

HARNESSING THE REVOLUTION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Man is so made that he never wholeheartedly
risks his life fighting for just a lesser
evil; he will willingly die for an illusion.

Dang Van Sung
July 1963

10 September 1965

South Vietnam

INTRODUCTION

The conflict in Vietnam has entered a new phase wherein direct and large scale participation by US ground forces has now occurred. It is almost inconceivable that the United States will withdraw from Vietnam short of a military victory or a negotiated settlement that assures the autonomy of South Vietnam. This paper is therefore based on the assumption that a military defeat will not occur, and that opportunity will continue to exist to win the majority of the South Vietnamese to the side of a noncommunist government. If this opportunity is to be properly exploited, cognizance must be given to the mistakes of the past twenty years, not to point accusingly, but to exercise greater wisdom in choosing among ever fewer alternatives.

The authors of this paper represent a wide range of backgrounds and expertise; their common bond is a combination of field experience in Vietnam and a continuing belief that a viable, noncommunist, democratically oriented government can yet emerge there. They recognize the existence of a social revolution, which by an unfortunate series of events and mistakes is being guided and manipulated by the Communist dominated National Liberation Front. They believe that the inherent objectives of this social revolution are not incompatible with the policies and objectives of the United States, and that it is only through a noncommunist government in South Vietnam that the aspirations of this majority can truly be realized.

EXISTING PROBLEMS

A statement of existing problems is made herein without any attempt to array in order of importance. It is conceded that exceptions exist and that each listed problem is debatable in its absolute. It is not believed that any can be rejected as being nonexistent.

a. The social revolution underway in South Vietnam is primarily identified with the National Liberation Front, a communist dominated organization.

b. A popular, political base for the Government of South Vietnam does not now exist.

c. The regular armed forces, the paramilitary forces, the reconstruction cadre and the administrative cadre are politically inarticulate, and lack sufficient, positive motivation.

d. Resource utilization by the Vietnamese is haphazard at best, deliberately sabotaged at worst. It is characterized by waste, redundancy, misapplication, and the absence of valid priorities.

e. A chain of command exists principally on paper. This is applicable to both the military and civilian hierarchies.

f. Assistance from the United States, both military and economic, is used to perpetuate a regime, that despite its lip service to the contrary, has not demonstrated a sincere interest in bettering the lot of the rural population.

g. The centralization of administrative and financial authority at ministerial level has hampered the development of local responsive government, and has often provided an excuse for inaction by those dealing directly with the population.

h. The existing system of administration promotes inefficiency, prevents management by exception, creates confusion, and encourages corruption.

i. Gadgetry, air power, and artillery continue to be substituted for the discriminate ground actions required to prosecute the military side of this war without unduly alienating the civilian population.

j. Emphasis is placed upon the use of physical obstacles to provide population security rather than the fostering of a spirit of resistance.

k. The bulk of the Vietnamese ground forces are not effectively utilized; their most habitual employment is for defense or in reserve, and neither of these two missions is performed effectively.

l. The advisory concept has failed, not through lack of effort and dedication, but because it has been an instrument of a US policy of nonintervention in the internal affairs of the government of Vietnam, even though much intervention has been needed and desired by knowledgeable and concerned Vietnamese.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

During the past eleven years, the US has backed a succession of heads of government in South Vietnam. This backing has largely concerned itself with the provision of material and financial support and the rendering of tactical and technical advice. Apparently, for fear of tarnishing our own image, we have refused to become overtly involved in the internal affairs of governing to the extent necessary to insure the emergence of a government responsive to a majority of its people. As victor, in Japan and West Germany, we had no such inhibitions and the outstanding progress of these two countries in the past twenty years is at least partly attributable to our involvement in their postwar governments. Recognizing that we are faced with entirely different problems in South Vietnam, it is not intended to compare the three countries, but to remind the reader that the precedent of overt involvement is already established.

