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TELEGRAM INFORMATION REPORT TELEGRAM

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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Vietnam

COUNTRY SOUTH VIETNAM

REPORT NO. TDCS -3/529,667

SUBJECT STATUS OF THE FREE ELECTION PRINCIPLE
IN STRATEGIC HAMLETS ON 28 NOVEMBER 1962

DATE DISTR. 29 NOVEMBER 1962

PRECEDENCE ROUTINE

DATE OF
INFO.

REFERENCES IN 25498

PLACE &
DATE ACQ.

APPRAISAL COMMENTARY

FIELD REPORT NO. FVS-8222

THIS IS UNEVALUATED INFORMATION. SOURCE GRADINGS ARE DEFINITIVE. APPRAISAL OF CONTENT IS TENTATIVE.

SOURCE STAFF OFFICER OF THIS ORGANIZATION.

1. THIS IS A FIELD APPRAISAL OF THE STATUS OF THE FREE ELECTION PRINCIPLE IN STRATEGIC HAMLETS IN LATE NOVEMBER 1962. IT IS NOT AN OFFICIAL JUDGMENT BY THIS AGENCY OR OF ANY COMPONENT. IT REPRESENTS THE OBSERVATIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF ~~A STAFF~~ OFFICER, BASED ON INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO HIM AT THE TIME OF ITS PREPARATION. PREPARED FOR INTERNAL USE AS A GUIDE TO THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT, THIS COMMENTARY IS DISSEMINATED IN THE BELIEF THAT IT MAY BE USEFUL TO OTHER AGENCIES IN ASSESSING THE SITUATION FOR THEIR OWN PURPOSES.

2. THE VILLAGE, TOGETHER WITH ITS RELATED HAMLETS, IS THE

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GROUP 1
Excluded from automatic
downgrading and
declassification

STATE/INR	DIA	ARMY/ACSI	NAVY	AIR	JCS	SECDEF	NSA	NIC	AID	USIA	OCI	ONE	OCR	ORR	O&I	OO	EXO
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BASIC UNIT IN THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF SOUTH VIETNAM. ALTHOUGH VILLAGE IS THE COMMONLY ACCEPTED TERM, TOWNSHIP MORE ACCURATELY DESCRIBES THIS POLITICAL SUBDIVISION, WHICH TYPICALLY EMBRACES FROM TWO TO EIGHT HAMLETS AND CONTAINS FROM 2,000 TO 10,000 INHABITANTS.

3. IN THE PAST, VILLAGES WERE RUN BY COUNCILS ELECTED BY AND FROM WEALTHY FAMILIES. TODAY, WITH THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF BINH DINH AND PHU YEN PROVINCES, VILLAGE OFFICIALS ARE APPOINTED BY HIGHER AUTHORITY. THIS SYSTEM IS NOT WITHOUT ITS DRAWBACKS. IN QUANG NGAI PROVINCE, THE MEMBERS OF THE VILLAGE COUNCIL WERE SELECTED BY THE DISTRICT CHIEF ON THE BASIS OF THEIR ANTI-COMMUNIST POSTURE ALONE, WITH LITTLE OR NO CONSIDERATION FOR THEIR SUBSTANTIVE QUALIFICATIONS. IN PHUNG HIEP DISTRICT, PHONG DINH PROVINCE, POLITICAL SCHEMING RESULTED IN THE APPOINTMENT OF VILLAGE OFFICIALS WHO LACKED EXPERIENCE, THEREBY, PROVIDING GRIST FOR THE LOCAL VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST /VC/ PROPAGANDA MILL. WHEN PRIVATELY POLLED, SOME INHABITANTS OF THE PROVINCE COMPLAINED OF ABUSES COMMITTED BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND EXPRESSED A DESIRE FOR VILLAGE OFFICIALS TO BE ELECTED DIRECTLY BY THE PEOPLE.

4. ALTHOUGH THERE APPEAR TO BE FEW EXAMPLES OF DIRECT ELECTIONS OF OFFICIALS AT THE VILLAGE LEVEL, IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS EVENTUAL GOAL APPEARS TO HAVE SUPPORT AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT.

