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TELEGRAM INFORMATION REPORT TELEGRAM

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COUNTRY	SOUTH VIETNAM	REPORT NO.	TDCS DB-3/650,769
SUBJECT	ANALYSIS OF THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS' PROGRAM AND OF THE MONTAGNARD SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM	DATE DISTR.	16 JULY 1962
DATE OF INFO.	11 JULY 1962	PRECEDENCE	ROUTINE
PLACE & DATE ACQ.	VIETNAM, SAIGON (11 JULY 1962)	REFERENCES	IN
APPRAISAL	2	FIELD REPORT NO.	

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SOURCE AN AMERICAN OBSERVER (B).

STRATEGIC HAMLETS' PROGRAM

1. IN ASSESSING THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS' PROGRAM IN JULY 1962, IT IS IMPORTANT TO MAKE THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE PROGRAM AS A GENERALIZED NATIONAL RALLYING SYMBOL AND AS A SPECIFIC TACTIC COUNTERINSURGENCY CAMPAIGN. IN THE FORMER SENSE, THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS' PROGRAM HAS GROWN IN RECENT MONTHS INTO THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM'S (GVN) MAJOR IDEOLOGICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL TOOL IN ATTEMPTING TO GENERATE POPULAR CONSENSUS IN SUPPORT OF ITS EFFORTS TO DEFEAT THE ENEMY. THIS WAS MADE CLEAR IN PRESIDENT NGO DINH DIEM'S DOUBLE SEVEN MESSAGE ON THE EIGHTH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS ACCESSION TO POWER. HE PROCLAIMED THIS THE YEAR OF STRATEGIC HAMLETS, DESCRIBING THEIR ESTABLISHMENT AS CONSTITUTING "THREEFOLD POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND MILITARY REVOLUTION ADAPTED TO UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRIES.

GROUP 1
Excluded from automatic
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STRATEGIC HAMLETS BRING THE SOLUTION TO OUR TRIPLE STRUGGLE AGAINST UNDERDEVELOPMENT, DISUNITY AND COMMUNISM." DIEM DEFINES A STRATEGIC HAMLET AS "MILITANT DEMOCRACY IN UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRIES, ... THE GAINING OF LIBERTY, OF HABEAS CORPUS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE BY ALL THE PEOPLE, LIBERATING THEM FROM THE GRIP OF ALL DETERMINISMS."

2. THESE CONCEPTS ARE NOT NEW, HAVING BEEN FREQUENTLY EXPRESSED BY NGO DINH NHU, BROTHER AND POLITICAL ADVISOR OF PRESIDENT DIEM, DURING THE PAST YEAR IN HIS EFFORTS TO ARTICULATE THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS CONCEPT AND BRING IT INTO SHARPER FOCUS. IT IS ENCOURAGING, HOWEVER, THAT THE PRESIDENT SAW FIT TO EMBRACE THESE IDEAS AND MAKE THEM THE MAIN THEME OF HIS DOUBLE SEVEN MESSAGE. HITHERTO, THERE HAS BEEN SOME INDICATION THAT THE PRESIDENT WAS NOT ENTIRELY SOLD ON THE PROGRAM. NHU AND OTHER GVN SPOKESMEN HAVE BEEN AT PAINS TO MAKE CLEAR THAT THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS' PROGRAM IS IN THE MAINSTREAM OF THE "PERSONALIST" PHILOSOPHY, WHICH THEY CONSIDER SOUTH VIETNAM'S ALTERNATIVE TO COMMUNISM ON THE ONE HAND, AND WESTERN-TYPE LIBERALISM ON THE OTHER. WHATEVER MERITS THIS PHILOSOPHY HAS, IT HAS SUFFERED FROM DIFFUSENESS AND ITS LACK OF DISCERNIBLE APPLICATION TO DAY TO DAY PROBLEMS. BY TYING IT TO THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS CONCEPT, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THEY HAVE FINALLY FOUND A MUCH NEEDED FOCUS, WHICH MAY SERVE TO AROUSE A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF SUPPORT FROM AMONG THOSE INTELLECTUALS WHO ARE NOT IRREPARABLY ALIENATED FROM THE DIEM REGIME.

