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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

DOS

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TO : Office of the Military Representative
of the President - Lt. Cdr. Bagley,
Naval Aide

DATE: November 15, 1961.

FROM : Department of State - Chalmers B. Wood,
Deputy Director, Task Force/Viet-Nam

CBW

SUBJECT: Thompson's British Advisory Mission to Saigon

This is Thompson's latest memorandum which suggests measures for improving security in the Delta. He asked that a copy be made available to General Taylor. I recommend it.

DOS

RETURNED TO DOD

Enclosure:

Thompson's Memo dtd 11-8-61.

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Date: JUN 04 2014

Office of the Secretary of Defense **SUSC 552**
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MEMORANDUM

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Introduction

This Memorandum should be read in conjunction with my Appreciation of the situation in Vietnam dated October 27, 1961. The main recommendations in that paper, apart from the re-orientation of national policy to provide an attractive and constructive appeal to the people, were briefly:-

- (a) a re-organisation of the Government machine for directing and co-ordinating all action against the terrorists;
- (b) the production of an overall operational plan defining responsibilities, tasks and priorities;
- (c) the establishment of a static security framework by amalgamating the Police, Civil Guard and Sureté thereby creating a national Police Force; and
- (d) the establishment of a single security intelligence organisation within the static security framework.

2. While these main recommendations still stand I am convinced, as the result of a five-day visit to provinces in the Delta area, that they can best be carried out in stages and achieved steadily but naturally as the situation develops. To attempt, in the present serious situation, any drastic re-organisation would cause so much disruption that it would not have time in which to achieve successful results. The remedy should therefore be clinical rather than surgical. It will be much easier to make a start in one area and, for this purpose, the whole Delta area south and west of Saigon, comprising the present 32nd and 33rd tactical zones, would appear to be the most promising starting point. The areas north of Saigon and the Highlands require, at the present time, more specifically military measures, and the aim there should be to mix it with the communists in the jungle areas and to prevent as far as possible the Communists from obtaining a further grip on the populated coastal plain, particularly in Quedang Nam, Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh Provinces. This is essentially a holding operation. It is not considered further in this Memorandum, the aim of which, therefore, is to outline a plan and the measures required for the clearance of the Delta area.

Overall aim

3. The overall aim of any counter insurgency plan must be to win the people. The killing of communist terrorists will follow automatically from that. If the main emphasis is placed merely on killing terrorists there is a grave risk that more communists will be created than are killed. Winning the people must,

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therefore, be kept in the forefront of the minds of every single person, whether military or civilian, who is engaged in anti-terrorist operations.

Combined Headquarters

4. There is a very similar terrain throughout the whole area of rice fields and swamp, with mangrove on the coast. The area is at present divided into 12 provinces with two tactical zones (the seven southern provinces and five northern provinces) in each of which a military division is stationed. At the present time there is very little overall direction and co-ordination with the result that the 12 provinces are fighting 12 separate battles supplemented by the military operations of the two divisions.

5. There must be established a Combined Headquarters for the area to direct and co-ordinate:

- (a) all anti-terrorist operations;
- (b) all civilian emergency measures;
- (c) all security intelligence;
- (d) information and propaganda; and
- (e) as a follow up, social improvements.

It is logical that these Headquarters should be the present 3rd Corps reinforced by Administrative, Civil Guard, Self-Defense Corps and propaganda elements. There is great advantage in the fact that the Corps Headquarters itself is based in the Saigon area where the best facilities for control are available.

6. It is desirable that these Headquarters should be relieved of any responsibility for the 1st tactical zone and for the special zone of Saigon, and it is for consideration whether these two zones can best be handled by a Field Army Headquarters as a separate command or, perhaps, incorporated into 2nd Corps. The Combined Headquarters at 3rd Corps should cease to be responsible to Field Army Headquarters (which can then concentrate on the area north of Saigon and the Highlands), and should be directly responsible to the National Security Council (the membership of which may require revision). The Corps and all its military units would, however, continue to draw logistical support from the N. C. A. R. V. N.

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The Tactical Zones

7. Given this Combined Headquarters for the whole area, the 32nd and 33rd Tactical Zones as such should be abolished. It may be necessary to have an operational dividing line between the two divisions but this should be changeable, depending both on the situation and on the operations planned. This will allow much greater flexibility with regard to the movement of military forces.

