

MEMORANDUM

January 3, 1966

To: Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge

From: George C. Lodge

Subject: Problems of motivation and organization in
South Viet Nam

Introduction: This report is based on observations made during a trip to Viet Nam (December 7-21, 1965) when I visited the following places: Saigon; Vung Tau Training Center; Thu Dau Mot and Ben Cat, Binh Duong Province; Phan Thiet; the Cam Ranh Bay area; the Qui-Nhon area; and Hue and other communities of Thua Thien Province. I had extensive conversations with Tran Quoc Bau and other leaders of the Viet Nam Confederation of Labor (CVT); province and district chiefs; leaders of five Political Action Teams (PAT) in the field; U.S. Marines at Phu Bai and Army personnel elsewhere; top personnel of the U.S. Mission and U.S. field representatives; a number of GVN officials, including Prime Minister Ky, Minister of Labor Nguyen-Xuan-Phong, and Vo Long Trieu of the Ministry of Rural Affairs; a group of "out" politicians, including Tran Van Van, Phan Quang Dan, Phan Huy Quat, Tran Van Tuyen and Nguyen Van Tuoi; leaders of the Buddhist hierarchy in Hue; and students and faculty at Hue.

I

The problems confronting the United States and the Government of Viet Nam (GVN) are parts of a circle, interdependent and interrelated, inseparable from one another. Efforts to deal with them separately are bound to fail.

The point of highest priority in this circle is the matter of security, which can be divided into two parts: (1) the confrontation of main force units of the Army of North Viet Nam and the Viet Cong on one side against the U.S. and GVN regular forces on the other, and (2) the activities of small groups of guerrillas and terrorists who have been regularly and systematically destroying the social, political and economic life of each community and of the nation. This report deals with this second category of security.

The identity, control, and defeat of the terrorist in any community depends largely on the motivation, organization and commitment of that community. Without this commitment guns and force are of limited and short-term value. The terrorist in Viet Nam has the powerful weapon of fear which he has refined and implanted over a long period of time. The villager has received little protection against him and, therefore, has frequently cooperated with him, not because he approves of him, but because he has no clear alternative. The Government - Saigon, Province or District - remains a distant and confusing entity. For many in fact the Viet Cong is the government, it being organized and dispersed in such a way as to tax and impose its will in a very direct if oppressive manner.

The problem comes in the shape of a circular dilemma: increased commitment on the part of the villager to his hamlet, his village, his district or province or nation, is necessary to motivate and organize him to deal with his security problem; but it is also necessary to provide him with the means of security in order to raise his commitment level above that of his fears. Commitment and security, therefore, must be dealt with together and concurrently. There is good reason to believe that previous security efforts failed partly at least because they attempted to provide security first and then to raise the commitment level.

There is ample evidence to show that the commitment level is not necessarily raised by the bestowal of goods and services from authorities outside the community. School houses, health workers, fertilizer and pigs do not necessarily have an effect on the commitment level. Their distribution does not necessarily, therefore, achieve our objectives in Viet Nam. They can, in fact, hamper that achievement by smothering initiative and dulling local agitation for the fulfillment of needs.

It seems apparent that some of our material aid is indeed a waste and, what is worse, is undoubtedly enriching the Viet Cong. I saw a handsome new school building which is used in the morning by the children of the region and in the afternoon by the Viet Cong. Another schoolhouse at Ben Cat is an adornment and probably an efficient educational institution but there is no evidence whatsoever that it has advanced our objectives in that besieged community.

We must be clear in our minds what the priorities are and what we hold as criteria for success. We are not presumably interested in education per se or indeed even in health per se. I heard a story of a health worker in a village in Thua Thien who had done an admirable job. After he left, the local Viet Cong newspaper, The Liberator, congratulated him on his good work and told the people that efforts would be made to get him back, leaving the clear impression that the Viet Cong had been responsible for the man's work. Incidentally, our information program seems to lack anything equivalent to The Liberator, which is local, flexible, and quick to take advantage of small opportunities.

