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THE USIS PROGRAM IN VIETNAM

This despatch, which is a general description of the USIS program in Vietnam as it exists in mid-1956, how it got that way, and what is proposed for the future, was prepared in conjunction with a new Country Plan, of which it should be considered an integral part. It is being submitted separately, however, not only because its inclusion in the Plan itself would involve an insupportable length to that document, but also because it is intended to stand by itself. It can be considered as a history of one USIS post, as an exposition of some problems which are unique and of doctrines which are in some respects unorthodox. It is hoped that its general usefulness to the Agency will extend beyond the immediate and specialized requirements of revising the Country Plan.

Evolution of the Program

The colonial status of the country was the original controlling factor in the evolution of the USIS program in Vietnam. For while USIS usually serves as the spokesman and direct exponent of U. S. foreign policy to the people of a given country, this role was denied us in Vietnam three years ago.

We could speak to the Vietnamese only through their overlords, the French -- and it was in the French interest to limit direct USIS access to the Vietnamese people by every means short of overt hostility or provable sabotage.

The main reasons for this attitude were two: first, the French harbored deep suspicion (which if anything is even deeper now) that it was American policy to oust the French so that we simply might replace them as exploiters of Indo-Chinese markets and raw materials; second, the French feared that in American hearts and minds there might conceivably still lurk faint vestiges of the ideas and ideals of our own anti-colonial revolution, and some of these might rub off on the Vietnamese if we came close enough.

(An instance of the French attitude during this period is the more than usually forthright French official in Phnom Penh, who disapproved a simple USIS picture poster, with a short caption in basic primer Cambodian, on the grounds that "this is toying with dynamite -- you are teaching these people to read!")

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A second conditioning element was the French attitude toward a Vietnamese information service. In the several semi-independent regimes sponsored or tolerated by the French since World War II, the Vietnamese role in information and propaganda was generally restricted to anti-communism on the negative or critical side, and praise of the great French cultural and civilizing mission on the positive side. Neither argument had perceptible effect even on the attentistes.

Thus when the Vietnamese Government became more independent with the appointment of Ngo Dinh Diem as Premier during the chaos that followed Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva Accords, the main results in the information field were two-fold: First, USIS had its wraps removed and for the first time could speak directly to the Vietnamese people; and Second, it was immediately apparent that the new Vietnamese Government had no mechanism to do so itself.

Under these circumstances, the USIS role was obvious. The first task was to help the fledgling government create an effective information program. The second was to fill the vacuum in the meantime. Thus from the first moment this became possible, USIS was the Information Ministry of the Vietnamese Government in all but name. Pamphlets, posters and press releases which bore the Government imprimatur were produced in fact by USIS. The mobile units working in the countryside, which bore no identification and which the villagers assumed were Government vehicles, were owned, staffed and operated by USIS. The "Vietnamese Government" newsreels and documentaries similarly were USIS-produced, stocked and distributed. As many as 20 hours a week in the output of the national radio network was produced in USIS studies.

The economic aid mission, USOM, simultaneously stepped into the information vacuum by supplying the Information Ministry gradually with such basic equipment as 1,200 village radios, mobile units, tape recorders, movie projectors and much other audio-visual equipment, by payrolling many Ministry employees through USOM counterpart fund projects, and by providing technicians to instruct Vietnamese in methods of mass communication.

Gradually the picture changed as Ministry employees attained experience and knowledge. Increasingly the USIS role became that of advice and assistance rather than outright production, and increasingly, as Ministry officials gained confidence, they came to rely on their own judgment. Indeed, in recent months there has been a growing tendency to ignore or contravene USIS advice if it runs counter to the totalitarian ideas the Vietnamese imbibed originally from the Viet Minh.

Ideology versus Mechanisms

From the foregoing it might be inferred that, like Topsy, USIS

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just grew, following paths which circumstances forced upon it rather than controlling and directing its own destiny. The contrary is the case, for from the beginning the program evolved shrewdly, and with intelligent design. The patterns which resulted, however, were quite different from the normal USIS operation in terms of ideology and mechanism -- or perhaps more exactly, ideology versus mechanism.

For quite early it became apparent that in Vietnam, more than in most countries, USIS work split into two major areas which did not necessarily bear any relationship to each other. The first was that of ideology, subject matter, the content of the message aimed at the Vietnamese people, the priority of themes, the choice of appropriate media and the nuances of expression. This area embraces the production of materials, attributed or otherwise. It is the area with which a Country Plan and a Country Budget are most largely concerned, covering not only the realm of policy objectives but also the major portion of local expenses and nearly all of Washington support activities.