3. NHU AND OTHER SUPPORTERS OF THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS' PROGRAM SEEM QUITE AWARE OF THE NEED TO DESCEND FROM THE PLAIN OF PHILOSOPHY IN ORDER TO MAKE THE

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PROGRAM ATTRACTIVE TO THE PEASANTS WHO ARE THE MAIN TARGET. IN A RECENT CON-
 VERSATION WITH NHU, HE STATED THAT HERETOFORE, THE APPEAL THAT THE VIETNAMESE
 COMMUNISTS (VC) HAD FOR THE PEASANTS WAS IN TERMS OF THE PRIVATE AND IMMEDIATE
 INTERESTS OF THE PEASANTS, WITH THE LATTER PERSUADED OR DELUDED INTO BELIEVING
 THE VC COULD BEST LOOK TO THEIR MATERIAL NEEDS. (FIELD COMMENT. SEE FVS-7609,
 TDCS-3/516,128.) THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS' PROGRAM IS TO
 COUNTER THIS APPEAL BY PROVING TO THE PEASANTS THAT THE GVN CAN HELP ORGANIZE
 THE DEFENSES AGAINST THE VC WHILE AT THE SAME TIME GIVING THEM TANGIBLE BENEFITS
 WHICH WILL CONVINCED THEM THAT THEY HAVE A STAKE IN THE SUPPORT OF THE GVN AND THE
 DEFEAT OF THE ENEMY. THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE GOVERNMENT CAN ACTUATE THE PROMISE
 OF A "TRIPLE REVOLUTION" IN THE COUNTRYSIDE MAY IN THE LONG RUN BE THE MOST
 IMPORTANT RESULT OF THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS' PROGRAM, OUTWEIGHING THE IMMEDIATE
 TACTICAL ADVANTAGE.

4. AS A TACTIC OF THE COUNTERINSURGENCY PROGRAM, IT SHOULD BE EMPHASIZED
 THAT THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS CONSTITUTE ONLY ONE OF A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT APPROACHES
 BEING DEVELOPED TO PACIFY THE COUNTRYSIDE, EVEN THOUGH THERE IS A GENERAL
 TENDENCY, EVEN AMONG THE VIETNAMESE, TO LUMP ALL THE APPROACHES TOGETHER UNDER
 THE GENERAL TERM OF STRATEGIC HAMLET. UNDER CURRENT GVN PLANNING, THE STRATEGIC
 HAMLETS PER SE ARE A PREVENTIVE MECHANISM AIMED AT ARRESTING THE EROSION OF THE
 GOVERNMENT CONTROL AND PRESENCE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE. THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS ARE
 BEING CONSTRUCTED IN WHAT NHU CALLS "A" AREAS, I.E., AREAS WHERE THE VC THREAT
 IS LEAST SERIOUS AND WHERE THE GOVERNMENT CAN ORGANIZE THE VILLAGE DEFENSES MOST

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QUICKLY AND WITH THE LEAST EXPENDITURE OF THE OVEREXTENDED CONVENTIONAL MILITARY CAPABILITY. IN THESE HAMLETS, PEASANTS GENERALLY MUST LOOK AFTER THEIR OWN DEFENSE. IN "B" AREAS, PROVISION HAS BEEN MADE, IN THEORY AT LEAST, FOR OUTSIDE HELP FROM CIVIL GUARD -- SELF-DEFENSE CORPS FORCES, AND IN SOME CASES FROM THE VIETNAMESE NATIONAL ARMY (VNA) ELEMENTS. IN "C" AREAS, WHICH ARE DEEP IN THE TERRITORY CONTROLLED BY THE VC, THE CONCEPT IS TO ESTABLISH LARGE SETTLEMENTS REMINISCENT OF DIEM'S EARLIER AGROVILLES, INTO WHICH EVEN THE VC WOULD BE HERDED AND KEPT, PENDING "RE-EDUCATION" AND IMPROVEMENT OF THE SECURITY SITUATION. THIS KIND OF RESETTLEMENT LARGELY AWAIT THE FUTURE, AND IS PERHAPS THE MOST DEBATABLE FEATURE OF CURRENT GVN PLANS. THE FOURTH TYPE OF HAMLET DEFENSE NOW ENVISAGED BY NHU, IS A STRING OF KIBBUTZ-TYPE POSTS TO WHICH YOUNG, HIGHLY MOTIVATED FAMILIES WOULD BE SENT TO LIVE ON A PERMANENT BASIS IN AREAS ADJACENT TO VC STRONGHOLDS.