A proper ordering of priorities and success criteria would suggest that a rude thatched hut built by villagers as a place in which to educate their children is more valuable than a million-dollar concrete building.

This is reasonably obvious. Where, then, does the problem lie? USOM's program policy was admirably and articulately explained to me - the list of needs of the people, the manner in which goods and services were being distributed to meet those needs and the basic premises upon which all this is being conducted. The flaw lies in one simple element of the reasoning: the program is being conducted by, with, and through local government for the purpose of making that government more effective and responsive. While with part of our mind we know quite well that in most of Viet Nam there is not a shred of social-political-economic structure that can legitimately be called "government", with the other part of our mind we assume that by injecting large quantities of material aid into what is called "government", we will automatically inflate and strengthen it.

This is a fallacy which marks our AID policy not only in Viet Nam but in Latin America and other regions where large and critical masses of the population are completely beyond the reach of central, national government.

The effect of this policy is often to harrass and overburden the delicate tentacles of what someday may be government and to consume scarce local manpower in a fruitless exercise.

We must recognize that the priority objectives of the US-GVN effort in South Viet Nam is not necessarily related to the distribution of matter. Our objectives are not only to the extent that the villagers are agitated, motivated and organized to commit themselves to achieving fulfillment of their needs. Then and then only will their commitment level surpass their fear level and will we be in a position to solve the security problem.

AGITATION - I was told that the people in Viet Nam really do not care much about reforms or anything else except tranquility. They want to be left alone; they want peace. While this is quite understandable, it is also dangerously misleading. What it really means is that the fear level is so high that all other needs of the villager are sublimated. As long as this is the case, of course, seeking to meet his needs is in a sense a waste of time. He must be agitated to feel his needs as being just as, if not more, important than his fears. He must be stimulated to realize that education for his children, reasonable credit arrangements, land reform, health or whatever, are of great importance to him. He must be made, in short, into a revolutionary. This doesn't happen naturally, especially in rural, static, traditional areas.

It is interesting in this connection to note what Prime Minister Ky said to me when I asked him about his plans for land and other reforms. I asked whether his land reform scheme was more than parcelling out government land to the squatters who occupied it and who in effect felt already a sense of ownership, only without its responsibilities. We also talked about the inability of NACO to reach the people who need agricultural credit the most. I gathered that it was hard for him to push through reform against the forces of the status quo who naturally resist them without real and visible pressures from the countryside. The point is that while all seem to agree that revolution is necessary in Viet Nam, you can't have revolution without revolutionaries among the masses.

ORGANIZATION AND MOTIVATION - Once the needs of the villagers are as or more important to him than his fears, he can be motivated to set to fill those needs through organization of many kinds: political structures, labor organizations, cooperatives, community efforts, etcetera. It is only after the villager has been agitated, motivated and organized that his needs can be fulfilled with the political or ideological effect which is our priority concern. It is only then that response to his call for assistance is useful. It is only then that he can receive assistance with dignity.

COMMITMENT - The natural sequel is commitment of the villager to whatever individual, group or force has successfully agitated, motivated and organized him and assisted him in meeting his needs. In Viet Nam it would seem unlikely that commitment will come quickly to the Central Government which is by tradition and in practice so distant and overburdened. Commitment would logically come first at the hamlet level, then the village, the district and maybe in time the province and the nation. This, of course, does not mean that the villager need be opposed to any of these levels of government during the stages of commitment growth, but it is important to recognize as precisely as possible the place or point to which he can be expected to be committed at any one time.

Given this sequence, I would recommend that USOM review its provincial operations program and policy and consider substantial rearrangements and refocusing of effort to the end that:

No aid is distributed or services rendered unless they follow upon real local agitation, motivation and organization and unless they are requested by and directed through an organizational structure which offers a reasonable guarantee that they will not fall into the hands of the Viet Cong and that they will directly contribute to raising the commitment level above that of the fear level and thus contribute to the solution of the security problem which is paramount.

