No Path to Victory: MACV in Vietnam 1964-1968

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ABSTRACT

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No Path to Victory: MACV in Vietnam 1964-1968

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The scholarship regarding US policy and military strategy in Vietnam is substantial, and by no means conclusive. To provide clear focus within the realms of national policy and military strategy, the analysis provided by this thesis is focused on the advice and actions taken by the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), and its commander General William Westmoreland from 1964 to 1968. Within the actions of MACV, this thesis seeks to determine the contribution of MACV in the decision to escalate US involvement in the Vietnam War. This thesis analyzes the US Army’s doctrine, structure, and culture related to civil-military relations. Also, this thesis analyzes the military approach taken by MACV in fighting the Vietnam War at the operational level, and concludes with an analysis of a possible alternative to MACV’s military strategy in the form of the Combined Action Program (CAP). This thesis concludes that MACV’s operational approach was correct.
DEDICATION

For my family, who make everything possible. May my words bring answers to some,
and inspiration to others.

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First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Ingo Traushweizer, for his support and patience in guiding me through the process of developing this thesis. His mentorship and patience have been invaluable in forcing me to think in far broader terms than I thought possible. I also wish to acknowledge the administrators and professors of the Ohio University History Department for challenging my preconceived notions, and providing me the opportunity to grow as a scholar and person. Additionally, I wish to acknowledge the outstanding support I received from my peers. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my wife Brittany, and children Grayson and Myla, for their patience, encouragement and support that enabled me to complete my thesis. Without the support of my family this project would have been impossible.
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INTRODUCTION: NO PATH TO VICTORY: MACV IN VIETNAM 1964-1968

The scholarship regarding US policy and military strategy in Vietnam is substantial and by no means conclusive. To provide clear focus within the realms of national policy and military strategy, the analysis provided by this thesis is focused on the advice and actions taken by the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), and its commander General William Westmoreland from 1964 to 1968. The analysis of MACV and Westmoreland’s advice and actions are based on the relationships between US military doctrine, organization, training, and civil-military relations during the early 1960s. The purpose of this thesis to challenge the long held narratives of the Vietnam War put forth by Andrew Krepinevich, and supported by scholars Lewis Sorley and John Nagl. Theirs are narratives that continue to impact the dominant discourse related to the importance of counterinsurgency in contemporary US military operations.

When approaching the topic of how the US fought the Vietnam War, there are many themes to choose from. Was Vietnam a policy failure? Was the failure of the US in Vietnam related to a flawed national and military strategy? Did an alternative exist to Westmoreland’s approach? The above questions are but a few of the questions scholars have attempted to answer regarding the defeat of the US in Vietnam. The problem with such questions is that they are broad and ignore the complexity of the situation faced by General Westmoreland in South Vietnam. In so doing, scholars have ignored that Vietnam was both a conventional war fought against a well-organized and equipped enemy in the People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN), in addition to an insurgency waged by
an insurgent force backed by North Vietnam. This complexity is what led to the topic of this thesis.

What has developed in the fifty years since US escalation in Vietnam is a narrative that the US military could have singlehandedly won the war in Vietnam. For Krepinevich it was the failure of a US army culture focused on a Soviet threat to Western Europe. For Sorley it was that Westmoreland was the wrong military commander, and for Nagl the US failure was based on the inability of the US to adapt to the conditions in Vietnam. The result of these narratives have led to the contemporary metanarrative that all counterinsurgencies waged by the US in the wake of Vietnam are just like Vietnam, and by doing the opposite of what the US did in Vietnam militarily, the US can achieve a different outcome. From this narrative, springs a need to determine if the Vietnam War was fought in the manner that has been taught and accepted by generations of scholars and the US military.

Was Vietnam fought in the manner that US historians claim? This question, of many regarding US military actions in Vietnam, led to a focus on the what is called the operational level of war today. How did Westmoreland attempt to use military operations to link tactical means, to strategic ends? Why did Westmoreland request more troops in the summer of 1965, when in 1964 he said that even with 500,000 to 700,000 US troops, there was “no likelihood of achieving a quick a favorable end?”

Furthermore, why did Westmoreland request more troops in the face of political instability in South Vietnam

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that led Westmoreland to observe that the South Vietnamese government was unable to “foster national discipline, issue firm guidance, and give strong support, and would not survive without substantial intervention.”

What changed in Westmoreland’s thinking between July 1964 and July 1965? Why did Westmoreland respond to political issues by recommending more military means? The answer to the questions regarding the change in Westmoreland’s thinking and the requesting of more military means, can be found when one understands the framework in which Westmoreland was constrained, both politically and militarily.

The first chapter establishes the role of General Westmoreland as the operational commander over the war in South Vietnam. The analysis of Chapter One is broken into three parts. The first part is an analysis of the state of US civil-military relations during the Cold War. On the matter of civil-military relations, one need only turn to Robert Komer, a member of President Johnson’s national security council, who states that Westmoreland was not given new strategic guidance from 1966 to 1968, and was acting within traditional civil-military roles by focusing on the ground strategy, and leaving pacification and national policy to civilians.

Part two is an analysis of the command structure in which General Westmoreland had to operate. Here again Komer is clear in his critique that the US had an ad hoc command structure in Vietnam, ensuring Westmoreland had to answer to several different military and civilian bosses. The third part, and the bulk of the analysis, is focused on the national and theater strategy in which

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4 Ibid., 84.
Westmoreland had to operate, and is centered on the national objectives laid out in National Security Action Memorandums (NSAM), and the interpretation of the NSAMs by the JCS and Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, Commander-in-Chief Pacific (CINPAC). The purpose of the analysis of Chapter One is to determine what advice, if any, did MACV provide in the strategic discussions concerning escalation. Was Westmoreland asked for input regarding escalation? If so what did he recommend? If not, why was he not involved?