IN A PUBLIC ADDRESS IN JULY 1962, MINISTER OF INTERIOR BUI VAN LUONG

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STATED THAT THE INTERMINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC HAMLETS HAD AGREED THAT SELF-GOVERNMENT IN THE HAMLETS WAS ONLY THE FIRST STEP IN A PROGRAM OF BASIC DEMOCRACY, WHICH WOULD BE APPLIED PROGRESSIVELY UPWARD TO ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT. HAMLET ELECTIONS WOULD BE FOLLOWED BY THOSE FOR VILLAGE CHIEFS, DISTRICT CHIEFS, PROVINCIAL COUNCILS, AND, FINALLY, PROVINCE CHIEFS.

5. THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF A STRATEGIC HAMLET IS REFLECTED IN ITS COMMUNAL CHARTER OR CONSTITUTION. A TYPICAL CHARTER STIPULATES THAT ALL HAMLET RESIDENTS MUST FIRST BE ORGANIZED INTO GROUPS ACCORDING TO AGE AND SEX. RESIDENTS ARE ALSO TO BE ORGANIZED INTO INTERDEPENDENT FAMILY GROUPS, AND AN ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE WILL BE ELECTED THROUGH SECRET AND DIRECT VOTE. IN SOME HAMLETS THE TERM OF SERVICE IS 12 MONTHS. IN OTHERS THE TERM IS INDEFINITE. THIS COMMITTEE IS CHARGED WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY OF DIRECTING THE POLICIES OF THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT. THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE IS ALSO ASSISTED BY AN ADVISORY GROUP CALLED THE HAMLET COUNCIL, CONSISTING OF FROM FIVE TO SEVEN MEMBERS, WHO ARE ELECTED BY HAMLET RESIDENTS THROUGH A GENERAL ELECTION. ACTUAL POWER IN THE HAMLET APPEARS TO RESIDE IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE. ALTHOUGH THE ELECTION OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE IS HELD ANNUALLY, THE RESIDENTS OF THE HAMLET CAN, IF THEY ARE DISSATISFIED, PETITION THE PROVINCE CHIEF THROUGH THE DISTRICT CHIEF, REQUESTING A NEW

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ELECTION.

6. THE FACT THAT A HAMLET MAY BE OFFICIALLY LISTED AS COMPLETED, DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN THAT THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE HAS BEEN ELECTED. ONE SOURCE ESTIMATED THAT 2,000 OUT OF ABOUT 3,000 STRATEGIC HAMLETS OFFICIALLY DESIGNATED AS COMPLETED, HAD HELD SUCH ELECTIONS, BUT ELECTIONS IN ALL HAMLETS WERE HOPED FOR BY APRIL 1963. HOWEVER, DO CAO MINH, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, ESTIMATED THAT ELECTIONS IN ANY FORM HAD BEEN HELD IN ONLY 600 AND NOT MORE THAN 700 OF ABOUT 1800 STRATEGIC HAMLETS IN WHICH AT LEAST PERIMETER DEFENSES AND BASIC ORGANIZATIONAL WORK HAD BEEN COMPLETED.

7. INITIAL HAMLET LEADERSHIP USUALLY IS ESTABLISHED BY THE APPOINTMENT OF A TEMPORARY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BY THE DISTRICT CHIEF. ONCE THE HAMLET IS IN RUNNING ORDER, THE FIRST ELECTION MAY BE HELD. CANDIDATES ARE ALLOWED A WEEK TO ENTER THEIR NAMES ON THE SLATE AND A WEEK TO CAMPAIGN FOR OFFICE. MEANWHILE, PROVINCIAL AND DISTRICT AUTHORITIES INVESTIGATE THE CANDIDATES TO DETERMINE WHETHER ANY MAY BE VC SYMPATHIZERS OR MEMBERS. ALTHOUGH THIS PROCEDURE COULD BE UTILIZED TO CONTROL THE OUTCOME OF AN ELECTION, IT HAS BEEN REPORTED THAT, OUT OF 50 HAMLET SLATES EXAMINED BY THE AUTHORITIES IN PHU YEN PROVINCE, ONLY ONE CANDIDATE WAS ACTUALLY REMOVED AS UNDESIRABLE; WHILE IN TAY NINH PROVINCE NO SINGLE CANDIDATES WERE REMOVED. OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY WAS

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STILL A PREREQUISITE FOR CANDIDACY IN KIEN HOA PROVINCE, BUT THIS DID NOT APPEAR TO BE THE CASE IN OTHER PROVINCES.