We should remember that the Communists achieve substantial motivation and organization but distribute very little aid. They heal very few sick and build few schoolhouses. The problem in Viet Nam is fundamentally not materialistic. Matter will not solve it; it can, however, be used as a tool in its solution.

II

I would suggest four existing or potential receptacles for focus and priority under the above criteria (not listed necessarily in the order of their importance):

1. The Vietnamese Confederation of Labor (CVT) impressed me as an organization of the utmost importance with proven capacity to agitate, motivate and organize. It is hard to estimate its real capacity for action at the moment. It has been restrained by successive governmental regimes which understandably fear its political power. It is wary of committing itself to any single regime, having the equally understandable apprehension that the regime may be overthrown. On the other hand, it is reasonable to estimate that it has 100 competent leaders and perhaps 100,000 committed followers in three areas of work which are critical to Viet Nam: fishing, the rubber plantations, and farming. It also has varying degrees of strength in other activities, especially the oil industry, various sorts of transport, the docks, the construction industry, and, in some parts of the country, meat slaughtering.

Relationships and understanding between the CVT and the GVN, especially Prime Minister Ky, seem to be at an unprecedented high level. In my conversations with Ky and the Minister of Labor there seemed to be an awareness of the importance of the CVT in securing political support for the GVN, gaining worker cooperation in industries such as the Saigon bus company, and in performing various social services in both urban and rural areas. Tran Quoc Bau, President of the CVT, appeared disposed to cooperate with the GVN in any way he could, although he was obviously aware of the distance between the GVN and the people and its consequent instability. It is too early to predict what will happen to these relationships in the future, just as it is hard to assess with confidence the real power of the CVT. It is time, however, to conduct some careful tests with the following objectives:

- a. To show the GVN that the CVT can be a useful and constructive force in the achievement of national objectives;
- b. To show the CVT that it can engage in substantial activities without the interference of government;
- c. To lay the basis for continuing activity by the CVT in motivating and organizing the people of South Viet Nam;
- d. To develop useful experience in this regard which can be converted into training material for wider application.

Test #1: At Phan Thiet the CVT has about 10,000 dues-paying members under the leadership of Tran Van Khuyen, most of whom are or were engaged in fishing, fish processing and boat building. The quantities of fish caught today are substantially below normal because it cannot be transported over the roads to Saigon and other markets, where the price of fish is rising, contributing to the general inflationary problem.

A \$15,000 (one million piasters) loan should be extended to the Fishermen's Federation at Phan Thiet with which it would build a 50-ton boat, members of the boat builders union contributing some free time for the construction. This boat would be owned and operated cooperatively by the Union. It could be built in two months and could pay for itself within a year or less with efficient operation. It would shuttle between Phan Thiet and Saigon, carrying fish to market.

Its real purpose, however, would be to demonstrate and test techniques of cooperative formation in Viet Nam today, to form a model for further similar organizations along the coast and to produce practical and proven training material for cooperative and community development to be used at Vung Tau or elsewhere for the training of PAT groups and other associated teams. This is a low risk project which consumes a minimum of Vietnamese manpower and could provide maximum assurance to the CVN and the CVT of each other's sincerity. It is outside of Saigon and would be under the direction of a relatively non-political labor leader, who appears to enjoy close relations with his District Chief.

There are undoubtedly numerous obstacles to be overcome. For example, the unloading and marketing of the fish in Saigon in an efficient and just manner would have to be assured. Some technical assistance might be required. I would strongly urge that this assistance not come from the United States. U.S. cooperative experience appears to be of only marginal value in countries like Viet Nam. The unfortunate history of the Cooperative Research and Training Center in Saigon, which was assisted by the Cooperative League of the U.S., is a case in point. Our advice and experience concerning cooperatives is far too sophisticated and is usually based on assumptions of motivation and organization which are just not valid in developing countries. Assistance might be sought from the community development institute (Coady Institute) at Antigonish, Nova Scotia; Histadrut in Israel or possibly Taiwan.

