

Office of the Chief
MILITARY ASSISTANCE ADVISORY GROUP, VIETNAM
Saigon, Vietnam

28 March 1961

Mr. Wesley R. Fishel
Chairman, Asian Studies Group
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan

Dear Mr. Fishel:

I was extremely pleased to receive your letter in which, among other things, you mentioned Doctor Hannah's visit to Saigon. I have delayed answering you until I had the opportunity to talk with Doctor Hannah.

It is indeed encouraging for us here in Vietnam to know that influential people such as you, Doctor Hannah, General O'Daniel and Ed Lansdale have kept alive such a strong interest in the fortunes of Vietnam.

Prompted by your letter, I established immediate contact with Doctor Hannah on his arrival. My two deputies, Generals Ruggles and Sibley, and I had a most interesting discussion with him. I think that we pretty well covered the entire situation here in Vietnam. Doctor Hannah had talked to President Diem the day before so that I think he has been brought up-to-date on Vietnam.

Much of our discussion Saturday was focused on a comprehensive study which the United States Government has recently proposed to President Diem as a guide to the solution of the current problems of Viet Cong insurgency in Vietnam. In fact many of the answers to your most provocative questions are also covered in this treatise. In attempting to answer your letter, I find that to cover your questions thoroughly would require disclosure of certain sensitive information which should not be written out. Since I have frankly discussed most of your points with Doctor Hannah, I think it would be best if he give you the details. Thus my answers will be general.

As a result of years of study and personal concern over the prospects of Communist domination, including the analysis you mentioned of the psychology of the Chinese Communist prisoners at Koje-Do, one of my first directives upon arriving here in Saigon was to direct initiation of a comprehensive plan to find a solution to the insurgency problem here in Vietnam. Since I am completely convinced that the ultimate solution must be a combination of the political, economic, social, psychological and military aspects, I urged the other US government agencies to participate in the study. After considerable effort, we produced a document which at least is a starting point toward our goal. This is the document which now has the approval and support of Washington and has been presented to President Diem.

A logical keystone to the solution of the problem of governmental harmony at all levels has been highlighted in our study. We have urged the utilization of the existing national level Internal Security Council as the policy formulating body for the President. Here an overall integrated country-wide counter-insurgency plan would be formulated. Preparation of supporting operations plans and implementation would be directed to all government agencies including the Department of Defense. The coordination and integration of effort, started at the top, would be carried out at each successive lower echelon of government by regional executive committees composed of all governmental leaders at those levels. Thus at Province level, the Province Chief would meet frequently with other leaders including the senior military leader, to coordinate the unified counter-insurgency effort. As you have properly noted in your letter, this insidious war will only be won by the most intimate relationship between all of the factors of government. In focusing on the present powers of the Province Chief, you have hit one of the most crucial stumbling blocks in reaching any meaningful victory. I have frequently urged President Diem to relieve the Province Chiefs of any direct military responsibility, and to assign this responsibility to the military commander. If actually carried out, the recently announced local Province councils might be a big step toward this ultimate coordination. However, I do not believe that this can yet be construed as a step to weaken the Province Chiefs' power in the military arena. In fact, the governmental political structure works against this and after talking to Marshal Templar, "Hero of Malaya", Diem is convinced he is right.

The employment of the Civil Guard still remains a problem regardless of operational transfer to the DOD for the period of the emergency.

As you stated, the employment of Civil Guard companies does infringe on the stated prerogatives of the Province Chief. Our proposal is, generally, that the Civil Guard will be semi-permanently assigned to one geographical location and thus will become an integral part of the community and can win the confidence of the people by providing public security. Units will be employed as security forces and in more offensive type actions as required but in their area. Although the Civil Guard will operate under military command of RVNAF, missions requested by a Province or District Chief would be arranged for and coordinated at the local council. As the regular military forces move on to more active areas of the country, the Civil Guard units would remain for local security.

With regard to the capabilities of and the missions assigned the Vietnamese Armed Forces, I will not go into detail for security reasons. There has been no change in United States Objectives. These objectives assign the ARVN reasonable missions and my purpose here in Vietnam is to assist President Diem in every way I can to successfully accomplish these tasks. One of my main jobs is to properly train and equip the Armed Forces and Civil Guard, and to make sure that we expend our major effort now against the insurgency but not to the extent that we let down our guards and encourage an overt external attack.

In our study, we have not overlooked the requirement for Civic Action in our unified solution. We urge coordination of both official and non-official assets as a part of the overall psychological approach. The military, of course, can and should play an important part in this task. Under the guidance of a very active Psychological Warfare Section in DOD in conjunction with other agencies, I believe we are making considerable progress now.

With regard to your last point, the problem of border control, this constituted much of our conversation with Doctor Hannah. In principle, I am in hearty agreement with the concept of a "sanitized" strip along the Cambodian and Lao borders and we have discussed with President Diem ways and means of implementing some type of border control. Realistically, I find that there are hardly sufficient bulldozers in Vietnam to clear and maintain clear the few kilometers surrounding the ammunition depots here in Vietnam. Also, the aircraft required for surveillance of such a long area do not exist and are not planned for the Vietnamese Air Force. Finally, there are the many villages nestled along the border

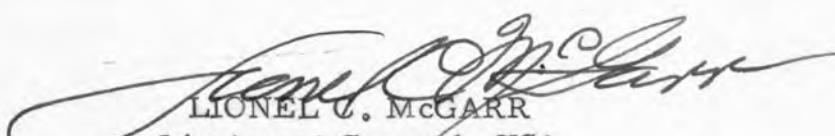
whose movement would pose great problems. Thus, from a practical point of view, a cleared border however desirable, will be difficult. However, your suggested use of chemicals for weed and jungle clearance does seem to offer at least a limited solution for portions of the border and for other security uses.

Regardless of the realistic problems cited above, I consider number one priority the requirement for sealing the Cambodian-Lao-Vietnam border to Viet Cong infiltration. I have urged President Diem to expend every effort to effect this by political agreement with the neighboring countries. Failing this, I have recommended that the sealing be done by military means despite the difficulties and the added expense. Suggestions for implementing such military border control are discussed in our overall plans.

In closing, I feel you might be interested in another document that has also been "in the making" since my arrival. While still in command of the Command and General Staff College, I noticed a lack of military educational guidance in the general field of unconventional warfare. Therefore, I instituted a section at the College to study this problem. With the broad results produced there as a background, we have prepared a "Tactics and Techniques of Counter-Insurgent Operations" study. This study molds my personal thoughts on this subject with the concepts and techniques learned in Malaya, Burma, the Philippines and elsewhere as applicable and then modifies them to fit the situation here in Vietnam. This study will be coordinated, staffed, and modified by a US-RVNAF Study Group prior to being used as a guide for counter-guerrilla actions.

My apologies for such a long reply, but you see you have aroused my interest with your questions on a subject which is indeed my very life here in Vietnam. I trust Doctor Hannah can fill you in where I have had to be sketchy. Thank you for writing and for mentioning Doctor Hannah's visit. I enjoyed very much talking to him and am not only heartened by his interest but I learned much from him. Best wishes to you.

Sincerely yours,


LIONEL C. McGARR
Lieutenant General, USA
Chief