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6 September, 1955

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. FISCHER

SUBJECT: Civic Action

Attached is a study of Civic Action.
This study describes the background, objectives,
national organization, method of work, selection,
training and proposed budget for Civic Action.

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CIVIC ACTION

1. Background

a. During the war between the Franco-Vietnamese forces and the Vietminh, government was extended to the villages by the GAM's (Groups Administratif Mobile), which were civil government groups attached to the Franco-Vietnamese forces. The GAM's were somewhat similar in concept to the military government sections of the U.S. Armed Forces. They were in contrast to the Vietminh local governments which were mostly of a permanent nature, which simply went underground for secret control of a village while it was occupied by an enemy, and which were supported by clandestine cadres.

b. On December 31, 1954, President Ngo Dinh Diem issued a directive on National Security Action (pacification) for the Vietnamese National Army. This directive included the use of GAM's to establish government in districts and villages as quickly as Army troops could secure them. The GAM portion of the directive was never implemented. During attempts to assist the Vietnamese government in implementing this directive, it was learned that the highest government authorities had taken a second look at the GAM's and quietly concluded that past experience showed that the GAM's had been so temporary in the minds of the villagers that they had been ineffective against Vietminh administration of districts and villages. It was learned further that these Vietnamese government authorities were working out an organization to replace the GAM's, an organization to remain in place in a district and struggle directly against the Vietminh for control of the villages.

c. Defense Minister Ho Thong Minh had asked a former Vietminh (whom the Vietnamese government has described as a nationalist rallie), Kieu Cong Cung, to work out plans for this new organization as part of the Defense Ministry's implementation of the National Security Action Directive. Cung's plans were so broad that they affected many different government programs and ministries. In January 1955, President Diem asked Tran Trung Dung, who was then a Secretary in the Presidency, to take the responsibility for planning, and to use Cung as his assistant.

d. The Presidency was worrying about the concentration of government employees in a few population centers, (a census revealed that about 80% were in Saigon-Cholon alone), and the lack of government workers in the provinces. As a result, the Dung-Cung team came up with a plan called Civic Action which was intended to increase provincial government workers by both the employment of new personnel and the transfer of ministerial and regional employees. At the same time, these employees were to

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be indoctrinated in becoming actively helpful to the people, responsive to their needs, and in basic team-work with the villagers.

e. The first Civic Action program appeared to interested Americans as too ambitious an organizational structure for support by the national budget and to contain elements of rivalry with regional and provincial authorities. It was suggested that the plan be revised so that Civic Action would strengthen the existing provincial and regional government structure and make it effective. Dung and Cung stated that this was the purpose of the plan. They then presented it at a National Security Action meeting of all Regional Delegates and Province Chiefs, which was sponsored by the Minister of Defense in February 1955. Province Chiefs opposed the Civic Action plan strongly in this meeting, deeming it an invasion of their authority. They felt the central government should simply provide money and let them carry out the program.

f. Meanwhile, the Defense Ministry became burdened with actual operations of National Security Action, including the occupation of such Vietminh regroupment zones as Camau and Binh Dinh, the reorganization and training of the National Army, and armed actions against dissident groups such as the Binh Xuyen. During this period, Kieu Cong Cung revised the Civic Action plan to make it a method of supplementing the armed security work of the National Army, a means of strengthening regional, provincial and district civil administrations, a means of combat against Vietminh control of villages, and a means of expediting central government assistance to regional and provincial officials. President Diem gave Cung small funds from time to time, which Cung used mainly to set up pilot projects for testing his plan.

g. On 7 May 1955, President Diem established the Civic Action Commission directly under the Presidency, and appointed Mr. Cung as Commissioner General for Civic Action. Meanwhile, Mr. Dung had become Acting Minister Adjoint for National Defense, from which position he continued to support the Civic Action plan. President Diem granted the Civic Action Commission 10 million piastres. With this relatively small sum, Cung established his headquarters in Saigon at 301 Vo Tanh (to the left of the road to the Ton Son Nhut airport), processed and trained thirty-one Civic Action teams, and commenced working in 11 provinces, which had been subjected recently to Vietminh influence. Two teams operated in Binh Dinh in coordination with the National Army during "Operation Giai Phong". Recently, President Diem ordered six Civic Action teams to Camau, as troops were withdrawn from National Security Action duties in that province for operations against Ba Cut.