The purpose of Chapter Two is to answer the question of how balanced General Westmoreland’s strategy was between pacification and large unit operations. Did Westmoreland focus more on conventional operations, to the detriment of pacification and the training of the Republic of Vietnam’s Armed Forces (RVNAF)? If Westmoreland did focus on conventional operations, why did he do so? Was an Army culture glorifying large unit operations to blame for Westmoreland’s approach, as Andrew Krepinevich argues? Also, what effect did PAVN and People’s Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF) military operations play in Westmoreland’s approach? To find the answers to these questions, an analysis of MACV’s Command Histories from 1964 to 1968 provide the operational goals, and the actions undertaken by MACV to achieve the ends discussed in Chapter One. Also, within Chapter Two, analysis concerning what the Army at the time could actually accomplish given its training, equipping, and counterinsurgency and operational doctrine is discussed. Analysis will occur within the arguments presented by Krepinevich regarding Army culture, John Nagl’s charge that the Army failed to adapt, and Lewis Sorley’s claim that Westmoreland was working outside
his capabilities. Subchapters, outlined by year from 1964 to 1968, provide the analysis of MACV’s attempts to link the means to the ends the US aimed to achieve in Vietnam. Overall, when viewed within mission parameters given to MACV, one can see that General Westmoreland did adapt operationally, and was not solely focused on conventional large unit operations. Westmoreland did in fact have a three-pronged approach in which conventional operations served as support to pacification and the training of the RVNAF. Yet, these efforts failed. Why is that?

Chapter Three is focused on the training, equipping, selection, employment, and effectiveness of the Combined Action Platoons (CAP) within Vietnam. The purpose of Chapter Three is to determine if a strictly counterinsurgency campaign would have led to a different outcome for the US in Vietnam. Those like Sorley and Marine Corps veterans argue that a better war existed after General Westmoreland relinquished command to General Creighton Abrams in June 1968. At the heart of this narrative is the belief that General Westmoreland specifically ignored the best program of pacification known as the CAP, started by the Marines in the Northern Provinces of Quang Tri, Thua Thien, Quang Nam, Quang Tin, and Quang Ngai. The CAP has long been touted as the road not taken by the United States in Vietnam. Is this true? Was Westmoreland against the CAP concept? Were the Marines better suited than the US Army to conduct counterinsurgency despite the U.S. Army possessing an officer corps in which twenty

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percent had served as military advisors to foreign armies battling insurgencies? Did the success of the CAP go beyond the tactical level, and if not, could it have?

This thesis is not intended to resolve who is responsible for the US defeat in Vietnam. Rather, it aims to provide a view of the Vietnam War not only from the prospective of General Westmoreland, but also from the view of the enemy. By making North Vietnam’s goals a part of the narrative, this thesis breaks from traditional scholarship. This is the first time US military action is explained in conjunction with North Vietnamese actions and reactions to US strategy. The hope is to provide those interested in the Vietnam War with a more holistic view of why Westmoreland took the actions that he did. Careful analysis of the evidence proves that Vietnam was both a conventional and counterinsurgency conflict. To focus on one, would lead to defeat in the other. Yet, Westmoreland was not given the military means to do both. This thesis also concludes that even if the US focused on counterinsurgency, without a willing partner in the form of the South Vietnamese people and government, defeat was a certainty. Therefore, for Westmoreland there was no path to victory.

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CHAPTER 1: THE ROLE OF MACV IN THE DECISION TO ESCALATE IN VIETNAM

The decision by President Lyndon Johnson to escalate U.S. involvement in Vietnam has been a subject of much debate. Yet, a key element of U.S. decision-making leading to escalation is often overlooked. What role did MACV, namely its commander General Westmoreland, play in recommending both increased bombing of the North, and deployment of US troops to the South in Vietnam? To determine the role of MACV in escalation several factors must be analyzed in order to place MACV’s advice into context. First, prior to US escalation in Vietnam in 1965, what did the U.S. military see as their role in battling insurgencies? Analysis of the structure and doctrine of the U.S. military provides a glimpse concerning what exactly the U.S. military was able to do in terms of advice and capabilities. Second, the state of civil-military affairs during the 1960s describes the perceived division of labor between policymakers and military leaders. The perceived division of labor between policymakers and military leaders sets the stage for understanding the command structure in which MACV was constrained, and last, provides insight into the advice provided by Westmoreland to the Johnson Administration regarding the commitment of U.S. ground forces outside the 21,000 advisors and marines present in South Vietnam in March 1965. Upon analysis of these factors mentioned above, one finds that the advice provided by MACV was in line with the capabilities of the U.S. military at the time, and functioned within the constraints provided by policymakers.
The U.S. Army in a Cold War Context

Studying the U.S. Army in Vietnam without understanding the wider implications of the Cold War is equivalent to reading only one chapter of a long book. With the end of World War II, the world became divided between a democratic West and Communist East. The division became know as the Cold War, and was waged across the entire world, but especially in the developing third world. Southeast Asia was one of these developing areas, however, the real focus, and the one place for the real potential of World War III erupting was in Western Europe. As Ingo Trauschweizer states, “The Cold War was a global competition for access to markets, resources, skilled labor, and strategically placed military bases. But Western Europe, with its industrial societies and vast economies, was the prize.”7 The battle for this prize, and the need of the U.S. Army to find a defined role within the struggle for Western Europe is where the story leading to Vietnam begins.

The post-World War II world was defined by two words, nuclear war. With the ability to destroy the entire world in a blink of the eye, the presidential administration of Dwight Eisenhower set about developing a strategy of reducing land power, and relying on predominantly nuclear weapons as a deterrent to Soviet aggression in Europe.8 The issue with this policy known as massive retaliation is that it left very little flexibility in the response to Soviet aggression.9 Enter General Maxwell Taylor, from 1955 to 1959 the Army’s Chief of Staff under Eisenhower. Due to the global nature of the Cold War, a

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general-purpose force was needed, and Taylor pushed for a modern, dual-capable land force, armed with conventional and atomic weapons.\(^\text{10}\) Taylor hoped that not only would such a force provide greater strategic flexibility, but also that it would secure a larger share of the military budget. Unfortunately, for Taylor support for a large land force would have to wait for the election of President John F. Kennedy.\(^\text{11}\)