The second area was that of distribution, of using or creating mechanisms to bring this production output to the end-user, the "target audience," the individual minds and hearts the material was supposed to influence. And in this area USIS faced a vacuum. There were no such mechanisms functioning in a war-ravaged and politically divided nation. The Information Ministry showed little comprehension of this problem and in any case lacked the capacity to do anything about it. If transmission belts were to be fashioned to carry the USIS/VIS message to the people, they had to be evolved from scratch.

In broadest terms, the USIS mandate 18 months to a year ago might be expressed as three-fold:

- I. To advise and instruct the Vietnamese Government on propaganda procedures and techniques, and to persuade the Government to adopt proper public relations policies;
- II. Physically to assist the Government to carry its message to the people; and
- III. To present and advocate, openly and directly, the general foreign policy of the United States.

The conflict that developed between ideology and mechanism, and among the above three objectives, was primarily one of time and energy on the part of a limited USIS staff. All three tasks had to be done, and simultaneously, and they were equally important. Indeed, there seemed little point in producing anything unless it got to the audience for which it was designed. Therefore, rough but fluctuating priorities were worked out as crises

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came and went. The total USIS effort thus went forward sometimes in see-saw fashion, but it did go forward and for the most part in at least workable balance.

For an understanding of just how it worked, it may be convenient to divide the subject matter into the general topics of ideology and of distribution (including audience groups) and discuss them separately.

Development and Implementation of USIS Policy

From Geneva onward, U.S. foreign policy in Vietnam had one all-important overriding objective, the creation and support of a strong, independent central government, commanding popular support, which could block the southward expansion of communism in Southeast Asia. In late spring of 1955, the further decision was reached that Ngo Dinh Diem was the man most likely to succeed in this endeavor, and consequently U. S. support centered on the Diem regime and decisively rejected Bao Dai, the various sect chieftains, military leaders and rival politicians who were intriguing for control.

If this was U. S. policy in Vietnam, and if USIS was to assist in implementing this policy, then it was apparent that only secondary emphasis -- if indeed any at all-- could be given to the many other facets of U. S. foreign policy which USIS was expounding in other countries. International conferences, Atoms for Peace, tariff adjustments, congressional debates, German rearmament, American culture -- indeed the warp and woof of most of the policy guidances emanating from the Department of State and USIA -- could not be given even lip service unless they bore immediately and directly on Vietnamese interests and Vietnamese problems.

Another basic fact bolstering this conclusion was that if USIS was to be the Vietnamese Information Service in the first stages, and later to advise and assist the VIS as it attained proficiency, then USIS had to act like the VIS. Any more than casual mention, in VIS output, of topics which were primarily in American interest and of only slight moment to the Vietnamese, would have given the whole show away and would have played directly into the hands of the Viet Minh who were already dinning the theme of "American puppets" anyway.

It may be apropos at this point to mention a distinction which became increasingly important as the program progressed. For while the USIS effort was certainly not an overt one, neither was it a covert operation as that term is generally understood. Government officials, down to provincial levels and below, certainly knew and understood that USIS was producing most of the printed materials being disseminated in their areas. Theater

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owners were perfectly aware that the "Government" newsreels and documentaries they were required to show were made by USIS -- if only because they knew that no other production facilities existed in Vietnam. Newspapers, magazines and printing shops knew the real origin of posters and pamphlets, because their presses were used in the process, and the contracts were made and bills were paid by USIS.

In this sense, the USIS program to assist the VIS might have been termed one of the worst-kept "secrets" in the history of propaganda, and if had been intended to be a covert or "gray" operation, it would have been a dismal failure. But it never was intended to be a gray operation. It was recognized at the outset that real concealment would present impossible problems in production, would hamstring output, and could not succeed anyway if only because the government itself (and perhaps the USIS staff as well) was thoroughly penetrated at all levels by the Viet Minh.

The important thing was that nearly all the audiences for such materials believed -- or had no reason to suspect otherwise -- that the material had indeed been produced by the government, their government, and that apart from the propaganda impact of the pamphlet, newspaper, movie or radio program, its very existence and professional competence was in itself evidence of governmental strength and proficiency.

USIS emphasis on non-overt activities, and the inadvisability of trying to advance purely American views through such channels, led naturally to strict division of output. Speaking out of one side of its mouth, USIS advanced one set of themes as the voice of the Vietnamese Government. But most of the Global and Area themes were expressed openly and officially and were attributed to USIS when they could not be woven naturally into Vietnamese Government output. Thus the Daily Wireless Bulletin, locally-produced stories about Embassy, USOM or MAAG activities, occasional pamphlets and much of USIS cultural activities have always been labeled clearly, as is the weekly newspaper "Strength and Freedom". It is interesting to note, however, that even with such direct output, editors have been advised that they need not give USIS credit unless they wish. The result is that most publications using USIS material do so without attribution. Scarcely a tenth of the total USIS iceberg shows above water in Vietnam.

