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**THE VIETNAMESE "STRATEGIC HAMLETS":
A PRELIMINARY REPORT (U)**

John C. Donnell and Gerald C. Hickey

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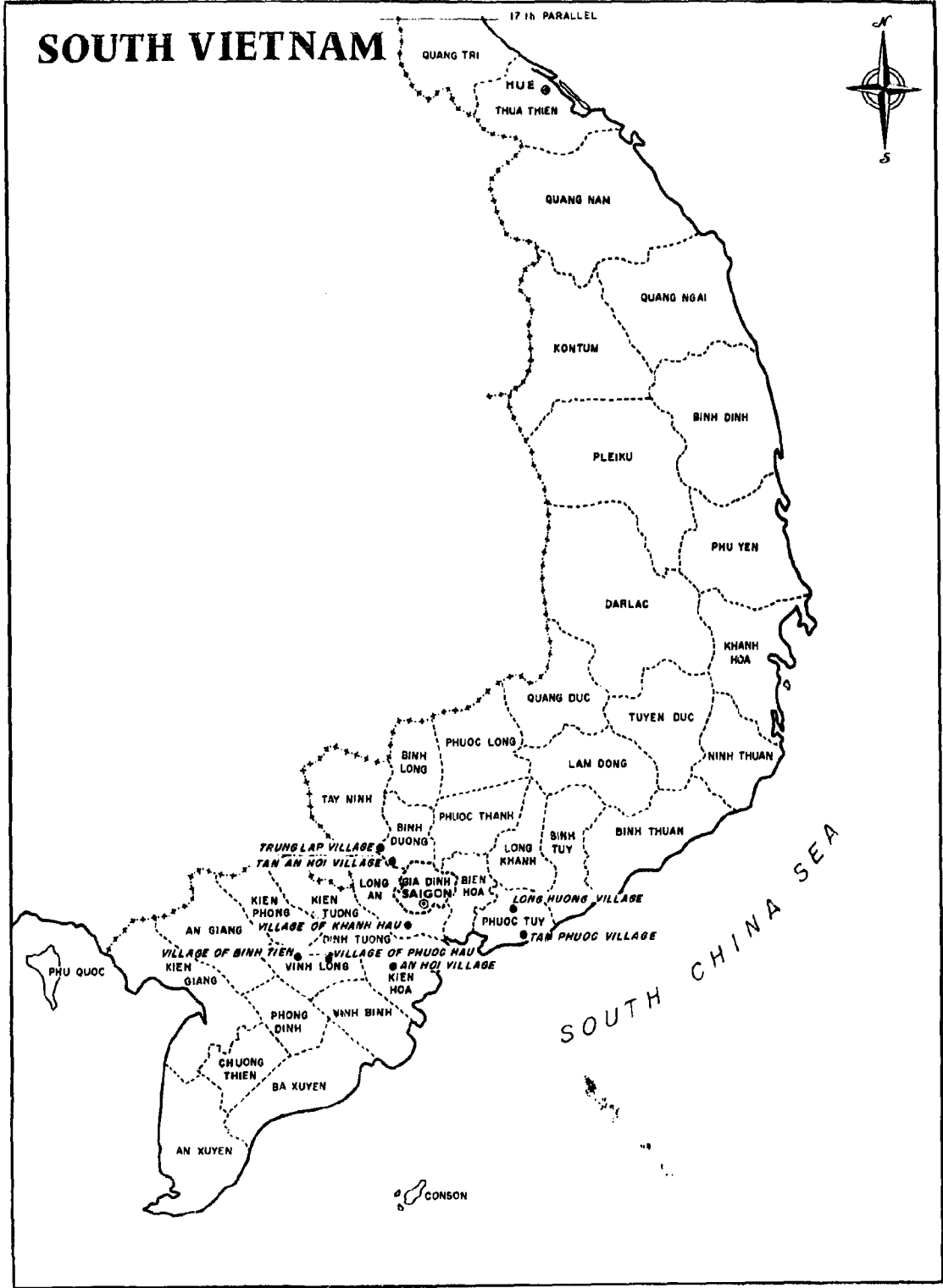
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A PRELIMINARY REPORT (U) 15
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PREFACE

The following Memorandum is a preliminary report on a three month field-research trip to Vietnam by two consultants of RAND's Social Science Department. From January through April of 1962 Mr. John C. Donnell and Dr. Gerald C. Hickey studied certain aspects of the "strategic hamlet" program in South Vietnam, centering their attention on villages near Saigon and in several nearby provinces, where the program is most heavily concentrated. Because of time limitations the authors were able to observe only a small sample of villages. The observations included here were made during a period when the program was in its evolutionary stage. This Memorandum does not take into account any modifications made in the program since April nor the official government justifications for its implementing actions. No attempt was made to survey the entire program or to make an over-all evaluation of it.

