

aliens. Then of course Communist propagandists have sought to couple this with the "American imperialist" presence, as they call it -- alien government. Now this so-called alien government of President Diem, or Premier Ky's might be able to function in what you would call the repressing role, clearing the area, collecting everybody in concentration camps, euphemistically known as "New Villages" if they had the troops, the junior officers and NCO's, and so forth, who also felt themselves to be aliens, who also did not give a damn about the people among whom they were dealing.

I am surprised that somebody hasn't jumped up and started throwing rocks on this, because, to a certain extent, to too great an extent, the troops in Vietnam do feel themselves aliens to the people among whom they are moving, among whom they are fighting. It is a very interesting, almost hairline distinction there in Vietnam. You know that to the Vietnamese, average peasant Vietnamese, anybody from outside his own village is a foreigner, if he is from outside his province he is a damn foreigner, if he is from outside his section of the country he is really an alien; and of course if he is not Vietnamese at all he is scarcely human. There is considerable question whether he is human or not. Everyone who is from outside the village is a foreigner, you get a bunch of these boys into the army, and take them two or three provinces away from home, they are in a foreign country and are entitled to the rights and privileges of a conqueror; at least that is the feeling which is too often expressed through their behavior. But the fact of the matter is that they are not foreigners; you can't draw a clean cut line between the troops and the people; when you draw more recruits, as you have to do, you draw them from the people, so although you suffer from some of the disadvantages of being an alien if you are the Vietnamese armed forces, you do not enjoy the corresponding advantages, and you don't have an outside pool of manpower to call on.

This is why Dr. Fall's concept of the concept of the Strategic Hamlets is so utterly ludicrous; however poorly one thinks of Mr. Diem, or Mr. Nhu, or Madame Nhu, or any other high ranking Vietnamese, you certainly cannot think they were foolish enough to think that they could establish 11,000 concentration camps and guard them with Vietnamese troops. Those were not intended as concentration camps. (Audience question: "Eleven thousand?" ) Eleven thousand, that was the target, eleven thousand and, I think three hundred forty-six. (Audience question: "What did they achieve?") Good question. They claimed by the last report, for October 1963, I believe, 9,600 completed Strategic Hamlets. Of those that they claimed, the best estimate that I can give you is that roughly 3,000 plus or minus, were indeed reasonably to be described as completed Strategic Hamlets. Roughly one-third were in the process of being made into Strategic Hamlets with a reasonable hope of success; one third either did not exist, had no hope of becoming Strategic Hamlets, or were in effect, Strategic Hamlets for the Viet Cong.

Let us talk about the Strategic Hamlet program for a moment, since it is something that haunts us, something that has been brought to your attention a number of times, usually with the implication that it was a horrible mistake, a monstrosity, an abortion, God only knows what. When the Strategic Hamlet program was first proposed for US support, in early 1962, I happened to be in Washington, moving around more or less in think-tank circles in counter-insurgency and so on. There were no very clear descriptions of it available, it was billed as a counter-insurgency measure. I thought it was a monstrosity, and I said so, and did whatever I could to sabotage it, or to prevent US commitment to the program. I failed to do this, and we went all out, it said here, we said, for Strategic Hamlets. Forgive me if I talk now in the first person of my own experience, my own observation, but to me that is the most meaningful way I can tell you. Other people will tell you their interpretations; I will tell you what I saw and interpreted on the spot at the time this program was going on.

First of all, I found out that it was not primarily a counter-insurgency measure, that it was not primarily intended, in President Diem's thinking, as a way of fighting the Viet Cong. President Diem saw it as a nation-building operation, as a revolutionary way of building a newer and stronger self-governing South Vietnam, and at the same time eliminating the Viet Cong insurgency as a serious threat. Official Vietnamese doctrine gave three purposes for the Strategic Hamlets: One, to organize the people for the social and political revolution. Two, the economic modernization revolution; and Three, the elimination of the Viet Cong.

When people tell you that there was no appeal to the people, no explanation why they should participate in this program, for their own good, they are at best convicting themselves ignorance of basic, enunciated, principles and purposes of the program. I wish I could show you, if I could reach a long arm back to my library in Manila, I could drag out and show you, the basic documents dating back to early 1962.

We announced all-out support for this program, and the amounts of money and materiel appropriated and allocated to the program seemed astronomical. If memory serves me rightly the total appropriation per Strategic Hamlet was supposed to be 12,000 US dollars. Translate this into Vietnamese piastres at 72 to 1, and then multiply this by 11,000 hamlets - Man, all of us could retire comfortably on that !! In fact it probably amounts to as much as the cost of one B-52 raid.

If you take a closer look at the allocation of funds and materials for the support of this program, you find that the biggest single item by far, if I recall rightly amounting to a little more than half, was for barbed wire and steel fence posts. Just a hell of a lot of barbed wire, and quite a few steel fence posts. If you go out on the ground and look at a Strategic Hamlet, and look at its allocation of fence posts and barbed wire,

you could barely build an ordinary, country-style, four-strand barbed wire fence around the damn place. Even then you would have to eke in between the steel fence posts. Then people got to worrying that this was too much money, so they arbitrarily cut the allocation in half so that the barbed wire and fence posts that were supposed to go to one Strategic Hamlet were now supposed to go to two Strategic Hamlets.

