

25 November 1964

Option A Plus

"More of the same" - Option A - in Vietnam will not work. Before moving to the dangerous option of military attack on North Vietnam, however, we must consider whether other options exist within South Vietnam. This requires a consideration of what "the same" has been and how it might be transformed to "different".

While it is too early to assess the prospects that the present GVN leadership can hold together, gain popular support and energize the national administration to arrest or reverse the deteriorating military trend, there are several factors on the positive side which should be given due weight. ARVN with strong MACV support has achieved a military stalemate, compelling the Viet Cong to remain a guerrilla force. The long-term economic effort in Vietnam has made the population aware that a better life would be offered by a free than by a Communist victory. The equally long-term training and development of a new generation of American rather than French trained military and civilian leaders is beginning to show results. Lastly the Vietnamese are fighting for their own independence, not for a colonial power. It cannot thus be said that the situation is hopeless. It can be said that "the same" must be replaced by "different".

The elements of a "different" approach might be:

- a) Recognize the division of responsibility for counterinsurgency and press

the civilian side. For good reasons in the past our major emphasis has been on the military side. In this "people's war" more emphasis must be placed on the civilian approach, expressed in a territorial and political effort. The civil power must become the central authority, with both civil and pacification responsibilities, and its command structure, as in Malaya, follow the governmental rather than the military chain. The military should continue to provide military support thereto and continue operations against the Viet Cong main forces and base areas. The economic effort now underway must be supplemented by intensive efforts to develop a political purpose and structure, engaging and organizing the maximum number of individual Vietnamese citizens in their own defense and development.

b) Decentralize the pacification program to its territorial and local bases. The province chief must be considered the key figure in the program, with the national government and military in support. The weak central government should be supplemented through American channels in order to provide maximum support for any indications of local willingness to resist the Viet Cong, which are most apt to arise for local motives. As provincial strength grows, the limited importance of the Saigon governmental machinery to the pacification program will become obvious, and the Saigon political situation may fall into more appropriate focus.

c) Appoint an American civilian "Chief of Operations" with full authority over all American civilian agencies engaged in the pacification program. This

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officer would be under the Ambassador and DCM, but have no diplomatic or administrative responsibilities. He would be co-equal to COMUSMACV and have a personal staff for planning, review and control of American civilian pacification operations. He should have direct authority also over key American civilian advisors to the government e.g. ministerial advisors, regional civilian advisors, etc.

d) Transfer the Regional and Popular forces from the Ministry of National Defense to the Ministry of Interior for support, and to province chiefs for operational control. ARVN would retain its own chain of command for ARVN operations with the mission of providing support to province chiefs' pacification plans, reenforcement on request in the case of strong Viet Cong attack and offensive operations against Viet Cong main forces and base areas.

e) The Strategic Hamlet program, or any euphemism thereof, should be re-launched as the primary pacification tactic, operating on the oil spot principle as presently contemplated. The "clear-secure-develop" sequence which depends on military initiative should be replaced by a "defend-probe-develop-defend" sequence placing main reliance on population engagement, local auxiliaries, irregulars and police forces, with military reenforcement as needed. The target would be the population, not the Viet Cong.

f) Initiate and support a variety of non-government popular political, economic and social organizations, with emphasis on the rural areas, to serve

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as vehicles to attract and organize the population through local leadership.

While this "different" Option A Plus is not necessarily exclusive of Options B and C, it would offer an alternative to them.

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