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19 July 1963

SUBJECT: Report of Duty Tour in a Country Confronted with Insurgency

TO: Deputy Chief of Staff for Military Operations
ATTN: OPS SW
Department of the Army
Washington 25, D. C.

1. I served as Senior Advisor to the I Corps of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) from 7 July 1962 until 9 June 1963. During this period, in accordance with directives from MAC-V and the MAAG, my MAAG Detachment placed following priorities on its activities:

a. Assistance to the ARVN in planning and execution of military operations.

b. Training.

c. Non-military activities such as the Strategic Hamlet Program, assistance to the US Overseas Mission (USOM) and civic action.

2. Inasmuch as terrain, enemy activity and commanders differ considerably from one ARVN Corps area to another, I emphasize that my discussion of topics listed at TAB A applies solely to the I Corps Area (except where noted) and may not necessarily apply throughout all Corps areas. I have omitted topics I do not feel qualified to discuss or which I feel have been exhaustively covered elsewhere.

3. Causative factors of the insurgency.

a. Political. Occasionally I observed evidence that the Diem Regime lacks complete support in the Army and among the Vietnamese people. On occasion, high-ranking ARVN officers of I Corps complained to me that the Government obviously favored the Catholics over the Buddhists, especially in its distribution of US aid. During the current Buddhist "revolt" (monitored and reported on by I Corps MAAG officers), I gained the distinct impression that the Buddhist issue functioned as a catalyst arousing much latent resistance against the Diem Regime, which did not bear on the theme of religious freedom. For example, this issue sparked demonstrations by the previously politically apathetic students of the University of Hue. It also aroused the antagonism of certain "intellectuals" in the I Corps area (a class which, in Vietnam, includes not only writers and educators, but also professionals and businessmen).

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of this coordination (voluntarily participated in by U. S. agencies) were well worth the effort. This effort kept everyone informed. It also helped furnish sorely needed coordination to the Vietnamese agencies involved in such activities as the Strategic Hamlet Program, USOM-funded economic programs, Montagnard resettlement and relief, and propaganda activities.

7. Random Observations.

a. In this final section, I shall mention briefly subjects which I consider important and which lend themselves to separate treatment.

b. Leverage. I believe that the development of techniques and means to increase U. S. leverage in Vietnam is the single most important problem facing us there and that it will be a fundamental problem in any future counterinsurgency effort in which we become involved. In Vietnam, the U. S. is fighting its first major war by proxy against international Communism. Our objective is to help the Vietnamese to expel Communism from their country and to develop a viable, democratic nation, friendly to the West, that will be able to carry on by itself thereafter. We want to accomplish that objective as quickly and as economically as possible. This goal does not necessarily coincide with that of the Republic of Vietnam. From time to time, there is nagging suspicion among some Americans that the Republic may wish to prolong the war and the massive U. S. aid which will continue to be needed. There is also a suspicion that the present Regime is interested primarily in maintaining itself in power. There appears little question that the Diem Regime -- by penalizing commanders who incur heavy losses in battle -- discourages the aggressive military action against the Viet Cong essential to early victory. The extent to which Diem desires (or feels he can) broaden the political base of his support (as the U. S. recommends) is another moot point. Thus, the question arises: How can the U. S. influence the Republic to take action which the U. S. feels is needed to win?

c. In my opinion, part of the answer lies in the development of greater leverage at all levels wherein American advisors are in contact with the Vietnamese. At the Corps and Division levels, for instance, the control which the U. S. Advisor exerts over U. S. helicopters can be used to influence significantly, tactical plans. In the I Corps area, I did not hesitate (and the Vietnamese knew I would not hesitate) to use my "veto" of helicopters to discourage the implementation of unsound plans. Conversely, I encouraged the employment of sound and aggressive tactics by establishing the "rules" under which I would permit helicopter use.