h. In its short existence, Civic Action has proven to have some dynamic qualities which might well infuse the entire governmental bureaucracy. Initially, for example, provincial authorities

refused to even shake hands with Civic Action team captains; the Civic Action teams dress in calico noire like the villagers with whom they work, and provincial authorities in their coats and ties felt that Civic Action personnel were too undignified to be proper government functionaries. Commissioner Cung changed that by dressing in calico noire himself, visiting the provinces where his teams were working, and telling the startled authorities that he was from the Presidency. Provincial authorities are now starting to realize the necessity of working with the people, and there is a larger demand for Civic Action teams by Province Chiefs than can be met under the present budget.

i. Cung is striving to keep his headquarters as small as efficient functioning will permit, and to place every person possible into field work. At present, there are 310 representatives in the field and 90 persons at headquarters. Civic Action's proposed strength of one team per district will give it 1,844 persons in the field, with a headquarters staff of 105.

j. One immediate problem facing Civic Action is how to condition government functionaries, who are reluctant to leave an office desk in Saigon, for the rigorous life of a Civic Action team in the villages. Recently, 8 out of 13 employees of the Ministry of Information working with Civic Action teams returned to Saigon, complaining that the work was beneath the dignity of functionaries. The solution to the problem seems to lie in disciplinary actions for functionaries within the Ministries, which President Diem is acting upon already, and in further indoctrination during the training of Civic Action teams, which Cung has initiated.

k. In August 1955, Commissioner Cung presented a new budget to President Diem which would permit Civic Action to be extended into all districts of the nation. It totalled about 80 million piastres exclusive of materials which are expected to be furnished by participating ministries. A large portion of this budget includes salaries of field personnel representing five participating ministries. (Details of the budget are given later in this paper).

2. Objectives

a. The primary objectives of Civic Action is to extend the central government to the villages as a government responsive to the needs of the people. The present Commissioner for Civic Action desires to strengthen the role of the village council in the organizational structure of the government. Civic Action is intended as a temporary measure to be absorbed by the orthodox governmental organization when government is functioning effectively throughout the nation.

b. The present government structure is top-heavy and reaches only to the district level, where a district chief has authority over eighty to one hundred thousand people. Civic Action trains individuals in the villages to carry out various community tasks and, acting as an expeditor between the villages and higher echelons of government, assures that village affairs receive proper attention at these higher levels.

c. The loyalties of the people in the villages have heretofore been extended to whatever party, religious sect or local warlord that seemed to care for their welfare. It is necessary to unify these people under a national banner. The lack of public services in the villages has prevented their keeping abreast of the social and economic changes which have taken place in larger towns and cities, with the result that the Communists have exploited growing discontent, disseminating propaganda and recruiting agents for subversive and guerrilla activities. In areas where the Vietminh penetrated and gained control of the people, they taught them that a fuller life and a brighter future could be had, but they often failed to follow through on their promises. The central government now has the opportunity to help provide a fuller life for these villagers, and in so doing, demonstrate that a free government in Vietnam can accomplish what the Vietminh failed to produce.