The mid to late 1950’s Army structure was centered on the pentomic division, structured to provide five battle groups versus the standard three per Army division, and was armed with both conventional and tactical atomic weapons.\(^\text{12}\) Yet, the pentomic division was operationally impracticable, so in 1961 the Reorganization Objective Army Division (ROAD) concept was adopted by the Kennedy administration.\(^\text{13}\) The ROAD division was built on the need for army divisions to possess greater conventional firepower, greater mobility, and flexibility to fight in any environment.\(^\text{14}\) By making the battalion the basic combat unit, the brigade headquarters would remain permanently assigned to a division. Battalions, however, could be added or subtracted in order to tailor the division to operational requirements.\(^\text{15}\) ROAD was an outgrowth of the Kennedy administration’s adoption of a “flexible response” strategy in 1961, which

\(^{10}\) Trauschweizer, *The Cold War U.S. Army*, 49.
\(^{11}\) For the sake of brevity, the pentomic division is not discussed in great detail in this thesis. For further reading on the pentomic division look to Ingo Trauschweizer’s *The Cold War US Army: Building Deterrence for Limited War*. However, the Reorganization Objective Army Division (ROAD) is the focus of analysis regarding the Army structure leading into the Vietnam War, since it was the structure in place at the time of US commitment to Vietnam.
\(^{13}\) Ibid., 114.
\(^{14}\) Ibid., 114.
\(^{15}\) Ibid., 115.
although never clearly defined, assumed that the US “had to respond to political or military challenges with means that were proportionate to circumstances.”\textsuperscript{16}\hspace{1em} One must understand that at this time in the Cold War, the Soviet Union had ninety-seven active divisions deployed against twenty-one North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) divisions in Europe; therefore, the need to increase or decrease armor and mechanized capabilities in Europe was a requirement.\textsuperscript{17} As a result of the ROAD division, priority for troops was given to Europe, and all those divisions outside of Germany were left at reduced strength.\textsuperscript{18}

By 1963, the force structure and mindset of the US Army had shifted radically. In 1960 eleven of the fourteen Army divisions were either infantry or airborne infantry. By 1963 half of the sixteen combat divisions were either armored or mechanized.\textsuperscript{19} This shift was due to the focus on Europe as the main theatre of the Cold War, since the Soviets had an armored strike force of 5,000 tanks in East Germany, thus necessitating NATO to counter with more armored and mechanized forces to serve as deterrence. With the ROAD division structure, the Army was built on the premise of deterring Soviet aggression in Europe. General Decker, the Army Chief of Staff under Kennedy said, “We could lose Asia without losing everything, but to lose Europe would be fatal.”\textsuperscript{20} It also shifted the Army doctrine from one of defense, to one of offense. This idea of an offensive mindset is supported by Field Manual 100-5, published in 1962, that states,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Trauschweizer, \textit{The Cold War U.S. Army}, 114.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 126.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 116.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 163.
\end{itemize}
“The defensive may be forced on the commander, but it should be deliberately adopted only as a temporary expedient while awaiting an opportunity for offensive action…. Even on the defensive the commander seeks every opportunity to seize the initiative and achieve decisive results by offensive action.”

Another change in structure resulted from the addition of airmobile units: “The advent of nuclear weapons has weighted the fire-maneuver balance in favor of fire. This imbalance can be corrected only by a substantial increase in mobility. The use of aircraft adds new dimension to the land battle by permitting maneuver through the air.”

Thus, the airmobile concept was built in response not only to the need to have dispersed forces capable of withstanding a nuclear attack, but also forces capable of launching offensive operations rapidly, across what was typically a division-sized front of several hundred kilometers.

_U.S. Army Cold War Counterinsurgency Doctrine_

One of the more recent critics of the Vietnam Era Army’s regarding doctrine is John Nagl. Nagl attributes the failure of the US military in Vietnam to institutional inertia, and a failure to adapt to conditions in Vietnam. As previously discussed, Nagl does not consider the Army’s focus was on fighting the Soviet Union in Europe, and for good reason (as the Soviets had nuclear weapons and larger forces). Additionally, by taking a narrow view on 1965-1973, Nagl ignores the state of U.S. Army counterinsurgency doctrine prior to the Vietnam War. Nagl also ignores operational doctrine in general, and therefore misses the fact that the U.S. Army, though structured to

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22 Ibid., 99.
23 Trauschweizer, _The Cold War U.S. Army_, 165.
fight in Europe, had acknowledged that more than conventional war existed. In fact doctrine was published, and training was conducted at all levels. However, Nagl takes a narrow approach by assuming that the Army, and U.S. military for that fact, could have won the war in Vietnam by themselves. The truth is far less firm. The Vietnam War, of course, was far more complex and army doctrine was also more reflective of a guerilla and insurgent threat in Europe. During World War II, the Soviets used partisans against Germany, and the US viewed this as a possibility in the event of war between NATO and the Soviet Union. Therefore a majority of the doctrine came from lessons learned from German Army tactics used against Soviet partisans during World War II. This may not have fit the environment in Vietnam very well, but it represented a step in the direction of counterinsurgency doctrine.

Two field manuals published in 1963, FM 31-16 and 31-22 provide a deeper view of U.S. Army doctrine in during the 1960s. FM 31-16, provided guidance for conducting counter guerilla operations. A guerilla as defined by FM 31-16 is, “the armed manifestation of a resistance movement by a portion of the population of the area against the local government or occupying power.” The mission of the counterguerrilla “is to subvert, kill, or capture the enemy guerrilla force and prevent the resurgence of the resistance movement.” Accordingly, the commander of the counterguerrilla force was to “orient their efforts continually on the destruction of the enemy; not on terrain, which

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26 Ibid., 20.
can usually be yielded by the guerrilla force with little or no tactical loss.”

The manual further states, “even limited offensive operations are preferable to a purely passive attitude. Offensive action should be continuous and aggressive.” The purpose of this offensive mindset is to “keep the guerrilla force on the move, disrupt its security an organization, and lower its morale. Long periods of inactivity permit the guerrilla to lick its wounds, reorganize, and resume offensive operations.”

Yet again one is provided with a view of an aggressive mindset commanders were supposed to have when conducting unconventional operations outside of a conventional war sense. The next manual, FM 31-22 sheds even more light on how the U.S. Army viewed limited war.

FM 31-22, *US Army Counterinsurgency Forces*, defines the Army’s role in conducting counterinsurgency. First, the definition of counterinsurgency is given as, “Those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological and civic actions taken by a government to defeat subversive insurgency.” How does this differ from counterguerrilla operations? Let us look further into FM 31-22 to answer this question.