Basic Audience Divisions

In analysis of audience groups during the post-Geneva turmoil, several divisions were clearly apparent. In general, the main groupings were these:

1. The pro-Diem forces. Formally committed but frightened, often wavering in allegiance and badly in need of reassurance,

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these included a fair number of nationalist intellectuals who now comprised the top layers of government but who had little practical training in the exercise of power. The geographical center of Diem's strength was the Hue-Tourane area of Annam, where his family was powerful and respected. His mass support came primarily from the 2,000,000 Catholics south of the Parallel, including most of the 800,000-odd refugees from the north. Diem was virtually unknown throughout most of Cochin-China.

2. The sect groups. These varied from the Binh Xuyen, a Capone-type mob of ex-pirates who controlled Saigon-Cholon and levied tribute on legitimate enterprise as well as organized vice, to the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai religio-feudal baronies that maintained private armies and exercised control over large areas of Cochin-China. Their advantage was that at least they were anti-communist -- but they were only nominally pro-Diem and they connived continually for special advantage, a share of power, and ultimately either Diem's complete submission to their demands or his ouster for someone more amenable.

3. The "loyal opposition." A mixed bag of politicians, with varying degrees of competence and honesty, their only common denominator was their belief that they could run the country better than Diem and should have been chosen in his stead. They intrigued constantly in shifting coalitions, seeking the ear and the support variously of Bao Dai, the French and the Americans, and shuttling back and forth from Paris to the Riviera to Saigon as their prospects waxed and waned.

4. The Viet Minh. Of unknown strength, these consisted of two main amorphous groupings. First were the hard-core armed cadres of the Viet Minh forces who had been ordered to stay behind in the south and go underground pending further orders from Hanoi. Some estimates placed their number at about 10,000 well-armed experienced and indoctrinated men and women. The second group, much larger, consisted of sympathizers, fellow-travelers, persons woven throughout the whole social fabric, who were counted on to provide shelter, food and support to Viet Minh cadres. They infiltrated unions and the press. They provided an excellent intelligence network (which the Central Government could not hope to match in the north) and many of them occupied strategic if minor positions in the nervous system of the government, with opportunities for sabotage ranging from actual violence to the more subtle but also effective stratagems of bureaucratic delay, misplaced papers, missent orders and the promulgation of rumor and discontent.

5. The attentistes. Not significant in numbers but important in quality because most of them were from the better educated elements of the population, these could be divided roughly into three types. There were the crass opportunists, the natural quis-

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lings, the ones who weighed personal advantage above everything and who preferred to bet on a sure thing. Then there were the perfectionists who would not support any government unless it were simon-pure. Primarily oriented to the left although non-communist, trained in the old splinter sects of Trotsky and the left deviationists although they said they had now forsworn these doctrines, they refused to heed the dictum of their old mentor, Lenin, that to make an omelette you had to break some eggs. Every minor injustice, tough decision by the government, blunder of inept bureaucracy, or instance of graft or nepotism had them crying out with horror that they could not stain their hands or honor by supporting a "corrupt dictatorship." They never made quite clear exactly what they would support. Then there were the neutralists, mostly honest folk whose passionate nationalism blinded them to the dangers of a new and Red colonialism. To them the greatest crime was the 17th Parallel. Reunification of the country, at whatever cost or under whatever regime, was the most important task. They conceded the Viet Minh were scarcely gentlemen, but after all they were Vietnamese first and Communists second and surely they would be reasonable. Diem's refusal to discuss elections horrified them as a harbinger of permanent partition, and this to them was betrayal of the nationalist cause. The neutralists did little about it, however, except to whisper among themselves and listen wistfully to Radio Hanoi.

6. The uncommitted, either by abstention or ignorance. In essence, this was the mass of the people. They included the entire rural population outside the domains of the sects, as well as the working people in the cities, and the major minority groups -- Chinese, Indians and mountain tribes. To varying extent, most of these people had backed the independence movement, and in doing so they had of course supported the Viet Minh as the leaders and motive force of the war to oust the French. They were familiar with Viet Minh achievements and proud of their military success, although it is doubtful if much Viet Minh ideology had seeped into their minds. They had little personal knowledge of Viet Minh terror or oppression if only because these were soft-pedaled until after the victory, and then took place in the remote north. They did cherish memories of Viet Minh talk about land reform, a better deal for the poor, division of large estates, universal literacy, a higher standard of living, and other social and economic improvements of direct concern to their daily lives and spheres of interest. This was the sea of people in which the Viet Minh swam, the sea that nourished, supported, hid and cared for the Viet Minh forces, the sea that at times was fiercely partisan to Viet Minh goals and at worst was neutral, the sea which ultimately drowned the French as surely as did Viet Minh military victory.

