

The Michigan State University Group: Its Status and Prospects

The Michigan State University Group, or MSUG as we call it, is unique in many respects. It is the largest ICA financed university contract in the world. It is also the largest public administration technical assistance project in the world. Furthermore, it is the only contract group in the world which combines under one roof all types of public administration advising activities and police advising activities as well. With its authorized personnel quota of 54 American specialists and its annual budget in excess of 2½ million dollars it is larger than all save perhaps half a dozen USOM's or ICA missions in the world. By virtue of its very size, by virtue of the fact that it is <sup>almost</sup> ~~virtually~~ autonomous in its operations, and as a result of its success in its two years of work in Vietnam, MSUG has aroused a good deal of envy, jealousy, and even some hostility among other American groups in Vietnam. Particularly is this true of USOM.

It is a fact that MSUG has ~~not~~ won for itself an acceptance among Vietnamese government officials and among those members of the Vietnamese public who have come into contact with its programs which has not been equaled by any other American group in this country. As a consequence of its dual contract arrangement, that is a contractual arrangement with ICA to provide its funds and a similar contract with the government of Vietnam to provide advisory services in the fields of public administration and police administration, MSUG has come to be considered by the government as its own task force of advisors. This situation is enhanced by the fact that the President of the Republic himself has spoken very favorably of MSUG, its personnel and its programs in conversations with key government officials and even in public addresses. His remarks in East Lansing during his trip to the U. S., which were well publicized in Vietnam, have also added to the excellent reputation the group enjoys. The President himself told Dr. Weidner, ~~and myself~~ Dr. Smuckler and myself that as far as he is concerned the Mich. State operation should continue in Vietnam for the next 20 years. While this may have been a bit of exaggeration growing out of the comradery existing between those present at this meeting, it is nevertheless indicative of the affection and esteem in which our group is held by the President and members of his government. At the same time, the <sup>P</sup>resident and members of his government

have commented from time to time on the ~~ICA/relationship~~ fact that MSUG is tied to USOM ~~through~~ <sup>by</sup> a contractual ~~relationship~~, and they have wondered aloud occasionally whether this affects the honesty and objectivity of our programs. For cordlary to the excellent repete of MSUG is the not so excellent reputation of USOM and certain other ~~A~~ official American agencies represented here in Vietnam.

This brings us to a consideration of our place in the American community. Until a few months ago, when such firms as Capital Engineering and Johnson, Drake and Piper were brought to Vietnam by ICA as contractors in the field of highway construction, and other contracting groups came into Vietnam under the same sponsorship in the fields of electric power development, industrial ~~study~~ development, etc., the MSUG was the only contractual enterprise of any size in Vietnam, operating under ICA auspices. Coming in on the ground floor, as it were, MSUG received a number of benefits which have not accrued to the late arrivals in the contracting field here. Principal among these have been the use of the embassy medical unit, the fleet post office, and the commissary and post exchange. Although the other contracting organizations have requested these privileges, they have been refused them by the embassy, MAG, and USOM. There have been many problems ~~between~~ in the relations between MSUG and USOM, beginning with the very first day of the project. As time went on, however, these problems diminished in scope and in importance until some six months ago it could be said with considerable accuracy that our relations were entirely harmonious and satisfactory, and that there were no truly outstanding issues between us. Since the coming of the new contractors, however, some of the old problems have reappeared, and some new ones have arisen as a consequence of our enjoying a privilege status vis-a-vis the new contractors.

Many of the problems in our relationships with USOM stem from the fact that the four professors who made the initial survey of setting up the project did their study just prior to the arrival here of Leland Barrows, who is still director of the USOM in Saigon. The four professors recommended that MSU set up a project encompassing not only the fields in which we now work, but also involving extensive operations in the economics and finance areas and in the public information field as well. When Mr. Barrows arrived and read their report he hit the ceiling and exclaimed that no such project would ever operate in a country where he was director of the USOM. Ultimately, he and his public