FM 31-22 notes, “The major effort should be from the indigenous government because the problems in each area are local and unique to that society. These existing problems must be solved primarily by the local people and their governments.” Therefore, the main responsibility for counterinsurgency rests with the host nation. A further example of counterinsurgency responsibility deals with military civic action, defined as,

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28 Ibid., 20.
29 Ibid., 21.
31 Ibid., 4.
The use of *preponderantly indigenous military forces* on projects useful to the local population at all levels in such fields as education, training, public works, agriculture, transportation, communications, health, sanitation and other areas contributing to economic and social development, which would also serve to improve the standing of the indigenous military forces with the population.\(^{32}\)

Yet, how was a U.S. force supposed to participate in military civic action? “Both U.S. and indigenous forces may engage in the conduct of military civic action; *however, the primary effort of U.S. individuals and units will be to advise, train or assist the indigenous forces.*”\(^{33}\) If doctrine is to be understood correctly, the U.S. Army is not supposed to directly conduct counterinsurgency, but based on FM 31-16, the U.S. Army is supposed to directly conduct counterguerrilla operations. At this point one should be confused as to the differences between counterguerrilla from counterinsurgency. To add even more confusion, U.S. Army counterinsurgency forces consisted of Special Action Forces (SAF), drawn from Special Force units.\(^{34}\) The regular Army was to be prepared to provide Mobile Training Teams (MTTs) consisting of one officer, and four noncommissioned officers, but only if the SAF units were overtaxed.\(^{35}\) Additionally, brigade-sized units deploying in support of counterinsurgency were “normally deployed following an escalation in the level of insurgency, therefore more emphasis is placed on developing combat capabilities.”\(^{36}\) Yet, there was no clear demarcation between whether an insurgent is a guerrilla, or vice versa. Is a guerrilla to be treated differently from an

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\(^{32}\) FM 31-22: *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency Forces*, 4. Bold and italic portion is added by me to emphasize the key part of the definition.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 4. Bold and italic portion is added by me to emphasize the key part of the definition.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 16.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 17.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 17.
insurgent? Based on FM 31-16 and FM 31-22, there is no answer. However, the most interesting item concerning both FMs is the dependence on civil affairs and psychological operations forces; that are part of the Reserve Force structure of the United States military. The issue with having doctrine dependent on the activation of reserve forces is a topic for a later section.

If FM 31-16 and FM 31-22 were unclear as to the difference between counterinsurgency and counterguerrilla, FM 100-5 added to the confusion. A new edition of FM 100-5, *Field Service Regulations Operations*, was published in 1962, and remained in effect throughout the majority of the Vietnam War. The need for Army leaders to be offensive in their mindset has already been discussed regarding this manual. What is of interest relates to what FM 100-5 defines as irregular forces, and situations short of war. First, FM 100-5 defines what the term irregular means, and what types of groups fit into the category.

The term *irregular*, used in combinations such as irregular forces, *irregular* activities, *counterirregular* operations, etc., is used in the broad sense to refer to all types of nonconventional forces and operations. It includes guerrilla, insurgent, subversive, resistance, terrorist, revolutionary, and similar personnel, organizations and methods.  

FM 100-5 further defined what are considered irregular activities. Irregular activities include “acts of a military, political, psychological, and economic nature, conducted predominantly by inhabitants of a nation for the purpose of eliminating or weakening the authority of the local government or an occupying power.” In regards to conducting operations to suppress irregular forces, FM 100-5 reinforced that offensive operations

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37 FM 100-5: *Field Service Regulations Operations*, 136-137.
38 Ibid., 137.
held precedence, by stating, “Operations to suppress and eliminate irregular forces are primarily offensive in nature. Thus, the conventional force must plan for and seize the initiative at the outset and retain it throughout the conduct of the operation.”

Another chapter of FM 100-5 covers situations short of war. A Situation short of war is, “Specific circumstances and incidents of cold war in which military force is moved to an area directly and is employed to attain national objectives in operations not involving formal open hostilities between nations.” In handling situations short of war, relationships with foreign governments were addressed for the first time: “Department of State officials handle transactions with the foreign government when such officials are present and the civil government exists…In most instances, in situations short of war, political considerations are overriding.”

FM 100-5 did come before FM 31-16 and FM 31-22; yet, all three manuals pushed for aggressive conventional operations, supported by small special units to advise the host nation, and suggest coordination with the host nation government is the responsibility of the U.S. Department of State. Additionally, Army doctrine set forth in the above manuals provided no guidance on measuring the effectiveness of counterinsurgency, except in damage of enemy in relation to damage on friendly forces. Clearly, the US Army was meant to focus on aiding the host nation’s military forces, and by doing so helping to defeat the guerrilla and/or insurgent. If there appears to be a clear

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39 FM 100-5: Field Service Regulations Operations, 139.
40 Ibid., 154.
41 Ibid., 157.
demarcation between the role of the US military in counterinsurgency and counterguerrilla warfare and US civilian policymakers, it is because one did exist.

Civil-Military Relations: A Clear Divide

The place that the military occupies within the government structure is defined by checks and balances between three branches, and is at times confusing. The military follows the orders of the president, who serves as Commander in Chief of the US armed forces. Yet, in order to secure funding for military initiatives both in peace and wartime, the military is answerable to Congressional control of the purse strings. Therefore, it may appear that the military has two masters. Masters who at times can be from different ends of the political spectrum, and therefore pursue different objectives. This has occurred throughout American history, with the Vietnam War being but one example. The purpose of analyzing civil-military relations during the Vietnam War is intended to show how those relations defined military doctrine, terminology, and culture; thereby perpetuating a system in which military leaders viewed their role as advising policymakers in military operations, leaving strategy to the politicians.