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Target Audience Priorities

Considering these six basic divisions in the population, certain similarities linked some of them and thus arbitrary distinctions were possible in planning a USIS program.

A generally high level of education, and a basically urban life, linked the top leadership of the Diem Government, the sect chieftains, opposition politicians and the attentistes. All or most of them could be reached through the printed word, and since they lived in the larger cities or visited them frequently, they were relatively easy of access through the press, commercial movie houses, radio, the mails and the messenger distribution of their organizations. It was recognized that the only way to convert or eliminate active oppositionists was by firm political action backed in some cases by military forces. But it would be possible to help in this process by encouraging and strengthening the Diem supporters on the one hand, and by diluting or undercutting the opposition's mass support on the other, thus isolating these leaders from their followers.

Consequently the USIS-published output, both attributed and otherwise, was aimed at these groups. To encourage the faint-hearted in the Diem entourage, and to create a bandwagon psychology within the opposition, every little triumph of the government, every tiny milestone of progress, was publicized optimistically as evidence of the strength and stability of the government. Sometimes, when such evidence was scarce, it was necessary to strum one string to the breaking point, or fall back on the old circus device of marching the parade through the main tent four or five times. Some newsreel devotees claimed that the same tired old Thai buffalo had been presented to 20 different villages. (This was a canard.)

Another central theme, harped at incessantly during this period, was the strength of the United States and the Free World, and their determination to aid and protect Free Vietnam. Here again, the theme of President Diem consulting with Mr. Dulles, visiting Congressmen and other high U.S. officials was repeated in such infinite variation that it sometimes seemed as if they lived here.

On the negative side, and aimed primarily at the attentistes, was a constant flow of anti-communist material, stressing the brutality and terror in the north, the communist attacks on religion, the clan and the family, and Viet Minh subservience to the Chinese -- the ancient enemies of Vietnam.

There was no real common ground among these opposing groups from the U. S. standpoint, except a comparatively high educational level and relatively easy accessibility through existing media.

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And yet they were the only groups susceptible of approach through a normal "opinion leader" and "target audience" program. They could be broken down into areas of special appeal, through their professions, their religious affiliations, their French-oriented notions of western culture and civilization, and their occasional membership in special-interest clubs and associations -- although such social groups are as scarce in Vietnam as in most other undeveloped countries. It would have been possible ~~to~~ draw up distinctions and elaborate charts, subdividing them into left-handed Hoa Hao dentists, French-educated law professors, politicians related to Bao Dai versus generals related to Diem, atheists who had once been Catholics and Catholics who had once been communists. And conceivably a master propagandist could have sat at the console of his mighty Wurlitzer, composing and weaving special appeals into one great Machiavellian symphony that would reach and convince them all.

And yet the stark fact emerged that it would not be worth the effort even if it worked.

For the Diem supporters needed no converting. They were committed and now were obliged to remain loyal because they had no choice. They knew what would happen if the Viet Minh won -- all of them would be hanging from a high mango tree. What they needed, instead of ideology, was reassurance, sympathy and practical help and advice.

The sect leaders would not be converted or placated by a public relations campaign, although it might shake their confidence a trifle. They could be handled only by shrewd political and diplomatic means at the highest level, ultimately backed by force.

Opposing politicians would fall by the wayside once they were convinced -- again at the highest level -- that they had no hope whatever of French or American support.

There was certainly not the remotest prospect of converting hard-core Viet Minh cadres. These were a military, police and intelligence problem. There was some chance of shaking the convictions of fellow-travelers -- principally by disclosing to the idealists among them the truly savage nature of the Ho regime -- but here too it was far more likely that events rather than propaganda would immobilize or wean away these people.

The attentistes were scarcely worth winning. Greed would bring some of them over if the government seemed likely to last. The purists would clutch their impossible ideals and in the end would decline to enter heaven because there is a hierarchy there. The super-nationalists, yearning for reunification, had no real political base and were important only as the potential nucleus

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of any neutralist or Third Force movement that might develop later.

That left the uncommitted, the bulk of the population, and these were all-important. Ultimately the Central Government would stand or fall on its ability to win the allegiance of the villagers, the urban working people and the lower middle class of shop-keepers, artisans and petty officialdom.