It would be advisable to interest Vo Long Trieu of the Ministry of Rural Affairs in this project. He is a brilliant young man who played a leading role in the Peace Corps-like pacification efforts in the 8th District of Saigon, is a close personal friend of the Prime Minister, understands cooperatives, knows about relevant experience in Israel and Tunisia and does not appear to be engaged in priority work now. He would serve several purposes: to keep the Prime Minister informed and aware of the project, to relate it to overall GVN rural reconstruction activity, and perhaps would serve as director of the training program and expanded activities which could result.

If the Phan Thiet boat worked well, the Union could be encouraged to organize cooperative operations in other fields, such as cold storage and freezing, marketing and credit. It has already had some elementary experience with cooperation with a landing and cleaning facility at the port.

If USOM plans to continue to supply motors to the fishermen at Phan Thiet, I recommend that it be done through the Union so as to strengthen it as an organizer.

Test #2: It appears that the Tenant Farmers Union is strongest in Dinh Tuong, Vinh Binh and Kien Giang Provinces. (This should be checked.) Consideration should be given to assisting this union in these areas to form credit and fertilizer cooperatives with assistance from one of the three places mentioned above. It is apparent that NACO is not reaching far enough down to be really effective. Furthermore, it does not carry with it the motivation-organization powers that the TFU may. In general, it would seem wise to channel as much fertilizer and agricultural assistance through the TFU as possible. Undoubtedly the union would need accounting and administrative help if this were to be done on a large scale.

Test #3: The Plantation Workers Federation has its best organization at Loc Ninh in Binh Long Province on the French-owned C.E.X.O. plantation. Prime Minister Ky seemed enthusiastic about the idea of the GVN nationalizing this plantation and turning it over to the Union to run as a cooperative. The Union was also enthusiastic about the idea, although its president said he would need assistance in bookkeeping and marketing.

He suggested that such assistance could come from the Malaysia Rubber Workers Union which is one of the strongest organizations of its kind in South Asia and has long enjoyed close relationships with the Plantation Workers of Viet Nam. There are 5,000 workers on the Loc Ninh plantation, 3,000 of them permanent, under the leadership of a man named Tuy, who was described to me as one of the strongest leaders in the country. I understand there is a Special Forces Camp in the District and appreciate that this idea is filled with risks and difficulties. Its ideological appeal, however, is sufficiently strong that I believe it should be given careful consideration.

In general, I would suggest that opportunities be sought to involve the CVT in the management of enterprises. It has done an apparently successful job of managing the slaughter house in Hué, reducing prices and increasing wages. Most important is the ideological and commitment impact of such projects. In countries where the opportunities for more traditional trade union functions, such as collective bargaining, are severely limited, this type of cooperative-entrepreneurial venture can have substantial and beneficial social, political, and economic effect (e.g., Tunisia, Israel, Uruguay, etc.).

Incidentally, in Hué I saw a school which the CVT had built in the workers' section of town. I was told that it has been inoperative for a year because the small amount of cement and other materials necessary to complete it had not been received from USOM as promised. If this is true, it is an example of failure to observe proper priorities and criteria for success. I cannot imagine that there are many other instances where a local organization on its own initiative has built a school. Speedy assistance to allow its completion would seem to be of the highest priority.

I would guess that if the CVT is going to become a major factor in Vietnamese development, as I believe it should, it will and should eventually become increasingly identified with government. This is the pattern throughout the developing world. The stronger the CVT becomes, the more of a political force it will be and thus the more necessary it will seem to government to have its cooperation and support. The CVT obviously will continue to need government protection and approval. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance to keep the lines between the two strong and clear of misunderstanding and unjustified apprehension.