Samuel Huntington wrote the most popular and still widely discussed theory of civil-military relations during the Cold War in 1957. Huntington’s book The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations, on the face of it is focused on the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. However, the Truman and Eisenhower administrations set the tone for post-World War II civil-military relations, and therefore would be a must read for leaders in the US Army during the Cold War. Huntington’s main argument is that a clear divide between the responsibilities of the military and
politicians is the best system. Under this system, Huntington states that the military has three main responsibilities:

Keep the authorities [civilian] of the state informed as to what he considers necessary for the minimum military security of the state. Second, The military officer has an advisory function, to analyze and to report on the implications of alternative causes of state action from the military point of view. Third, The military officer has an executive function, to implement state decision with respect to military security even if it is a decision which runs violently counter to his military judgment.43

Therefore, the role of the soldier is to advise, and then follow the orders of the state regardless of the fittingness of the orders. Today, the US military calls this following an order that is neither illegal nor immoral. Though the immoral and illegal part are in the eye of the beholder.

Huntington’s effect on the US Army is clear when the first chapter of FM 100-5 is read in context of national objectives, national policies, national strategy, and the role of military strategy. National objectives are “Those aims or goals whose attainment will further national interests or produce effects conducive to national security and well-being.”44 In the case of the Cold War, national objectives of the US were to ensure its own security and freedom, and to establish and maintain worldwide conditions of peace, security, and justice”; this was defined at the time as the need to combat communist aggression.45 Derived from national objectives, national strategy is “the sum of the national policies, plans, and programs designed to support the national interests.”46 In

44 FM 100-5: Field Service Regulations Operations, 3.
46 Ibid., 3.
this case the national strategy of the US was deterrence. From the national strategy, the military strategy of the US is derived. Because the purpose of war is the attainment of national objectives, military strategy must be geared to these objectives: “Although military considerations enter into the development of national strategy, in the final analysis national objectives shape both national and military strategy. In consequence, a nation’s military operations must be subordinated to, and be compatible with, its national objectives.” Furthermore, military strategy is “The strategy by which these military objectives are to be attained is circumscribed by the same limitations, but thereafter—military objectives are pursued energetically, and military power is applied forcefully and decisively in accord with the chosen strategy.” One should note that military objectives are to be pursued energetically regardless of the limitations placed on them by national strategy and policies.

In all cases military strategy was to be subordinated to the ends outlined by policymakers. Military advice was warranted and to be given, but once a decision had been reached, the military’s role was to execute the mission with whatever means it was given. Therefore, based on doctrine at the time, the US Army was merely an instrument by which policymakers achieved national objectives. Chief of Staff of the Army Harold Johnson would say in 1964, “The senior military leadership had all been schooled in the professional ethic “that you argue your case up to the point of decision. Having been

\[47\text{ FM 100-5: Field Service Regulations Operations, 4.}
\[48\text{ Ibid., 8.}\]
given a decision, you carry it out with all the force that you can."\(^{49}\) The US Army like
any instrument was intended to bend to the will of the user; in the case of Vietnam that
user was President Lyndon Johnson and his cabinet.

As a result of US civil-military relations, there exists a military culture, especially
relating to the Cold War Army. As an instrument of the state, the military culture mirrors
the concerns and focus of the civil government. Andrew Krepinevich, a retired officer
turned historian, writes, “At the time of Vietnam the Army Concept of war had become
entrenched in the minds of the military hierarchy simply because it had been so
successful.”\(^{50}\) What was this Army culture predicated upon? According to Richard
Lock-Pullan, the US army depended on mass to overwhelm enemies; as exampled by the
fielding of eight million servicemen during World War II.\(^{51}\) At the heart of Lock-
Pullan’s argument is the belief that the US depended on the mass mobilization of its
population and resources to defeat an enemy. Lock-Pullan further uses the Korean War
in which the Army had poor readiness, resulting in initial battlefield defeat, and then
turned to massive build-up of forces and a successful counterattack.\(^{52}\) Therefore, Korea
seemed to prove “that vastly superior firepower and equipment could always defeat a
poorly equipped Asian army.”\(^{53}\) Lock-Pullan’s argument supports Krepinevich’s by
stating, “In sum, the Army’s pre-Vietnam experience in low-intensity conflict in general

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\(^{49}\) Lewis Sorley, *Honorable Warrior General Harold K. Johnson and the Ethics of

\(^{50}\) Andrew Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins


\(^{52}\) Ibid., 23.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 24.
and in counterinsurgency in particular represented a trivial portion of the service’s history as compared with the three conventional wars that it had fought over the previous half century.” The impact of this belief led to the military seeing the Red Army, poised to invade Western Europe, as the only major threat to US security. Setting the stage for the first peacetime standing Army, trained for a conventional threat in the familiar conflict environment of Europe. Army leaders assumed any conflict that would be fought was to be based on a declared emergency in which reserve forces would be mobilized, and with them, the nation.

The Chain of Command

There are nine total Principles of War in US military doctrine; objective, offensive, mass, economy of force, maneuver, unity of command, security, surprise, and simplicity. In analyzing the role of MACV in the decisions to escalate in Vietnam, the principle of unity of command is perhaps the most important. According to FM 100-5, “The decisive application of full combat power requires unity of command. Unity of command obtains unity of effort by the coordinated action of all forces toward a common goal. While coordination may be attained by cooperation, it is best achieved by investing a single commander with the requisite authority.” Yet, in Vietnam, there was not one overall commander. This was in part due to the lack of a declaration of war, under which the military commander becomes pre-eminent in ensuring unity of effort by the United

55 Ibid., 6.
56 FM 100-5: Field Service Regulations Operations, 47.
What existed in Vietnam was a parallel chain of command that went through both the Ambassador and Commander-in-Chief Pacific. Figure One provides a visual representation of the chain of command in Vietnam.

Figure 1. Command Structure for Politico-Military Decision Making Vis-a-Vis Vietnam, taken from Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect by Admiral Ulysses Sharp.