Provinces

8. It follows from this that the Chefs de Province will be directly responsible to the Combined Headquarters on all emergency matters (though they will continue to work to the Ministries concerned in respect of normal routine administration). The Chef de Province should remain responsible for the direction and co-ordination of all emergency measures in his Province and the District Chiefs should similarly remain responsible to their respective Chers de Province. Bearing in mind that most of them are military officers this is likely to be more satisfactory in the present circumstances than the Malayan District War Executive Committee system. This system should only be developed gradually as military Chers de Province can be replaced by civil administrators.

Command Channels

9. (a) The military chain of command will operate in the normal way, from the military Corps staff at the Combined Headquarters to the two Divisional Headquarters and thence to regiments and battalions. It may be desirable for Ranger Companies, specifically attached to a particular province, to come under the operational command of the Chef de Province, but the latter should not command any army battalion or regiment operating in his province. He should, however, be responsible for co-ordinating operations with the commander of that battalion or regiment, as the case may be.
- (b) The Chef de Province will, however, be responsible for all civil emergency measures and their direction and, in that respect, will exercise command over the civil departments concerned.
- (c) Civil Guard and Self-Defence command channels are discussed in paragraphs 18 and 15 below.

Civil Measures

10. The basic units of population are the village and hamlet. Although the sizes vary, there are normally about 4 or 5 hamlets of 200-300 houses to each village. (I personally think that the

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Canton, coming between the village and the district, is an unnecessary extra in the chain of administration and it would be best to abolish it. However, if it remains, it can be regarded as irrelevant). The main civil emergency measures required at this level are:

(a) regrouping of hamlets round the perimeter, i.e. along the Cambodian frontier and on the fringes of the mangrove swamp areas, particularly those which have become long established communist bases. These hamlets should be known as "defended hamlets"; and

(b) the establishment of "strategic hamlets" in the remainder of the area.

11. The establishment of a "Cordon Sanitaire" along this frontier (or elsewhere on the perimeter) is not desirable, except possibly at special points, because:

(a) it gives up ground;

(b) it eliminates intelligence coverage;

(c) it establishes a more or less permanent patrol commitment for either Civil Guard or military forces; and

(d) it still does not solve the problem of the populated areas wherever they may start.

Regrouping of hamlets is likely to prove a better solution provided that they are of a convenient size for defence and control and the inhabitants are not moved too far from their normal work. Regrouped villages might be too unwieldy and cause too drastic a move of the population. The ideal size for a defended hamlet is about 300 houses (8-10 to an acre).

Control Measures

12. (a) Prohibited areas from which the population is totally excluded until further notice should be declared and all Government forces should have complete freedom to shoot on sight in such areas;

(b) Curfews, particularly at night, should be introduced on certain roads and waterways, in areas surrounding defended hamlets and in such other areas as may be required. Anyone breaking the curfew should be liable to be shot on sight.

(c) Identity cards should be issued to the whole population and the Delta area should be given priority for the new plastic cards. The inhabitants of each house should be recorded (as is being done in most strategic hamlets)

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and a photograph of the complete household should be pinned inside the house with duplicates available at district and province level (as in Vinh Binh province).

- (d) Check points should be established on all roads and waterways. They should not be static and should be moved as often as possible to avoid circumvention. This will help to prevent the present freedom of movement enjoyed by communist agents and couriers.
- (e) It may be possible to introduce a limited degree of food control (and of other supplies) particularly in the areas where defended hamlets are established.

✓ Self-Defense Corps

13. It appeared that good progress was being made with the establishment of the Self-Defense Corps and Self-Defense Corps' posts, (particularly in Xien Hoa, Vinh Binh and Vinh Long Provinces) based on strategic hamlets with a larger post at village level. The potentiality of this policy is tremendous and the Self-Defense Corps could be made the key to the whole situation. The permanent, or "regular", members of the Corps are capable of being reinforced by "irregulars" comprising almost every able-bodied man in the village or hamlet, armed with a great variety of spears and machetes. At present, permanent members are ill paid, ill equipped and ill clothed, but the necessary spirit seems to be there and should be easily encouraged. If this is done successfully, the great advantage will lie in the fact that the people are defending themselves. Their local intelligence is good and provided that they are given sufficient confidence not to fear reprisals, they will pick off communist agents and supporters and small guerrilla units. (In one of the Provinces visited they have the highest score of kills over the last few months).