8. IN PRINCIPLE, NATIONAL ELECTION PROCEDURES ARE FOLLOWED IN HAMLET ELECTIONS. CANDIDATES SUBMIT THEIR NAMES IN WRITING; THE VOTE IS CONDUCTED BY SECRET BALLOT UNDER SUPERVISION; AND THE RETURNS ARE EXAMINED BY AN APPROPRIATE COMMITTEE. IN ACTUAL PRACTICE THERE ARE DEVIATIONS, INCLUDING THE USE OF THE HAND VOTE IN LIEU OF THE SECRET BALLOT.

9. LEGAL PROCEDURES NOT WITHSTANDING, INDIRECT CONTROL OF HAMLET ELECTIONS IS INDICATED BY A GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM /GVN/ DOCUMENT, BELIEVED AUTHENTIC, APPROVED BY ALL GVN LEVELS IN APRIL 1962 AND REQUIRING ONLY THE SIGNATURE OF PRESIDENT DIEM FOR PROMULGATION. IT STATED THAT, IF THE DISTRICT CHIEF WERE SUFFICIENTLY 'PRUDENT,' THE INHABITANTS WOULD ELECT THE PERSONS SELECTED BY HIM, ADDING THAT A DISTRICT CHIEF MIGHT ALSO USE HIS RIGHT OF VETO BY REFUSING TO APPROVE THE WINNER AND SUBSEQUENTLY CALLING ANOTHER ELECTION. ALTHOUGH THE DOCUMENT CALLED FOR STRICTLY DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS OF LEADERS OF INTRAHAMLET GROUPS, IT ALSO NOTED THAT IF THE VARIOUS CIVIC ACTION CADRES AND THE YOUTH AND INFORMATION ACTIVISTS DID THEIR WORK WELL, THE ELECTIONS WOULD NOT TAKE AN UNEXPECTED TURN, AND THE PEOPLE WOULD ELECT THE PERSONS SELECTED BY THE AUTHORITIES.

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10. NGO DINH NHU, AT THE 9 NOVEMBER 1962 MEETING OF THE INTERMINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC HAMLET, WAS REPORTED TO HAVE REPRIMANDED PROVINCIAL AND DISTRICT CHIEFS FOR NOT HOLDING HONEST ELECTIONS FOR CHIEFS OF STRATEGIC HAMLETS, FEARING THAT A VC OR REACTIONARY WOULD BE ELECTED. NHU STATED THAT THIS RISK MUST BE TAKEN; HOWEVER, IF THIS SHOULD HAPPEN, THE PROVINCE CHIEF COULD SIMPLY VOID THE ELECTION ON THE BASIS OF NONCOMPLIANCE WITH THE HAMLET CHARTER AND CALL ANOTHER ELECTION LATER.

11. IN AUGUST 1962 TWO CIVIC ACTION OFFICIALS IN BIEN HOA PROVINCE STATED THAT THE VILLAGE AND HAMLET CHIEFS OF THE PROVINCE WERE NOT ELECTED DEMOCRATICALLY. THEY REPORTED THAT THE RESIDENTS OF AN BINH HAMLET, BIEN HOA PROVINCE, HAD STATED THAT THE HAMLET CHIEF, WHO WAS BORN THERE, HAD EARLIER OPPRESSED THEM WHILE SERVING WITH THE CAO DAI PRIVATE ARMY AND HAD BEEN ELECTED THROUGH AN ELECTION RIGGED BY THE DISTRICT CHIEF. IN PHUOC HAU HAMLET, PHU YEN PROVINCE, A PERMANENT EMPLOYEE OF THE PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION APPEARED TO HEAD THE FIVE-MEMBER HAMLET COUNCIL. IN THE CAM HUNG REGION OF QUANG TRI PROVINCE, THE GVN WAS FORMING STRATEGIC HAMLETS AMONG ALL BRU TRIBAL VILLAGES, WITHOUT INFORMING THE TRIBESMEN ABOUT LOCALLY ELECTED HAMLET COMMITTEES; AND HAMLET ADMINISTRATION REMAINED IN THE HANDS OF THE GVN-APPOINTED HAMLET CHIEF. IN NINH THUAN PROVINCE THE PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES REPORTED THE ELECTION OF THE BA RAU HAMLET ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE, SUBMITTING A LIST OF

