

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

subject: Conversation with Lt. Col. Chau, Province Chief of Kien Hoa Province on 11, 12 September.

Pacification

1. I asked Chau what the people of his province wanted most in his opinion. After security he felt they wanted the following in this order:

- (a) Good behavior and treatment by the GVN.
- (b) Adequate care for war widows and orphans.
- (c) Adequate care for war victims, compensation.
- (d) Adequate care for war refugees.
- (e) A sincere open arms policy toward the VC.
- (f) More opportunity for the young people (more educational and training facilities).

Chau said the people felt that if the GVN wasn't even able to take care of its own people adequately that they could expect nothing from the GVN themselves. Chau felt strongly that solving the immediate problem created by the war should have top priority. The current system was too inflexible to meet there needs. (See attached memo from Reasonover of USOM about how indemnification system is not working.)

2. Chau said he believed that he had developed a system for pacifying the province which would show astonishing results if he could only be given the freedom to put it into operation. (See attached memo for his analysis of the problem and for his approach.) He believes that the key to pacification is above all popular participation in government at the village level and effective government at the village level. He believes that one major mistake of the strategic hamlet program was the concentration of effort at the hamlet level, which has never meant anything to the rural people, to the detriment of the village. From his own experience in the province, where the strategic hamlet program was most successful was where he has good village government. At first he had tried to by-pass the village level, but this had not worked. Where he placed the strategic hamlet teams under the village chief and gave him full responsibility was where the program succeeded.

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At the same time the village chiefs and committees had to be thoroughly supervised and he used the census-grievance teams for this purpose.

3. Chau is working out his own land reform program. He had trained a land reform deputy for the village chief. This deputy, with the assistance and advice of the village administrative committee, holds sessions of contending parties and settles each land issue in the traditional Vietnamese manner of compromise. In this way many of the problems which the Government's land reform law does not touch, are being solved.

4. Chau wants authorization to begin the formation of a peoples self-defense force in the hamlets. He also wants authorization to hold elections for a village people's advisory council. He says that these are two of his main programs to mobilize the population against the Viet Cong.

5. Chau said it was absolutely essential to raise the pay of the village chief and village administrative committee. The village chief salary is currently set at between 1600 to 2500 piastres. The GVN furnishes the 1600 piastres while the village chief has to make up the rest from local contributions. Normally village chiefs make extra money by collecting rents for landowners. One village chief in Kien Hoa collected a "school tax" of 50 p's from each family with kids attending the village school, until Chau caught him. In contrast a single ARVN private gets 2100 piastres per month. Chau suggests a base pay of 3,000 p's for village chiefs with the provincial government being authorized to supplement this income from provincial sources (but not the village chief from village resources).

6. Chau said that the only effective assistance he had received in the province during the past year had come from Mr. Johngenson's people. They had supported the PAT's and the census-grievance teams which were helping him to maintain the status quo in the province and prepare local opinion for his future pacification effort.

7. Finally, Chau said that although the security situation in Kien Hoa was as bad as when he first arrived in Kien Hoa in 1962, he felt that he now had a solid base of political support in the province which extended into Viet Cong controlled areas, that he now had a good, experienced staff and a program which had been tested. If he were given a free hand and two years he was sure he could pacify the province with the forces available to him.



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Political

1. Col. Chau was extremely warm and friendly. We talked over 8 hours about the situation in general and what he was trying to do in his province. This memo will present the highlights. As background, Col. Chau was the only province chief back in the days of the strategic hamlet program who made as his principle objective, winning the support of the people for the Government, or as he put it "Giving the people faith in their government." He was always scrupulously honest in reporting progress to Saigon, and he made impressive progress until he was sent up to Danang as Mayor by President Diem in September 1963.

2. General Chau said that Vietnam was now in a state of anarchy and that fewer and fewer people were willing to commit themselves. The only person he trusted among the Generals was General Thieu, who was an old personal friend but Thieu was afraid of taking any action. The Vietnamese were wondering, he said, if the American purpose was to use its power just to force the Viet Cong to talk so that the Americans could withdraw. Many Vietnamese feared that this was so and could find little reason for continuing to destroy their own country. This was particularly true of religious leaders who were having their churches destroyed. Without the air strikes on the VC in the South we would be losing the war militarily but with them we were losing it politically. Neutralist sentiment was increasing and it was difficult for him to reproach his friends who felt this way.

3. Chau said the present Government was very inexperienced and the Generals were full of complexes. Almost all the educated Vietnamese, for example the officers and school teachers in his province, believed that the Americans had installed this Government and had put Ky in as a puppet they could control. Otherwise, why Ky, who was the most inexperienced of all the Generals. He said he did not personally believe this but most educated Vietnamese did. The farmers in his province were not interested in who was in the Central Government or even very interested in who was province chief; their life still centered around their village.



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4. Chau said the Government had made three major mistakes and he believed that there were VC sympathizers in the Kien Hoa Dao and elsewhere (Chau is Buddhist) ~~who encouraged~~ who encouraged this. These mistakes were:

(a) A renewed attack on the ghost of the Can Lao which obliged, for example, Thieu to relieve about 12 capable officers.

(b) The draft which was destroying GVN civil government in the provinces.

(c) The ARVN pay raise which was wrecking the morale of the Popular Forces and the village and district cadre structure. As an example, an ARVN private now received more pay than a village chief.

5. Chau felt very strongly that the Americans must help the Vietnamese reestablish a proper moral climate in the country and a court system which dispensed justice. He said if he were asked by Ambassador Lodge what the Americans should do he would say: "First win the trust and confidence of the Generals, second set up an informal joint staff for pacifying the country, and third select some experimental provinces where the province chiefs would be given a completely free hand, but working with his American advisors in a joint committee." He said that above all, however, the Americans must assume control of the situation to reverse the current trend toward anarchy. No one was a stronger nationalist than he, but keeping the country free was more important than preserving the technicalities of sovereignty. Too many Vietnamese who refused to work openly and sincerely with the Americans did so because they had some dishonesty to hide. (Comment: Clau is one of the most touchy Vietnamese I know on the question of Vietnamese sovereignty.)

6. Chau felt that General Ky was severely handicapped by his post as a playboy. When asked how Ky could overcome this, he said stop talking so much and take effective actions. Chau felt the more the Government talked, the more the Vietnamese people thought the worst of it. They assumed that Government leaders talked to hide something.

LG: RCPHILLIPS:pag  
September 23, 1965

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