14. The pay problem might be solved by making the permanent members more part-time on a roster basis so that they can still attend to other normal work. With regard to equipment it is understood that carbines are on the way. Every post should, however, also have a grenade discharger. Other minor equipment (nothing fancy) and better uniform would greatly improve morale. Each post should also have a Vorey pistol or at least a rocket. The Horn is very adequate for raising the alarm within the hamlet itself.

15. The chain of command in the Self-Defense Corps should go through village and District to the Province level but not higher. Above that there should only be an inspectorate. The Civil Guard at Province and District level should be responsible for logistic support.

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16. A prerequisite for the establishment of Self-Defence Corps units, including their posts in strategic and defended hamlets, is that they can be adequately and rapidly supported by Civil Guard units in the event of an attack developing and, in turn, the Army should be responsible for dealing with any concentration which may develop against such hamlets. It would be sadness to establish such units and posts before such support can be provided. Training is not a major problem as only a minimum is required and in many places there are a number of former soldiers.

Civil Guard

17. The Civil Guard should be organized to provide the permanent static framework of security forces within each Province. Their present organization on a battalion and company basis is desirable only for the purpose of equipment and retraining. Their deployment requires that battalion Headquarters should be the provincial headquarters with company headquarters becoming the district headquarters. Provinces should then be reinforced by additional companies as may be required particularly for mobile operations. As the security situation improves companies may be transferred elsewhere, except that a company headquarters must remain at district level even though the number of men in that particular company may be reduced.

18. The operational direction of the Civil Guard in a Province should rest with the Chef de Province through the battalion commander and at district level with the District Chief through the company commander (where these officers are military). In all other respects the command and administrative channel should go direct from the battalion commander to the Civil Guard element at the Combined Headquarters, and thence to the main Civil Guard Headquarters in Saigon. As and when provinces are declared 'white' and civil administrators are appointed as Chefs de Province, then the whole command chain will run direct from Civil Guard headquarters in Saigon through Combined Headquarters to the battalion at Province level and its remaining companies. It is this organization which should then gradually be developed into a national police force with the amalgamation of other suitable forces.

Military Units (including Rangers)

19. The initial aim of military units should be to keep the main communist forces off balance while the whole framework of defended and strategic hamlets is being developed and consolidated and their main tasks will therefore be:

- (a) active patrolling and engagement of communist terrorists outside the populated areas;

/(b)

- (b) prevention of communist terrorist concentration;
- (c) support of defended hamlets in bad areas and rescue of them if attacked;
- (d) enforcement of control measures especially curfews and prohibited areas.

20. As the framework is established, military units should gradually be relieved of all static duties, except in defence of their own establishments and, where any static duties remain, a mobile reserve should always be available. This will be the time when the communists will either have to concentrate to attack the framework or else will withdraw to their bases in the swamp. Planned Military operations will be necessary to deal with both these eventualities.

21. In so far as the Delta area is concerned it would be desirable gradually to withdraw Ranger Companies as they can be replaced by retrained Civil Guard companies in order that the Ranger Companies themselves can be retrained for their proper task in the jungle areas north of Saigon and in the Highlands. But, as already stated, where they must initially remain they should be under the operational command of the Chef de Province and used in much the same role as the mobile Civil Guard companies.

Air Force

22. The main role of the Air Force should be to increase the mobility of the security forces in areas where other communications are lacking. It will also have the normal tasks of reconnaissance and communications and, where a suitable target presents itself, of ground attack. The priority task for helicopters should be the evacuation of wounded. This will particularly apply to the Self-Defense Corps where cases have occurred of wounded not reaching hospital for several days.

Navy

23. The main task of the Navy must be to prevent the entry of supplies, reinforcements, agents and weapons by sea into the area. Simultaneously the Navy should prevent all communist movement by water along the coasts. At the present time large communist units appear to be able to move rapidly from island to island across the mouth of the Delta with complete impunity. Not only should these be stopped completely but, if suitable craft are made available and fitted with radar, there should be considerable slaughter on the first few occasions. The type of vessel required is a seaward defence motor launch, inshore minesweeper, sea-going customs launch or the police P-craft as used in Malaya. They are all quite small with crews of between 10 and 15 men but they must be fitted with radar, wireless, search light, at least one 20 mm. and machine guns. They should carry sufficient fuel and

/stores

stores to stay at sea for about 7 days.

