

Thursday,  
November 17, 1966  
2:55 p. m.

Mr. President:

This is Ed Lansdale at his  
best -- worth reading.

W. W. Rostow



EMBASSY  
OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

96a

American Embassy,  
Saigon, Viet Nam,  
November 12, 1966.

OFFICIAL-INFORMAL  
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Dear Walt:

You and Bill might find my crystal-balling of 1967 in Viet Nam, in the attached, stimulating to your own thinking. I wrote this mostly for the folks in Saigon, who are reading it now.

Warm regards,

*SL*

Edward G. Lansdale  
Assistant to the President

Enclosure: As stated.

The Honorable  
Walt Rostow,  
Special Assistant to the President,  
The White House.

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ADMINISTRATIVE MARKING  
NOT NAT'L SECURITY  
INFORMATION, E. O. 12356,  
SEC. 1.1(a)

BY *AS* ON 9-6-88

TO: The Ambassador  
and U. S. Mission Council Members

FROM: Ed Lansdale

SUBJECT: 1967.

Attached are some personal views about 1967 in Viet Nam. You may not agree with them. Your own crystal ball may be better than mine. Thus, I offer them to stimulate thinking about a time and a strategy just ahead of us that can prove to be vital to our cause

Attachment: As stated.

SLO: EGLansdale:mlh  
November 8, 1966

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INFORMATION, E. O. 12356,  
SEC. 1.1(d)

BY Ng ON 9-6-88

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MEMORANDUM

BY

Ed Lansdale

SUBJECT: The Battleground in 1967.

DECLASSIFIED  
E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

NLJ 88-214

By lsp, NARA, Date 1-27-89

All of us on our side in Viet Nam need to be soberly aware of what we are about to do in 1967.

We are adding something that is significantly more than the present hard push against the enemy. From the viewpoint of Hanoi and COSVN, in 1967 we will be giving the most serious challenge yet to the Communist enemy in his favored position among the people in the countryside.

This challenge is inherent in plans for next year's Revolutionary Development campaign with its "Ap Doi Moi" concept in plans for changes in the military mission to provide support for the Revolutionary Development campaign, in plans for the holding of hamlet and village elections, in plans for forming a constabulary force from the RF, PF, and PFF, and in plans for a dynamic National Reconciliation Program. It hasn't been so voiced yet, but since these activities will be undertaken simultaneously they constitute a major strategy for us in 1967.

The Communist enemy can be expected to view this challenge as vital to him. In his book, if we succeed in wresting the initiative from him on what he believes to be the true battleground of the "people's war" he is attempting to wage, then 1967 will prove to be the turning point of the present war, against him. No doubt, he will react vigorously. He has local forces that are more numerous and more difficult to "fix" than the main forces we have been concentrating upon. He may have some main force units revert from Phase III missions to assist local forces in Phase II actions to counter our 1967 challenge.

1967 also will levy its demand upon us to keep up the momentum we gained in 1966 in our military efforts against the enemy's

main force units and in our political efforts of strengthening the GVN structure at the top through a Constitution, another national election and a new form of Central Government. These two major enterprises require staunch continuation as we add a third one in 1967 and move onto ground that the enemy knows so well and where he has been following rules of people's warfare that have brought him success. 1967 is going to require much more from us all--Vietnamese, Americans, and Free World allies--than was given in 1966.

Some thoughts, suggestions, and comments about the era of the Vietnamese struggle into which we are heading are noted in the following:

1. Base. The true struggle in Viet Nam is being waged upon a political basis. We now have too weak a political foundation on our side. The Central Government and even the new Constitution, are top layers of a foundation. The vital bottom layers are missing. The 1967 strategy deals with the bottom layers. Until there is something firm at the bottom, nothing else that is built can last. The collapse of so much during the past 12 years of Vietnamese-American collaboration, in military, political, social, economic, and psychological enterprises, was due primarily to this weakness.