administration division chief, Professor Joseph Starr, revised the survey report to recommend a maximum of ten MSU professors, who would be limited in their activities to purely academic instruction and in-service training. After several months of negotiation between MSU in East Lansing, ICA in Washington, and USOM in Saigon, it was agreed that the ~~MSU~~ Mich. State group in Vietnam would comprise a maximum of 30 persons, including five who would be considered either administrative or secretarial. When the first chief advisor, Dr. Edward Weidner, ~~had~~ drew up his table of organization, however, he decided that he could get along with fewer than five administrative and secretarial people and ~~had designated~~ designated two of the five so called administrative openings for additional professional personnel. However, when Mr. Barrows learned that this had been done, he was extremely angry and accused Dr. Weidner of violating his promise. Concurrently, there was a problem in connection with the administrative support which USOM was, under the terms of the ICA-MSU contract, supposed to provide the MSU group in Saigon. Notwithstanding this contract provision, Mr. Barrows claimed that it was not possible for him to provide as much support as the group thought it needed, and insisted that the group find its own housing, set up its own motor pool, and otherwise care for its own administrative needs. As time went on, the group developed and administrative service of its own and grew relatively free of USOM administrative support and control. When I arrived in Saigon to take over the post of Chief Advisor at the beginning of March 1956, Mr. Barrows ~~insisted~~ took this opportunity to renew his insistence that we accept responsibility for all of our administrative services, if indeed we intended to maintain our ~~administrative~~ program autonomy. He told me at that time that, properly speaking MSUG should be part of his public administration division, but under the terms of our contract we were supposedly to enjoy a degree of autonomy. If we expected to enjoy program autonomy then we must accept the reverse of the coin and maintain our own administrative services. We must not come running to USOM for help every time we needed it. We accepted this challenge and our dependence upon USOM and all other American agencies for administrative support grew consistently less as time went on. At the present time we receive only nominal assistance from other American agencies, and that is in such areas ~~of~~ as clearance of imported items through customs, security checks for Vietnamese staff members, and other services which we are not in a position to provide

for our-selves without increasing our American staff by several additional persons.

During the greater part of 1956 and continuing through 1957 up to the present moment, there have been invidious comparisons drawn by ~~Viet~~ members of the Vietnamese government between the work done by Mich. State Univ. Group staff members and USOM staff members. USOM has come in for a good deal of sharp criticism on the grounds that its programs are not oriented in the interests of the Vietnamese government or Vietnamese people, that USOM is "pushing" an American program in Vietnam, rather than a program for the benefit for Vietnam. The quality of USOM's specialists has been questioned privately and even publicly on occasion by the President himself and other members of his government. And by and large the USOM operation is regarded with a good deal of suspicion and reservation by a great many influential Vietnamese. By contrast, the MSUG operation has been acclaimed by the President and his ministers, and it is an indisputable fact that members of MSUG have achieved a rapport with members of the government and with other Vietnamese that has not and probably will not be equalled by Americans working in official American agencies in Vietnam. Our success and their corresponding lack of success has been the cause for a growing ~~amount~~ amount of jealousy, envy, and even hostility, on the part of USOM staff members, from Mr. Barrows down to the clerks in the mail room. It might be well to pause here for a moment to analyze the character and personality of the USOM director, Mr. Leland Barrows. Mr. Barrows is an extremely intelligent and capable man, with many years of administrative experience, and is rated by ICA as one of their two or three best county directors in the world. He came to Vietnam after a successful tour of duty in Greece, which in turn followed a successful tour in Italy, and that in turn was preceded by one in Paris, where he was an assistant to Paul Hoffman. He is an intensely moody man, constantly at war with himself; that is, he argues with himself ceaselessly, first taking one side of the argument and then the opposing side, until finally he reaches agreement with himself and the two sides of his personality settle down to work together once more. He is very nervous, has little sense of humor, and is oppressed by a fear that Congress will some day investigate him or his mission and find that something dreadful occurred during his period of stewardship which will eventually destroy his career. His ambition for many years has been to gain entry into the U.S. foreign service, and recently this objective was achieved when he was

accepted into the foreign service via the lateral entry method as a class I officer of career. This gives him a permanent ~~minister~~ rank as a career minister and opens the door to further advancement, perhaps to the level of ambassador. Our personal relations have been consistently warm and friendly, at least outwardly, though each of us is aware that the other is exercising restraint in order to avoid personalizing difficulties which occasionally arise between our two organizations. From time to time word has come back to me that Mr. Barrows is envious of my relationship with the President and with other members of the government, and on certain occasions he has even expressed to me his uneasiness about the fact that I see the President privately and many times more frequently than he does, and he doesn't really know what we talk about. On such occasions, and whenever other opportunities arise, I take pains to tell him some of the subjects which we discuss, hoping thereby to reassure him that I do not "knife" him in private conversation with the President. It is questionable, however, whether he will ever be fully convinced of this fact. I may say that he extends the same suspicion to Wolf Ladejinski, who is present at my conversations with the President, more ~~often~~ often than not.