5. THE TECHNIQUES USED IN THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS' PROGRAM, IN OPERATION SUNRISE, AND IN OTHER PROGRAMS ARE INCREASINGLY BEING INCORPORATED INTO OVER-ALL PROVINCE PACIFICATION PROGRAMS, OF WHICH OPERATION HAI YEN II IN PHU YEN PROVINCE IS A PROTOTYPE. TWO MORE PLANS, FOR BINH DINH AND QUANG NGAI PROVINCES IN CENTRAL VIETNAM, ARE CURRENTLY BEING PLANNED AND THE OUTLOOK IS FOR SEVERAL MORE IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS.

6. BY 30 JUNE 1962 THERE WERE APPROXIMATELY 2,000 STRATEGIC HAMLETS ALREADY COMPLETED, WHICH REPRESENTS AN INCREASE OF 1,300 SINCE JANUARY 1962, INDICATING A MONTHLY CONSTRUCTION RATE OF SOMETHING OVER 200. GVN SOURCES CLAIM THAT 7,000 ARE SCHEDULED FOR COMPLETION BY THE END OF THE YEAR. QUALITATIVELY,

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THERE IS CONSIDERABLE VARIATION, SOME BEING VIRTUAL FORTRESSES AND OTHERS HAVING ONLY TOKEN SIZE FENCES OR OTHER DEFENSIVE DEVICES, WHICH COULD BE EASILY BREACHED BY THE VC. IN THE PAST, MUCH HAS DEPENDED ON THE DEGREE OF ENERGY, INITIATIVE AND RESOURCES OF THE PROVINCE CHIEF, AS WELL AS HIS UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT NHU AND OTHER NATIONAL LEADERS WANTED IN TERMS OF STRATEGIC HAMLETS. IT IS HOPED THAT SOME STANDARDIZATION EFFORT WILL ENSUE AS THE PROGRAM BECOMES MORE CLEARLY DEFINED, ESPECIALLY THROUGH THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS' CADRE SCHOOL, THE SECOND COURSE OF WHICH BEGAN ON 2 JULY.

7. GEOGRAPHICALLY, THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS ARE WIDELY DISTRIBUTED. BY 30 JUNE, ABOUT 950 HAD BEEN CONSTRUCTED IN THE VNA III CORPS AREA, OF WHICH OVER 300 WERE BUILT IN THE SINGLE PROVINCE OF VINH BINH; 858 IN THE II CORPS AREA, 173 IN DARLAC PROVINCE AND 164 IN BINH DINH PROVINCE; AND, 195 IN THE I CORPS AREA, WITH 85 IN QUANG NAM. THE LOW RATE IN THE VNA I CORPS AREA MAY REFLECT IN PART NGO DINH CAN'S OFTEN REPORTED COOLNESS TOWARD THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS' CONCEPT. THERE HAVE BEEN INDICATIONS RECENTLY, HOWEVER, THAT CAN HAS REACHED AT LEAST TACIT UNDERSTANDING WITH HIS BROTHER NGO DINH NHU TO EXCHANGE GREATER SUPPORT FOR THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS FOR FULLER SAIGON SUPPORT OF CAN'S CHERISHED REGIONAL FORCES' PROGRAM.

8. GENERALLY, THE PRESENT STRATEGIC HAMLETS ARE BEING CONSTRUCTED IN SAFER AREAS AWAY FROM THE MAIN CONCENTRATIONS OF VC STRENGTH. THIS DOES NOT MEAN, HOWEVER, THAT THEY ARE NOT WITHIN STRIKING DISTANCE OF VC ELEMENTS SUFFICIENTLY STRONG TO ATTACK ISOLATED HAMLETS WITH SERIOUS EFFECT. TO DATE, THERE HAVE BEEN

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ONLY A FEW SCATTERED INSTANCES OF VC ATTACKS ON STRATEGIC HAMLETS, BUT THE PACE IS EXPECTED TO STEP UP CONSIDERABLY, PARTICULARLY AT THE END OF THE RAINY SEASON. THAT THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS' PROGRAM IS BOTHERING THE VC IS WELL DOCUMENTED IN THE FORM OF VIRULENT PROPAGANDA ATTACKS BY RADIO HANOI AND BY NATIONAL FRONT FOR THE LIBERATION OF VIETNAM OUTLETS, IN ADDITION TO CAPTURED DOCUMENTS AND AGENT REPORTS, WHICH INDICATE THE PROBLEM OF HOW TO COPE WITH THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS IS NOW ONE OF THE MAIN VC PREOCCUPATIONS. THIS PAST SPRING THERE WERE SEVERAL INSTANCES OF VC ATTACKS ON LARGER AGROVILLES AND LAND DEVELOPMENT CENTERS, WHICH MAY SUGGEST SOME CONFUSION IN THE VC MINDS, AS WELL AS THE WESTERN, AS TO THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN STRATEGIC HAMLETS AND OTHER DEFENDED INSTALLATIONS.