Reaching the Villages

The most difficult to reach of all these people were of course the villagers, and yet they were the most important. For in the last analysis the government controlled the cities, once the Binh Xuyen had been driven out of Saigon-Cholon, and any dissidence in urban areas could be handled by the police. Among the country people, however, security was tenuous at best and large areas were under actual control of a shadowy Viet Minh underground.

Where there was no security, there was also no government, no normal communication. The central government reached out to the provincial capitals, and sometimes beyond to the prefectures, but it stopped there -- and early in the game it was widely believed that perhaps 60 per cent of the prefects themselves were secretly allied with the Viet Minh or perhaps playing both sides. The government was isolated, cut off completely from those who should be its main source of support --- the farming people who comprise five-sixths of the population.

Further, many of these people had had no contact whatever with any kind of central government for nine long years of war; they had almost forgotten that such a thing could exist. To them, the government was the Viet Minh, which had served that function for so long. USIS, therefore, had to come to them, had to create its own distribution network and field organization, and had to couch its message in terms they could comprehend -- which meant visual and aural media rather than the printed word.

Among the villages, the literacy problem had several facets, all of them discouraging. For one thing the literacy level was far lower than had been supposed -- reports began to come in of village after village where posters had been pasted up faithfully -- but sideways or perhaps upside down. And second, while our original assumption proved correct that in most villages there was at least someone who could read and thus pass on the tidings to the rest, this was not an unmixed blessing. Often this person was such a poor reader that he skipped, guessed or misread even the simplest text until its meaning was garbled or reversed. Or even worse, the people of more than average intelligence and education were the ones most likely to be Viet Minh adherents, and their deliberate distortions, "interpretation" and "explana-

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tion" can be imagined.

Under these limitations, the USIS field program developed. When the present Public Affairs Officer arrived 10 months ago, all basic elements were already in operation and the program has expanded since, with some reorganization at the top to ensure better planning and coordination among its several arms. Without going into details of its development, the following description gives a picture of the field operation as it exists at present and as it is planned for the near future.

The Field Operation

SUB-POSTS:

At Hue, ancient capital of Annam, and just below the 17th Parallel, there is a USIS office and information center directed by an American provincial public affairs officer, a junior officer trainee who is completing his second year of training. He is responsible for five northern provinces, and plans, directs and inspects all USIS operations therein, including the routing and management of four mobile units assigned to his area.

At Nha Trang, a city of 60,000 on the seacoast halfway between Saigon and Hue, a house and office have been leased and will be opened next month, under direction of an American provincial public affairs officer (presently the Exhibits Officer). Initially, he will direct USIS operations in three provinces along the fertile, heavily populated seacoast shelf of Annam, reaching from Binh Thuan in the south to Khanh Hoa, the province adjoining the southern limits of the Hue territory. Later, when roads have improved, the two mountain provinces of Kontum and Pleiku, now serviced from Saigon, will be added to the Nha Trang region. An information center is not contemplated at present in Nha Trang, but the Vietnamese-American Association, which operates the bi-national center in Saigon, is discussing plans to open a branch center in Nha Trang, and USIS would of course collaborate in such an endeavor. The Nha Trang branch will serve primarily as a despatching and servicing center for four mobile units assigned to its area, as a distribution depot, and to administer and inspect the USIS field points in these provinces.

Can Tho, 105 miles south of Saigon, a modern city of 300,000 population, is the administrative center of the Mekong delta area that comprises most of Cochin-China. From Can Tho roads radiate to the west where the Hoa Hao sect has controlled large areas and where the great Cai San project will establish 100,000 refugees on reclaimed land, and to the south, the Camau area which was a Viet Minh stronghold and is still heavily infiltrated by armed dissidents. Can Tho also is the center of a web of waterways which are the sole means of access to much of the delta. The

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post will propose shortly to the Agency, and is accordingly budgeting for FY 1957, establishment of a USIS office at Can Tho similar to the one in Nha Trang, performing the same functions for southern Cochin-China, and directed by a second-year trainee.

FIELD POINTS:

USIS Field Points have been established in 21 provincial capitals out of the 36 provinces in Free Vietnam. Each has been manned by two local employees, who in nearly all cases occupy space in Vietnamese Information Service offices run by the Ministry of Information. These teams are equipped with a motion picture projector, a radio, a generator, a public address system, a tape recorder, a phonograph, a typewriter and a mimeograph machine. Each team also has been assigned a jeep loaned to USIS by the Vietnamese army. Due to excessive cost of gasoline for these jeeps and careless use of the vehicles, these jeeps are being returned and molyettes are being purchased instead.

