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Date: JUN 04 2014

DOS
RETURNED TO DOD

(71112/62)

British Advisory Mission,
British Embassy,

SAIGON.

January 3, 1962.

DOS
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EMBASSY OF UNITED KINGDOM,
APRIL 9, 2014

DOS
REVIEW AUTHORITY: Richard Zorn,
Senior Reviewer

When I met you in Saigon in October you asked me to write to you at any time. I had then only been in Vietnam about a month and had had no opportunity of seeing things on the ground and was, therefore, able only to give you my first impressions which were inevitably biased by the "Saigon" outlook. I have since been able to travel around and I thought you might like to have my impressions now at the beginning of this crucial year in Vietnam.

2. The similarity with the problems which faced us in Malaya has been most striking. I have come across little which is new here but, of course, there is considerable variation both in form and in degree. For example, the frontier is far more complicated owing to its length and the proximity of outside communist support for the Vietcong.

3. There is no need for me to elaborate on the weaknesses of the Government or the strength of the Vietcong of which you are well aware. On the Government side, apart from the excellent Army which you have created, the greatest advantage seems to me to lie in the strength and cohesion of the village community derived from an earlier and traditional semi-autonomous form of administration. It is this inherent strength of the village community which we need to exploit because there is, at the same time, a fundamental weakness in the communist appeal to the villages on religious and economic grounds. Resistance to communism is bound to be high in any religious and agricultural community (there is an interesting comparison between Malay-Muslim rice growing areas in Malaya which were hardly penetrated by communism and the predominantly Chinese wage-earning villages which were heavily penetrated). This will also enable us to attack the communists at their weakest point which is supplies, particularly food, without which they cannot concentrate their forces for any length of time. At the present moment they seem to have little difficulty in obtaining their day to day requirements from those sections of the population under their control, but I can find no evidence of their building up hidden stock piles of food other than small dumps sufficient only for a specific operation. If that has not been done then I think they will become vulnerable later in this respect.

/s/

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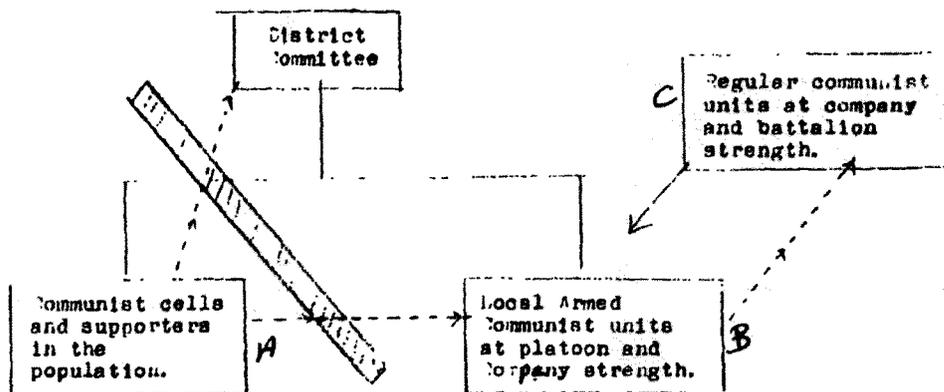
4. Apart from the Army, I have been more impressed with the villages and the potentiality of the Self-Defence Corps than with anything else and I wish to stress the point that on the Government side the villages are their main strength and on the communist side their main weakness. In fact, I would go so far as to say that but for the resistance to communism in the villages the war would already have been lost. This raises the vital question of what is the village support for the present Government. It is very difficult indeed to assess and of course it varies from Province to Province. I have seen a communist claim that they have 60% support and that when they have 90% they will win. My own personal feeling is, as I have suggested above, that the very great majority would be anti-communist if they could be and would support the Government if given a lead. Without attempting to put precise figures on it I would say that only a very small percent are pro-communist, a much larger percent are anti-communist and about half will go either way depending on the influences and pressures which are brought to bear on them. It is this half for which we are now fighting. I suspect that the communists already prematurely regard this half as theirs because the communist pressures at the present time are the more effective.

5. To me, therefore, the basic principle in this campaign must be to control, protect and win the population in the rural areas. In order to do this, it is essential to establish a solid security framework which will protect the population. The framework should be based on defended and strategic hamlets and villages and depend for armed support mainly on the Civil Guard and Self-Defence Corps. The establishment of the Self-Defence Corps is one of the major props of the framework but it cannot safely be done until adequate support from the Civil Guard and the Army can be provided. I am quite sure that we must pin our faith on the Self-Defence Corps and on what it will achieve by way of local protection and intelligence. The intelligence organization and a good communications network are all part of the security framework. Only when the population is protected can a steady flow of good intelligence be expected. Only when there is good intelligence can the armed units of the Vietcong be eliminated. Initially, therefore the role of the Army should be to keep the regular units of the Vietcong occupied and off balance so that the security framework can be established and consolidated in the populated areas. If the Army at this stage merely concentrates on trying to eliminate these regular units by sweeps and other operations without paying any attention to the establishment of the security framework as the first objective, they will not inflict any damage which the Vietcong cannot rapidly make good (by both local recruitment and further infiltration).