9. AT THE PRESENT STAGE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS' PROGRAM, ONE MAJOR WEAKNESS IS THE HIT AND MISS CONSTRUCTION WITH THE INSUFFICIENT INTEGRATION OF HAMLET DEFENSES INTO OVER-ALL DISTRICT AND PROVINCIAL SECURITY PLANS. HAMLETS THUS VARY CONSIDERABLY IN VULNERABILITY TO VC ATTACK. LOCAL OBSERVERS RIGHTLY STATE THAT UNTIL THE COUNTRY IS CONSIDERABLY MORE SATURATED WITH STRATEGIC HAMLETS, MANY OF THOSE ALREADY IN BEING WILL BE EXPOSED TO VC DESTRUCTION. THE BEST WAY TO USE THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS AS A TACTIC IN THE COUNTERINSURGENCY PROGRAM IS, WHEN POSSIBLE, TO MAKE THEIR PHASED CONSTRUCTION AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE BROADER PACIFICATION PROGRAMS, EXTENDING WHERE PRACTICABLE TO PROVINCE-WIDE SCOPE. THIS IS ONE OF THE MORE ATTRACTIVE ASPECTS OF HAI YEN II IN PHU YEN PROVINCE, WHERE CONSTRUCTION OF STRATEGIC HAMLETS WAS CAREFULLY PHASED WITH OTHER ASPECTS OF THE PLAN, SUCH AS AVAILABILITY OF CIVIC ACTION TEAMS, EMPLACEMENT OF VILLAGE

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DEFENDERS, AND THE GRADUAL DISPLACEMENT OF THE VC BACK TOWARD THE MOUNTAINS.

10. AS TO THE OVER-ALL POPULAR REACTION TO THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS' PROGRAM, IT MUST BE CONFESSED THAT, AS IN MANY OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM, IT IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO COME UP WITH FIRM GENERALIZATIONS. PEASANT REACTION VARIES FROM DISTRICT TO DISTRICT AND FROM PROVINCE TO PROVINCE DEPENDING ON HOW THE QUESTION IS HANDLED BY THE RESPECTIVE AUTHORITIES. IN CERTAIN CASES, WHERE PEASANTS HAVE BEEN DIRECTLY HARASSED OR ATTACKED BY THE VC, THEY OFTEN WELCOME OR SEEK SELF-DEFENSE. IN OTHER INSTANCES, THE PEASANTS REPORTEDLY FEEL SOME INITIAL RESENTMENT AT CHANGES ENFORCED IN THEIR WAY OF LIFE AND IMPOSED BY THE PROGRAM, AS WELL AS AT THE EXACTIONS OF MONEY AND LABOR. IN SOME CASES AT LEAST, INITIAL COOLNESS LARGELY DISAPPEARS AS ADVANTAGES OF THE PROGRAM BECOME MANIFEST. ONE OF THE MOST ENCOURAGING DEVELOPMENTS IS THE TREND TOWARD THE ELECTION OF HAMLET COUNCILS.

11. IN SUM, THE STRATEGIC HAMLETS' PROGRAM IS DEFINITELY MOVING FORWARD, BOTH AS AN ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE AROUND WHICH THE WHOLE GVN COUNTERINSURGENCY PROGRAM HAS A FAIR CHANCE OF BEING SOLD TO THE PEOPLE, AND AS A SPECIFIC TACTIC IN PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF VC INFLUENCE AMONG THE PEOPLE. BUT STRATEGIC HAMLETS IN THEMSELVES ARE NOT SUFFICIENT TO CARRY THE DAY AGAINST A STILL STRONG AND DETERMINED ENEMY. UNTIL THEY ARE SUPPLEMENTED BY BROADER PACIFICATION PROGRAMS INVOLVING A WIDE VARIETY OF COUNTERINSURGENCY MEASURES, THEY REMAIN VULNERABLE TO VC COUNTERMEASURES.

