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*(Brought in tonight and  
just then brought to them  
and they were very  
impressed)*

THE MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY GROUP:  
ITS STATUS AND PROSPECTS

① The Michigan State University Group, or MSUG as we call it, is unique in many respects. It is the largest ICA-financed university group in the world. It is also the largest public administration technical assistance project in the world. Furthermore, it is the only contract group 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 an annual budget in excess of two and one-half million dollars, it is larger than most USOMs (or ICA missions) in the world. By virtue of its very size, however, by virtue also of the fact that it is almost autonomous in its operations, and as a result of its success in two years of work in Vietnam, MSUG has aroused a good deal of envy among other American groups in Vietnam. Particularly has this been true of USOM.

② It is a fact that MSUG has won for itself an acceptance among Vietnamese Government officials and among those members of the Vietnamese public who have come into contact with its program 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 program in conversations with key Government officials and even in public addresses. His remarks in East Lansing during his trip to the United States, which were well publicized in Vietnam, have also added to the excellent reputation the Group enjoys. The President himself told Dr. Weidner, Dr. Smuckler, and myself that as far as he is concerned the Michigan State operation should continue in Vietnam for the next twenty years. While this may have been a bit of an exaggeration growing out of the camaraderie existing between those present at this meeting, it is nevertheless indicative of the affection and esteem in which our Group is held. At the same time, the President and members of his Government have commented from time to time on the fact that MSUG is tied to USOM by a contract, and they have wondered aloud occasionally whether this affects the honesty and objectivity of our program. For corollary to the excellent repute of MSUG is the not-so-excellent reputation of USOM and certain other official American agencies represented here in Vietnam.

This brings us to a consideration of our place in the American community. The Michigan State University Group was the only ICA-sponsored contractual enterprise of any size in Vietnam, until a few months ago. Then 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 development, etc. Coming in on the ground floor as it were, NSU received a number of benefits which have not accrued to the later arrivals. 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, MAAG, and USOM. There have been many problems in the relations between NSU 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 it could be said with considerable honesty that our relations were 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 privileged status vis-a-vis the new contractors.

Many of the problems in our relationship with USOM stem from the fact that the four professors who made the initial survey setting up the NSU project made their study just prior to the arrival here of Leland Barrows, who is still Director of the USOM mission in Saigon. The four professors recommended that NSU set up a project encompassing not only the fields in which we now work, but also involving extensive operations in the economic 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 the Director of the United States Operation Mission. Ultimately, he and his Public Administration Division Chief, Professor Joseph Starr, revised the survey report to recommend a maximum of ten NSU professors, who would be limited in their activities to purely academic instruction and in-service training. After several months of negotiation between NSU in East Lansing, ICA in Washington, and USOM in Saigon, it was agreed that the Michigan 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, drew up his table of organization, however, he decided that he could get along with fewer than five administrative and secretarial people and designated two of the five so-called administrative openings for additional professional personnel. When Mr. Barrows learned that this had been done, he was extremely angry and charged that Dr. Weidner had violated a promise.

Concurrently, there was a problem in connection with the administrative support which USOM, under the terms of the ICA-NSU contract, was supposed to provide the NSU 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 an administrative service of its own and grew relatively free of USOM support and control.

When I arrived in Saigon to take over the post of Chief Advisor at the beginning of March 1956, Mr. Barrows took this opportunity to renew his insistence that we accept responsibility for all of our administrative services. He told me at that time that, properly speaking, NSOU 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 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 ourselves without increasing our American staff by several additional persons.

(6) During the greater part of 1956, and continuing through 1957 until the present moment, there have been invidious comparisons drawn by members of the Vietnamese Government between the work done by NSOU 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 the Vietnamese people, that USOM is "pushing" an American program in Vietnam, rather than a program for the benefit of Vietnam. The quality of USOM's specialists has been questioned on occasion by the President himself and by 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.

(7) By contrast, the NSOU operation has been acclaimed by the President and his ministers, and it is an indisputable fact that members of NSOU have achieved enviable rapport with members of the Government and with other Vietnamese. Our success and their corresponding lack of it has been the cause for a growing amount of jealousy and envy on the part of USOM staff members, from Mr. Barrows down to the clerks in the mail room.

It might be well to take time here 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 behind him. He is rated by ICA as one of their two or three best country directors in the world. He came to Vietnam after a successful tour of duty in Greece, which in turn followed one 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 the period of his stewardship, and that this will 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 One Officer of Career. This gives him a permanent rank of 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 more frequently than he does, and that he doesn't really know what we talk about. In fact, however, he is kept informed of the general substance and tenor of our conversations. It is questionable, however, whether he will ever be fully convinced that this is the case. I may say that he extends the same suspicion to Wolf Ladejinsky, who is present at my conversations with the President, more often than not.