6. When I visited Washington in September General Lemnitzer said to me that where there was a problem there must be a law. At that time I could not give it to him because I did not know the manner and method in which the Vietcong were operating. Their organization here is exactly the same as it was in Malaya and I am convinced that the same law will apply here. This

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can best be shown in diagrammatic form using the district as an example:



(Note: C may or may not be stationed in every District but is moved in to reinforce B for specific operations.)

7. The communist organization within the population at A is responsible (with the help of the armed units at B and C outside the population) for expanding communist control over the population under the direction of the District Committee (also outside the population and normally located with one of the platoons at B). The organization at A is also responsible for providing the District Committee and the armed units at B and C with food, other supplies, recruits and intelligence. This traffic runs from A to B and thence to C (as shown by the dotted lines). Our initial aim, therefore, should be to cut this traffic at the red line and steadily to wipe out all the communist supporters in the population at A. That is the first task of the security framework and, while this is being done, it should be the task of the Army to keep B and C occupied and off balance so that they cannot concentrate to prevent the framework being established. The Civil Guard and self-defence corps provide the close protection for the population. When A is almost eliminated and the traffic to B and C begins to stop, B and C are then isolated from the population and the red line becomes, at that stage, a barrier between B and C and the population. They are forced to smash it in order to exist. This is the time when the Government forces have the initiative and offensive patrols and ambushes pay off. The red line then becomes the killing ground for members of B and C.

8. It took us some time in Malaya to learn this lesson.

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the time that we were chasing B, A and consequently B got larger and larger, with the result that any damage inflicted on B could rapidly be made good. As soon as we changed our tactics and concentrated our attention (in the first instance the intelligence effort) on traffic over the red line, we started to win.

9. The establishment of the framework is a slow, methodical, systematic process. It should be immediately followed by social and economic improvements which make an impact at village level and complete the objective of winning over the population. The framework cannot be started everywhere at once - it would be quite beyond the administrative resources of the country to do it - and I have suggested the Delta as the best starting point, not only because of its strategic importance (in population and rice and in its proximity to the capital), but also because it is likely to be the easier area, particularly the populated areas in the delta of the Mekong itself. It is the area which could show, without additional troops, the quickest returns. You may have heard that I produced a general outline plan for this area which, in view of the threat to Hanoi from the north and as a result of discussions with General Hoang and his staff, I am now intending to take in the populated areas of the Provinces round Saigon itself. (These have been more heavily penetrated by the Vietcong than those in the Mekong Delta. For example, according to the Province Chief, out of 56 villages in Binh Duong Province just north of Saigon only 10, where strategic hamlets have been established, are controlled by the Government. I attach a small map showing in very rough outline the boundary of the first priority area. It would be the intention after that to spread gradually southwards, west to the Cambodian border and then north to take in the War Zone D provinces in the remainder of the III Corps area.

10. This emphasis on the populated area of the Delta as a first priority does not mean that I am advocating inactivity in all the other areas. The area north of Saigon centered on War Zone D is now presenting a potentially dangerous threat to the capital. While we are going ahead with the establishment of the framework in the populated area of the Delta, I fully agree that there is need for a military operation in the War Zone D area; but I suggest that it should have the limited objective of preventing the threat from developing unharassed. A major operation, which took away troops from the populated area of the Delta, might prejudice the establishment of the framework there and I do not think that such an operation would, at this stage, achieve any lasting results. The enemy are too well supplied and informed, and therefore elusive, and any success achieved against them would only be temporary. If we attempted to establish the framework in that area first and consolidate it, we would, I think, be biting off more than we can chew at this stage. It is difficult terrain with large areas of isolated rubber estates and the population has been heavily penetrated by the communists. Rubber estates particularly pose a different and difficult security problem and the field areas of operations and protection