Currently, we are developing Vietnamese Air Force helicopter units and there would appear to be military logic to this effort. However, the day when the Vietnamese commander has an adequate helicopter capability directly under his own control will mark a time of significant decline in the influence now exerted by Division and Corps MAAG advisors over military operations in Vietnam. Perhaps, therefore, we should think twice before we take what apparently is the clearly desirable military action of phasing Vietnamese helicopter units in and U. S. helicopter units out of Vietnam.

d. The same principle applies in the political field. When ARVN troops killed and wounded Buddhist demonstrators in Hue on 8 May, it appeared to many American advisors on the ground that the government's handling of the resultant situation was unwise. Its "get tough" policy, together with Madame Nhu's inflammatory accusations against the Buddhists promoted a country-wide Buddhist revolt that cannot help but hamper the war effort against the Viet Cong. How could the U. S. have brought pressure to bear on Diem to conciliate the Buddhists at the outset of the revolt? Admittedly, this is a most delicate and difficult question, involving as it does the internal affairs of another nation. Yet, it is the sort of problem which we must expect to encounter in wars of counter-insurgency and learn to solve, as best we can.

e. To prevent misunderstanding, I emphasize that the points raised in paragraphs 7 b-d above, are presented to illustrate a principle. That principle is that it would be a miraculous coincidence if a host nation in a war of counterinsurgency were to share identical objectives with the U. S. or arrive at identical solutions to problems that arise. Hence, it behooves the U. S. to seek ways in which it can influence the host nation to act in a manner compatible with U. S. interests in a war which we are financing to a large extent and otherwise supporting. In presenting these points, I am not attempting to pass judgment on the Diem Regime's effectiveness one way or the other.

f. Intelligence Penetration of the Host Country. This second topic is closely allied to the one just discussed. In our attempt to influence our host nation, it is essential that we be as well informed as possible on the internal political situation. This is especially true in an Asiastic country where the political situation is frequently complex, unstable and in a state of flux. Simply stated, we must identify and support those political and military leaders whose interests are most closely akin to our own. We must do practical things such as influencing the selection of promising young potential military leaders for tours of duty in U. S. military schools. (As a rule, I found Vietnamese officers who had been schooled in the U. S. to be much more cooperative and sympathetic to U. S. views than those who had not had such schooling). These requirements generate the need for an adequate and

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Yet, the hamlets were recently termed by several influential American clergymen as "concentration camps." What's the solution to this problem? About six months ago, we were told in Vietnam, that DOD was arranging a visit by scores of top U. S. reporters, including members of the Washington Press Corps. This visit, unfortunately, failed to materialize. I believe that anything we can do along these lines, to get responsible and influential journalists on the ground in Vietnam to report on the facts, as they see them, will help correct a situation that is not helping our counter-insurgency effort in Vietnam.

1. Are we winning the war? This is the most common question asked of all Vietnamese returnees. My answer, so far as the I Corps area is concerned, is "Definitely yes. We have been winning the war since the summer of 1962." On 3 July 1962, for instance, the Viet Cong in battalion strength attacked three ARVN outposts in the I Corps area, overrunning two of them. This was the last successful attack of its size made in the I Corps area. By contrast, a Viet Cong regimental attack made against the company outpost of Phuoc Chau on 25 November 1962 resulted in a disastrous defeat for the enemy. In the I Corps area, the people are talking, giving more information on the enemy to the ARVN. There are more Viet Cong defectors, especially of higher rank. (Following the battle of Phuoc Chau, three officers, including the battalion commander, defected from the 65th Viet Cong Battalion, a regular unit which had participated in the attack). The Self Defense Corps units are defending their villages against enemy attacks with much greater confidence and success than in the past. The ARVN is reaching out into the deep jungle to attack Viet Cong "secure" areas. In these attacks, ARVN training is starting to show and -- more important -- the ARVN recognize and admit the value of training (a subject concerning which some ARVN leaders had displayed skepticism in the past). No one predicts quick victory, especially if the enemy decides to commit a large increment of additional force in the I Corps area. When I asked Vietnamese commanders, near the end of my tour in Vietnam, how long they thought the war would continue, I would receive a smile, a shrug of the shoulders and a hesitant "Two, three, four years -- who knows?" But, there is no doubt in their minds (nor in mine) that we are winning in the I Corps area.

BRYCE F. DENNO
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TAB A - Report format

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