

PRIVATE

24th July 1957

Just file

To: Dr. Fishel.

The present writing is not a unilateral implementation of the general assignment that you specified for the group of Vietnamese employes who were present at the July 17 meeting. It is rather aimed at discussing a few points at issue which are more or less related to the rapport between the Government of Vietnam and MSUG. Discussions, frank and blunt as they should be, were not deemed proper at the July 17 meeting. In connection with this meeting, it should be noted here that during the meeting diagnosis of the situation was not attempted while anyone emulously endeavored to indicate remedies.

Generally speaking, one is induced by the circumstances to think that some tension exists in the relations of MSUG with the Government. Whether it does or not, it is none the less true that the situation is not so alarming or critical as to justify the special concern given this matter, and even the summons for the aforesaid meeting, which is well designed to provide ground for distorting gossips if the information leaks to outsiders. Also, if the information comes to the attention of government officials, it is most likely that they would assume, being as they should be inspired and encouraged by their first success, a still more reticent attitude toward MSUG and other American agencies as well. I do not take any stand in discussing this matter but, inasmuch as I believe that any co-operation must rest on a certain amount of mutual understanding and even of reciprocal yieldingness, I am but trying, in a go-between position, to make a tentative analysis of the situation with the ambition that it might turn out beneficially for both parties by leading to possible satisfactory adjustments.

Although, as I believe, there is no ground to be alarmed, one should not be lulled into the common fallacy that if one is extending assistance one can always expect downright co-operation or good will from the people assisted. The reason can be easily understood if one tries to study the factors from a psychological viewpoint. In fact, as one carefully ~~examining~~ recent developments of the situation, one must readily recognize that the untoward attitude of some government officials stem from psychological reactions which in turn have been provoked by some defects on the part of MSUG and, to a greater extent, by their own misunderstanding of MSUG's eagerness to be helpful. At this point, I would ~~want~~ linger in the details which have been so well taken of; I would rather present the general lines of the discussions.

Indeed, the Americans as benefactors are much less favored in Vietnam than the French were as colonialist rulers. The French were staying as masters and capacitated themselves to do what they liked being not restrained by any scruples. But once they have been ousted, the consequences of their misdeeds are no longer felt against them but, by association, indiscriminately against all Western peoples. As far as the Americans are concerned, only a

minority of the Vietnamese people are convinced of the American good will and good intention to help. The masses (some of them are fashioned by the subversive elements' propaganda), if they happen to be considering the question, find themselves still confused with the purposes of such help, in spite of some propaganda activities - rather nonchalant on this subject - carried out by the Government and also incidentally by USIS. The Government is well aware of these conditions and therefore eyes suspiciously and even condemns all acts or mere offers on the part of American officials which might appear too "aggressive" in the eyes of the public. On the other hand, it is sincerely disturbed by the ever-present apprehension that aggressive Americans might interfere, though unintentionally, with its business. Thus, too many offers and acts aimed with good faith at assisting Government agencies are misunderstood and misinterpreted as attempts to meddle in their operations. (In this connection, you will recall the most recent cases: purchase of radio equipment for the Colombo Conference, assistance to Mr. Le-van An on overdue payments to contractors, etc.)

Another psychological factor may be titled 'jealousy' or merely 'emulation'. Vietnamese officials usually believe that they are up to their task and don't need to be advised so often; moreover, they want to don all the merits on themselves. As a specific example, the attitude of Secretary Nguyen-huu Chau is most illustrative. Probably he is tired with having to outdo the MSUG Chief Advisor's advices to the President, but times and again the Chief Advisor's advices have more weight with the President than his own. That a foreigner, no matter who he is, has as free access to his boss as he has finishes by upsetting him. He has no doubt managed to induce the President into debarring the feared and so-called influence of too enterprising advisors. Maybe he has not foreseen the scope of his inducement, but the fact remains that the President's instructions to executives of various levels have a consequence farther-reaching than the Secretary himself would have anticipated, because, as a matter of fact, the local executives look upon these directives as a new stiffening veer of the government policy vis-a-vis American officials in Vietnam and interpret that they should appear as uncommunicative or even uncooperative as possible unless the Government otherwise directs for each case. These instructions may mean to some of them the depreciation of the American programs in the eyes of the Government and especially, the little prestige so far enjoyed by MSUG suffers accordingly. A further reason which might have provoked the contents of the President's circular should not be unknown to some Americans who have gone out on field trips. The local administrative officials sometimes think it smart to hoist streamers with welcome inscriptions for American visitors. While perhaps some conceited visitors take it for granted that the honors are due, the central government officials are of the opinion that these welcome arrangements can but arouse suspicions and misunderstanding among the general public.