The primary element motivating USOM's hostility toward NSUS stems from the fact that USOM does not control our programs or other activities. Occasionally, a statement to this effect will be made openly by Mr. Barrows or by his deputy, Mr. Wesley Haraldson. More often, however, it takes the form of a charge that we have not "cleared" or "coordinated" our research or counselling activities with our opposite numbers in USOM, or with Mr. Barrows or Mr. Haraldson in person. The consulting activity of our Field Administration Division, which until two months ago was headed by Mr. Walter Mads, since returned to his post with the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in Boston, has been the most frequent target of such criticism. On one occasion, Mr. Haraldson charged that our Report on the Reorganization of the Department of National Education of the Vietnamese Government had been prepared without consultation of any



sort with the USOM Education Division, notwithstanding the fact that USOM had a six million dollar program in education in Vietnam, and that education was "really none of NSU's 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 of any other conversations of significance. We were able to go to our files and assemble evidence proving that Mr. Nods 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. In addition, they had met 70-odd times with members of the Department of National Education, and of those meetings nearly half were also attended by personnel from the USOM Education Division. Subsequent investigation showed that the Chief of the USOM Education Division, having been criticised by Mr. Haraldson for 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 later admitted that his memory had been faulty.)

In clearing up this particular matter, we took the opportunity 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 Department of Information, Department of Agrarian Reform, Commissariat General for Refugees, and so on. Nevertheless, Mr. Barrows occasionally still repeats these old charges that NSU never clears with USOM before going into something, or before coming up with recommendations to the Government.

If Mr. Barrows is resentful of the fact that he does not control NSU, he is also resentful of the fact that our personnel engage in consulting activities vis-a-vis the 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. This situation is the result of a decision he himself made to permit NSU to handle all public administration activities for him and for ICA in Vietnam. (Mr. David L. Wood serves as his Public Administration Advisor and as liaison between USOM and NSU, attending our staff meetings, reading our reports, and so on.) It 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 devolve upon USOM personnel (if indeed some were brought in to act as such advisors)

our 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 from experts from Michigan State and experts from USOM, but rather a choice between advice offered by experts from Michigan State or experts from some foreign country who would have no responsibility to coordinate or to 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 short-sighted 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 of highly complimentary remarks about MSOG reports and certain other MSOG programs. However, he has a long memory for slights, real or fancy, 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 MSOG 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 by perhaps half if we were ever to accept the limiting status of a USOM division. For the fact of the matter is that unlike USOM, MSOG does not "pass" a program of its own. It acts as a group of advisors to the government of Vietnam; it offers its services as 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 assist it to build a democratic administration for a democratic society.

Interestingly enough, although some envy and jealousy toward MSOG is manifested from time to time by personnel of other American agencies, more frequently one hears expressions of admiration for the success which members of our Group have achieved here. Furthermore, the turnover rate among our Vietnamese staff is so slight that we have been unable to accommodate more than a fraction of the applications for employment which have come to us from qualified Vietnamese currently working with other American organizations here. Again, MSOG families have developed warm relations with the Vietnamese and have studied their language in an attempt to know them better. It is believed that much of the resentment of us is the result of our unquestioned acceptance by the Vietnamese people.

15) In evaluating our two years of work in Vietnam, I am convinced, as I have been since I assumed the position of Chief Advisor, that the most lamentable aspect of our operation has been the absence of opportunity for basic research. Our Group is in an unique position. It is the only American university group in Vietnam, Cambodia, or Laos. It has (if we may for the moment exclude our police members) 23 academicians and other well trained social science specialist. Yet the urgent operational character of its programs has acted to limit the depth of the research the Group has done in support of those programs. When the Vietnam Project was first conceived, we in the Governmental Research Bureau decided that there should be a certain proportion of research assistance sent abroad to compliment the work of the professors who might take active roles in the project. This proposal was put to ICA. The argument was used that information about this part of the world was extremely scanty, usually superficial, and frequently unverified; that there were virtually no American scholars in the social sciences or humanities who had had extensive experiences here and written about them; that in the interests of pushing back the frontiers of knowledge Michigan State University should be allotted a number of "research assistant" positions in addition to the contemplated professional and administrative jobs; that the international interest of the United States also dictated that this project should be used as a vehicle for increasing our knowledge of the peoples and political and social dynamics of this part of the world. There was the further important consideration that the resources of the University could be enriched if this project were used as a base of operation by professors and graduate students interested in research in this area.

I suppose it is unnecessary to add that ICA considered such proposals at best peripheral and even superfluous. ICA could see no reason why the U.S. Government should support such activities when they were "obviously not germane" to the purpose of the project. As a consequence, many of us have discussed from time to time the desirability of ultimately trying to shift the Vietnam Project from ICA to foundation patronage. As an alternative, it might be possible to secure foundation support for a basic research augmentation to this ICA-sponsored program of ours. Certainly, a splendid opportunity will have been missed if Michigan State University does not make a determined effort to develop a substantial research program in connection with the Vietnam Project.