The authors have concerned themselves only with the social, economic, and certain political aspects of the strategic hamlet program as seen from the peasants' point of view. In considering these aspects, they have tended to emphasize areas where improvement could be made. They have not investigated the military worth of the program,

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and nothing they say about weaknesses of implementation should be interpreted as a criticism of the program as a military device or of its over-all potential value.

The trip and its objectives were suggested and sponsored by the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) as part of that agency's research Project AGILE. In Vietnam, the combat development and testing center of the Vietnamese armed forces under Col. Bui Quang Trach, ARVN, and the OSD/ARPA Research and Development Field Unit, Vietnam, under Col. William P. Brooks, U.S. Army, provided additional support and guidance to the authors.

Mr. Donnell, who has recently joined the faculty of Dartmouth College, spent several years in Vietnam during the 1950's on behalf of the State Department and USIS, and returned there for six months in 1961 as a Ford Foundation fellow. In the present study, he has been primarily concerned with the physical characteristics and the social and administrative features of the strategic hamlets.

Dr. Hickey is a research associate and lecturer in the Southeast Asia Studies Program and the Department of Anthropology of Yale University. Formerly a research associate of the Michigan State University Vietnam Advisory Group, he also spent a number of years in South Vietnam, studying

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an agricultural village in the Mekong delta region. His primary contribution to the present Memorandum is an economic analysis of the hamlets and their attendant problems.

More detailed observations and the general conclusions of Donnell and Hickey will be combined in a comprehensive Memorandum now in preparation. Because of the timeliness of the subject, however, and the strong official interest in this research project, the present preliminary report has been prepared. Readers will receive the complete report as soon as it is available, and are asked to bear in mind the tentative character and, in some respects, limited scope of this short paper.

No views or conclusions contained in this Memorandum should be interpreted as representing the official opinion or policy of ARPA.

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SUMMARY

The authors examined the "strategic hamlet" program in the three provinces around Saigon in which "Operation Sunrise" now is underway (Binh Duong, Tay Ninh and Phuoc Tuy) as well as in Kien Hoa and Vinh Long.

They found three major types of strategic hamlets in South Vietnam, each type having a certain degree of fortification. The administrative and social reorganization pattern is nearly identical in all three. The most costly and extensive construction is being carried out on the most accelerated time schedule in the Operation Sunrise region, particularly in the pilot project area of Cu-Chi District, Binh Duong, which, unfortunately, is the poorest agricultural region of the three. Here the peasants are paying for the project in the form of obligatory communal labor on digging and construction, through the consequently reduced yield of secondary crops, by the contribution of local materials including bamboo, and by payments for purchase of concrete fence posts and barbed wire. They also have to sacrifice the land put out of cultivation by earthworks.

The rapid pace of the strategic hamlet program in the Operation Sunrise region, with its protracted forced-labor

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schedules and generally high cost, has come closer to arousing peasant dissatisfaction over the program here than elsewhere. Compulsory regrouping within hamlet perimeters also has caused dissatisfaction, but regrouping in most hamlets affects only a minor percentage of the residents. (This report does not cover the large-scale forcible regrouping operations which began in Ben-Cat District of Binh Duong in late March.)

The Vietnamese government must act quickly to implement the administrative and economic programs it has promised the farmers if it is to convince them that its arguments for their participation in the program were made in good faith and if it is to prevent their suffering an unusually bad financial year as a consequence of their participation. The concluding section of the Memorandum lists some of the authors' specific suggestions for increasing the effectiveness of the strategic hamlet program and coping with the rural problems related to it.

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I. THE STRATEGIC HAMLET PROGRAM

In order to examine a cross section of the "strategic hamlet" program, the authors visited villages in several regions of South Vietnam including villages in Binh Duong province northwest of Saigon, in Phuoc Tuy province on the South China Sea east of Saigon, and in the Mekong River delta provinces of Vinh Long, Kien Hoa, and Long An. (These villages are identified on the map at page

The "strategic hamlet" is a key concept in the rural pacification program known as "Operation Sunrise". Thus far, the program has been concentrated in three provinces around Saigon but it will ultimately extend to ten provinces in the Eastern Region. Cu-Chi District, which had been more or less under Vietminh control since 1945 or earlier, was selected as the pilot area in this operation.