In the period from July 1964 to July 1965 the Secretary of State, through the Ambassador to South Vietnam Maxwell Taylor, governed policy in Vietnam. Ambassador Taylor, a retired army general and former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, would then provide direction to General Westmoreland on the goals to be achieved in South Vietnam. In an effort to synchronize policy and military efforts of different American agencies, Taylor created the Mission Council at the embassy in July 1964, composed of the heads of all U.S. agencies in South Vietnam, including MACV, and chaired by the ambassador himself.\(^{58}\) Running in parallel was the military chain of command which went from Westmoreland to CINPAC, from CINPAC to the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), and finally to the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF).\(^{59}\) The issue with this parallel chain was that Westmoreland had to go through CINPAC, who then had to go through the JCS, and finally the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF), to get a decision on military matters, yet, Taylor had a direct line to the Secretary of State, leaving the military to struggle through a much larger and slower bureaucracy leading to disconnect. As commander of CINPAC, Admiral Ulysses Grant Sharp stated, “One of the most aggravating was the frequently inordinate delay we experienced in receiving a reply from the JCS to proposals that required their approval. The reason was regrettably simple: the JCS could not get a decision from McNamara (SECDEF).”\(^{60}\)

The military chain of command was no less cumbersome. According to Westmoreland,

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 127.
MACV functioned not directly under the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington but through CINPAC. That is to say, that was the prescribed channel; but in practice the Joint Chiefs usually communicated directly with me while sending the same message to CINPAC. I adhered to the chain of command and sent messages to CINPAC but occasionally sent information copies to the Joint Chiefs. The White House seldom dealt directly with me but through the Joint Chiefs.61

Thus General Westmoreland in addition to answering to Taylor also had to answer simultaneously to the JCS and CINPAC. He did not have direct access to the SECDEF and the President unless McNamara or LBJ requested his presence or input. Essentially, Westmoreland had two military bosses, and one civilian boss whose differing focuses he had to balance. Additionally, under the command structure for Vietnam, Westmoreland’s command authority extended only over parts of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and South Vietnam.62 Only in 1966 would Westmoreland gain authority over limited airstrikes in Laos and just north of the DMZ, but Admiral Sharp controlled the overall air war as theatre commander.63 Westmoreland was only the operational commander on the ground, and therefore was responsible for applying military means to the situation in South Vietnam. He had to coordinate all fixed-wing air support through Seventh Fleet, under the command of Admiral Sharp who exercised command authority as CINPAC, and the Seventh Air Force commanded in 1964 by Air Force Major General Joseph H. Moore.64 Yet, Washington did not designate one overall commander. What occurred was command by coordination. General Westmoreland ran the ground war in the South, and Admiral Sharp controlled the entire air campaign. Admiral Sharp would say, “I should

61 Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, 76.
62 Ibid., 77.
63 Sharp, Strategy for Defeat, 114.
64 Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, 75.
make it clear that although I did not attempt to review in detail General Westmoreland’s conduct of the ground war in South Vietnam, I did instruct him in some detail as to the air war in Laos and North Vietnam.”

Therefore, with no overall military commander entrusted with running the entire war in Vietnam, the US violated the key principle of unity of command, ensuring component commanders received guidance and reported information to multiple and parallel chains of command. What held the system together were personal relationships.

Individuals matter in war. Due to the weakness of not having an appointed overall commander, the military leaders involved had to count on personal and professional relationships. In the case of Maxwell Taylor, both Westmoreland and Sharp had a good relationship with the ambassador. Admiral Sharp would write, “The comprehensive authority over military operations given to Ambassador Taylor worked in this particular case because he was a broad-gauge thinker, a skillful diplomat and an experienced military leader of the first order.” For Westmoreland, Taylor was a man “he grew to admire,” and would further state that his association with Taylor in Vietnam “was close.” In return, Taylor viewed Westmoreland, or as he called him “Westy”, as a protégé, and had indeed recommended him to serve as MACV commander. Taylor also, kept his promise to Admiral Sharp to not interfere in day-to-day military business.

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66 Ibid., 39.
The only outlier in terms of positive relationships seemed to be Marine Lieutenant General Victor Krulak, commander Fleet Marine Force Pacific (FMFPac). Having served as special assistant for counterinsurgency to the JCS during the Kennedy administration, Krulak, nicknamed “Brute,” saw Westmoreland as losing the war. Krulak proposed, “The real war is among the people and not among the mountains.”\(^{70}\) Krulak would later publicly condemn Westmoreland’s strategy, and by default President Johnson’s strategy. Also, Krulak bypassed his chain of command, which ran through CINPAC and the Commandant of the Marine Corps, and passed recommendations directly to Robert McNamara.\(^{71}\) By doing so, Krulak helped build the myth that a focus on pacification would have won the war in Vietnam. These men were instrumental in the debate about American strategy for Vietnam from spring 1964 to summer 1965.

**NSAM 288**

An analysis of US policy in Vietnam is well beyond the scope of this thesis. But analysis of the military strategy that drove the debate leading to escalation is illustrated by the thoughts of the JCS and CINPAC within the context of NSAM 288. National Security Action Memoranda were documents in which the National Security Council issued presidential guidance. For the sake of brevity, the National Security Council came out of the National Defense Act of 1949 and was envisioned as facilitators of national security, and not a contributing party to national security debate within the White House. The role of the National Security Council evolved under President Kennedy, giving

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\(^{71}\) Ibid., 295.
National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy greater influence over and access to the President of the United States. However, prior to discussing the military strategy that helped lead to escalation, attention to the state of relations between the military and Johnson Administration is important to provide context for the difference between what the military advised and what course Johnson chose to pursue in Vietnam.

The most trenchant modern critique regarding civil-military relations leading to escalation comes from H.R. McMaster. When it came to the question of escalation in Vietnam, the JCS wanted to blockade North Vietnam’s ports, conduct unrestricted aerial bombing of the North, and attack National Liberation Front sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia. However, McMaster argues that neither John F. Kennedy’s administration nor Johnson trusted the JCS, a state of affairs dating back to the Bay of Pigs fiasco in spring 1961. Johnson witnessed, for example, how Kennedy and McNamara orchestrated the activities of individual ships from the White House situation room during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Johnson also inherited Kennedy’s Executive Committee meetings, which he converted to Tuesday lunches in which no member of the JCS participated until late 1967. Additionally, at McNamara’s prerogative, all communication from the JCS to the President had to pass through the Secretary of Defense’s office. This act of micromanagement and distrust alone explains how the war simulations for US escalation

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74 Ibid., 31.
75 Ibid., 26.
in Vietnam, Sigma I and Sigma II-64, held in 1963 and 1964 respectively, could have occurred without Johnson knowing the outcome. Both war games concluded that neither bombing nor gradual escalation would win the war in Vietnam. Johnson was also working under the advisement of McGeorge Bundy, National Security Advisor, who now pushed for a limited use of airpower to coerce North Vietnam into stopping support of Communist in the South.  