In Vietnam, the only apparent condition imposed or required by our assistance programs has been that GVN be anticommunist. Those Vietnamese who are the most ardently anticommunist are the affluent members of the urban areas who stand to lose the most if the communists take over. Being politically articulate and influential, these are the same people who inherited and are propagating a government which is intrinsically opposed to the social revolution in progress. Generally, it is in our national interest to support an anticommunist and the spokesmen for such a stand. Realistically, however, a viable, noncommunist government in South Vietnam may more easily be attained through

socialist-inclined leaders who are more in tune with the aspirations of the rural population.

It has been the default of GVN, more than the appeal of communism, that has forced those nationalists and revolutionaries who object to "attensime" (fence-straddling or do-nothing) to throw their lot in with the National Liberation Front. It is a scathing indictment of our political awareness that we have sat idly by while many patriotic and noncommunist Vietnamese were literally forced to ally themselves with a communist dominated movement in the belief that it was their only chance to secure a better government. It is an exploitable weakness of the communists that they have consciously played down their own objectives in an attempt to attract such people. The failure of both GVN and NLF to thus far fully exploit the potential of this revolutionary movement is evidenced by the apathy of the majority of the population. Between the two, the GVN has been less successful, attracting primarily those among the rural population whose religion or personal knowledge of communism makes the more anticommunist than pro-revolutionary.

The government of South Vietnam has failed to appeal to its rural population since its formation in 1955. The game of musical chairs has permitted many occupants of the driver's seat but little perceptible change in direction. Thus, it is increasingly clear that the reorientation necessary to appeal to the majority of the population will not occur voluntarily at the top. This is not to imply that either the current or the past national leaders have not had a sincere desire to create a better Vietnam as they envision it. Several of these leaders have displayed personal integrity and patriotic devotion. They have demonstrated, however, that they are incapable of surmounting a system of which they are both a product and a participant and have a vested interest in perpetuating. At most they can give vocal assertion of the desirability for a more representative type government to evolve. The actual emergence of such a government, however, will occur only with the development of a political base among the population, a matter of years and decades. It can occur peacefully with a benevolently inclined autocracy or dictatorship. Alternatively, it can begin with a violent overthrow. Either way, it requires an evolutionary process that results in the emergence of leaders who come from, think like, and are responsible to the majority.

The existing government is oriented toward the exploitation of the rural and lower class urban populations. It is, in fact, a continuation of the French colonial system of government with upper-class Vietnamese replacing the French. Although the wealth of the country lies in its agricultural production, it is the agrarian population which is realizing the least out of either the technological advancements of the twentieth century or the massive assistance provided by the US. The dissatisfaction of the agrarian population was manifested against the French, held in check during the early years of Diem, and has become increasingly evidenced each year since the late fifties. It has obviously been fanned by communism; today is largely expressed through alliance with the NLF. The understandable concern of the US with the communist involvement in this revolution has obscured the fact that most of the objectives of the revolution are identical to those for which Americans have long fought and died.

The communists, whose own objectives are in conflict with those of the revolution, have displayed political astuteness by moving to the fore of the revolution and assuming control of its direction. With hopes of a military victory now denied to the NLF by the US presence, that organization is increasingly vulnerable to losing the true patriots and revolutionaries now allied to it. This vulnerability can be exploited best by the offering of a positive alternative which would permit the primary objectives of the revolution to be achieved. The major challenges now facing the US in Vietnam is to stimulate such an alternative to be offered by the GVN, and to insure that its achievement is both possible and compatible with our own objectives. It is believed that the emergence of a viable, noncommunist and independent South Vietnam would be an achievement well beyond present expectations, but one that is yet possible.

To this end we submit herein a proposal for consideration. It is little more than a concept at this stage. Considerable time, effort, and thought will be required to develop a formal plan for implementation. In particular, there will be a requirement for the advisory personnel working with the high command and the ministries to determine how the proposal can be implemented. The cooperation and support of GVN is essential if this proposal is to be successfully implemented, hence every effort should be made to "sell" this proposal to GVN. If this cannot be done without compromising the principal provisions of the proposal, then GVN must be forced to accept US judgment and direction. The situation is now too critical and the involvement too great for the US to longer tolerate a lack of direction and floundering effort that is losing the population, hence the war.