2. From Ground Up. Heavy paternalism has prolonged the ills of colonialism in Viet Nam. We tell the GVN what is good for it and the people. The Central Government goes down its structure with detailed instructions to its local officials on what they should do for the good of the people. At the rice-roots, most hamlet and village organizations are designed to respond to what comes from above, and not to work out their own affairs. This colonial attitude is a vulnerability which the Communists are masters at exploiting. It can be changed in 1967. The British departed from centralism with the Municipal Reforms of 1335. In our own country, we changed early in the 1770's long before the Revolution or the writing of our Constitution. As one of our founding fathers, John Adams, observed: "The Revolution was effected before the war commenced," because the colonists were "formed by law into corporations, or bodies politic" and possessed "the right to assemble

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in their town halls, there to deliberate upon the public affairs;" it was "in these assemblies of towns or districts that the sentiments of the people were formed in the first place."

3. Rice-Roots Action. The local elections proposed to be held in March to May 1967, hopefully in 5,000 hamlets and 800 villages, can provide the real genesis of viable democracy in Viet Nam. If the elected hamlet and village executives, along with the elected People's Councils, truly get the people started in handling their own affairs, then we will have the start of building the solid political foundation necessary for success in Viet Nam. This will require loosening the controlling grasp of paternalism, to let the people start having a real say in local development--in selecting their own officials and in public discussion of social, security, economic, health, and educational improvement, as well as public works. Much greater use of "town meetings" needs to be made than is now contemplated; such use probably will require U. S. and GVN stimulation at the beginning. Americans who have participated in recent village development in Peru, East Pakistan, and several African nations, and who now are serving in Viet Nam, have some exceptional understanding of what is needed here; it would be profitable to bring them together in a short-term "task force" to develop more dynamic guidelines for 1967 hamlet and village self-reliance. The lessons of the changes made in India's "Panchayat" (5-man village board of selectmen) over the past twelve years are worth noting, also.

4. Constitution. The new Constitution for Viet Nam probably will contain beautiful and profound precepts. The precepts will have to be honored by the government and the people, if these precepts are to live. Two dead Vietnamese Constitutions--the 1956 Constitution and the 1964 "Vung Tau" Constitution--underscore the reality of this statement. The creation of the new Constitution comes at a time when a major strategic move is being made at the rice-roots, among the people of the countryside; its creation should become integrated with that strategy. This suggests that provisions for local self-government and self-reliance be considered for the new Constitution. The politicians themselves would gain more participation in the development of Viet Nam, given more stress on local initiative. Further, the concept of holding a series of public hearings throughout Viet Nam on proposed

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provisions for the new Constitution would help the 1967 strategy. The GVN should be encouraged to provide air transportation and other means to the Constituent Assembly, to get this done. The September 1966 election earned some credibility for GVN's honor among the people; the Constitution-making process can capitalize on this start, make it grow stronger, with popular participation that will make sense to the people.

5. Income. Full bellies do not equate with human freedom. Too many U. S. and GVN socio-economic programs, including a number of military "civic action" projects, seem to be based upon the premise that liberal handouts to the people will win their "hearts and minds." We cannot win that simply and cheaply when we are up against an Asian Communist enemy. The 1967 campaign calls for something more. What the Vietnamese at the rice-roots wants is a chance for his own independent stake in the future. He can get a start on this through increasing his own family income by his own efforts. A number of U. S. and GVN programs which could make dramatic changes in the Vietnamese incomes in the countryside--and probably double farm production in 1967--are now existing at far less than their potential. Topside executive action, not further study by committees, is required to get dynamic progress in farm production, marketing co-ops, agrarian credit unions, and local industry--all designed to increase individual income and independence in a way that the Communists cannot do. Greater use of the Chinese agricultural technicians in operations with the RD Cadre in 1967, as now contemplated, is one example of tapping a real potential.

6. Basic Unit. The main thrust of the 1967 strategy is targeted on hamlets. Yet, a prompt, secondary development--of then targeting on villages--is worth considering. The local elections planned for 1967 offer one means of doing this. Security and socio-economic operations are required to backstop the political operation. The Vietnamese village was the traditional basic unit. It comes closer than the hamlet to being a self-reliant unit, able to elect responsible executives with whom a Central Government can deal practically in security and socio-economic affairs. The NLF/VC changes and consolidations of villages were not purely a psychological-political move; the result was a basic unit amenable to streamlined administrative control and able to contribute economically to the VC war effort.

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The NLF/VC breaking of tradition suggests that the GVN can afford to do so also, particularly if it helps the people. 1967 might well prove to be the time to start electing District officials, wherever security permits. We should be alert to encourage such progress, and even dare to think of electing Provincial officials someday before long.