Planning and cadre training for Operation Sunrise began in August 1961 and actual construction of strategic hamlets in the provinces of Binh Duong, Tay Ninh, and Phuoc Tuy followed. The operation is under the command of Brigadier General Van Thanh Cao, who also is Government Delegate for the Eastern Region. General Cao's operational organization is the Directorate-General for Rural Reconstruction, in the Department of Rural Affairs. Rural Reconstruction

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cadres have included volunteers from public services such as Civic Action, Information, Youth, Agricultural Credit, and Public Health, but the Civic Action Department retains a leading role on the Rural Reconstruction cadre teams in the hamlets.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM AND ITS REGIONAL VARIATIONS

The objective of the "strategic hamlet" program is to consolidate governmental authority in pacified areas through a defense system and administrative reorganization at the hamlet level.¹ In each hamlet, the military basis of the system comprises a Self-Defense Corps (SDC) unit that may number anywhere from five to twelve men, an auxiliary warning and/or guard force composed of members of the Republican Youth, and more or less extensive fortifications. In addition, the program involves the political and social organization of the inhabitants in a way that permits close

¹As used here, the term "hamlet" reflects a variety of local usages. These are described in Lloyd W. Woodruff's Local Administration in Viet-Nam: The number of Local Units, Michigan State University Advisory Group, National Institute of Administration, Republic of Viet-Nam, Saigon, November 1, 1960. In general, however, the term designates a geographical and administrative sub-unit of a village. According to Woodruff, there are 16,398 hamlets in Vietnam (as compared with more than 3,000 villages). The hamlets range in population from four persons to almost 17,000. Fifty per cent of them have less than 500 inhabitants and 77 have more than 5,000.

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surveillance of their political activities, of their social participation in such government-controlled mass movements as the Republican Youth, and of their contribution to labor projects for community development. Once these programs are established, the system is further designed to serve as a basis for wider programs of rural economic reconstruction, including agricultural credit and extension services.

At one time, the Vietnamese government announced a 1962 goal of at least one completed strategic hamlet in each village. This would serve as a model for the eventual conversion of the rest of the hamlets. A New York Times report of May, 1962, says the current goal is to establish 12,000 strategic hamlets throughout the country in six months, that is, to convert about three-quarters of the total number of hamlets.

The national government's role as director of the program was not explicitly revealed during the first few months, although it was generally known that the impetus came from "the presidency." The real driving force behind the program has been Ngo Dinh Nhu, the President's brother and political adviser, but Nhu has not wanted this announced publicly. The first formal program organization,

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announced in early February, established a directing committee of Cabinet members. The Minister of the Interior became Secretary-General, but no chairman was named because Nhu, who exercises this authority in practice, did not wish to have his position formalized. Nhu seems to have consulted the committee seldom and to have shared his policy-making power with it even less frequently.

As regards the degree of their physical fortification, we were able to distinguish three main types of strategic hamlets in South Vietnam.² (All three types are alike, however, in the organizational pattern of their social, administrative, and security systems, as will shortly be explained in more detail.)

The first type is the heavily fortified strategic hamlet to be found in the "Operation Sunrise" area around Saigon. In these strategic hamlets, at least the main residential areas of a single hamlet, or group of hamlets, are largely or entirely surrounded by extensive earthworks. These include a ditch about 5 feet deep and 10 feet wide

²Although we did not visit any strategic hamlets in Central Vietnam during our trip, it is safe to say that they probably are less disruptive of traditional settlement patterns and economic routines than those in the South, because hamlets in the Center are characteristically more compact and their populations less dispersed, owing to their long-standing defense problems.

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at the top, and a rampart of corresponding dimensions, both studded with bamboo spears that project about 1-1/2 feet. In addition, outside the ditch they usually have a fence of cut bamboo or wooden pickets, though occasionally there will be a barbed-wire fence strung between concrete posts instead. (In some cases the bamboo fence obstructs the fields of fire from the hamlet.) In certain hamlets, thorn hedges are planted alongside the bamboo or picket fence.

Within or at the edge of the hamlet, there may be a military post of concrete surrounded by another set of ditch, wall, and barbed-wire fortifications. Until recently, the hamlet containing the village headquarters was often the only one to have such a fort and its own Self-Defense Corps unit, but a major objective of the program is to extend this type of protection to the other constituent hamlets of the village as well.

Where necessary, roads within the territory of the hamlet are built or widened to improve both defense and economic capabilities. Nonmilitary construction, in varying degrees, is devoted to small bridges, schools, administrative offices, assembly halls, youth movement quarters, and the like.

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In the second type of strategic hamlet, which we found in Vinh Long Province, there is a military post, or "support point", with the earthworks limited to that post. These hamlets are divided into "defensive blocks", which comprise most of the residential areas and rely for their static defense mainly on some bamboo spears embedded in the ground, thorn hedges, portable steel-spike boards, and a few hand grenades planted as land mines. The spike boards and grenades are moved each night to confuse local Viet Cong agents.

