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MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

VIETNAM ADVISORY GROUP

OFFICE MEMORANDUM

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TO : Dr. Wesley R. Fishel,
Chief Advisor

DATE: November 15, 1957

FROM : Dr. John T. Dorsey, Jr., Chief,
Public Administration Division

SUBJECT: Evaluation of NIA Progress and Problems

The renewal of the MSU contract with the Government, the arrival of new staff members in Saigon, my own still-recent return to Saigon and the subsequent reorganization of the MSU Group all combine to make appropriate a candid appraisal of the progress which has been made in the two and a half years of technical cooperation between NIA and MSU. We all agree, I think, that the NIA will remain after we depart as the single most important consequence of this technical cooperation project. It is crucial therefore for the future development of the quality of public administration in Viet-Nam, and, I might add, for the reputation of this entire project among political scientists and educators in the U.S., that we not lose the capacity to view critically the work in which we have participated, and more importantly, that we not spare any effort to correct such deficiencies as we may be able to identify.

With these thoughts Dr. Montgomery and I have had several searching discussions concerning the NIA. Dr. Montgomery's views reflect his extensive experience at high levels of educational administration in the U.S. and are further enhanced by his opportunity to look at the NIA with a fresh eye. My own perceptions gain some value, I think, from my association with the NIA through its first year, followed by a year in the U.S. which gave me a chance to reflect on the experience and to try to view the NIA in perspective. It is hardly necessary to add that both of us, as you, are motivated basically by the strong desire to see the NIA succeed. In this memorandum I shall try to present to you the results of our thinking and of our discussions.

Progress of the NIA.

It cannot be denied that the NIA has made progress in which we as well as our Vietnamese colleagues can take pride.

- 1) In August, the first class to go through the NIA since MSU arrived on the scene was graduated, and these students (almost 50) are now serving in the administration throughout the country.

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(In 1955 a smaller class which had gone through the shorter program of the former National School of Administration at Dalat was graduated.) Some of the graduates of both classes are already in fairly responsible positions.

- 2) The student body has been almost doubled to a 1957 total of about 200.
- 3) Over a thousand persons (most of them civil servants) have gone through the courses of the night school.
- 4) The faculty of the NIA has been somewhat enlarged, and Vietnamese instructors now teach all but one course in the regular undergraduate curriculum.
- 5) Three faculty members have gone to the U.S. for about 6 months of study and observation.
- 6) The curriculum of the NIA has been expanded to include several courses concerned with the managerial aspects of administration. A recent shift in the curriculum gives added emphasis to the practical as distinguished from the academic and theoretical training of students. Field work aspects of this training show considerable promise of effectiveness. An advanced studies or graduate curriculum has been announced for 1958. MSU staff will teach most of the courses in this new program.
- 7) A number of in-service training courses have been conducted under NIA auspices. Although it cannot be said that this constitutes a government-wide effort or program of in-service training, NIA has increased the staff of its In-Service Training Division and has been engaged in substantial planning for the development of the program.
- 8) A professional association for administrative studies has been organized and has recently published the first issue of its quarterly journal.
- 9) A library has been established which now possesses almost 6,000 volumes in public administration, political science, economics, and finance.

The NIA, in other words, is now a going concern. Although primary credit for this achievement is due to the Government and to the Vietnamese staff of NIA, it is beyond doubt that these advances would not have been made without MSU and the contract with the Government of Viet-Nam.

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Problems of the NIA.

It is also beyond doubt that the progress made has not been as great as it should have been, and that the prospects for the future are in some respects grave. Let me spell out some of these problems.

- 1) Certain of the above achievements were too much the result of MSU efforts, and indeed were made only after overcoming strong opposition from the Direction of the NIA. For example, the student body was enlarged only after strong persuasion and even insistence by MSU. The night courses program also was undertaken only after great initial opposition by the Direction of the NIA had been overcome. In-service training courses have been largely taught by MSU personnel, and it is doubtful that the NIA will be able to take this activity over in the near future. The library has been almost entirely an MSU enterprise, with little responsibility accepted by the NIA. Until this Fall NIA had not even obtained the services of a professional person to be trained as librarian. The clerical staff of the library are all MSUG, not NIA employees.
- 2) The academic standards of the NIA are disturbingly low. For example, no one has ever been "flunked out", to my knowledge. Also, a large proportion of the students find it possible (and desirable) to attend the Faculty of Law of the University and obtain the Licence there concurrently with their supposedly full-time studies at NIA. The grading system is not very rigorous (in some instances, grades given by MSU instructors have been revised upward by the Direction of the NIA) and is of a type that encourages cramming--indeed, requires it. Teaching methods, in spite of occasional pronouncements by the Director to the contrary, have not been greatly improved, and the straight lecture technique is still the usual practice. Very few professors spend any time at all at the NIA for counseling with students. Students make little use of the library except as a study hall.
- 3) There has apparently been little systematic evaluation of the curriculum by the NIA, and efforts to reshape and develop the curriculum seem to have gone no deeper than inserting new course titles and dropping old ones. This statement can be verified by a reading of the outlines of course contents, which will reveal considerable overlapping in some areas and gaps in others. The curriculum is still heavily legalistic in content--which, incidentally, probably helps explain why students find it possible to follow courses and pass exams at the Faculty of Law while attending NIA.