3. National Organization

a. Civic Action is directly responsible to the President. It maintains close liaison with the ministries. Civic Action does not encroach upon responsibilities properly belonging to various ministries but, with the sanction of the President, acts as a coordinator with the ministries to assure that needed action is taken expeditiously and that aid is distributed efficiently.

b. For Civic Action to work in villages in an area, the approval of the Regional Delegate is necessary. Once this is granted, Civic Action works directly with the Province Chiefs who control the teams under them.

c. Civic Action is placing a field representative in each province with the title of "expeditor". These representatives work closely with the province chiefs in determining where Civic Action teams are to be sent and where material aid available within the provinces may best be distributed. Through their channel to Civic Action Headquarters, they assist the province chief in obtaining material assistance. The provincial representatives coordinate the administrative functioning of the Civic Action teams in the provinces to which they are assigned.

d. Once assigned to a province, Civic Action teams are operationally responsible to the province chief, whether he be military or civil according to the zone classification. They take no action without his direction, except as may affect their own internal organization. In their village work, these teams are direct representatives of the province chief. The average province chief will have five Civic Action teams responsible to him since the ultimate objective is to have one team located in each of South Vietnam's 170 districts.

e. The Civic Action team leader has a rank equivalent to district chief. He works closely with the district chief so that they might make joint recommendations for village action to the province chief.

f. Civic Action initiates village development activities and monitors their progress, reinforcing the existing government structure where inadequacies are found.

g. The following provinces are employing two Civic Action teams apiece: Gia Dinh, Thu Dau Mot, Baria, Bien Hoa, Cholon, My Tho, Go Cong, Tan An, Bentre, Tayninh and Camau which has six teams.

4. The Civic Action Team for Village Work

a. The Civic Action team consists of ten men, one of whom is designated team leader. The members come from ministries most concerned with the work, as far as practicable. The team has trained together and has learned to work as a closely-knit unit. Among its members, the team contains specialists in the fields of medicine, information, education, social welfare and civil administration. Upon initially entering a village, the team is equipped with medical supplies, information materials including school texts and instruction guides for the village counterpart agents the team will train, the sufficient funds to support the team during its two week stay, and a bicycle for trips of the team leader to the district chief.

b. The team members dress like villagers. They are generally housed with some of the village leaders and they eat with the villagers. There is no fanfare accompanying the entrance of Civic Action into a village, for the team's first objective is to gain the confidence of the people through impressing them with the serious purpose of its mission. After the team has accomplished something for the village, it begins to indoctrinate the villagers toward the national cause. The indoctrination process, of course, commences with the team's first actions and is carried out as rapidly as possible.

c. Civic Action teams learn one from another. The problems which teams in one area encounter and the solutions they develop are circulated to other teams so that Civic Action techniques continue to improve. These lessons learned are also incorporated into training doctrine and materials.

5. Method of Work

a. A Civic Action team works in the district assigned to it for an indefinite period. During the initial phase, the team spends two weeks in each village of the district. In the second phase, the team concentrates on follow-up action and periodic revisits to the villages. When the normal administrative system of the district and province shows itself capable of handling village problems without Civic Action assistance, it is planned that the team will leave the area.

b. Upon entering a village, the team presents its credentials to the local leaders and explains the purpose of Civic Action. The team makes a survey of the village, determines its most pressing needs and sets up a schedule of action priorities. The team members work individually or collectively in these tasks, as directed by the team leader. The major efforts of the team are generally devoted to the following five projects:

1) Reconstruction of the villages: The team ascertains the physical condition of the village and decides what necessary public works improvements might be made through community self-help. If the roadways and paths are in disrepair, the team calls for volunteers to help improve them. If unsanitary conditions exist, the team shows the villagers how to eliminate them. Where outside material assistance is needed to complete a job, such as in the construction of a pump-well, the villagers may be promised a pump if they dig a well according to the approved specifications. The simpler jobs are tackled first so that these, quickly completed, will stand as examples of what self-help can accomplish and encourage the villagers to take on bigger tasks. Civic Action attempts to develop within the community a sense of civic pride which is engendered by having the villagers work for their own betterment. Outside assistance is arranged only if the villagers contribute to a project whatever is within their means locally.

A study of basic deficiencies of the village, including such needs as land reform or major works construction required for economic development, is prepared and forwarded to higher authority. These village studies are collated at the provincial level so that a comprehensive area report may be forwarded to the central government for action.