In Kien Hoa, and probably in other provinces as well, there is a third kind of strategic hamlet, in which fortifications and defensive devices are usually limited to the military post. In one area of Kien Hoa, however, we saw the regular fortification plans for strategic hamlets being adapted to local conditions: in a hamlet bordered on three sides by a stream and canals, a wall and a ditch were being constructed outside the remaining side, and a "strategic road" was being cut through the coconut palms at the water's edge to permit easier patrolling. The provincial chief, Lieutenant Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao, believes that even for his comparatively wealthy province the fortification of all hamlets with ditches and walls is excessively expensive,

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and he intends to fortify only those that have suffered frequent attacks from the Viet Cong and are likely to be attacked again. (In Kien Hoa the Viet Cong often attack in greater strength than in other provinces, and the Colonel apparently believes these larger units would not be so readily deterred by the fortifications of the strategic hamlets.)

Under the program, the small proportion of farmers living in scattered locations relatively isolated from the bulk of the population are usually regrouped within the perimeter of the strategic hamlet. They are given a small plot of land on which to re-erect their houses, but they continue to work their own fields outside the perimeter, which are usually only a kilometer or so from the hamlet. In Vinh Long, on the other hand, some families have deliberately been left in these outlying areas in order to serve as intelligence outposts to report on Viet Cong movements.

In most strategic hamlets only a small percentage of the population is regrouped. In Xom Hue Hamlet, Tan An Hoi Village, for example, only ten families out of a population of 1,768 have been moved. However, regrouping may be much more extensive in such insecure zones as the Ben-Cat District, where entire hamlets are being relocated.

The reorganization of a hamlet's social and administrative

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organs is regarded by all officials as at least as important as the construction of physical defense facilities. In the first stage of this effort, a Rural Reconstruction Team, with a military unit to protect it, visits the village for anywhere from ten days to more than a month. These cadres -- ten to twenty men from such services as Civic Action, Information, Youth, Security, Agricultural Credit, and Public Health -- explain the objectives of the strategic hamlet program, organize the communal labor schedules, try to learn about families with pro-Viet Cong sentiments who should be regrouped near a military post for easier surveillance, and set about rehabilitating the hamlet's social and administrative organs.

They begin by taking a new census, which often prompts some pro-Communist individuals to flee the hamlet. The "combined-family mutual assistance system" which began in 1956, and which is based on units or "cells" of five families, is being reorganized (or organized for the first time), with the election, or more often the appointment, of unit chiefs. Similarly, a new hamlet chief is either designated by the district chief or elected by all adult voters in the hamlet a few weeks after the inauguration of the strategic hamlet project. Instead of being in sole charge of

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the entire hamlet administration, as was formerly the case, he is now given three assistants (one for economic and social affairs, another for administration and political affairs, and a third for youth and security), and the four men form the "hamlet management board" (ban tri-su ap), or council.

In Kien Hoa, two other bodies are being created or reactivated: the Council of Elders (Hoi-Dong Ky-Lao at the village level), which may have from twenty to two hundred members, including women, and the Council of Patrons (Ban Bao-Tro at both village and hamlet levels), comprising relatively wealthy and influential men and women who furnish valuable financial and moral support to the community development programs. The Council of Elders (which actually includes some influential younger men) has some authority to consult with the village and hamlet councils and to criticize their actions. Thus, it provides an added measure of response to local needs, a link with Vietnamese traditional institutions, and, very possibly, a degree of prestige that the modern village councils often lack.

One of the first efforts of the Rural Reconstruction Team is to organize hamlet units of the Republican Youth

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Movement (Thanh-Nien Cong-Hoa), whose members receive some political and military training and presently become part of the warning and guard systems. (Although, theoretically, the age range in the Republican Youth is 18 to 35, in practice the upper age limit is often as high as 45 or 50 years.) The training of these units appears to be mostly military in some areas, and predominantly political in others. Women are expected to join the men in nonmilitary activities, most of which are centered in the community development labor program and in "political" or civic training. Although local programs vary greatly, many units seem to be receiving no more than about one or two hours of political training, and as much again of military training, per week. Some rather ineffectual military drill exercises we observed consisted of practicing the facings, doing the manual of arms with a 5-foot bamboo staff, and reading slogans in unison.