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- ✓ 4) As far as we know, no research has been produced by the NIA faculty and none is in progress. An important reason for this is that the few full-time professors are overloaded with administrative and committee work; they just don't have time. Presumably the half-time professors regard their NIA responsibilities as secondary; since many of them are fairly capable people it is reasonable to assume that they are overworked in their other jobs, as is so often the case with capable people in Viet-Nam. Students are not often required or encouraged to do research in connection with their courses.
- 5) The planning aspect of the NIA's administration seems to be clearly inadequate. As far as I know, there has been no serious attention devoted to the development of projections of enrollment and of future faculty needs. There has been no systematic attempt to assess the nation's needs for administrative personnel at the levels for which the NIA is supposed to prepare people. The goals and function of the NIA in the future, after the present critical need for higher civil servants has been met and when the average annual need for NIA graduates will probably be about 30, have not been considered. As late as November, the academic calendar for courses beginning in February, 1958, had not been fixed.
- 6) There has been a consistent refusal to take the English language program seriously; this has been left to MSU and the courses are not even listed in the curriculum. While we realize the unfortunate position in which we are placed by seeming to insist that the students learn our language, the fact remains that about half the books in the library are in English, and these books contain almost all the ideas and data on which a reorientation of the teaching and practice of public administration and economics in this country will have to be based--these things, as you well know, are not in the French and Vietnamese materials.

The foregoing seems to indicate a regrettable lack of attention on the part of the Direction to the academic responsibilities of a university-level institution. However, there are at least two other problem areas which give us cause for concern: the organization and management of the NIA and the failure to take advantage of opportunities for technical cooperation.

- 1) First, it is now clear that the tie-in of NIA to the Presidency is too close for effective administration. Although the Institute has benefitted from the close interest and attention of the President, the fact that so many questions have to be cleared with the Presidency or by the President himself results in inevitable delays and problems of communication, and forces the instructors of courses undergoing revision to proceed with little opportunity for advance planning or preparation.

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- 2) Second, it is probable that the Administrative Council, representing a number of Departments of State and other agencies, is too large, meets too infrequently, and has to approve too many kinds of questions. Dealing with any one of these problems (by reducing its size, increasing the frequency of meetings, or delegating more authority and responsibility to the Direction of the NIA) would help considerably.
- 3) Within the Institute itself there is too much centralization. Too many questions must be referred to the Director or to either the Executive Committee or the Academic Committee.
- 4) The Divisional organization of the Institute is too proliferated, hampers coordination, and frustrates the focussing of responsibility for the development of the academic program and the raising of standards. With a staff as small as that of the NIA, the fragmentation of the Teaching Division into six sections and the Research and Documentation Division into four does nothing but build in undesirable rigidities. It is also irrelevant to the academic purposes of systematic curriculum building.
- 5) One of the most concrete and obvious organizational problems is the great need for a full-time director. A full-time director, if he were imaginative and energetic, if he were capable and regarded the development of NIA as his primary mission, could do a great deal to resolve the problems already listed and those which will be listed below. A school which is supposed to develop awareness of and capacity for administration ought to be better administered.

The final category of problems can be summarized as a failure to take adequate advantage of available resources for technical cooperation. More adequate use of the skills and knowledge which have been made available by MSU could have lessened many of the problems already cited. The indications of this failure are the following:

- 1) The Director and many of the staff seldom discuss the problems and plans of the Institute with MSUG professors and specialists. When an opinion is occasionally requested and a written statement or proposal is submitted to the person making the request, that is usually the last heard of it by MSU. No opportunity is provided for a follow-up or explanatory discussion.

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- 2) Important decisions affecting the future of the NIA are made without consultation or discussion with MSU. An example of this was the decision to drop MSU instructors from all but one undergraduate course this Fall. Another was the decision to establish the advanced studies curriculum. This is not a complaint that we don't participate enough in the actual running of the NIA--far from it. We wouldn't have time. But we might have been able to provide some useful suggestions, for example, in the shaping of the advanced studies curriculum. This latter, incidentally, is another prime example of inadequate planning by NIA. Aside from administrative shortcomings, it is very questionable to take courses dealing with the social and political science foundations of public administration out of the regular undergraduate curriculum and place them in the advanced curriculum.
- 3) There has been a persistent and tacit refusal to work jointly with MSU personnel in the development of new courses and materials or research projects, or even to participate regularly in organized mutual exchange of opinions and ideas. Thus the fact that NIA staff now teaches almost all of the courses in the regular undergraduate program is not a cause for congratulation; most of those courses are in content and method, as far as we can ascertain, just what they might have been had we not been here at all. This condition is in part a reflection of the unfortunate psychological structure of some people here which refuses to recognize that there is really anything to be learned or any improvement needed. This may well be one of the consequences of newly liberated nationalism, but if so it is a fearful handicap for future development.
- 4) There has been a continual tendency to channel communications between MSU and NIA through top echelons, which makes professional and interpersonal relations hesitant and generally ineffective.
- 5) A related problem is in the unduly great emphasis on protocol and formality at the top echelon of NIA. This emphasis, which is considerably greater than is usual in Viet-Nam, sets the tone for behavior throughout the NIA and complicates all relations between MSU and NIA personnel.

Since many of the problems which I have discussed reflect in the final analysis upon the Direction of the NIA, it is necessary to emphasize an important distinction at this point. Very little of the criticism can be directed at the Assistant Director, Mr. Nghiem Dang. Were it not for his capacity and energy and his moderating influence, most of the problems which I have discussed would without doubt be much more serious.

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I hope that this rather lengthy survey will be of use to you in understanding the situation at the NIA. We are of course actively continuing the attempt to ameliorate these problems, and, as noted above, the situation is far from completely negative, on balance. However, unless something can be done about the basic causes of these problems, there is, as I said earlier, ground for serious concern about the future development of NIA as a leading center for the study of administration in Southeast Asia.

JTD/mpw