This part of the program slightly overlooked one of the basic military axioms, which is that an obstacle is of value only if it is covered by fire -- in other words, putting up a fence, even a proper army double-apron barbed wire fence, complete with concertina inside, and danglers to make noise, and all of that, even that isn't an effective obstacle unless you have somebody in position and equipped, and motivated, to shoot anybody who tries to get through it. This fact applied to a lot of things in the Strategic Hamlet program. The Strategic Hamlet program, had as its specific objective for a hamlet to be considered completed, the organization of the people; the preparation of some kind of obstacles or restraining structures around the hamlet; the election of an administrative committee and a hamlet chief -- so far as I knew outside the major cities the first popular direct election of local officials in Vietnamese history; and finally, the initiation of self-help projects -- projects supported both by the people and the government. Part of it also was the training and equipping -- organizing, training, and equipping, of a hamlet militia.

This hamlet militia was supposed to be, for the average hamlet, in areas not overrun by the Viet Cong, was supposed to be 12 men, including a member of the hamlet committee as its chief, initially supposed to be armed with eight shotguns, single shot; one pistol or revolver; and 12 hand grenades. Now, anybody who thinks that that force was designed to make this Strategic Hamlet a combat position, has got rocks in his head. On the other hand,

this force was useful, damned useful, just as were the obstacles which were supposed to surround the hamlet.

Why? Well, before the Strategic Hamlet came into being, let us say that I am a Viet Cong; I've got myself an old French rifle; got 4 or 5 boys with wooden rifles or spears, or clubs, or cane knives; and I can walk into your damn hamlet at any time of the day or night; call out the hamlet chief, tell him: "OK, call a meeting"; get all the people out, talk to them; form a Peoples Court; try and execute any one I want to, call on them for taxes, and there isn't a damn soul in the hamlet who is mentally or physically prepared to oppose me. So I can also walk in there, ready to do these things, as their friend and benefactor, or as a poor country boy coming in to solicit their support to carry on the fight for them, and meet no opposition. But you organize even 10 armed men in that hamlet, you have a few more on guard, you have something definable for them to guard, and it is not going to be so damn easy for me to walk in and take over. My one real rifle and my half a dozen wooden rifles aren't going to make me king of the roost any longer.

So, I, the Viet Cong, see that I am going to have either to come in very diplomatically, after having won the consent of the Hamlet, or else I am going to have to come in in force, prepared to fight. OK, initially that isn't so hard to do. I can dig up some more malcontents who may not be Communists at all, who may or may not be really rogues at all, they may be simply guys who want to get away from home and a nagging mother-in-law. So we go out, we steal a few rifles, simple enough to do. We come back to that hamlet and the hamlet militia says: "No, you can't come in." and the man I have got back there says: Bang! One hamlet militiaman dead. You don't know how much more troops I have got scattered out in the brush, so they surrender, and I come in; I pick up the shotguns, that is true; but I have killed a member of that hamlet, maybe we have had a pretty good little fire-fight, maybe several people in that hamlet have gotten killed

or wounded. OK, I know the next time I go back to that hamlet I am likely to have trouble on my hands, if the government has done anything, has made a real effort to get the support of the people ~~of~~ the hamlet.

Those people have already committed themselves against the guerrillas -- for every hamlet militiamen who actively participates you can figure that four or five more members of that hamlet are committed to the government side, have reason to fear the guerrillas. This is one of the most important factors in successful counter-insurgency, to commit the people, to get the people to commit themselves, against the guerrilla, to commit themselves toward their own protection, their own security. This, the Strategic Hamlet was intended to do, and this it did do, in many cases.

Now, let's talk about some of the other aspects. I mentioned that the Strategic Hamlet was supposed to have a discernible boundary, marked by some kind of obstacle, a barbed wire fence, or bamboo hedge, or an earth wall studded with spikes and a moat with more spikes in the bottom of it, and the people were supposed to live inside. Now, to listen to some people talk, you would think that in order to build a Strategic Hamlet the people were all moved 25 miles away from home, and put into a bunch of straight-line grass shacks. That is nonsense. We could never come up with any accurate figures as to just how many people were moved under the Strategic Hamlet program, never will come up with any accurate figures, but the highest estimate which I have heard from informed sources, and my own observation does not confirm these figures as being realistic, as not being too high, is fifteen percent. Fifteen percent of the people were moved anywhere from 100 metres, to, in some instances, fifteen or twenty miles -- which was generally, but not always, a horrible mistake.

I want to emphasize; most people were not moved in the process of Strategic Hamlet construction. What was done was to fence in, in most cases, not in all, in most cases it was simply the fencing in of an already existing hamlet, a cluster of houses, what in the Philippines we would call a sitio and then perhaps to move into it one to ten or fifteen families living outside that perimeter. True, there were indeed hamlets such as you have heard described, people in rows of grass shacks, all moved, usually not moved more than two or three miles, sometimes more than that. These hamlets were very conspicuous, many of them because they were just outside Saigon, on the road to Long An province. Any reporter, any observer who wanted to see Strategic Hamlets in the next 30 minutes, could go right out there and see them, and they were pretty damn pathetic, counter-productive. These were not representative of the majority of Strategic Hamlet.

I see we are running out of time. I will see some of you at seven-thirty this evening. I think this stuff is pretty important, both as knowledge of what has gone on in the past, as well as an opportunity to assess the truth or falsity, veracity or perversity of those you talk to; but most of all to give you some handles to go on and think with in the situations you will meet. Thank you very much.

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