In compliance with a Presidential Circular of December 1960, a Republican Youth member has been elected to every village council in all areas under government control where this had not already been done earlier. In some areas, all members of the Republican Youth are eligible to vote; in others, only the leaders of the toan (a unit of twelve

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members). It is difficult to determine just how much enthusiasm has been generated by this small concession to the idea of broader political participation at the village level. With certain exceptions, the elections seem to have been conducted in a routine way and with only moderate popular interest in them.

MAJOR PROBLEMS

1. In Binh Duong and the other provinces around Saigon, the economically poorest of the three geographical areas visited, farmers are obliged to contribute to the construction of the most elaborate type of strategic hamlet at a high cost. This contribution includes obligatory communal labor, the use of local resources (such as bamboo and other woods), cash for the purchase of such materials as barbed wire and concrete for fence posts, and the sacrifice of paddy land to the construction of earthworks. In Xom Hue Hamlet (Tan An Hoi Village), for example, farmers detailed to compulsory projects worked from 45 to 90 days between mid-December and mid-March, with only a five-day break for the New Year in February. In late March they were still doing communal labor, though on a reduced schedule. The district chief maintains that their families could produce enough spare manpower to tend to the crops adequately during

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that period. But the farmers themselves talk about the drastic reduction of the tobacco crop this year (it will be about one-tenth the normal yield) as a "defeat", which they attribute mainly to their heavy communal labor schedules, even though they grant that other factors are partly responsible. Furthermore, they have had to contribute to the fortifications all of their marketable bamboo -- their "cushion" secondary crop -- and it will require three years for a new crop to mature. These adverse economic developments have occurred despite the fact that the program in the area affected by Operation Sunrise is being carried out on a time schedule calculated not to interfere with the cultivation of the primary crop, paddy rice, as did some projects in the earlier agrovillage construction program.

It should be noted here that one bad crop year can put a Vietnamese farmer in debt for several years afterward because he tends to live on a very narrow subsistence margin. This is particularly true of the Cu-Chi District and much of the Operation Sunrise region, a comparatively poor, economically "transitional" area between the Mekong Delta and the Central Highlands.

2. Another cause of discontent has been that, until recently, villagers working in the program and assigned to

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distant hamlets were not paid even for the cost of their food while away from home. In Xom Chua Hamlet of Tan An Hoi Village, for example, parties of 30 to 150 persons were sent out five times, for one and two days at a time, to work in hamlets as much as 100 km. away. The district chief and two village chiefs maintained that each man had been given ten piastres per day and a lunch, but the farmers, when interviewed alone, denied having received payment in either cash or food. When we revisited the area in late March, we were told that an allowance of five piastres a day had been introduced "only recently."

3. There is no principle of reciprocity in operation. The strategic hamlets in Tan An Hoi Village (the site of the district headquarters) were built with the aid of villagers from Trung Lap and other villages, who neither received similar help in return nor were paid for their labor (although the Trung Lap village chief alleged that they had been). The Cu-Chi district chief's rationale is (a) that all the people in his district have a common interest in protecting the seat of the district administration and a duty to do so, and (b) that the strategic hamlets around the district seat will serve as a model for all the other hamlets. Here again, the work method is reminiscent of

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the inequitable features of the agrovillage program.

4. Families that were either forced to resettle within the strategic hamlet defense perimeter or chose to do so voluntarily have been promised subsidies but have not received them. Again, the Cu-Chi district chief claimed to have paid 1,000 piastres (about \$14) to each resettled family and to have made free labor available to it for the re-assembling of its house, but the farmers themselves denied having received any such payments. On our last visit, in late March, the district chief told us that he would "henceforth" pay 500 piastres (!) so each resettled family and that resettlement in his district would shortly be undertaken on a much larger scale, including the relocation of four hundred families in Thai-My Village alone.

5. Corvee labor, although a traditional feature in Vietnam, has never been used for extensive periods or for projects far from the home hamlet. Moreover, in at least that part of Vietnam that was once the colony of Cochinchina, the demand for corvee labor is associated with the hated French administration, and the peasants may not take kindly to having it issue from "their own" government. The fact that the government of North Vietnam also has a communal labor program does not lessen this resentment.

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II. AN EVALUATION OF THE STRATEGIC HAMLET PROGRAM

In the present war, the Vietnamese peasant is likely to support the side that has control of the area in which he lives, and he is more favorably disposed to the side which offers him the possibility of a better life. The strategic hamlet program has the initial advantage of extending government control to areas previously considered insecure. In doing so it affords an opportunity for the Vietnamese government to organize, at the hamlet and village level, projects that are urgently needed and that would demonstrate the government's concern for the villager and his problems. The need for such action is particularly evident in the Eastern Region, the Operation Sunrise area, where there is some resentment among the rural citizens over the amount of communal labor and materials that they have had to contribute "voluntarily" to the strategic hamlet program. Here and elsewhere, some of those who have been forcibly regrouped in new settlements are dissatisfied. (As noted above, in many hamlets the percentage of people forcibly regrouped is small, and most families that move inside the perimeter do so voluntarily.) In the Operation Sunrise region, in particular, farmers were unwilling to express enthusiasm for the program and appeared

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to harbor strong doubts that the sacrifices of labor and materials imposed on them could yield any commensurate satisfaction.

