

Inside Report

Pacification Czar

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WHILE THE HEADLINES are filled with the political crisis in Saigon, President Johnson has moved quietly and surely to give unprecedented support to the vital mission in South Vietnam of Robert Komer.

Komer, a well respected former intelligence specialist on the White House staff the past five years, now has the backing of a highly classified National Security Council (NSC) memorandum to proceed with the essential work of planning peaceful reconstruction in South Vietnam.

When President Johnson a month ago named Komer a special assistant to oversee the reconstruction program, there were signs of some unhappiness in the State Department. What bothered the department was the prospect of bureaucratic conflicts between the special Vietnam task force there, headed by Leonard Unger, a highly regarded senior diplomat, and the new Komer task force.

Mr. Johnson cut through this minor trouble in adroit fashion. He instructed the State Department, the Defense Department and every other agency having a hand in the reconstruction program that Komer was the boss. All disagreements on priorities would be resolved



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by Komer himself. This was nailed down by the NSC memorandum, precisely spelling out Komer's broad grant of power.

MR. JOHNSON'S intensive personal involvement in the vastly complex job of reconstruction isn't generally known. Following his trip to Honolulu to impress on the Saigon government the importance with which the United States views reconstruction, the President returned here all but decided to set up an emergency agency to handle the job.

He was thinking in terms of an agency with the prestige and power, for example, of the World War II mobilization office, headed by James F. Byrnes of South Carolina, then one of the country's most influential politicians. The President toyed with the idea of bringing Ben Heineman, the highly respected president of the Chicago & Northwestern Railway, to Washington to run the program.

He finally decided, however, the job needed somebody intimately familiar with the Washington national security bureaucracy. So instead of Heineman, he turned to Komer, who since 1961 had been the top assistant to McGeorge Bundy, Mr. Johnson's now-resigned national security aide.

Johnson knew Komer well. As Vice President, he had taken Komer with him on his Middle East tour. He was impressed with Komer's handling of the war last year between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. In effect, he has now made Komer the czar of all major aspects of the non-military operation in South Vietnam.

WHAT THIS MEANS is that Komer now has some-

thing close to outright requisition power over scarce materials and scarce manpower essential to the economic side of the war. He can directly compete with the military, which means that for the first time the reconstruction program has been put on a par with the military program.

Furthermore, here in Washington, the reconstruction plans now being drawn up by Secretary John Gardner's Department of Health, Education and Welfare and Orville Freeman's Agriculture Department all must clear through Komer. Komer and his Saigon counterpart, Deputy U.S. Ambassador William Porter, working directly under President Johnson's personal supervision, have been instructed by the President to let nothing impede the work of reconstruction.

But with all this, the task is an awesome one, quite apart from the political instability and the coming elections in South Vietnam. For example, it has now been decided that the basic work in the hamlets and villages of South Vietnam must be done not by Americans but by South Vietnamese.

This may require giving reconstruction units priority over the Vietnamese army for scarce manpower. If that replace the Vietnamese units in the fighting zones it could mean new political problems in Washington.

Besides these enormous problems, still to come is Nation-wide recruitment to round up the scores of education, health and other American experts who must be found to help train Vietnamese cadres for work in the field.

But at least the program has now been brought under one master, Presidential Assistant Komer, who has been given power to command scarce resources for this all-important part of the war in Vietnam.

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