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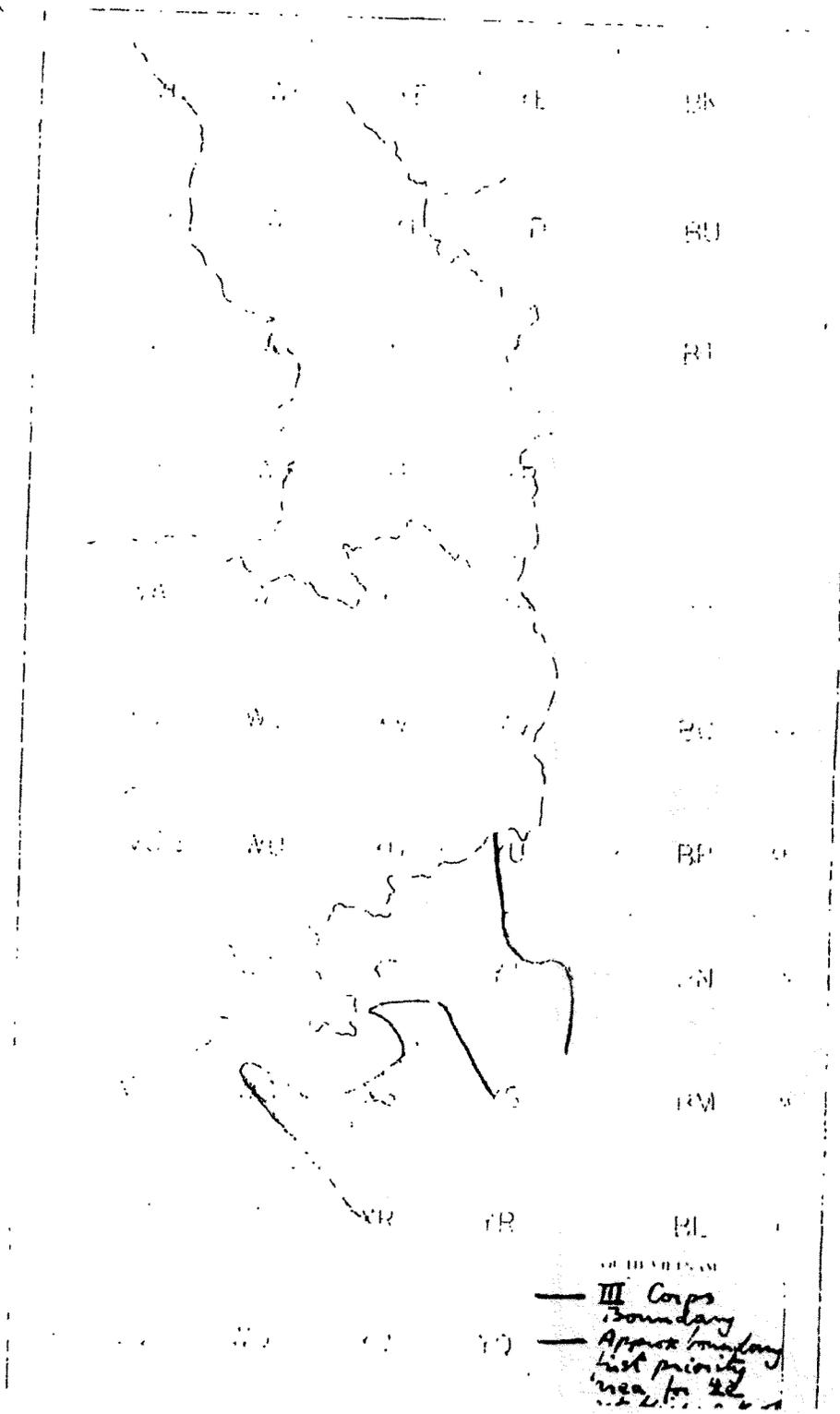
will be a very large number of unemployed. This, in turn, means that, counting dependants, perhaps a quarter of a million people will somehow have to be supported and fed. To start the framework in this area, therefore, would tie up indefinitely far too many troops, which cannot be made available until we have been successful in the Delta first.

11. With regard to the Highlands and Central Vietnam, we cannot do more than contain the Vietcong for the time being. I think we are all here agreed on the need for a more enlightened Montagnard policy, for the establishment of Montagnard units as a protective and intelligence screen on the frontier, and for deep jungle operations by specially trained Ranger Companies or other units in order to deny freedom of movement to the communists in the mountain areas. The Provinces which may present the greatest difficulty are the coastal provinces of Quang Nam right down to Binh Thuan, all of which have narrow, heavily-populated strips along the coast, where it will be difficult to establish the security framework in sufficient depth between the mountain areas and the sea.