A certain degree of discontent is unavoidable in the developmental stage of such a project. This discontent, however, need not pose a serious political problem for the government so long as the regrouping of people and the construction of strategic hamlets are organized efficiently, and provided the Vietnamese government follows through on its assurances that it will re-establish and expand regular administrative services and economic reconstruction projects in these rural areas. The U.S. Operations Mission in Vietnam has drawn up a list of thirty-six such services which USOM is prepared to help the government put into operation.

Vietnamese farmers, who have lived in a state of insecurity for several years, tend to take a short-range view of the future, as is illustrated by the farmers of Xom Hue Hamlet who look upon their reduced tobacco crop in a single year as a "defeat". These farmers are the backbone of the village warning and auxiliary guard systems. In our opinion, they will participate in these security activities willingly and effectively only if, in the

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very near future, they see evidence that the strategic hamlet to which they have made such heavy contributions in time, materials, land, and reduced secondary crop yields is capable of improving their economic, social, and political welfare beyond the narrower aspect of the greater physical security it offers them.

Some Vietnamese and American officials would not agree with this view. They say, or imply in their statements, that the rural population is basically hostile to the Viet Cong, and that it requires no more than the hamlet fortifications themselves, together with the protection offered by the regular military forces that support such pacification programs to make the people grateful for these islands of security and turn them into solid supporters of the Vietnamese government. Ngo Dinh Nhu, in an interview with one of the authors in August 1961, blamed virtually all political unrest in Vietnam on Communist agitation and added that "the people never march against their government unless they are instigated to do so by Communist terrorism." An obvious corollary of this view is the belief that the rural population, in order to be kept loyal to the government, need only be protected from contact with Viet Cong agitators and terrorists, and that the strategic

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hamlet is the means to that end.

Yet even the Cu-Chi district chief admitted that, while only a very small number of his people, perhaps no more than 4 per cent, were definitely pro-Viet Cong, some 60 to 70 per cent had divided political loyalties and were capable of occasional collaboration with the enemy. The strategic hamlets are performing an obvious service for those farmers who previously felt threatened or bothered by Viet Cong terrorism, nocturnal propaganda lectures, or tax collections. But to villagers who have none of these complaints, either because they have been fortunate enough not to suffer from terrorism or because they are indifferent or hostile to the national government and thus willing to tolerate or even support local Viet Cong activities, the strategic hamlet presents no visible advantages and may indeed, in view of the hardships and sacrifices it entails, appear to them as having distinct disadvantages.

This suggests the usefulness of acquiring much more specific information than is now available on the rural population's attitudes toward the Viet Cong and the national government. We were able to obtain only fragmentary insights into those attitudes, as the subject matter involved is extremely sensitive and in interviews with the citizens

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must be approached by time-consuming indirection. It is safe to say, however, that people's attitudes differ a good deal from one village or one region to another, depending on a variety of factors: the effectiveness of government administration in the particular area in the past; the treatment of the local people at the hands of government officials and military personnel (that is, whether or not the citizens feel exploited); the kind of activities the Viet Cong have been conducting in a given place; and whether the communists, in their relations with the local population, have leaned more toward the carrot or toward the stick approach. The need for research that will yield more precise information is being recognized. For example, the Special Projects Section of the U.S. Information Service in Saigon plans to conduct a series of depth interviews with captured and surrendered Viet Cong personnel, once the Vietnamese government grants USIS the permission to talk to those prisoners which so far has not been forthcoming.

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III. SOME SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS

SUGGESTIONS RELATING DIRECTLY TO THE STRATEGIC HAMLET PROGRAM

1. As indicated above, the planners of any particular strategic hamlet project should take careful account of a hamlet's economic capabilities, peasant attitudes, and local security needs before determining the pace of construction and probably also the extent of its fortifications. To cite just one example of short-sighted planning that we observed in the Cu-Chi District, the farmers' sacrifice of the great quantity of bamboo used there for building the outside fence may have been wasted, because at least some of the fence obstructs the defenders' fields of fire, and the type of young bamboo used in the fence is likely to become brittle and thus greatly reduce any deterrent value of the fence within one year. (By contrast, matured bamboo spears embedded in the earth are durable, and even those in the ditch will not deteriorate for at least ten years although they are submerged in water during the rainy season.) The advisability of building the expensive temporary outside fence appears even more dubious in view of the fact that a permanent fence will be available eventually. The plan is to plant the roots of recently-cut bamboo in the

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earth wall, and live bamboo will grow to maturity in about three years. The saplings will be twisted to form a dense cross pattern, and future cutting for commercial purposes will be made at least 3 feet from the ground, so as to leave the intertwined trunks permanently in place.

