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MEKONG BASIN

The following measures are recommended as comprising a socio-ecological approach, as distinguished from the conventional engineering approach:

Agricultural modernization: Mechanization, fertilization, and improved varieties of seed. Experience readily available in U.S. agencies; political support from industry.

Caveat against insecticides: The world faces an insecticide dilemma, with DDT already found in deep-sea food products. Insecticide use may have to be sharply curtailed, and should not be relied on for massive agricultural expansion.

Headwater storage: Flood control, local water supply, and local irrigation by U.S. Soil Conservation Service methods. Experience readily available in U.S. agencies; bulldozers and comparable equipment readily exportable; political support from U.S. industry. This approach can move much more flexibly and rapidly than large dams; also less expensive.

Caveat as to hydropower and reclamation dams: The rural and urban consumers of electricity might be forthcoming, but the industrial complexes are not available; such development will come slowly, if at all; hence, hydropower development is not a realistic solution to present economic improvement problems; large irrigation projects are usually uneconomic without hydropower subsidy.

Soil and watershed management: The headwater storage program implies effective watershed stabilization and management, using terraces, cover crops, and afforestation. Soil protection and improvement policies integrated with agriculture are also implied. The techniques are familiar; agencies experienced; industrial support customary.

Medical, sanitary, and population measures: Medical clinics as a part of village and city programs; completely modern sanitation systems practicable, coupled with local water supply projects; population clinics should be integrated with medical clinics.

Note on population: The area has the usual high pre-industrial birth rates; death rates are declining; South Vietnam has one of the highest rates of population increase in the world.

Populations in part of the area are low in proportion to space; hence living standards are higher than they would otherwise be. Prompt stabilization of population, if chosen by these nations themselves, coupled with modernization of agriculture, could result in a spectacular improvement in living conditions.

Protein: Hill tribes are dependent in some places on wild game for protein. Newly developed access has resulted in destructive slaughter, which threatens food supply. Scientific wildlife management programs should be instituted to maintain supplies in balance with demand. Experience available in U.S. agencies and private organizations; support forthcoming from U.S. industries.

Travel: Foreign exchange can be supplied, as has happened in Africa, by overseas scientific, safari, and tourist visitation. National parks and forests should be established as in Africa and Latin America, in prime wildlife and scenic country; conflicts with large reservoirs should be resolved in favor of the environmental protection afforded by parks and forests; these serve as wildlife refuges and propagation areas, and as magnets for visitation. A number of plant and animal species, of worldwide scientific and other significance, threatened with extinction, could be preserved in this manner.

Forestry: The plateaus and uplands contain good tropical evergreen hardwoods. Cutting has begun on a destructive basis. Sustained-yield, selective-cutting methods could readily be employed; experience available in U.S. and U.N. agencies. U.S. national forests might serve as models for land tenure and

forest management policies. Wood products industries and exports could be developed with relatively slight investment.

Transportation: Highway construction has good and bad aspects. U.S. fast-highway standards may have military, but not civilian, value for the area. Road engineering and location should be adjusted to regional and local considerations. Where new country is opened, the renewable resources will need protection.

Education: Assistance with elementary, secondary, and higher education programs, including libraries, would have economic feed-back value, in addition to direct cultural, scientific, technical, and professional value. Courses and library contents must be locally controlled, if only to obviate accusations of propaganda and avoid hostile demonstrations.

Energy: Hydroelectric power resources should be developed with caution and deliberation. Necessary industrial markets do not yet exist. Reservoir site clearance involves dislocation of farms and communities, destruction of protein and scenic resources of great value, serious disturbance of ecologies, and heavy investment. Agricultural energy should come largely from tractors and liquid fuel. Coal and petroleum resources are not unavailable; sun power, as developed, coupled with improved electric storage, as developed, will be suitable, at least seasonally, to the region.

Cooperatives: Agricultural expansion could be accompanied by encouragement of democratic cooperatives if the nations in the area so desire. European and U.S. experience is available for aid to farmer-producer and farmer-marketing cooperatives; and at the other end, consumer cooperatives. U.S. domestic agricultural policy has favored such cooperatives; politically, the approach has value as against Russian and Chinese authoritarian collectives.

Public ownership: River basin development and related electrification in the U.S. has always involved a high degree of democratic public and cooperative ownership. National forests and national parks are other examples of the democratic use of public ownership in a mixed private-public economy. Development and conservation programs using such tools have political value as against the authoritarian state-ownership economy of Russia and China. Choices in such matters must be left to democratic decisions of the nations in the region; all approaches should make this proposition clear.

Agency: The Lower Mekong Committee established under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East in 1957 might be a useful agency if reoriented toward a socio-ecological approach as contrasted with an engineering approach. Its membership might be expanded; suggestions

in this memorandum make use of the Mekong River only as a starting point; they may be applicable to all of Southeast Asia; expansion might help to bridge the East-West conflict.

Security: If the U.N. Assembly were so disposed, upon invitation by the participating countries, a U.N. peace-keeping force could be provided, financed by voluntary contributions of governments having a sufficient concern with settlement.

Finance: Reduction of enormous military expenditures would follow social and economic stabilization; public and private credit could be extended more safely. Available funds would be devoted to village, farm, forestry, game, watershed, water supply, sanitation, medical, population, education, and training programs instead of big engineering and construction.