There are no precedents for the current conflict in Vietnam; there are no experts. This struggle is now unique in the history of both warfare and social revolution. Vietnam occupies the center of a world stage in a drama potentially affecting the destiny of all mankind. It is the scene of a civil war, the target of external aggression, the forum for an East-West confrontation, and the testing ground for all forms of economic, psychological and military warfare. Most baffling of all, Vietnam has thus far been its own worst enemy.

A PROPOSAL

It is proposed that three or more provinces be selected to begin, in January of 1966, a three year test of a program which has the following major features:

- a. A decentralization of authority from the ministries in Saigon to the test province.
- b. The re-establishment of a line of authority which goes from the central government directly to the Province Chief. The Minister of the Interior, assisted by the Government Delegates, would be the focal point of the central government for the province chief. For military matters involving regular forces only, the province chief would be subject to control by Corps and Division Commanders.
- c. De jure and de facto control by the Province Chief of all resources permanently located in or allocated to a province. This

includes, men, money, and materials, but excludes military forces under Corps or Division control and interprovincial projects such as communication and power systems.

d. Political indoctrination and motivational training of all GVN and US advisor personnel assigned to a province. This training to be modeled after the limited program successfully implemented in Quang Ngai province in 1964. (See Inclosure 1.)

e. Consolidations, within each test province of the many cadres, organizations, and programs now involved, often haphazardly, in the reconstruction and pacification effort.

f. The development and use of simplified systems of administration and funding. Limited to, but standard among, the test provinces.

g. Establishment of a country team advisory unit consisting of the present authorizations for MACV and USOM personnel, and additional authorizations for advisors in the fields of public administration, finance, and political indoctrination and motivation.

h. A strengthening of advisory influence by requiring that "advice" be accepted and acted on by GVN personnel or a review be jointly US-GVN conducted by the next higher echelon. This review to be a two-edged sword that improves or removes the advisor giving bad advice or the GVN official rejecting good advice.

i. A purse string control exercised by the financial advisor on all reconstruction and pacification type expenditures; the US involvement at provincial and district levels to be to the extent of assigning reasonable financial accountability to the advisor.

j. The creation of a "Political (or Pacification) Deputy" at both province and district levels to control and direct all cadre, reconstruction, new life hamlet, political indoctrination, and motivational training efforts.

k. The elimination of separate US reporting requirement by having all reports jointly prepared and submitted.

l. The gradual elimination of US advisory compounds and the separate US communications equipment as the advisors become so closely integrated with the GVN organization that they eat, live, and work with their counterparts. Substantial personnel and equipment savings will be realized.

m. Establishment of an independent evaluation team to monitor the test provinces. Innovations that prove successful could be instituted country-wide in advance of the suggested test completion date.

PROPOSAL DISCUSSION

Fundamental to this proposal is the long range objective of developing a political base from which a national government will emerge that is responsive to the dynamics of the social revolution now in

progress. GVN has demonstrated that it cannot establish stability, even with dictatorial powers, let alone achieve a popular base among the people. On the other hand, a representative type government is not now possible that would be capable of dealing with the externally stimulated and backed aggression; indeed, over half the population is not even accessible without a military operation. We are therefore faced with the dichotomy of having to maintain an autocratic government while laying the foundation for a democratically oriented one. Now that the United States has committed its national prestige, as well as its resources, to maintaining an autonomous South Vietnam, it can ill afford to gamble that a successful military venture will be negated by a continued failure of GVN to win its own people. Our current emphasis upon military action must be complemented by an effective, government program to strengthen GVN at all levels, but particularly at village and district levels.