2. Promises of payments to villagers, be they for labor outside their home areas, for resettlement, or for other purposes, should be kept. Where it is impossible to keep them, the reasons should be explained to the villagers. Defaulting on promises without explanation and merely leaving the issue of payments in suspense, as has happened in the Cu-Chi District, is not the way to build up the farmers' confidence in their government.

3. Colonel Nguyen Cao, the Commissioner General for Land Development, told one of the authors that his office intended to pay 30 to 40 piastres a day to the inhabitants of six villages, about to be relocated in agro-hamlets in Kien Phong Province, for laboring on the defensive earthworks. It would be well to explore the possibility of making similar payments to the inhabitants of strategic hamlets, particularly to farmers who must spend fifteen or twenty days per year on construction projects and to persons

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working in hamlets other than their own. Such payments would be particularly welcome to farmers in the relatively poor "transitional" agricultural area around Saigon, who often are forced to seek outside work during the dry season, often in places distant from their own hamlets.

Unemployment and underemployment are prevalent problems that affect small landowners, tenants, and laborers. These problems could be alleviated through a program of public works utilizing paid labor recruited in the villages. Recruitment through the Republican Youth might be the best way of tapping the available labor resources, and conceivably would make membership in this organization more attractive to the villagers than it now appears to be.

4. Agricultural credit and agricultural extension services should be provided or restored to farmers in these poorer regions as rapidly and generously as possible. (In the new strategic hamlets in Cu-Chi District, an expansion of the agricultural credit program and a revival of such extension services as the lending of breeding swine and poultry were imminent at the time we left there.)

5. Special training for local government officials (down to the hamlet chiefs) and for combined-family-unit

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chiefs should be initiated or reinstated as necessary. (USOM has for several years supported such training for local officials in areas where it has been feasible.) In the strategic hamlets of Tan An Hoi Village, the newly designated hamlet officials and chiefs of combined-family units had as yet had practically no administrative or other training. (The district chief said that they would receive it eventually.)

6. The countrywide direction of the strategic hamlet program probably ought to be entrusted to a technically competent group of officials below the top level of government. The Cabinet secretaries who at present are in charge of it apparently are too busy with the affairs of their respective offices to devote much attention to this important interdepartmental program. It is difficult to predict the impact that Ngo Dinh Nhu's supreme authority will have on the program. To judge by past experience, it is not impossible that a group of competent technicians charged with running the program might find their proposals and methods modified by Nhu for reasons of his own that would not necessarily persuade the experts themselves.

The present system, under which local officials have a good deal of leeway in planning their own strategic hamlet

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programs, appears to be working well in Kien Hoa (under Lt. Col. Thao) and in Vinh Long (under Lt. Col. Phuoc). In Cu-Chi, under the overzealous District Chief Capt. Binh, it is yielding less-than-good results. Capt. Binh had earlier organized the huge labor forces that built the Hoa Luu-Vi Thanh agrovilles, and he recalls with satisfaction the 25,000 man-hours that went into the construction of the artificial lake and island there. From both the economic and the political point of view, his operational methods in Cu-Chi today are reminiscent of the negative features of the agrovillage construction projects.

SOME MORE GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

1. It would be well to systematize and, in general, to increase the pay of the hamlet chiefs. At present, hamlet chiefs do not have regular civil service status. They receive no salaries, but only allowances that are often paid out of SDC funds. The allowance may be as little as 300 piastres monthly (the basic allowance); it may be 900 piastres (the pay of an SDC member); or it may be as much as 1,200 piastres (the one plus the other). Hamlet chiefs ought not be paid out of SDC funds, as this procedure reduces the number of SDC effectives. Their pay, or allowances, should be based on a national schedule, perhaps one

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similar to the sliding pay schedule for village chiefs. A range of 500 to 900 piastres per month would not seem unreasonable. (The Cu-Chi district chief, for example, recommends paying hamlet chiefs around 600 piastres a month.)

