

I am familiar perhaps not with all the details of some of the policy decisions, but I have been generally familiar with the Vietnamese situation through my former position.

ACCURACY OF VIETNAM STORIES

Mr. MEADER. I would like to ask whether or not the Vietnamese Government has given the press stories which were something less than completely accurate?

Mr. HILSMAN. * * *. Let me again, picking up from what I said in my statement, say you are dealing with a country which, first of all, has relatively few educated people, a very great lack of experienced and trained people, stemming from a Mandarin tradition that is quite different from ours, 2,000 years of authoritarian regimes.

I think it is interesting and important to note that under the present government, which has only been in since 1954, there have been held the first national elections that have ever been held in the history of Vietnam in 2,000 years, national elections, and only during the last year the first hamlet elections under the strategic hamlet program, where hamlet officials were elected, rather than appointed by the emperor or something else.

Now in a situation like this, they find it very difficult to understand the institutions of a free press and how it works. The whole cultural complex there is in another direction, so it is perfectly true—

Mr. MEADER. Mr. Hilsman, I don't want to interrupt you. I find this very interesting, but Mr. Reuss and I had the privilege of visiting in Saigon, and we met Diem. I see Mr. Hardy has come in. He was also there.

I understand Diem spent a good deal of his life in the United States. He is perfectly familiar with our customs, and he is the principal official of Vietnam and whatever may have been the case 2,000 years ago, or up until now, I think it would not be quite accurate to represent that Mr. Diem did not understand American systems of news coverage.

Mr. HILSMAN. Let me answer it this way, sir. We have not been satisfied with the South Vietnamese handling of the press, and we have gone to the lengths of making not only private protests to the Vietnamese Government, but Secretary Rusk, as I said in my statement, has twice said publicly that we were not satisfied with their handling of the press. So we are not satisfied with it. That is the short and straight answer.

Mr. MEADER. I am interested not only in suppression of news, but in the release of inaccurate news, news management, if you would like to use that term. Has there been news management by the Vietnamese Government?

Mr. HILSMAN. This is one of the things that we are not satisfied with the way the Vietnamese Government is handling the press.

Mr. MEADER. Do you have or does your staff have instances of statements publicly made which were inaccurate, which you can supply to the committee?

Mr. HILSMAN. I will check on this. * * *. Their briefings are improving. As I said, probably the best one they have done yet was on the herbicide operation. It was a model, really a model of a good press briefing that we thoroughly liked and would have been proud of ourselves, and so were the press pleased with this.