

Report of Interview with the Secretary of State for Interior  
December 20(?), 1955

Interviewers: Mode, Wickert  
Reported by: Wickert

Date: January 23, 1956  
Interpreter: Quan

1. The first question asked of the Secretary of State for Interior concerned the matter of technical versus administrative control of services at the provincial level. The Secretary made it clear that the technical representative of such a service may only report to his appropriate Department through the Department of Interior. The chief of province must coordinate the work of the technical people within his province. The Secretary wanted to explain to us that the chief of province, according to the French system, has greater responsibility than simply being in charge of his province. He is the representative of the central government in his province and not merely the representative of the Department of Interior alone. For this reason he has to be given authority over all others in the province including the representatives of the various Departments.

The Secretary went on to point out that he has special responsibilities in (1) general administration (the supervision of technical services in the provinces and (2) security (law enforcement). These two are interrelated because one must have security before one can have good administration.

2. The Secretary was asked whether he considered the province chief as having so much to look after that he constituted an administrative bottleneck. The Secretary then wanted specific examples. Examples were drawn from our experiences with refugees. The Secretary replied that the province chief is not an administrative bottleneck nor is this a problem. It is true that there has been a problem with respect to refugees because the Commissariat for Refugees has operated somewhat independently of the province chiefs. Soon, however, the government will issue a decree to suppress the Commissariat for Refugees and give all these responsibilities to the province chief. This will end the problems with respect to refugees, and there has been no trouble in the other areas.
3. It was pointed out to the Secretary that in our experience we discovered wide differences in the quality of provincial administration. In a sense these observations implied that in some cases the province chiefs were administrative bottlenecks. The Secretary's reply was that he understood very well that such differences in quality of administration did, in fact, exist. He went on to say that this was not a question of administration but a question of men, or personalities. He added that situations and problems differed from province to province so that one would expect differences in quality of administration because of these factors as well.
4. The Secretary indicated that liaison at the present time is not very good between the Department of Interior and the province chief. This can be accounted for by the fact that the regional délégué stands between the Department of the Interior and the province chief and acts like a king in his region. The Secretary felt that the situation would be improved if he had more direct control over the chiefs of province.

5. Administrative review procedures were briefly reviewed, and the Secretary was asked whether such procedures were needed in the Vietnamese government. The Secretary's response was that we do not now in Vietnam have enough good men to carry out administrative review procedures as described. He added that we here in Vietnam have a different form of government from yours, but the actual government all comes back to the quality of the men who are doing the administering. The Secretary recognized that much goes on clandestinely. For this reason, President Diem has asked for more inspectors to maintain control. But one must do more than simply give orders to these inspectors as well as to members of the Sûreté, the police, customs inspectors, etc. One must do more than simply give them great power. For example, the President has at the present time a group of inspectors to whom he has given great power, but the men are ineffective. In trying to control the price of rice, the President has appointed rice-price inspectors. Because they were ineffective, the President then requested that the Secretary of State for Interior prepare a written order to get the police and customs to get better control over the price of rice. The men in this latter case were more experienced and could do the job more successfully than these special appointees who were given great power.

At this point Mr. Mode tried showing that the administrative review procedure was not an inspection procedure and that one perhaps should not emphasize inspection as much as the Secretary had done in the example above. He further pointed out that the administrative reviewer tries administratively to prevent troubles rather than to inspect after the fact. The Secretary agreed with the idea that it was better not to use inspection procedures but insisted that Vietnam just did not have men to carry out Mode's ideas of administrative review. The subject was concluded when the Secretary asked Mr. Mode to write out his proposal regarding administrative review. Nevertheless, the Secretary still insisted that good personnel were simply not available.

Mode then emphasized that training and having those trained train others in a kind of fanning-out or snowball process was a way of breaking the bottleneck with respect to the quality of available administrative personnel. The Secretary saw this as a possible long-term approach but seemed somewhat hesitant about giving high officials "training." It was then pointed out that this should be called "executive development" rather than "training." The Secretary agreed with this change of phrasing.

6. Mode suggested that the Secretary of State for Interior have a deputy secretary of state for Interior to supervise the work of the chiefs of the super-provinces. This deputy would, in fact, be a kind of chief of internal administration for Vietnam. The Secretary rejected this proposal flatly. He said that he now had a general director for security, and his work extended to all provinces. He also had a general director for administration, and his work extended to all provinces. The implication was that this general director for administration did now supervise chiefs of provinces and would supervise chiefs of super-provinces. The Secretary went on to say that the new deputy would have nothing to do because the setup already existed for taking care of these functions.
7. With respect to budget problems, the Secretary said that already the province budget is supplemented by the regional budget, and the regional budget



by the national budget. Actually, then, the national budget is already in effect. The MSU idea to put the super-province budget inside the national budget is a difficult political problem, according to the Secretary. South Vietnam super-provinces will complain that they should not be subsidizing PMS super-provinces. Mode indicated that the hope was that these difficulties could be overcome by having the origin of tax money lose its identity. The Secretary again asked for a written proposal on this matter.

8. It was indicated that MSU would have no report prepared until after the first of the year. It was also indicated that MSU would prepare the rough draft in French for the Secretary to review it.
9. Discussion then shifted to the problems of the area, or super-province, council. Direct election of the members of the area council would be feasible, said the Secretary. He especially asked, however, that MSU not recommend anything that would prevent the unification of the country. Mode presented the further idea that it would be helpful in Vietnam to have a good balance in what people have to say at the national, the area, and the village level. The Secretary's reaction to this was that one had to think not only of a rational solution but also of a politically feasible one.
10. The MSU persons present proposed that a committee be set up to consist of representatives of the Department of Interior and MSU. The purpose of this committee would be to help MSU think through these difficult problems. The Secretary rejected this proposal by saying that he preferred a written report of the study. He added that there were too many committees already. In his opinion, after he saw the rough draft, he felt he would be in a position to decide on what steps to take next.