2. An increase in the salaries of village chiefs is also advisable. The Department of the Interior, by two decrees dated August 1958 and September 1960, respectively, has set up a sliding scale of salaries for village chiefs that is based on the level of a village's annual revenue. Thus, the chiefs of villages in the lowest revenue category (under 50,000 piastres a year) are paid 1,300 piastres a month, and those in the highest category (over 20 million piastres) receive 3,600 piastres.

The village, district, and provincial officials we interviewed were unanimous in regarding this salary scale as inadequate, particularly in the great number of small and medium villages, where the chief's pay is as little as 1,500 or 1,800 piastres. As one official expressed it, "the system favors the selection of the wealthy, and the wealthy tend to serve first of all the other wealthy elements in the village." A pay increase, it is believed, would counteract the long-standing tendency to select only

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village chiefs who are well off.

The various officials agreed that salaries should be raised so that most village chiefs would receive at least 3,000 piastres and other council members from 2,500 to 2,800, with special consideration given to the fact that the member in charge of "security" has an unusually heavy work load.

3. We suggest that the institution of the "Elders' Council" observed in Kien Hoa might be studied with a view to the possibility of establishing similar organs in other areas, thereby increasing the village councils' prestige and their responsiveness to local needs.

4. Self-Defense Corps members should be given family allowances and, if possible, higher pay. In many areas, the SDC, along with the Civil Guard, has acquired a reputation for exploiting the local citizenry in various ways. Some of these abuses are undoubtedly being remedied by the new programs for SDC training and re-equipment, which appear to be raising the men's morale. In the long run, however, SDC members cannot be expected to reconcile themselves to the discrepancy between their own pay and that of the Civil Guard and the Army, especially as more and more of

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them are being assigned to demanding and hazardous anti-guerrilla offensive operations. In theory, the SDC's serve in their home areas and thus, supposedly, can subsist on less money than can regular army troops. In practice, however, many of them now are stationed in posts far from their home provinces. As Lt. Col. Thao in Kien Hoa put it, the SDC men need family allowances that not only will enable them to get married but may also encourage them to assume greater financial responsibility for the children whom they sire in their usual common-law marriages.

5. Ways should be explored that would permit people to take a more active and meaningful part in the political life of their country. The government's political and social mass movements -- the Republican Youth, the National Revolutionary Movement (NRM), and the Vietnamese Women's Solidarity Movement -- suffer from popular indifference and lack of identification. This is only partly attributable to the diminution of contact between the national government and the people that is inevitable in any security crisis. Contributing factors are the unpopularity of some national policies (such as those on agrovillage construction), the government's ineffectiveness in carrying out rural welfare programs that could help to win peasant support, and

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people's sense of frustration at having no part in any policy decisions affecting their own welfare. The national government imposes policy from above, with little or no consultation or debate with representatives of dissident views, and this principle of operation is accepted and followed throughout the administrative structure, down to the very lowest echelons of government. The people themselves, we believe, do not receive a real sense of participation from their often sterile propaganda functions, from furnishing "voluntary" labor in the community development program, from guard duty in the rural units of the Republican Youth, or from contributing time and money to the activities of the Vietnamese Women's solidarity Movement. They want to participate in other, more substantial ways.

The present requirements of security impose obvious limits on the possibilities for widening political participation without encouraging Communist infiltration and manipulation, but we believe that the problem is nevertheless worth exploring. For example, in Binh Dinh Province and other areas of Central Vietnam, there have been instances in which the election of Republican Youth members to village councils has generated genuine popular interest. The impending formation of appointed provincial councils appears

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unlikely to arouse much interest. In view of the Vietnamese government's extreme touchiness regarding this problem area, we can only suggest here that further field research on activities of hamlet, village, and provincial councils might be of some value in any attempt to make more specific recommendations about widening the extent of political participation. It may be that the Vietnamese government, which is extremely sensitive about widening participation to include any of the Saigon nationalist figures, whom it distrusts and generally detests, would be willing to allow an increase in participation at the very lowest levels where representatives of these opposition groups are not to be found. Now that the pilot strategic hamlet projects in Cu-Chi District, constructed at breakneck pace, are completed or nearly so, it is to be hoped that the Vietnamese government will allow wider local participation at least in decisions such as those affecting the rate and method of completing future projects.

Some such way will have to be found to increase communication between the Vietnamese government and its citizenry, if the former is to defeat the strong bid being made for peasant support by the Communists who have found ways to establish their own communication. The present

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government position is unenlightened, to say the least. Nhu put in striking terms the government's frustration over its inability to communicate with the people when he told one of the writers in August 1961: "People say that our cadres should go out, work with the peasants and establish a relationship of affection and confidence with them to learn their needs. But if the cadres do this, they are overwhelmed by the people's claims and demands. The only thing for the government to do is issue orders and back them up with force."