Inland waterways

24. With regard to the Mekong itself and other inland waterways this should not be a naval task (although the Navy may be required to help for a specific operation). River patrol units are required in the Civil Guard (as in Kien Hoa Province). It is understood that the Americans are planning to provide landing craft suitable for troop movement and patrolling of the Mekong. These should be excellent but, in addition, there will be a future requirement for smaller and faster boats, possibly fibre glass with outboard motor, capable of carrying about 6 men. In the initial stages these should be used, if based on static control points, to check traffic up and down the rivers and, in the later stages when security has improved, for patrolling and quick communications.

Roads

25. Some Civil Guard battalions now have a road patrol platoon Provincial Headquarters using mainly former Malayan G.M.C.'s and Lynx scout cars. These are all very old and problems are arising with regard to spare parts and tyres. (It should be possible to produce more of the latter somehow). For the future it is considered that a light armoured car to take the place of these vehicles is essential. As far as is known the only one being produced is the U.K. Ferret scout car and this is due to go out of production in 1962. It may be possible to make a final order. If this cannot be done then the best solution is to devise a fairly simple system of armour plating jeeps and light trucks (as was in fact done in Malaya).

Wireless Communications

26. These will need to be gone into in some detail to see that they all tie in correctly. At the lowest level strategic hamlets may have to communicate with the village by courier, ~~fire~~ or pocket, but at village level the Self-Defense Corps certainly needs a simple transmitter/receiver and this may also be required in the defended hamlets. These sets should work back to a control set at District Headquarters next door to the Civil Guard Company set which would then be responsible for relaying any messages as required to Civil Guard Headquarters at the Province level. The Civil Guard Company Headquarters at District level would also provide the connecting link with Civil Guard patrols and any other Civil Guard sets within the district.

27. When the Army is operating in any Province it should always provide a set to serve as the connecting link at the appropriate point in the static framework. Naval patrol craft must also be able to link to the nearest Province (or District) as well as to their own Headquarters.

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Intelligence

28. Bearing in mind the whole framework the first requirement here is to establish a joint committee in one room at provincial level with representatives of the Surete, the Chef de Province, the Self-Defence Corps, the Civil Guard and, if military units are operating in the province, the Army together. The most suitable person among these should be placed in charge to direct under the Chef de Province, the intelligence effort in the Province. A similar, but smaller, set-up is required at the District level and, at that level, the closest contact must be kept with the Self-Defence Corps, villages and hamlets which will be the main source of intelligence. At the Combined Headquarters there should be a similar Intelligence staff directing intelligence for the area as a whole. As this system is developed it will gradually turn into a security intelligence organisation and eventually, if the Civil Guard and Surete in particular can be amalgamated, will become part of the National Police Force. There can always be attached to it at any level an army intelligence officer to provide the army link.

29. Another important source of intelligence, though not always of immediate tactical importance, will be surrenders and captured documents. Surrenders should always be interrogated at the nearest District Headquarters in case they have any tactical intelligence which can be immediately exploited. They should then be returned to Province Headquarters, each of which should have a small interrogation centre where SEPs (Surrendered Enemy Personnel) can be interrogated on communist orders of battle, sources of supplies and other particulars. If of sufficient importance the SEP may need to be brought back for further interrogation at the Combined Corps Headquarters. Everything possible should be done to encourage surrenders and all SEPs, including any captures, should be well treated as they may become of great importance for propaganda purposes.

Information and Propaganda

30. A strong section must be established at the Corps Headquarters covering all fields of information and propaganda from the radio downwards. It is essential that a common line should be taken throughout the whole area on every subject. In the field at provincial level, however, mobile units are required (both boats and jeeps) in order that every hamlet can be visited as frequently as possible. In addition each hamlet should have a receiving set (as already supplied by Australia under the Colombo Plan). Greater use also needs to be made of leaflets to be dropped either by patrols or by aircraft and for this purpose the Combined Corps Headquarters should either have under its control, or should be able to call on, adequate printing resources. Voice aircraft would also be a tremendous asset particularly for exploiting successful action and any surrenders.