2. The second receptacle which should receive priority attention under the criteria stated above is the Political Action Teams and other development groups which it is planned to associate with and behind them. I had occasion to visit and talk at length with the leaders of five PAT groups in the Quinhon and Hué areas. I was profoundly impressed by their indoctrination and commitment and the work they were doing. The danger is that they will be over-extended, moved from community to community too quickly and asked to do things for which they have not been trained. There were many signs of extreme fatigue among the teams I saw. Their work of community organization is so important and yet so difficult that it would seem wise to keep them in one place for a year if necessary, it being far better to have one area properly established than to have ten inadequately organized. The process of integration of the PAT operation into the rural reconstruction framework obviously must be watched with the closest attention. This transition from a special, elite, high quality operation to a routine bureaucratic one could be disastrous.

As training in cooperative and other types of community organization are necessary to expand and solidify PAT achievements, great care must be taken to insure that training for these activities is as good as that now given the PAT teams at Vung Tau. My guess would be that it will be difficult to find the knowledge necessary to make this new type of training valid in the Vietnamese environment. This is why the Phan Thiet experiment and others like it is of special importance: to produce valid techniques based on experience and experiment.

3. The civic action work of the Marines at Phu Bai exemplifies a kind of motivation-organization achievement on the part of our military which can have permanent effect on village commitment level. The significant factors at Phu Bai seemed to be: a squad of volunteer Marines stays in one hamlet or village for a long period of time, four to six months; they work with Popular Force contingents in the community not as supervisors or trainers but as fellow fighters, leaving the command structures to be set by experience; the example of their humanity and dedication has a profound effect. In the Phu Bai hamlets the hamlet chiefs are once again able to sleep in their houses and there is reason to hope that enough fabric has been put back into these communities so that when the Marines leave they will not slip backwards. It would seem possible to repeat this operation elsewhere, using volunteers from other military units.

4. In some ways the most important revolutionary receptacle is the political structure of the hamlet or village itself. At the moment it would seem that there is no structure except that which has been superimposed from the district or provincial level, which by definition is not representative. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance to hold some form of village elections at the earliest possible moment. In talking to hamlet-village chiefs I was struck by how frequently there was someone alongside him who was described as being "the man who knows the people here", or "the man who has been around here a long time". Until the communities can establish their own representative political framework it is hard to conceive of their having any political validity. It is equally hard to imagine their commitment level rising.

I recommend that consideration be given to concentrating U.S. provincial operations on making these four receptacles as useful as possible. If a request comes from any of these four, it should get high priority and speedy attention. At the same time, consideration should be given to reducing our efforts in other places so as to conserve scarce GVN manpower and allow all concerned to concentrate on gaining a real success in a few selected areas.

III

Some miscellaneous observations:

1. Housing at Cam Ranh Bay - I found an urgent and serious problem at Cam Ranh involving the 700-odd construction workers who have come from all over South Viet Nam to work on our Air Force installations there. Another 10,000 workers will be needed during 1966. The workers are now living in a disorganized community with inadequate housing and would appear to be likely targets for easy subversion by the Viet Cong who inhabit the surrounding hills. While housing is indeed an urgent necessity, even more urgent is the organization of these men into a viable community. For this purpose I recommend that consultation be held with the civilian contractor on the job (R.M.K.) with a view to securing two U.S. construction trades organizers to proceed immediately to Cam Ranh. Working with two counterparts from the CVT they should organize the work force into a bargaining unit and a community. Housing should then be built in cooperation with this organization on as much of a self-help basis as possible.

It would appear that there are two situations in Viet Nam in which U.S. labor methods and personnel could be useful: on the docks in Saigon and at Cam Ranh.

2. I was struck by the imprecision with which we use words and the ease with which we accept Communist terminology. The Viet Cong are known as the "revolutionary liberation army"; the GVN is known as "the nationalist army". We apparently accept these designations as we do "National Liberation Front", "People's Army of North Viet Nam", and "Democratic Republic of Viet Nam". We tend to ridicule the preposterous jargon used by the Communists over and over again. We tend to assume that actions speak louder than words and that, therefore, words are not all that important. I think this is wrong. We should give more careful attention to our language, our explanations, our terminology, never accepting that of the Communists, including the word "communism" itself, which among the villagers to whom I spoke means: "No rich people and no poor people."