These teams distribute USIS and VIS printed materials in the City and nearby towns and sponsor outdoor movie showings in the evenings. They also report back to USIS/Saigon on general political and economic conditions in their area, with particular stress on Viet Minh activities. They assist USIS mobile units in their province.

Their main task, however, is production of a mimeographed newspaper, which in most cases is the only newspaper circulated in their areas, since there does not exist a single daily paper outside Saigon-Cholon, and these papers arrive days late if at all. Originally these men monitored a special news broadcast produced by USIS and read late at night, at dictation speed, over Radio Saigon. They then typed this news on stencils and mimeographed several hundred copies which were distributed next morning to governmental and private offices, schools, teahouses and market places where the public congregated. Space was reserved at the end of the bulletin for local news and announcements usually supplied by the provincial chief or the VIS representative.

The Radio Saigon signal was so weak, however, often inaudible in most provinces, that this system was abandoned. Instead, VOA agreed to tackle the job. The USIS press and radio sections now prepare local news stories and radio them to Washington by Signal Corps facilities. From this material, plus regular world news, VOA prepares a special broadcast three nights weekly on the Vietnamese language program, comprising the first eight minutes of the regular 15-minute newscast. This is read, of course, at normal speed, but the field points record it on tape, which they can play back at much slower speed for transcription on mimeograph stencils.

It is now planned to expand the field points to the remaining

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15 provinces during the coming year, and simultaneously to phase them out. The contradiction is only apparent. First, the present two-man staffs will be reduced to one man apiece, with the extra personnel being used to establish the new field points. Second, depending on the ability of the Ministry of Information to manage them, the older and better established field points will be transferred gradually to the Ministry, along with the USOM equipment with which they are supplied. The Ministry has, in fact, already taken over two of the offices and is eager to acquire the rest.

MOBILE UNITS:

There are now 24 mobile units operated by USIS, including five boats provided by the Vietnamese army in the Mekong delta area. These units have been directed from Saigon, except for the four units attached to Hue. In dissident areas, they are accompanied by Vietnamese army guards. They are by all odds the most effective means of reaching large numbers of rural people, and at present they are showing movies to an average of one million persons a month throughout the countryside, including troop detachments of the Vietnamese army. A unit crew may consist of a driver and a projectionist, but usually one man accomplishes both functions. None of the vehicles are identified as American, and Americans accompany them only very rarely, for inspection or survey purposes. It seemed the part of wisdom not to lend credence to Viet Minh propaganda that "Americans are running Vietnam".

With assignment of some of these units to the new offices in Nha Trang and Can Tho, Saigon will direct only those working in the vicinity of the capital, in the Cao Dai areas to the northwest, and in the high plateau regions on the western slope of the Annamite range. Saigon will remain the central supply point for all the sub-posts, however, and will continue to handle major repairs of equipment and vehicles.

The boat units loaned by the Vietnamese army are in deplorable condition and present a constant maintenance problem. It is planned during FY 1957, therefore, to build three new shallow-draft boats specially designed for small canals and to turn three back to the army when the new ones are ready. Two more can be constructed in FY 1958. It is intended however, to phase out the remaining mobile units by attrition, and consequently no funds have been requested for replacement vehicles. A year ago USOM ordered 60 units for the Ministry of Information and 35 of these have now arrived, with the rest on route. As the ministry program shakes down, there will be lessening need for the USIS vehicles. At the current rate of depreciation it is anticipated that in another three years no USIS mobile units will be on the roads in Vietnam except for a few special-purpose vehicles attached to the three main sub-posts and Saigon.

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TRAVELING PLAYERS:

From the standpoint of audience impact and requests for return engagements, there is no question but that the USIS traveling theatrical troupes are the most popular of all the field enterprises. Two of these troupes have been operating more than a year, and a third was recently added. Hired by contract, these troupes include actors, singers and instrumentalists whose stage is a converted truck. Their repertoire includes skits and playlets, mostly satirical or broad burlesque, interspersed with songs and instrumental solos. Topics are primarily anti-communist. There is no USIS attribution. All reports from the field emphasize the delight with which these troupes are greeted by rural people to whom their coming is a major event. They have also been a big hit with military encampments, and constituted the first "USO" possessed by the Vietnamese army, which liked the idea so well that it organized similar troupes of its own. It is planned to retain this operation at present strength, and to urge the Vietnamese armed forces to expand their own dramatic program in cantonments and bivouacs throughout the country.