Published March 17, 1964, NSAM 288 provided the framework in which CINPAC and the JCS viewed the US objectives in South Vietnam. NSAM 288 was based on a copy of a memorandum prepared by McNamara after his trip to South Vietnam in mid-March 1964. NSAM 288 further refined the US objectives in Vietnam:

We seek an independent non-Communist South Vietnam. We do not require that it serve as a Western base or as a member of a Western Alliance. South Vietnam must be free, however, to accept outside assistance as required to maintain its security. This assistance should be able to take the form not only of economic and social measure but also police and military help to root out and control insurgent elements.

NSAM 288 also provided recommendations on what means should be used to achieve these objectives in South Vietnam. However, the guidance was still broad in nature. According to Admiral Sharp this was to “keep the actual means to stated ends both consciously limited and purposely indirect.” Also, in the jargon of the JCS, the means to be applied were still limited. NSAM 288 stated, “There were and are sound reasons

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78 Ibid., 50.
for the limits imposed by present policy—the South Vietnamese must win their own fight; U.S. intervention on a larger scale, and/or GVN actions against the North, would disturb key allies and nations.

NSAM 288 further recommended against the “initiation of overt Government of Vietnam (GVN) and/or U.S. military actions against North Vietnam.” Rather, the NSC proposed a National Mobilization Plan for South Vietnam, an expansion of paramilitary forces, and the increase in US economic and military aid. JCS recommendations that the US assume overall tactical command in South Vietnam and deploy American ground troops in the Saigon area were rejected.

The response to NSAM 288 by the military was clear. In a memorandum to the SECDEF on March 14, 1964, the JCS criticized NSAM 288:

> The JCS do not believe that the recommended program in itself will be sufficient to turn the tide against the Viet Cong in South Vietnam (SVN) without positive action being taken against the Hanoi government at an early date….To increase our readiness for such actions, the U.S. Government should establish at once the political and military bases in the U.S. and SVN for offensive actions against the North and across the Laotian and Cambodian borders, including measures for the control of contraband traffic on the Mekong.

Further response from the military regarding NSAM 288 came from Admiral Sharp, who assumed command as CINPAC in June: “The continuing dialogue between my headquarters and the JCS during this period clearly reflected the military’s view that we need to hit hard and right away.” Sharp further states that Commander United States MACV (COMUSMACV), General Harkins, CINPAC, and the JCS “supported a strong

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81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
84 Sharp, Strategy for Defeat, 52.
campaign designed to interdict infiltration routes, to destroy the overall capacity of the north to support the insurgency, and to undermine North Vietnam’s will to continue supporting the Viet Cong.” 85 It is clear that in March 1964 there existed a clear division between the advice the military provided to President Johnson, and what National Security Council was recommending. Despite acknowledgement that the situation was still unstable, Johnson seemed to be willing to commit US forces overtly to the defense of South Vietnam.

Not surprisingly, the strained relationship between the military and Johnson administration had a great impact on the Vietnam War. President Johnson ignored the military’s advice on how to execute strategy in Vietnam. In early spring 1965, in response to the JCS advising the calling up of reserve units to give the American people a stake in the war and show the strength of US commitment, President Johnson would tell the JCS chairman, “General, you leave the American people to me. I know more about the American people than anyone in this room.” 86

**Military Advice 1964 and 1965**

In discussing military advice given to President Johnson in 1964 and 1965, Admiral Sharp, Ambassador Maxwell Taylor, General Harold Johnson, and General Westmoreland are insider witnesses. Through their words one is able to determine what the military wanted, and what in fact it got relating to escalation. Let us begin with General Westmoreland.

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85 Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat*, 52
On June 30, 1964, General William Westmoreland took command of MACV, and as of yet had not been asked to provide recommendations for greater US involvement in Vietnam. Upon his ascension to MACV commander, Westmoreland was focused on advisory efforts. Yet, the JCS and Taylor were in favor of an offensive bombing campaign against the North. In the summer of 1964, Westmoreland was concerned that heavy bombing of North Vietnam would force the North to commit larger ground forces against a very fragile South Vietnam, thereby collapsing the South Vietnamese government.\(^87\) Previously, CINPAC had proposed OPLAN 37, which was a three-phased plan to force North Vietnam to stop supporting the Vietcong (VC) insurgency in the South. Part of OPLAN 37 was to conduct reprisal air strikes, raids, and mining operations against North Vietnam.\(^88\) What Westmoreland wanted, was to focus airpower not against the North, but to continue using air power to support Army of Vietnam (ARVN) operations in the South, and attack Northern infiltration routes through Laos.\(^89\) Westmoreland claims that despite his objections to sustained bombing of North Vietnam, Ambassador Taylor and the Joint Chiefs “were coming to think more and more in those terms.”\(^90\)

In December 1964, Westmoreland was ordered to return to Washington for a meeting with the JCS. During his time in Washington, Westmoreland states, “I deemed it odd that neither the President nor the Secretary had sought my views,” despite that he learned later, “at the time of my visit major new steps for escalating the war were under

\(^{87}\) Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 106.
\(^{88}\) Ibid., 109.
\(^{89}\) Ibid., 110.
\(^{90}\) Ibid., 112.
consideration.” This refers to the planning of Operation Rolling Thunder, a sustained aerial bombardment campaign against North Vietnam. Also, in 1964, Westmoreland recommended that no US escalation should occur without a South Vietnamese government that had “reasonably firm, political, military, and psychological base.” Westmoreland’s advice was ignored.

Westmoreland’s recommendations in 1964 are only part of the story. There were the recommendations of Maxwell Taylor, Admiral Sharp, and General Johnson to take into consideration. First, Maxwell Taylor, serving as Ambassador to Vietnam in 1964, as well as Admiral Sharp supported the call for bombing North Vietnam. For Taylor, the way forward was “First, to establish an adequate government in [South Vietnam]; second to improve the conduct of the counterinsurgency campaign; finally to persuade or force [North Vietnam] to stop its aid to the Viet Cong and to use its directive powers to make the Viet Cong desist from their efforts to overthrow the Government of South Vietnam.”