7. Hard Core. There are hard core anti-Communist hamlets and villages in Viet Nam today that the VC can occupy only by massacring all of the inhabitants. They are anti-Communist by their own desires, and not through any national program. In effect, the people there have pledged "their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor" to their own freedom. Whatever help the inhabitants get from the GVN they make go a long way. Some are sustained by religious beliefs, such as Catholic and Hoa Hao communities. Others are political "believers," such as some VNQDD and even a few Dai Viet communities. This suggests that the 1967 "Ap Doi Moi," or new New Life Hamlet, concept be considered for further enlargement, with the GVN giving recognition and special status to the already self-sustaining, hard-core anti-Communist communities. The GVN can identify them readily through Provincial officials. When their status is established, they can be regarded by giving them priority for self-government, means for self-defense, and credit, supplies, and technical help for self-development. This will give a big boost to individual initiative, as a strong ally to the GVN cadre-initiated campaign.

8. Partisans. Local initiative in pacification and development also can be greatly encouraged by adoption of some partisan proposals which have been long awaiting decisions by the GVN. Several already have many dedicated adherents who will work hard to make them succeed. Among these proposals, the Hoa Hao "Kien Ha Plan" and the planned Nung settlement along Route 20 between Saigon and Dalat have much to commend them. The voluntary commitment of great segments of the population, as part of a national plan, is a tactic of "people's war" which can truly hurt the Communist cause. Since these are large enterprises, U. S. interest in and support of the proposals seem to be a necessary first step for promoting GVN adoption of them. Thus, it is suggested that intense U. S. study be given them

for consideration of including at least a start of one or more partisan projects as part of the 1967 strategy.

9. More Partisans. The 1967 strategy offers further opportunities for initiative by partisan groups whose participation will greatly strengthen the GVN campaign. The participation seems to need just a little spark of encouragement, even a nod of approval from the GVN and perhaps the U. S., to become active. A leading example of this is the CPT, with its hopes of expansion into the countryside with farmers' unions, coincident with the establishment of co-ops and credit organizations. A great potential also exists among groups of politicians in Viet Nam; democratic parties will grow as a way is opened for meaningful development, and 1967 can provide the opening. Participation of elected Provincial Councils in the selection of the "Ap Dol Moi" and "hard core anti-Communist communities" is worth consideration, as is some participation of delegates to the Constituent Assembly. A further suggestion, as an incentive for partisan political growth, would be that the GVN donate one or more houses in Saigon to provide office space for political parties to use in 1967, when Viet Nam's political evolution will be accelerated. Other than the formal chambers of the Assembly, there is no real center for political meeting and inter-communication as yet in Viet Nam.

10. Civics. The success of the 1967 strategy will depend to a considerable degree on evoking patriotism, a true sense of citizenship in the nation of Viet Nam, among the people throughout the country. Family loyalties and ties still predominate, to the extent that a slogan such as "Family, Home, and Country" would have to be amputated to "Family and Home" to be meaningful. This suggests that courses in "civics," teaching the rights and duties of citizens the governmental processes of Viet Nam, and the aspirations for a free nation as described by Vietnamese leaders, be given special emphasis in educational programs. Such emphasis was given in Philippine schools by American teachers early in this century, making a sharp change from Spanish colonial customs; several Philippine Presidents and other leaders credit these early "civics" classes in the public schools as the most important element in the growth of responsible citizenship in the Philippines. In French West Africa a decade ago, General Le Puloch added "civics" to the training courses

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for local recruits in the Army; local civil administrators and tribal chiefs credited this military instruction with introducing a great new element of stability throughout the territory. Long An Province, where many residents have only the vaguest notion of Viet Nam as a nation or of its government, might provide a good starting point in 1967.