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THOSE ELECTED. INVESTIGATION REVEALED THAT THE ELECTED INDIVIDUALS WERE UNAWARE THAT AN ELECTION HAD TAKEN PLACE, THAT THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO SERVE ON THE COMMITTEE, OR WHAT THEIR FUNCTIONS SHOULD BE. ON THE OTHERHAND, IN VAN THANH HAMLET, TUYEN DUC PROVINCE, FIVE MEN WERE CHOSEN FOR THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE IN A TRULY DEMOCRATIC ELECTION; HOWEVER, A CLANDESTINE CONTROL MECHANISM WAS ESTABLISHED, HEADED BY AN INDIVIDUAL KNOWN ONLY TO THE HAMLET CHIEF, WHO WAS OBLIGED TO DEFER TO THE OTHER'S DECISION IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS. THIS INDIVIDUAL WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR MILITARY DEFENSE AND SECURITY OF THE HAMLET, INCLUDING DETECTION OF VC IN THE HAMLET AND MONITORING THE ACTIVITIES AND RELIABILITY OF MEMBERS OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE. HE REPORTED DIRECTLY TO THE AREA POPULAR FORCES COMMANDER.

12. IN SOME PROVINCES, MOBILE INSPECTION TEAMS HAVE BEEN CREATED TO ENABLE THE PROVINCE CHIEF TO LEARN THE ACTUAL STATE OF AFFAIRS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL. THESE TEAMS ARE AUTHORIZED TO VISIT HAMLETS DIRECTLY WITHOUT REFERENCE TO THE DISTRICT CHIEF. THROUGH THIS MECHANISM, THREE DISTRICT CHIEFS WERE REMOVED FROM OFFICE IN PHU YEN PROVINCE FOR ELECTION IRREGULARITIES. THE CHIEF OF THIS PROVINCE WAS PLEASED TO INTRODUCE DEMOCRATIC PROCEDURES IN HIS AREA BECAUSE IT ENABLED HIM TO ELIMINATE A NUMBER OF CORRUPT OFFICIALS INSTALLED BY THE FORMER ADMINISTRATION.

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13. CONCLUSION. FROM THE FOREGOING IT WOULD APPEAR THAT FREE, DIRECT ELECTION OF OFFICIALS DOES EXIST IN SOME STRATEGIC AND OTHER HAMLETS, BUT THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS IS OFTEN HONORED IN THE BREACH OR APPLIED ONLY IN PART. THE DIRECT ELECTION OF VILLAGE OFFICIALS IS PRACTICALLY NONEXISTENT ALTHOUGH THERE IS AN EXPRESSED INTENTION TO FOLLOW HAMLET SELF-GOVERNMENT WITH VILLAGE SELF-GOVERNMENT. IT APPEARS THAT THE PRESIDENCY AT LEAST IS SINCERE IN PROMOTING THE ELECTORAL PROCESS AT THE STRATEGIC HAMLET LEVEL, ALTHOUGH ACTUAL IMPLEMENTATION IS HAMPERED BY A RURAL POPULATION LARGELY UNPREPARED FOR DEMOCRACY. IT IS BELIEVED THAT THE SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM RESTS ULTIMATELY ON THE EFFORTS OF THE CIVIC ACTION CADRES ASSIGNED TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF STRATEGIC HAMLETS AND ON THE ABILITY OF PROVINCE AND DISTRICT CHIEFS TO RECOGNIZE AND ADJUST TO THE NEW ORDER.

14. FIELD DISSEM. STATE ARMY NAVY AIR AID USMACV 9TH FIELD STATION MAAG CINCPAC PACFLT PACAF ARPAC.

END OF MESSAGE

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