2) Medico/social: If a village dispensary does not exist, one is established using a village medical kit. A building is erected using volunteer labor and materials provided by the village. This building and other the team helps construct are of simple design, following the architectural style of other village huts. Hygiene is taught to the villagers, advice is given on such subjects as baby care and the preparation of potable water, and medicinal aid is dispensed. Impoverished families may be given direct support when sufficient means are available to the team. A villager is recruited and trained to carry on the work.

3) Information and Propaganda: An information hall is constructed (often in the same building as the dispensary) if none already exists. Reading materials are placed here and leaflets and posters are distributed in the village. The team illustrates to the people how the central government is looking after their welfare by pointing out aid projects which have been completed or are underway in their area. A local information agent is trained to continue these information activities. He is supplied with materials relating to problems of immediate concern to the villager.

4) Popular Education: A school is constructed and classes are given to the children during the day and to adults at night. Although analphabetism is usually the principle concern, Civic Action also gives instruction in improved agricultural methods, animal husbandry and so forth. The most qualified villager is selected to continue these classes, using texts provided by Civic Action.

5) Order and Security: In villages where the Council of Notables does not exist or does not have its full complement of nine members (as specified by Presidential decree) Civic Action establishes or expands the Council and sees that the workload of performing required community tasks is divided equitably among its members.

Civic Action teaches the community to accept responsibility for and practice a limited amount of self-defense. The concept of setting up a volunteer "watch and ward society" is outlined and an initial step is taken toward its establishment by having the village post a guard to watch for thieves or the arrival on the village of unfamiliar persons. Reports on the activities of suspected Vietminh agents and other dissident elements are currently being made.

Civic Action also makes an analysis of the general political or religious orientation of the village as a part of its own security investigation.

c. In working directly with the villagers, the Civic Action team is able to observe and screen them for volunteers to be trained to carry on community work after the team leaves. Training is accomplished through oral instruction, the use of printed texts and on-the-job apprenticeship to Civic Action team members. Volunteers who undertake these tasks are given minor seats on the village Council of Notables and are exempted from local taxes. Further, they receive certificates which indicate their affiliation with the national government. These inducements are attractive to young men who desire a start in community or national government service.

d. The Council of Notables, including the personnel the team has trained, is assisted in establishing or strengthening its ties with the district and provincial officials. The Council begins submitting periodic reports to higher authorities on such matters as security, health, information activities, social welfare projects and so forth. These village reports, plus those of the Civic Action team, are submitted in duplicate, one copy through normal administrative channels and the other through Civic Action channels. The Civic Action representative at provincial level is essentially an expeditor who reviews these reports and observes where action is delinquent. He knows what material assistance may be available within the province and can assist in having it distributed where it is most needed. In cases where the province chief must apply to the central government for assistance, the provincial Civic Action representative simultaneously advises the Commissioner for Civic Action that such a request has been made so that expediting may be accomplished at the ministerial level if necessary.

e. The continuation of Civic Action in a village is assured by the following:

- 1) The village agents trained by Civic Action are selected for their enthusiasm and their devotion to the national cause. This well-motivated cadre is expected to keep alive the spirit of civic action after a team leaves and to continue with programs of community development. They are responsible to higher authorities for the work they perform.

- 2) Various youth and women's groups are organized by the Civic Action team. These may be social, athletic or musical groups which are expected to keep high the sense of civic pride and exert pressure on the Council of Notables and other villagers to continue volunteer self-help projects.

3) The team or individual members of it return periodically to observe progress and assure that the village agents are continuing their work and are receiving the support of the populace, of the Council of Notables and of higher authority. If requests for medical supplies, information materials or school texts have not been answered, the Civic Action representative expedites the assistance needed.