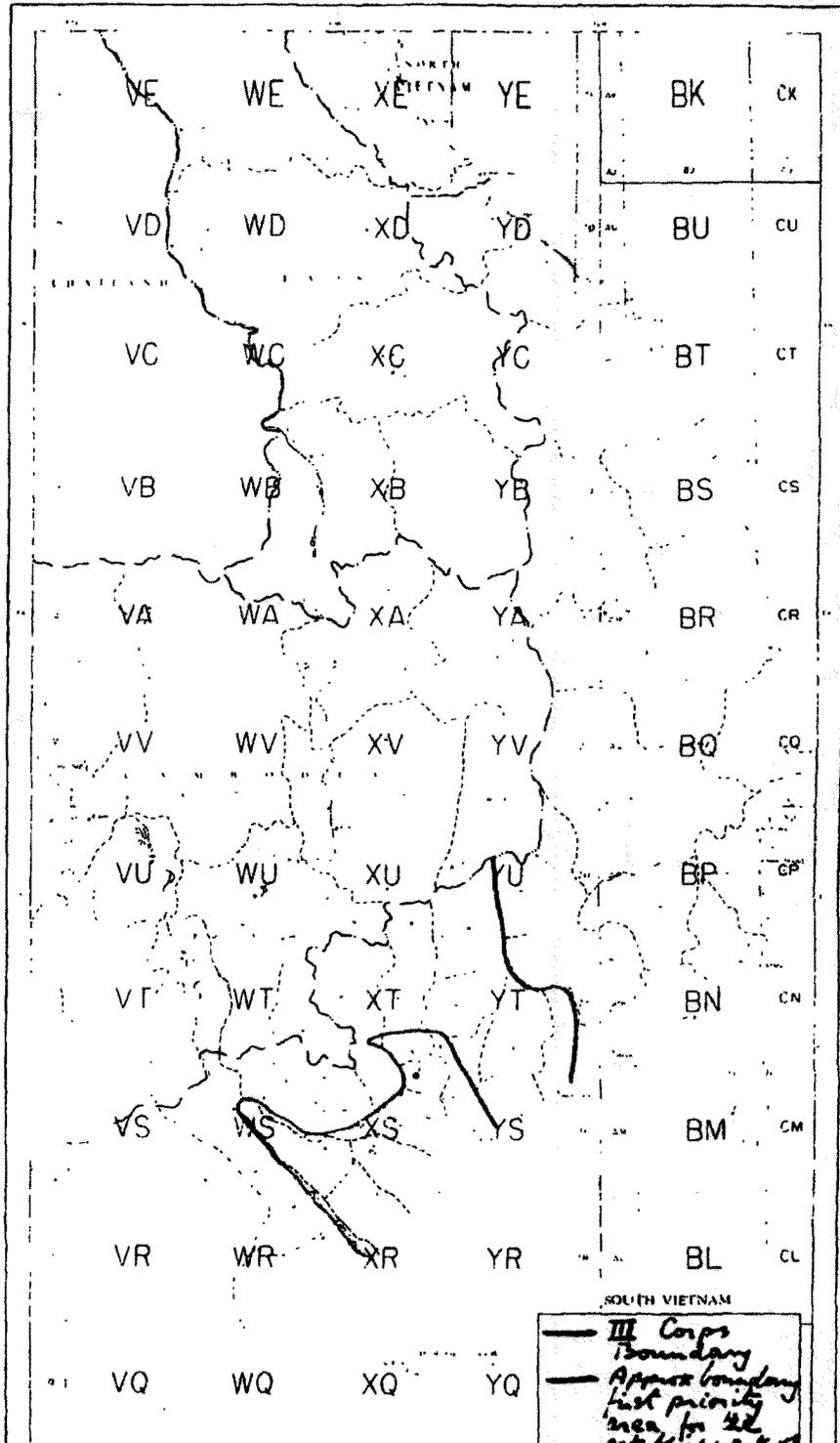
12. I have given you my views in some detail and I hope you may find them of assistance. The whole problem is a great challenge but, with the aid which you are now providing, I do not regard the position as by any means hopeless. The greatest difficulty will be to get the Vietnamese to implement any plan effectively and with determination owing to the shortcomings of their administration. I have, however, managed to establish good relations with President Diem and will do my best to put across what has to be done. As you can see I am not optimistic with regard to any immediate or spectacular results. In fact I am advocating a policy which is slow, methodical and apparently unimpressive in its initial stages. But I consider that we must do about it in this way and that, if we attempt any shortcuts or go only for military successes which do not have lasting results, we are merely wasting time which we do not have.

13. I appreciate that what I am advocating is not easy for you because, with increased aid, your public will be expecting quick and even dramatic results but, if we look to the final result, a complete victory here, ostensibly by the Vietnamese themselves, would be such a smack in the eye for communism that it would have profound and far reaching effects. The final dividend could be far greater than the aid.

14. I am, of course, sending a copy of this letter to your Embassy here and to General McFar.



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