to reduce substantially in the next few years, the present almost infinite capability for urban sabotage.

Finally, the discussion of the importance of urban development seems inadequately to appreciate the importance of the ties between urban and rural residents. This is understandable, for it is difficult to conceive of people so ignorant of the lives and thoughts of their country cousins as are many of the higher elite in Saigon (and many other capitals). Nevertheless the ties are strong among the lower elite and many of the proletariat, with the result that Viet Cong victories or dominance in the rural areas has very substantial urban psychological (as well as material) effects.

On balance it would be fair to say that, even as effective responsive government is a sine qua non of victory, so also is general support of the government by the urban enlarged elite, and by the rural population.

Counter-Insurgency and the Rural Areas :

Evaluation of the importance of the rural areas in the counter-insurgency effort in Vietnam has always suffered from a curious ambivalence. On the one hand it has generally been felt that virtually all effort should be concentrated in the rural areas (not, incidentally, the idea of USOM Rural Affairs) while on the other hand there has too often been a disregard, sometimes amounting to contempt, for the thoughts and attitudes of the peasants themselves. It is perhaps in this field

that the RAND report is most right, emphasizing the importance of influencing the thoughts, attitudes, and behavior of the people.

There are, however, three possibly serious errors in the discussion of the counter-insurgency program in the rural areas. "Possibly important" because they may be taken too seriously and too literally, but otherwise relatively unimportant.

Clear and Hold:

The first of these is the natural error of taking the "clear-and-hold" program too seriously and too literally, assuming that it will be a major, continuing program. Real progress in the rural war will not be made as long as literal application of, or preoccupation with, this program receives more than lip service. Fortunately, past experience strongly suggests that the Vietnamese, far more realistic than most of their American advisors, if far less capable organizers, realize the impracticality of military clearing and holding large areas, and will continue to mark time in marching on this one until American interest shifts, and we are able to get on with the war.

Government Benefits :

The second possibly serious error is related to the first. This is the idea that government (and AID) benefits should be restricted to the GVN "controlled" areas, except possibly under special conditions, or for special psychological operations. This is a basic fallacy in reasoning, for the object of the counter-insurgency effort is seen clearly by the authors of the report as being winning the support of the people, not "controlling" them. Worse, this approach can seriously hamper the effort, for it defeats the true, psychological purpose of assistance, to demonstrate the benefits to be derived from government.

In the nature of things, the reward or punishment aspect will be evident, for benefits will tend to concentrate in the areas which most clearly support the GVN (and, in consequence, fit reasonable criteria of government control). However, to establish and maintain credibility for the necessary claim of the GVN to represent, and to desire to benefit all the people, it must make at least token effort to extend it--

* See attachment 1, "Clear and Hold?"

government benefits to all, in so far as the VC will permit. Psychologically, and morally, government cannot openly adopt a "carrot-and-stick" policy until it clearly has the support of a vast majority of the people, instead it must demonstrate its intentions, and place squarely on the VC (as contrasted to "the people") the blame for non-receipt of benefits. (An hamlet school destroyed by the VC, properly exploited psychologically, is probably of more value to the GVN than if it were in operation.) Reward and punishment is effective against a well-developed insurgency almost directly proportional to the extent that the insurgents are clearly identified as the ones punishing, as those depriving the people of the benefits of government.

This is especially true in Vietnam. Traditionally, central government has been an entity apart from the lives of the peasant, except as it might call on them to give it their goods or their time. Until 1954 only the Viet Minh spread, in the countryside, the idea that government should both represent and benefit the governed. Since 1954, and especially since 1961, the central government has made intensive, and too often painful, efforts (e. g. the Strategic Hamlet Program) to promulgate the same concept. The alternative to "putting up", to proving intent and ability by performance is no longer "to shut up", it is to be destroyed. Moralistic statements rationalizing sanctions, that "you must suffer even greater deprivations of liberty or property because some among you support the VC" will be worse than meaningless, until the central government has proven its worth.

Benefit of the VC?

The third possibly serious error is the concern evinced over broadening the tax base, or increasing the income, of the VC, and the measures proposed to prevent this. Economic warfare is always attractive to those who will not feel the pinch, but where the enemy is among the people, it is warfare against the people, and even a "Hoover Mission" cannot justify its wide application in such a situation as exists in the "greater delta area", (including Saigon-Cholon) in Vietnam.

Guerilla logistics are difficult, and the difficulties increase in almost geometrical proportion to the "regularization" of their forces. In areas where food is plentiful the problem is not in acquiring food, but in assembling and transporting it. Increasing the

number of hectares under cultivation, and increasing the yield per hectare will not materially benefit the VC; these actions will materially benefit the people and the GVN by demonstrating GVN ability to assist the farmer and promote prosperity, by increasing GVN foreign exchange, and perhaps most important in the long run, by keeping the price of both absolutely and relatively low.

The importance of the support of the enlarged elite and the urban proletariat has already been emphasized, as has the danger of mob action in urban areas. Add to these groups the rural wage-earners, and you have, in terms of potential for short- or medium-term loss of the war, the most important factor in Vietnam. To virtually all of these people, the price of rice is the most critical element in their daily lives. The people of Vietnam do not demand pan et circenses, but raise the price they pay for rice (or charcoal, or nuoc mam) and you risk all.

Conclusions :

The RAND report well demonstrates an appreciation of the necessity for winning to an effective government at the support of the majority of all the people. It well points out the necessity for support among from certain groups too often over-looked, and recommends seemingly valid measures for winning such support. Its shortcomings it shares with, and to a large extent draws from, theories current in Vietnam, especially among Americans. These errors are pardonable, for they arise primarily from a lack of understanding of people and counter-insurgency, and are serious only to the extent they are generally put into practice.

The report is most clearly and unequivocally right when it emphasizes the need for vastly improved psychological operations. The American effort has been almost as tragically weak in this field as it has its efforts to influence the establishment of effective, unified, popular government. (Parenthetically, although neither is in its charter, Rural Affairs has in the past been perhaps the most effective US element in both.) It cannot be said too often, or too loudly, that the primary objective of our efforts is to influence the attitude and behavior of

people, not just the peasants or the VC.

Another maxim needs to be added to the collection. Perhaps it might be : "Don't try to boil the water to drive out the fish, or your goose will be cooked."

Attachment : "Clear-and-Hold?"

CTRBohannan
Consultant