

PERSONAL

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Ideas for Present Crisis

Following up on the USOM meeting of Thursday at which the above topic was discussed, the regular meeting of our Planning Group was converted into a meeting of technicians, in order to review the USOM meeting and to come up with further ideas. The following represents an attempt to set down on paper some of the points brought out at the meeting. There was no attempt at the meeting to codify these ideas as it was strictly a brainstorming session. You will realize, of course, that these ideas are submitted only because of concern about the present situation in Vietnam. No criticism of policy makers is intended nor any attempt to tell policy makers how to do their jobs. The ideas are submitted solely in order to (hopefully) increase the pool of available ideas.

A. Security

1. It was agreed that only a dramatic move to demonstrate that the government is ready to deal with the communist menace would begin to restore public confidence in the government. A flat announcement by GVN that it is prepared to take over the countryside both daytime and nighttime, followed by action showing that the government means business could accomplish this purpose. (Such action, coming on the heels of action to overcome the coup, would build the image of a vigorous government.) If the government could establish martial law, at least in the most seriously affected provinces, and establish roving patrols at night perhaps reality could be given to this aim. This step is suggested on the assumption that at the present time the peasants are subjected to two harassments: by the Viet Cong at night, for cooperation with the government, and by the government in the daytime, for cooperation with the Viet Cong. It is assumed that the peasants would be grateful for the removal of one of these harassments. In order to put this patrol of the countryside into effect there should be free use of military forces as needed.

2. Also under the heading of security, it was suggested that immediate and dramatic means be taken to begin to seal off the borders, beginning in the most critical areas. Steps suggested included the use of roving border patrols, the installation of an electrified fence, as in Algeria, and the use of soldier-farmers as residents in all border areas, as in Israel. It was recognized that the colonization of the highlands represents a step in this direction but that more pointed steps can be taken. These steps are suggested with full realization of the known difficulties in sealing the long, jungle-plagued border.

3. Once control of the countryside has been established, a crash Identification Card Program should be begun in the most troubled areas. The difficulty with this program so far has been that the Viet Cong have taken away the cards at night that have been furnished in the daytime.

4. Finally, permission should be secured from GVN to permit American advisors to establish training programs in the countryside and to evaluate the effect of police and security programs. Although it is most important for advisors in the security area to reach the countryside, it is also true that programs in all economic, political and social areas must be resumed and strengthened as soon as the countryside is sufficiently secure. In this connection American aid must be used persuasively in order to wean Vietnamese civil servants away from the Saigon headquarters and get them out in the field.

B. General

1. At the present time there is lacking a firm sense of purpose on the part of the government and the nation, and there is a need to identify the interests of individuals with those of the government. Assuming that measures to achieve better security are immediately undertaken, it would be wise for the government to announce as soon as possible an elaborate but detailed three-year plan. This should be announced in down-to-earth, practical terms in which each step contemplated by the government is spelled out plainly and giving a time schedule. The security measures, to the extent that they are not secret, could also be announced in the plan, on a time basis. The plan should not only establish time tables for existing and projected economic programs but it would give definite assurances to the people of reforms in the political and social areas, again on a time-schedule basis. Such items as the re-establishment of village councils and the elaboration of powers of municipalities should be a part of the plan. (If there is any interest in this idea we can spell it out in much greater detail.)

2. The fact that GVN has quietly appointed a committee to plan the reorganization of the government should not be overlooked. GVN should be persuaded to make this committee a perpetual reorganizing group. Efforts should be made to see to it that this group, in one way or another, receives good ideas which it can pass on to the President. It may be wise to offer this committee the services of a professionally-trained group of foreign advisors in government reorganization, although this step may not be advisable in the present circumstances. The object of having a perpetual "Hoover commission" is that if the President persists in making most decisions it is advisable to get as many ideas to him as possible.

3. As GVN has been notably clumsy in its relations with the public, would it be possible to conceive of a crash in-service-training program in public relations techniques? Such a program, to be thoroughly effective, should--as soon as conditions permit--be organized on a regional basis so that on

a local level the government story can be put across to the people. This program could be correlated with the inauguration of a provincial press and the installation of radio speakers in the hamlets, mentioned at the USOM meeting.

C. In Conclusion

By way of conclusion I should like to set forth my own notions about the urgency of the present situation. It is undoubtedly true that President Diem believes he has little reason to be grateful to Americans in relation to the recent coup. Probably the President is in a mood to listen to those of his advisors who came to his side during the coup, rather than to listen to foreigners who were remaining neutral. Any pleas to President Diem, consequently, must be put on the basis of the merit of the ideas themselves rather than the merit of those who put forth the ideas. It would seem there is good reason to think that the last chance for both President Diem and the Americans is now before us.

Assuming for the moment that the Diem government will not undertake effective reforms, what course of action shall the Americans follow? In order to prevent the American reputation from suffering, it would seem vital to get across the point to the Vietnamese people that the American interest is only in obtaining an effective anti-communist force. Would it be possible to make the American position about the necessity for reforms in various areas so clear that there would be no chance that the Vietnamese people would identify Americans with ineffective anti-communist action and with any government that tolerates such ineffective action? It would seem to me that American vigor on all fronts must be demonstrated to the Vietnamese people. The Vietnamese armed forces must understand clearly that the Americans are pushing strongly for effective military action. The same thing must take place in civilian areas. The virtue of this approach is that it would keep American motives and actions on the highest possible plane.

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