FIELD REPORTING:

Each of these field operations is a major source of information to USIS on conditions and developments throughout the country, whether political, economic or military. The mobile units crews are interviewed at length on their return from field assignments, and these reports are circulated not only through USIS, but to MAAG, USOM, the Embassy, the attaches and other interested sections. The field point personnel report regularly on operational and distribution problems and are called in to Saigon periodically not only for instruction and training, but for thorough individual debriefing as well. An instance in point is a "field conference" to which USIS called all field points personnel the day after the national elections for a constituent assembly. Within 48 hours the Embassy was able to submit to Washington a comprehensive and accurate report on conduct of the election in all areas.

These reports are discussed at length at fortnightly field staff meetings attended by all Americans in the field program, plus media chiefs as well. Integrated campaigns are planned on special themes at these sessions, and the entire program is kept tightly correlated. Once monthly, key developments reported from the field are pulled together into an unclassified mimeographed report which is widely circulated among all American agencies in Vietnam and Washington. Other agencies have been most appreciative of this special USIS service.

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Content of the Program

This, then, is the USIS field organization, the mechanism devised to reach the rural people with whatever message USIS chooses to convey. If the preceding pages have seemed to place undue emphasis on structure, it is because problems of structure were paramount and took a disproportionate amount of USIS time, money and energy that in some other country might have been devoted to creative production. And yet in most other countries these mechanisms already exist and only require feeding with material -- in Vietnam mere production was pointless if no one got the message.

It is believed by all USIS staff in Vietnam that the present and planned field organization will enable us to reach all physical areas of Vietnam with sufficient frequency to provide the continued impact and repetition that is the heart and soul of any effective propaganda effort. In the larger towns and more populous districts, this impact already is a weekly or even daily thing -- and this is apart from the almost hourly contact provided by radio (VOA and the national network) plus the general continuing influence of USIS press materials in Vietnamese newspapers and other publications, and the 72 commercial movie houses licensed in Vietnam, all of which are required by the Government to show our films.

The question of content, then -- of the themes and objectives and ideology to be projected over this mechanism -- has been sketched in the foregoing pages only in very general terms. For one thing, a detailed discussion of ideology is out of place in a paper of this length. For another, as had been pointed out elsewhere, the political situation in Vietnam changes almost daily -- any exposition of current problems and short-term themes might be out of date before the paper reached Washington. The place for discussion of content is the Country Plan itself, and the basic mechanism of USIS/Vietnam, its resources in equipment, people and funds, will remain fairly constant or at least change very slowly.

The important thing is that the instrument exists and that it is flexible, able to respond instantly to change in situations, that it can convey at once any message funneled into it from Washington or Saigon. No matter what shifts may ensue in U.S. relations with Vietnam, U. S. versus Russia, U. S. and the Free World, U. S. and the neutralists, the present USIS organism in Vietnam can carry the appropriate doctrine at once to the majority of the Vietnamese people, couched in acceptable Vietnamese terms, and by and large not attributable to U. S. origin.

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Since the main purpose of this despatch then, is to acquaint all sections of USIA (and other appropriate governmental agencies) with the physical organization of USIS/Vietnam in mid-1956, with our basic analysis of audiences and how to reach them, and with an account of the needs and pressures that created this organism, it may be helpful to complete the picture with a discussion of anticipated future changes, of planned shifts in emphasis, and of trends that are developing at this time.

Future Shifts in Emphasis

Looking to the future, the following general observations may be made:

1. The period when USIS masqueraded as the Vietnamese Government Information Service ended several months ago. Since then, the Ministry of Information has displayed increasing competence, if not always in the right direction. There has, in fact, developed within the Ministry considerable resistance to those USIS ideas which run counter to the totalitarian concepts embraced by a handful of top Ministry officials, and this has also been reflected occasionally in minor misunderstandings with provincial underlings whose Viet Minh experience inclines them toward authoritarian measures. There are encouraging recent signs that these officials are in disfavor and may be replaced, but the mere existence of the problem underlines the necessity for USIS to develop parallel and independent outlets to the Vietnamese people.
2. The Information Ministry has gradually created its own rural network, which by now is fairly effective. Following USOM and USIS advice, the Ministry has established sub-offices in each provincial capital and major town and is now extending its efforts to the villages. As USOM equipment arrived, the effectiveness of the Ministry's efforts also increased. Last week, for instance, the Ministry received 35 brand-new and most modern mobile units -- better-equipped in fact than the USIS units. With these on the roads, the need for USIS units proportionately decreases -- although all American observers believe it will take a year or more for the Ministry program to become efficient.
3. Simultaneously, in the Central Government's program to pacify the country and to reach the people, various other field organisms have developed. These include:
 - a. Civic Action. Not controlled by the Ministry of Information (it is a separate bureau under the Presidency) this organization sends work teams to spend six weeks in a village, indoctrinating the community -- and helping it -- in matters of public health, sanitation, village government, better ag-

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ricultural practices, literacy and propaganda. Follow-up action comes two months later when the team revisits the village. USIS has been close to this organization from the start, furnishes it with considerable printed materials, and intends to maintain even closer relations in the future.