At least three provinces should be included in the test; party to provide a wider base for expansion if the test is successful, and partly to insure that the test will neither fail nor succeed as the result of chance factors. The period of the test is proposed as three years with the hope that highly successful results might dictate expansion sooner, but to recognize that some wheel spinning will occur prior to the realization of forward motion.

Current command arrangements impose an almost impossible burden on province chiefs and on Corps and Division commanders. The province chief must report to, and receive orders from, the division and corps commanders, the high command, and the various Ministries. Since no man is capable of serving well so many masters, the natural result is to bypass one or more of these masters, and in turn, be bypassed by them. Neither does the province chief control his district chiefs or his ministerially connected service chiefs. It is easy to argue that a "strong" province chief can, by the force of his personality, overcome the control exercised on his subordinates from above. Such an argument is subterfuge, however, and admits to the deficiencies of the existing system. The same "strong" province chief could be immeasurably more effective if his energy were not diverted to the unproductive task of overcoming the system. Moreover, there are not that many "Julius Caesars" on the horizon in Vietnam. On the other hand, division and corps commanders are unable to exercise control or provide direction on other than military matters; they are not staffed to do so nor has there been any real evidence of more than cursory interest in the nonmilitary problems of government. Province chiefs are therefore forced to bypass these echelons or settle for inaction; inevitably, it is the latter.

The command arrangement and test proposed would give the province chief the authority to remove or reassign all subordinates and to control budgets of all activities within the province. Channels of communications to the ministries would remain open, but would be limited to technical matters. Policy and command instructions to the province chief, other than those of a purely military nature, would come to him from the Minister of the Interior and the Government Delegate. Resource control by the province chief would be absolute. Militarily it means command of all units and troops assigned or attached to the province and a coordinating requirement imposed on all other tactical commanders who may have occasion to conduct military operations in the province.

Such does not now exist in practice. Financially, it would mean a single provincial budget, with fund transfers among projects limited only to the extent required by US AID appropriations. Quarterly allotments would be made from the central government with only such standard items as pay of the armed forces and GVN officials not being in the financial package to be managed by the province chief. Personnel wise, the test provinces would continue to be responsible to furnish Norman national quotas, would send personnel to national training centers, and would be dependent upon the ministries and other central agencies for the technically trained graduates of their schools. Most significant from the standpoint of resources, the test does not involve the allocation of any additional resources not now programmed.

Effective political indoctrination of the population, and motivational training of GVN personnel is essential if widespread support of the government is to be realized. For the past decade or longer, we (Americans and Vietnamese) have naively expected an unsophisticated, relatively illiterate, rural population to recognize and oppose the evils of communism, even when it is cleverly masked by front organizations. Also, we have damned those who did not give wholehearted support to GVN without seriously questioning whether GVN was so constituted or motivated that it could expect loyalty and support from its people. Recently when advocating the establishment of a large, new free bombing zone in a populated area, a US officer stated: "If these people want to stay their and support the communists, then they can expect to be bombed." Completely ignored or unknown in this type of thinking are the considerations [*NB: First consideration, (1) is missing from original text.*] (2) They are ancestral worshipers who feel it necessary to daily pray at the graves of their ancestors. (3) They have no place they can go where they can continue to earn a living. (4) Most of them have never heard of communism, and sincerely believe that their husbands, sons or brothers, if involved in the conflict, are doing so to fight oppression. (5) It is primarily the GVN absence, as opposed to the NLF presence, that has involved a majority of them in the conflict.

The question arises as to the wisdom of a policy that, despite its objective, results in the exodus from a contested area of those elements of the population who do not support the NLF. This is surrendering an area and its resources to the enemy, and, even worse, removing those who might later provide the base of resistance to the enemy. The subsequent free bombing and unrestricted artillery firing the results may well provide an opportunity to polish conventional military techniques, but is worse than useless in accomplishing the ultimate objective of winning the population. Indeed, by leaving the enemy in unchallenged control of such areas, we encourage and assist him in the decision to move most of his forces into other contested areas, leaving only that cadre needed to control the remaining population and their agricultural output.