I could go into great detail concerning relationships between MSUG and USOM, but this would be a repetitious and unrewarding exercise. Suffice as to say that the primary element ~~in the hostility~~ motivating USOM's hostility toward MSUG stems from the fact that USOM does not control our programs or other activities. Occasionally ~~an~~ a ~~statement~~ statement to this effect will be made openly by Mr. Barrows or his deputy, Mr. Wesley Haroldson. More often, however, it takes the form of a charge that we have not "cleared" or "coordinated" our research or counseling ~~of~~ activities with our opposite numbers in USOM, or with Mr. Barrows or Mr. Haroldson in person. The consulting activity of our field administration division, which until two months ago was headed by Mr. Walter Mode, since returned to his post with the Department of Health, Education and Welfare in Boston, has been the most frequent target of USOM criticism. On one occasion, the charge was leveled by Mr. Barrows that our report on the reorganization of the Dept. of National Education of the Vietnamese government had been prepared without ~~any~~ consultation of any sort with the USOM education division, notwithstanding the fact that USOM had a 6 million dollar program in education in Vietnam, and that education was really

none of our business. Fortunately, members of our staff habitually keep memoranda of conversations they have had with USOM staff members or with members of the government, or ~~at~~ of any other conversations of significance. We were able to go to our files and assemble evidence proving that Mr. Mode and his staff had met no less than 32 times with members of the USOM education division in the course of their research and report writing on the Department of Education. They had also met an additional 70 odd times with members of the Dept. of National Education of the government of Vietnam, and of those meetings nearly half were also attended by personnel from the USOM Education Division. Subsequent investigations showed that the chief of the USOM Education Division, having ~~been~~ ~~criticized~~ been criticized by Mr. Barrows for ~~not~~ having permitted us to publish certain recommendations in conflict with USOM policy, had been afraid to admit that he had in fact cleared these specific recommendations. He therefore claimed that the report had been published without his knowledge and without having been cleared with him or his group in advance. He subsequently admitted that he had suffered from a faulty memory. In clearing up this particular matter we took occasion to refer to the number of instances of coordination between members of our field administration division and members of corresponding divisions in USOM during the course of preparation of other field administration reports, as for example on the Dept. of Information, Dept. of Agrarian Reform, Commissary General for Refugees, and so on. Nevertheless, ~~it~~ Mr. Barrows occasionally repeats these old charges that MSUG never clears with USOM before going ~~to~~ into something, or before coming up with recommendations to the government. If Mr. Barrows is resentful of the fact that he does not control MSUG, he is also resentful of the fact that our personnel engage in consulting activities vis-a-vis government of Vietnam officials. He sees no reason why we should not confine our activities to teaching at the National Institute of Administration (NIA) and to in-service training. It is useless to point out to him that, first of all, he has no public administration division of his own within USOM (Mr. David L. Wood serves as his public administration advisor and as liaison between USOM and MSUG, attending our staff meetings, reading our reports, and so on.) This situation is the result of a decision he himself made to permit MSUG to handle all public administration activities for him and for ICA in Vietnam. This is obviously a decision he now wishes he had not made. It is useless also to point out

to him that, if we refrain from serving as advisors to the government, that duty would not automatically therefore devolve upon USOM personnel, if indeed some were brought in to act as such advisors, but would in all likelihood be handed to French, Belgian, or German public administration experts whom the government would import at its own expense in order that it might be provided with objective expert advice in public administration. That is to say, Mr. Barrows does not realize that he does not have a choice between advice being offered by experts from Mich. State and experts from USOM, but rather a choice between advice offered by experts from Mich. State or experts from some foreign country who would have no responsibility to coordinate or clear or even to cooperate in any respect with Mr. Barrows and his staff at USOM, and who would be removed completely from his sphere of control. From our standpoint as Americans, his policy would therefore seem to be a most shortsighted one, and one that is not based upon an objective appraisal of the situation.

Notwithstanding these utterances and opinions, Mr. Barrows has from time to time delivered himself highly ~~fla~~ complimentary remarks about MSUG reports and certain other MSUG programs. However, he has a long memory for slights, real or fancied, and to this day will refer frequently to the difficulties he experienced with the first chief advisor. There is no doubt in my mind that if Mr. Barrows is given sufficient opportunity he will reduce MSUG to nothing more than a division of USOM. Indeed, he now habitually refers to our group as if it were one of his divisions and his administrative office appears to have received instructions from him to treat us in this fashion wherever and whenever possible. It goes without saying that we equally habitually resist such efforts to alter our status, in the feeling that our value to the American government and to the Vietnamese government would be reduced to perhaps half if we were ever to accept the ~~limiting~~ limiting status of a USOM division. The fact of the matter is that unlike USOM, MSUG does not "push" a program of its own. It acts as ~~an~~ a group of advisors to the ~~South~~ government of Vietnam, and offers its services as ~~an~~ a group of objective disinterested scholars to that government in an effort to render it more efficient, more effective, and more capable of meeting the challenge of the Communist north and to build a democratic administrative machine and society.

Interestingly enough, although there is some envy and jealousy toward MSUG manifested from time to time by personnel of other American agencies, there is more frequently expression of admiration for the success which members of our group have achieved in their work here. It is, however, correct to state that the official American agencies generally feel some resentment at the fact that the most successful American group in Vietnam has been the only unofficial group present, the Mich. State University Group. At the same time it should be noted that it is the unofficial character of the MSUG ~~operation~~ project which has contributed most largely to its success.

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