- b. The Garde Civile. This is the rural police of Vietnam, composed for the most part of army veterans, which is a sort of mobile gendarmerie, stationed in groups throughout the country to maintain order --- a politico-military fire brigade which can assist local authorities when "bandits" (or Viet Minh) prove too strong or troublesome for local resources. The Garde Civile has provided an excellent distribution mechanism for USIS materials and cooperation with this organization also will be broadened.
- c. Self-Defense Corps. Supported in part by U. S. funds, this group will number about 60,000 men, also veterans, stationed in each village in groups of 10 or less. They are furnished arms and a meager monthly stipend, and have the responsibility for maintaining village security. This corps also is envisaged as the logical group to follow through on reforms instituted by the Civic Action teams. USIS intends to develop relationships with the Corps until they constitute one of the main distribution mechanisms in rural Vietnam.
- d. Vietnamese Army PsyWar. The psychological warfare and troop information and education sections of the Vietnamese armed forces have attracted USIS from the first. Close collaboration with the VN army, in fact, was one of the main objectives of former PAO George Hellyer in 1953 and 1954, and PAO Edward Stansbury also pushed this program. USIS ever since has provided considerable instructional material to these groups --- which constitute a "captive audience" --- especially along the lines of improving troop relationships with the rural population. It is planned to devote considerable amounts of the USIS/Vietnam publishing quota with RPC/Manila to posters, pamphlets and other materials for the VN Army.
- e. Police and Surete. USIS has given considerable assistance, especially in publications, to the Vietnamese police, along the general line of building up the concept of the police as the people's friends. This will be continued.

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4. As USIS output can be channeled increasingly into the indigenous channels mentioned above, and as the Ministry of Information develops competence and takes over the USIS Field Points, USIS will gradually withdraw from the job of handling rural distribution by itself. As mobile units wear out, they will not be replaced. As field points are turned over to the Ministry, USIS supervision of these teams will dwindle. As the Government espouses dramatic troupes, USIS will get out of that business. By 1958, it is anticipated that the major field operation of USIS will be the three regional offices in Hue, Nha Trang and Can Tho, each under supervision of an American provincial public affairs officer and with a small service staff, maintaining relations with the rural Vietnamese agencies in each area, servicing them with publications, films and advice, but letting them carry the load.

5. As the USIS rural program dwindles, more and more attention will be devoted to the cultural, exchange, educational and English teaching fields -- those U. S. programs which have the most lasting effect.

6. More and more of the USIS output, as time goes on, will be clearly labeled as such. Some consideration already is being given, for instance, to USIS identification of our mobile units, which may become necessary to distinguish them from the Ministry units if the latter prove to be badly managed, if they expound lines embarrassing to the U.S., or if provincial politicians begin "requisitioning" these vehicles for other uses.

7. Increasing efforts will be made to bring the USIS message to the population north of the Parallel, to sow doubt and disaffection within the communist zone and to discredit the Ho Chi Minh regime while promoting the Free Vietnamese government as the future government of all Vietnam. Certain proposals to use Voice of America in this endeavor have been submitted to OCB by the Country Team, in Embassy Despatch No. 375, May 31, 1956. Other proposals, overt and otherwise, are under continuing study at the post, and will be presented as they seem feasible.

8. Another problem of growing importance to USIS is that of the Vietnamese Government's information relationships with other nations, particularly countries in this area. On the whole, Vietnamese diplomats have been either inactive or maladroit in their attempts to present Vietnamese views to the information media of their countries of assignment. USIS, at the request of the Foreign Ministry, shortly will begin training courses for Ministry personnel who will be assigned press attache duties in various countries. It is hoped that with this training, and with discreet advice and assistance from USIS posts in other capitals,

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an increasing amount of press and radio material favorable to Vietnam will be disseminated direct from the Vietnamese legations in Europe and Asia.



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It is requested that copies of this despatch be distributed not only to appropriate sections of USIA but to the Department of State, ICA and such other government agencies as seem appropriate. To the extent that USIA believes advisable, copies might also be sent to USIS posts in such neighboring countries as Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and the Philippines.