The enemy has been far more effective in political agitation and propaganda than the government because of an informed and a continual presence in the rural areas. GVN troops have often done more harm than good on the infrequent occasions when they stay in a rural area because they are inadequately trained or directed in their performance of the tasks of civic action and psychological warfare. Likewise, there is limited value, comparatively, to a Lambretta mounted VIS visit of two

hours or less that is conducted by city reared cadre wearing tight pants and pointed toed shoes and who are obviously apprehensive of their audience.

To effectively counter the enemy's agit-prop effort, and more immediate, to present a positive appeal of our own, we must secure an informed presence in the rural areas. Few government personnel today possess either the knowledge or the training to be really effective in such a role. Thus, as part of this proposed test, political indoctrination and motivational training would be given to all provincial and district officials and their advisors, to all cadre, and to all district military personnel. Initially, the existing National Cadre and their Advisors, now engaged in PF [NB: *Popular Forces*] motivational training would be used to assist in the development of a POI [NB: *Plan of Instruction*] and the training of provincial cadre. These cadre would then train provincial officials and advisors who would train the rest in turn. The result of such an effort, never before attempted on the proposed scale, should be the development of political awareness and responsiveness at the lowest levels, and this gradual improvement in both the GVN performance and the appeal of GVN to the people. Eventually, a base of support for GVN would be established among the rural population. As this population becomes politically articulate, GVN would have to respond by a shift of emphasis away from the urban population.

The proposal to develop and use simplified administrative and funding systems in the test provinces may well create more GVN opposition than any other aspect of this paper. Despite continual complaints, there is an ingrained respect and towering reverence for the bureaucratic machinations that require paper mountains for molehill actions. The current system, largely French in origin and practices is designed to provide as many jobs as possible. It is not responsive to the vicissitudes of a nation at war and was never meant to be. Due to the nature of the conflict, local officials are often faced with unusual problems and situations demanding unorthodox solutions. They are unable to respond, particularly where funds are involved, because the system does not permit rapid action on anything other than refusals.

It is not unusual to see a province chief night after night face a stack of papers two feet high awaiting his approval and signature. Nor to find that he is forced to give as much attention and as many signatures to a two hundred piaster purchase as to a half-million piaster contract award. He must sign his name eleven times on the 27 pieces of paper required to secure a year of gratuity pay for the widow of a popular force soldier who may already be two years dead. Provincial purchases from merchants, no matter how small, must be paid for by a check that requires a visit to the bank (often in another province) and a delay in receipt of the money from two weeks to six months. Needless to add, the province is charged by the merchant for the travel and the delay. To get around the lack of a petty cash fund, province and district officials often borrow from the closest village fund (in cash, since it represents collected taxes) often "forgetting" to repay the loan. It would not appear that we can continue to afford the luxury of such wasteful, time consuming, and inefficient administrative practices if we are sincere in our desire to win the people.

There is nothing novel in the proposal to extend the "Country Team" concept down to provincial and district levels. Inherent in this proposal, however, is a strengthening of the advisor's authority, an increase of from 5 to 8 civilian advisors in each province, and the assignment of financial responsibility and accountability to advisors at province and district levels, limited to the funds available for reconstruction and pacification. Specifically, it is proposed that a political advisor be assigned at provincial level, and a combination political/financial advisor be assigned at district level. Additionally, that a public administration advisor be assigned at province. Existing MACV and USOM authorizations would not be changed initially, but would be revised downward at a later date. The chief of the team, whether military or civilian, would be selected with the same care now given to filling division senior advisor or civilian agency director slots. To the extent practical all advisors would be assigned to the province for the duration of the test.

Numerous questions are not answered and many points not covered in the limited discussion and proposals presented herein. This paper is presented for approval of concept and for the designation of a team to prepare detailed plans for presentation to GVN.

/s/ JOHN PAUL VANN
/t/ John Paul Vann
USOM Field Operations
Coordinator