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MONTAGNARD SITUATION

12. A MIXED AMERICAN-GVN TEAM IS CURRENTLY MAKING A SYSTEMATIC SURVEY OF EIGHTEEN PROVINCES IN WHICH THE MONTAGNARDS LIVE. UNTIL THE SURVEY IS COMPLETED AND THE RESULTS ARE MADE AVAILABLE, FULL STATISTICAL EXPOSITION OF THE PROBLEM CANNOT BE PROVIDED. IN THE FIRST FOUR PROVINCES VISITED (DARLAC, TUYEN DUC, LAM DONG, AND NINH THUAN), SOME 18,000 OUT OF A TOTAL MONTAGNARD POPULATION OF ABOUT 165,000 HAVE MOVED AWAY FROM THEIR NORMAL LIVING AREAS IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS. ON THE BASIS OF THE SURVEYS OF THESE PROVINCES, AND SOME SUBSEQUENTLY VISITED, THE TEAM HAS REACHED THE CONCLUSION THAT THERE HAS BEEN EXTENSIVE RELOCATION OF THE MONTAGNARDS DURING THE PAST SIX MONTHS, STEMMING FROM A COMBINATION OF FACTORS, INCLUDING FEAR OF THE VC, RESENTMENT OF THE ENEMY CONFISCATION OF MUCH OF THE FOOD SUPPLY, AND A NEW FOUND RESPECT FOR THE POWER THE GVN HAS MANIFESTED IN BOMBING ATTACKS AND THE USE OF HELICOPTERS. IN SOME INSTANCES, HOWEVER, MOVEMENT HAS BEEN AT THE INVITATION OF THE GVN IN ACCORDANCE WITH LONG-TERM PLANS TO RESETTLE TRIBEMEN. THUS THE MOVEMENT OF 4,500 OF THE 11,000 MONTAGNARDS IN TUYEN DUC PROVINCE WAS MADE AT THE INVITATION OF PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS TO AREAS PREPARED IN ADVANCE. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF TUYEN DUC PROVINCE, WHERE THERE ARE 10,000 REFUGEES, MANY OF WHOM SEEM IN NEED OF IMMEDIATE PROVISION OF FOOD AND OTHER ESSENTIALS, MOST OF THE PROVINCES VISITED TO DATE ARE NOT CONSIDERED TO HAVE EMERGENCY SITUATIONS IN TERMS OF MONTAGNARDS NEEDS. IT IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY APPARENT, HOWEVER, THAT THE GVN AND THE UNITED STATES ARE FACED WITH A LONG-TERM PROBLEM IN LOOKING AFTER UPROOTED MONTAGNARDS, EITHER BY MAKING

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SETTLEMENT IN THE PRESENT LOCATIONS PALATABLE TO THEM, OR PREFERABLY, IN CREATING CONDITIONS OF SECURITY NECESSARY TO INSPIRE THEM TO RETURN TO THEIR ORIGINAL LOCALES. WHATEVER INSPIRATION THEIR MOVEMENT TOWARD GVN-CONTROLLED CENTERS, GVN IS FACED WITH THE OPPORTUNITY AND CHALLENGE TO FORGE A NEW AND BETTER RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TRIBAL PEOPLE. FAILURE TO DO SO COULD CONCEIVABLY MEAN THE LOSS OF THE ENTIRE PLATEAU AND MOUNTAIN AREAS TO THE COMMUNISTS.

13. IT IS HOPED THAT WHEN THE CURRENT SURVEY IS COMPLETED, THE SITUATION WILL BE CLARIFIED, AND THE GVN AND AMERICAN AGENCIES WILL BE ABLE TO MOVE FORWARD WITH MORE EXPEDITIOUS ACTION. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT BY PROVIDING AN ALLOCATION OF FIFTY MILLION PIASTERS DIRECTLY TO THE PROVINCE CHIEFS, A GREATER FLEXIBILITY IN DEALING WITH THE VARYING PROBLEMS IN CONNECTION WITH THE MONTAGNARDS IN DIFFERENT PROVINCES WILL BE ACHIEVED.

14. FIELD DISSEM. CINCPAC ARPAC PACAF PACFLT.

END OF MESSAGE

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