6. Selection and Training

a. The most direct impact of Civic Action on village communities is the impression produced by the individuals of the teams. They are representatives of the Vietnamese government; they are hard-core anti-communist agents.

b. The members of the teams come, whenever possible, from the various ministries, thus shifting Saigon functionaries out into the provinces. Roughly half of each team is recruited from refugees, these men being highly motivated and often trained in various aspects of community development work. Also, a number of men are selected from the districts by means of competitive examinations and personal interviews.

c. In addition to being trained in the specialities of village development, the cadres receive intensive instruction in how to recognize communist subversive tactics and how to combat them.

d. During a one month period of training and closely supervised work in pilot villages, team spirit is engendered through the team living together and working together. The result is a cohesive unit, the elements of which are mutually complementary, which carries out its village work as a well coordinated team.

e. At the present time, all training is centralized in Saigon, as this permits firm control, careful assessment of the cadre and the use of experts for instruction. Training is accomplished in the Civic Action Commission's compound, with trainees living in squad tents and dressed in calico noire.

7. Proposed Budget

The revised budget, which the Civic Action Commissioner stated had been reduced to a minimum according to actual experience, was presented to the President in August 1955. The budget called for:

a. Personnel. The Civic Action central office will have 91 persons charged with direction, administration and plans.

Total yearly salary 7,128,589 Piasters

The training section will have a permanent staff of 14 men.

Total yearly salary 1,298,657 Piasters

The village teams and the Civic Action expeditors at the province level will constitute 1,884 persons.

Total yearly salary 48,876,000 Piasters

Total 57,303,246 Piasters

b. Material for permanent use such as office equipment, transportation for the teams, etc.

14,000,000 Piasters

c. Material which is expended in the villages.

99,300,000 Piasters

d. Special works. This section includes funds for contingency expenses and a fund for construction carried out on an area basis.

8,948,703 Piasters

Total 179,551,949 Piasters

The budget has as yet not been approved by the President, who is currently planning an interministerial conference in which a division of the above costs is expected to be made among the responsible ministries.

8. Conclusions

a. Civic Action is a Vietnamese idea, designed to meet an immediate need seen by the government of Ngo Dinh Diem. It is an idea understood by Vietnamese, and one which they give every evidence of making a success.

b. It is a dynamic approach to meet the Vietminh threat to subvert the bulk of the Vietnamese population at the village level. As such, it furnishes a means within the governmental structure to communicate with the people at this level and commence to govern them.

c. Civic Action is already established, even though it was established on a "shoe-string budget". The comparatively small sums expended appear to have been used with great economy and effectiveness.

d. If U.S. agencies require an organization within the Vietnamese National Government structure to insure that ideas and materials reach village levels effectively and expeditiously, Civic Action appears to be the only existing organization to meet that requirement.

e. The area studies compiled from the village reports of the Civic Action teams should provide a most valuable means for revealing current conditions within Vietnam and be useful both to the government of Vietnam and to the nations engaged in assisting her become a free, independent and secure state.

9. Recommendations

It is recommended that:

a. U.S. agencies concerned with Vietnam study Civic Action as a useful instrument in carrying out operations designed to strengthen Vietnam against the threat of Communism.

b. The budget for Civic Action be studied for practical measures of obtaining funds for material and personnel now included in other governmental budgets; if existing funds are not available for this purpose, Civic Action should be supported by additional funds.

c. Studies be made for the extension of the use of Civic Action by additional ministries, such as Land Reform for the processing of its requirements in the villages, or Defense for the possible organization of village auto-defense units and means for conscription of mobilization.

d. Studies be made for the use of Civic Action by U.S. agencies and programs, such as mobile motion picture units visiting village information halls, the supplying of printed materials to the teams for use in villages, encouraging the visits of educators and lect-

urers to villages to explain programs and reforms of interest to the U.S. in strengthening the freedom of Vietnam, and possibly the inclusion of picture histories of Vietnam resistance against aggression in the past for use in village schools.

e. Vietnamese governmental authorities be urged to establish written communication, through Civic Action, to village councils with advise, news and encouragement, perhaps in the form of a monthly bulletin.

f. The Vietnamese government be encouraged, through Civic Action, to commence teaching democratic processes in the villages perhaps through the holding of elections for village authorities and include the use of symbols on the ballot for illiterates.