Let us assume, 'with humility', that the original sin remains with the Americans themselves. There is no doubt that your task as a Chief Advisor requires a great deal - as Mr. Khoi put it - of "dynamism", but the exercise of too much zeal or pressure is nonetheless harmful even if it is skilfully covered with tactful approaches. Therefore, if any responsive co-operation is to be expected from government officials, it is important that effort should be made to convince the Government that the zeal exercised has no other purpose than to urge it to take advantage of the technical assistance offered.

Most government officials are reluctant to show up side by side with Americans. Mr. Quan believes that this reluctance can be attributed to their fear of being thought of as trying to take advantage of their rapport with the Americans. I do not fully agree with this Mr. Quan's assumption. On the contrary, these officials do not actually fear such allegations but rather the impression which might become rife among the masses that they are being under the American spell. This fear constitutes a further psychological factor which has in part governed untoward reactions in government officials.

I do not believe that public and social relations are at stake. While it has been recognized that these kinds of relations should not be neglected, whether or not they need be overhauled or improved has little connection with the hardened attitude assumed by some government officials. It might do justice to say that public relations of American officials and of the American community as a whole have some indirect bearing on this official attitude, but the repercussions of such relations must be of little significance in comparison with the effects of official relations as described above.

It has been established that the behavior of the Vietnamese employes and especially interpreters of American agencies is also a determining factor. It can be said point-blank that the recent allegations against Vietnamese interpreters **cannot** be applied to MSUG interpreters without causing indignation. Apart from casual exceptions, one can say without risk of contradiction that they are considered beyond reproach. It is certain that the environment of the MSUG offices does not easily give way to any misconduct on the part of Vietnamese interpreters. Now, if the discussions are to be limited to the interest of MSUG and not extended to that of all American agencies, this question falls out of our range, although undesirable attitude (such as arrogance, for instance) of the Vietnamese employes of other American agencies in Saigon may likewise be unfavorably felt by Vietnamese officials against the totality of American agencies including MSUG. If there is any problem in connection with our Vietnamese interpreters, that problem is but one of "face", Mr. Quan's main concern. But it should not be overemphasized here, particularly inasmuch as it is irrelevant to the determination of the Vietnamese official attitude. Whether the interpreter should be best called an assistant or an interpreter, my opinion is that it is not the gay coat that makes the

gentleman.

An assumed psychological factor has been presented by someone as "inferiority complex". This seems incongruous as far as Vietnamese officials are concerned and, on the contrary, the hardening of their attitude in part results rather from their sincere but somewhat exaggerated self-confidence than from any sort of inferiority complex.

The above is my personal version of the Vietnamese official attitude. It merely seeks to be ~~a~~ contribution toward the understanding of such attitude and leaves the resolution of the problems to the ad hoc task force under Mr. Quan, who will design appropriate rules of conduct. But let me say here that any such rules of conduct should be flexible and adaptable to the particular circumstances.

As time goes on, the 'radio-active clouds' should be clearing themselves from the relations between the Government and MSUG and your own tact and care can help lift them more rapidly. In any case, patience is always the best medicine to heal this rash in the relations, caused by misunderstanding and preventive distrust on the one side and unproper conduct on the other.

P.A.