11. Oath. Most modern nations require those who serve the nation, both civil and military, to take an oath before they serve. It usually is fairly explicit and is so closely related to known national principles that the oath-taker is quite aware of the meaning of his pledge. The oath establishes the basis for the ethics of the service. Viet Nam, unfortunately, has a confusion of oaths for those who serve the nation, some related to ill-defined concepts, and others unrelated to the GVN wherein the service is performed. For example, RVNAF sees itself as the protector of the 1963 Revolution, yet the Revolutionary aims are still unclear and RVNAF members have not taken an oath to uphold these aims; this is in sharp contrast to the Indonesian Army, which also sees itself as the protector of a Revolution, whose aims it defined and has re-confirmed. The 1967 Strategy in Viet Nam will demand singular, understanding loyalty from RVNAF, from the RD Cadre, from the police, from civil officials at all levels. Since the new Constitution also will come into being in 1967, it is hoped that it will contain principles understood and accepted by the Vietnamese, explicit enough to provide the basis for a new oath of service by all who serve Viet Nam. Such an oath, related to defending, protecting, and upholding a principled Constitution that has the people's acceptance, can provide a forceful element in uniting the efforts of the hundreds of thousands now serving Viet Nam.

12. CMO. Although the 1967 strategy will emphasize operations among the people in the countryside, the cities cannot be forgotten. They are the geographical locus of the Communists' Phase III under the guiding slogan: "First the mountains, next the countryside, then the cities" In 1954, while waging the battle of Dien Bien Phu, the Communists were completing their secret control organization inside Hanoi. There is evidence that the Communists are attempting similar control measures inside the Saigon-Cholon national capital area today. It also is apparent that a more effective means than is employed today will be required to

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clean out the subversives, terrorists, and enemy military units from the national capital area. Personal experience tells me that it will require clearly assigned responsibility to a single command to clear the Saigon-Cholon area of the enemy threat. In 1955, ARVN did this successfully under the personal direction of President Diem, as Commander-in-Chief. In 1950, the Communist organization (including the Politburo) was cleared out of Manila, the Philippines' national capital, by the Philippine military under the personal direction of National Defense Secretary Magsaysay. Note that each of these operations was commanded by a decisive leader who also had great political skill. Saigon-Cholon requires similar action in 1967.

13. Integrity. A powerful corrosive will be present to harm the 1967 strategy, unless it is dealt with effectively. The corrosive is the people's belief that the GVN and RVNAF are riddled with corruption, including its top echelons. The enemy poses a contrast for the people to compare. The Communist leaders and forces, despite the savagery of their actions, demonstrate a personal honesty that is strictly disciplined. They, too, are Vietnamese. In 1967, success will demand the offer of a better choice to the people than between physical security with corruption under the GVN or harsh control with honesty under the Communists. The surest start towards eliminating the corrosive would be action at the top first. Since the action would be politically traumatic also, it will require expert political assistance. Thus, if the top GVN leadership were to establish a new, strict code of conduct for those who serve the GVN, and then strictly enforce the code, commencing with the highest-placed officials first, there would have to be some form of evident, firm support from both a judiciary body and a body representing the popular will. The People's-Army Congress partially fulfills the latter requirement; the elected Assembly fulfills it wholly. A "Blue Ribbon Committee" of the present or of the future elected Assembly, to determine decency in public service, is one instrument that can support executive action. In present day Viet Nam, due to its heavy input of fiscal support, the United States has the realistically decisive voice for supporting actions against GVN corruption. A U. S. policy decision to backstop GVN corrective acts, implemented by Americans working with Vietnamese from the top down through the whole structure, civil and military, could bring the change that the 1967 strategy requires.

14. Command. The 1967 strategy encompasses political, military, social, economic, intelligence, and psychological operations, which hopefully will be conducted in an integrated fashion. The present structure of the GVN and of the U. S. Mission in Viet Nam is not designed for firm control and informed executive decisions that the complex 1967 strategy requires. Improvement is indicated as an essential ingredient for success. The organization and methods of both the GVN and the U. S. Mission need to be such that the top man in each is aware of the true current situation and can take the coordinated action of telling a responsible official to do something, and it will be done. This means an operational staff for the top man; neither the GVN Cabinet nor the U. S. Mission Council is the operational staff required. This means an organizational span of control that is practical for one man; only partially effective elements of this requirement exist today. The Prime Minister has Super-Ministers and the U. S. Ambassador has the Deputy Ambassador for the civil side and COMUSMACV for the military. This means, also, better mechanical control, such as is afforded by an Operational Command Center and precise field coordination, as in the Malayan Red Book procedure; neither the GVN nor the U. S. have such a Center for the top command today, nor a way to coordinate Centers for the GVN and U. S., 1967 awaits command improvement.

SI:O:EG:Lansdale:mlh  
November 8, 1966

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