/Social

Social improvements

31. It may not be possible to introduce the necessary social improvements simultaneously with the emergency measures already enumerated, but they should follow as soon as possible particularly when an area becomes "white" with emphasis on improved schools and medical facilities. Much good work to this effect was already being done in the provinces visited. Such measures should, however, be undertaken in defended hamlets simultaneously with regrouping in order to demonstrate the advantages of such a measure. In defended hamlets it may also be desirable to install small generating sets capable of providing in the first instance perimeter and street lighting. The inhabitants should be informed that as soon as the communists have been eliminated these generating sets may then be used to provide house lighting in the hamlet.

Compensation, Rewards and Subsidies

32. Funds should be provided at provincial level to pay immediate compensation to the members or families of the Self-Defence Corps and any other innocent person who is wounded or killed by the communists. The present system is too slow and the amounts are inadequate. Funds should also be available for the payment of rewards to members of the Self-Defence Corps and any other person (not a member of the security forces) for information leading to the killing of communists and the capture of weapons. It is desirable to produce a set scale which should be uniform throughout the country. Subsidies may also be necessary in cases where houses are regrouped into defended hamlets. A sum of about Pn. 2,500 would not be unreasonable particularly if roofing material was also supplied free.

Summary of Material and Equipment Requirements

- 33. (a) Coastal and river patrol craft;
- (b) Wireless communications;
- (c) Better equipment for the Self-Defence Corps including carbines, grenade dischargers, uniforms, flare pistols (or rockets);
- (d) Helicopters;
- (e) Large quantities of barbed wire; (it is understood that the Army may have reasonable stocks but are not releasing them to the Self-Defence Corps for strategic hamlets. Chefs de Province are having to buy barbed wire for this purpose from provincial funds in the open market).
- (f) Mobile information units and small receiving sets;
- (g) Suitably packed medical supplies for defended and strategic hamlets;

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- (h) Roofing material - either corrugated iron, aluminium or asbestos (if regrouping is carried out on any scale this is bound to be a bottle neck and even supplies of nipah palm may not be available in the right places in sufficient quantity);
- (g) Tyres for present Civil Guard scout cars and their eventual replacement either by Ferrets or armour plated jeeps or land rovers; and
- ✓(j) Small generating sets and perimeter lighting for defended hamlets.

Results

34. The main results of establishing a framework as proposed should be:

- (a) protection for the population;
- (b) increased mobility for the security forces where required particularly the Army;
- (c) greater flexibility in the use of forces where required at any given time in the whole area;
- (d) with mobility and flexibility and improved communications there should also be greater economy of force;
- (e) all this will instil greater confidence both in the population and in the security forces;
- (f) this, in turn, will lead to better intelligence; and
- (g) better intelligence will result in more kills.

Protection, confidence, intelligence and kills should become a constantly expanding circuit.

Communist reaction

35. The communists will not be slow to react and will make a determined effort to prevent the framework being established particularly at the village and hamlet level. This requires that there should be careful judgement and timing in its establishment. As it grows, so the communists must concentrate larger forces in order to try to break it. That is the time for the security forces, and particularly the Army, to get them. Once the communists start to break they will attempt to withdraw, preferably over the frontier where they will be safe, but, if that is denied to them, then into the more inaccessible mangrove swamps in the coastal area where they can be steadily starved out and eliminated.

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Priority Areas

36. Even within the Delta itself these measures cannot all be carried out simultaneously in every area. First priority should be given to the provinces along the Mekong with the intention of clearing a wedge through the middle of the area along its easiest axis. The second priority should then be the Cambodian frontier areas, in fact regrouping should start there as soon as possible in order to take advantage of the damage caused by the floods. The main intention in this area, however, would be initially to prevent further infiltration and subsequently to deny the frontier as a safe refuge. The final aim should be to push the communists back into the mangrove swamps along the coast where they can then be starved out and eliminated.

Summary of Expected Achievements

37. (a) The first achievement should be a cleared wedge along the line of the Mekong, followed by
- (b) the declaration of "white" areas in the provinces concerned which will raise the morale of the whole country;
 - (c) the safeguarding of the rice crop;
 - (d) the release of troops from the Delta area for the more specific military operations North of Saigon and in the Highlands;
 - (e) the establishment of a solid security framework which it will be comparatively easy to maintain, and
 - (f) a model for operations in the remaining parts of the country, particularly in the area immediately north and east of Saigon and along the coastal plain.

(R. G. K. Thompson)

November 8, 1961.

British Advisory Mission,
Saigon.

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