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TO: Ambassador Lodge
FROM: Ed Lansdale
SUBJECT: The SLO Role

I believe that SLO has one major service yet to perform for the success of your mission and U.S. objectives in Viet Nam. When this has been performed, hopefully by late 1966, I recommend that SLO be disbanded. With your concurrence, I will plan accordingly.

The one remaining service is to help the Vietnamese gain a sound political footing for our side of the struggle here. When it is gained, there will be a true basis for military, economic, social, diplomatic, and psychological operations which can resolve the struggle in our favor. This basis also will permit increasing effectiveness of the Revolutionary Development and Chieu Hoi programs, to the point where their impact in following up of military operations can be decisive on the outcome of the war. The massive effort of the regular U.S. establishment, as long as it enhances the emerging political base in Viet Nam, should prove more than adequate for success here, without any real requirement for the services of a special group seemingly apart from the regular establishment, such as SLO.

There are a number of factors required in building a sound political footing for our side in Viet Nam. All are important ones. Also, all will be taking early shape in the days just ahead -- in the political activities prior to the Fall election, in the campaign and conduct of the election itself, and in the work of the Assembly when elected. These factors are seen as establishing principled election procedures to safeguard freedom, the organization of government which governs with the consent of those governed (and spelled out in a Constitution acceptable to the Vietnamese people), and the growth of popular political institutions strong enough to overcome the power of the Communist political organization among the people.

Much of the initial political activity, and eventually practically all of it, will be matters concerning official bodies of the GVN and thus are matters of continuing interest to the regular U.S. establishment. The transitory exception, in my opinion, is in the initial stages of forming groupings

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of political parties and factions so that strong national coalitions will emerge that transcend sectarian and sectional affiliations in favor of the greater good. Viet Nam nationalists have an unhappy history of being unable to write or to gain true popular participation in party structures. I believe that the political criticality of mid-1966, critical in terms of how the future of Viet Nam is going to turn out, has sobered enough political leaders in Viet Nam so that they are ready for much more practical realism in building political institutions than ever before. Working with these political leaders, often outside of official GVN circles, requires a special and sensitive effort if the U.S. is to influence them constructively while the favorable climate lasts.

On the basis of this thinking, I recommend that the Political Section continue its responsibilities with official Vietnamese political developments for the forthcoming election, the Assembly, the Constitution, and the organization of government. My further recommendation, though, is that SLO in its special position and with its special relationships be responsible for influencing the growth of coalitions of political groups having popular participation, helping them grow strong enough to vie with the Communist political organization, and guiding them into moving towards an eventually more stable and meaningful political party structure in Viet Nam. As veterans of political work in Viet Nam, including the founding of the Republic with its Constitution and political processes, members of the SLO staff can assist if necessary with advice on other U.S. political activities, but I firmly believe SLO's greatest value will be in helping the Vietnamese gain their own popular political institutions during this critical period. With success, these institutions will become part of the normal body politic in Viet Nam and U.S. relationships with them can then be continued in the customary procedures for dealing with foreign political parties.

For necessary coordination within the U.S. Mission, we will keep you, the Deputy Ambassador, the Political Counsellor, and the Mission Coordinator informed of developments as they happen. Colonel Karrick, as SLO Executive Officer, will establish close, daily liaison with the Political Section; it is hoped that a full measure of team-work can be achieved. Mr. Redick will be Reports officer, to assure that developments are reported adequately. The small remaining staff, including

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myself, will undertake the contact and guidance work. This will absorb most of the time and energy of our limited group, except for what I see as some continuing liaison responsibilities, such as with General Nguyen duc Thang of the Rural Development Ministry.

cc: Ambassador Porter
General Westmoreland
Mr. Habib
Mr. Hart
Mr. Wilson

SLO:EGLansdale:rm
May 27, 1966