Taylor like Sharp pushed an all-out bombing attack on North Vietnam. In fact, Sharp blames the US loss in Vietnam on the fact that; “we were never allowed to move decisively with our tremendous air and naval power.” Additionally, where Westmoreland saw the issue being primarily in the South, Sharp clearly saw the decisive point of the war being against the North. In 1964, and continuing throughout his tenure as CINPAC into 1968, Admiral Sharp called for the mining of Haiphong Harbor, through

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91 Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 89.
92 Daddis, *Westmoreland’s War*, 56.
which 85% of the North’s supplies were brought, a full naval blockade to include Cambodia, and the unrestricted aerial assault on Lines of Communications running from Hanoi to the DMZ.  

Where Sharp and Taylor saw airpower as key, General Harold Johnson, the Army Chief of Staff, saw land power as needed. Upon assuming the position of Chief of Staff of the Army in July 1964, Johnson saw the key to Vietnam as being, “Getting the South Vietnamese units up to strength. Next was to get some U.S. forces in on the ground, preferably in the highlands region.” Johnson further saw the need to place four US divisions straight across Vietnam to stop the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Unlike Sharp, Johnson felt that no matter how much the US bombed North Vietnam; it would take American boots on the ground to win the war.

How did Westmoreland’s recommendations change in 1965? At the beginning of 1965 they did not. Scholars like Lewis Sorley claim that Westmoreland was repeatedly requesting troops to “better prosecute his self devised strategy of attrition warfare.” However, Westmoreland writes that, “I hoped to keep the number of U.S. ground troops to a minimum,” and he continues, “I saw my call for marines at Danang not as a first step in a growing American commitment but…as a way to secure vital airfield and air units using it.” This idea of keeping a small US footprint would change, however, in May 1965, when the South Vietnamese government under civilian control resigned, and turned

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95 Sharp, *Strategy For Defeat*, 52.
97 Ibid., 185.
control over to the military. This was the fifth government in eighteen months, leading to a leadership crisis in the midst of a growing insurgency, and infiltration of People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN) regular units.

With the coup in May 1965, General Westmoreland had to face the fact that “without substantial American ground combat troops, the South Vietnamese would be unable to withstand the pressure from combined VC and PAVN forces.”

One must understand that as the commander on the ground, Westmoreland witnessed ARVN battalions being destroyed faster than they could be rebuilt. Also, the ARVN were fighting NLF and North Vietnamese “main force units armed with modern weapons like the AK-47 and RPG-2, while the ARVN were fighting with surplus US equipment from World War Two and Korea.” Additionally, “the VC demonstrated their ability to coordinate the efforts of elements of three main force regiments during the attack on Dong Xou…effectively used mortars…and appeared well fed, in khaki uniforms with Chinese Communist (CHICOM) web equipment.”

Westmoreland was a military commander, not a policymaker. US Army doctrine and traditional civil-military roles dictated it was Westmoreland’s job “as the American military commander in Vietnam to advise from a military standpoint what had to be done to achieve the goal.”

Westmoreland would later write, “Like me, the others of the U.S. Mission were charged

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100 Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 139.
103 Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 140.
not with making policy or grand strategy but with executing it.”

Furthermore, Westmoreland was told by Robert McNamara “to request the troops needed to carry out the missions and not to restrict his requests. Nor was Westmoreland to concern himself with economic, political, and public opinion problems.” In June 1965 Westmoreland made a request for forty-four Allied and US battalions. Westmoreland saw these battalions “as no force for victory but as a stopgap measure to save the ARVN from defeat.”

U. Alexis Johnson, Ambassador Taylor’s deputy, said “the thrust for bringing U.S. combat forces into Vietnam came from Washington, not from Vietnam.” As 1965 began, and the call for the commitment of US ground forces became the dominant voice in the discourse concerning Vietnam, Taylor stood in opposition to Westmoreland and General Johnson. The policy Taylor wished to pursue was called the enclave strategy. Under this strategy, US forces would be committed to key population areas along the coast of Vietnam. With an enclave strategy the US would assume full security over the enclave areas, freeing the ARVN to conduct offensive operations against the VC and PAVN. If necessary the US forces could conduct limited offensive operations within fifty miles of their assigned enclave, and provide assistance to beleaguered ARVN forces. What Taylor feared was that the ARVN would become too dependent on the US to do a bulk of the fighting. Also, by committing large numbers of US troops, the US

104 Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, 140.
105 Ibid., 142.
106 Ibid., 140.
108 Ibid., 141.
was also committing American prestige.\textsuperscript{109} Taylor would support the limited deployment of two marine battalions to secure key airfields, and compromised on supporting an additional deployment of two additional Marine battalions, and air squadron, and 20,000 support troops as an experiment to test the enclave strategy.\textsuperscript{110} What actually occurred, however, was the dispatching of two US combat divisions to Vietnam, much to the concern of Taylor. However, by July 1965, even Taylor had to admit the situation was deteriorating very quickly in South Vietnam. In one of his final situational updates to the State Department Taylor wrote, “The use of U.S. and third country ground forces in RVN in sufficient quantity could make the difference between GVN defeat or victory. Current indications…that RVNAF is not capable of containing the VC without outside assistance.”\textsuperscript{111}

The main proponent on the JCS who pushed for the greater commitment of US ground forces in Vietnam was General Johnson. In March 1965, President Johnson sent General Johnson on a fact-finding mission to Vietnam. Upon his return from Vietnam, General Johnson observed that the “situation in Vietnam has deteriorated rapidly and extensively in the past several months.”\textsuperscript{112} General Johnson would testify before Congress that in March 1965 Vietnam was on the verge of collapse, and only the commitment of a large US ground force would be able to reverse the situation. What


\textsuperscript{110} Taylor, \textit{General Maxwell Taylor}, 313.


\textsuperscript{112} Sorley, \textit{Honorable Warrior}, 198.
Johns on recommended was deploying a US division to secure the highlands. Another piece of critical advice put forth by General Johnson, Westmoreland, and surprisingly, McNamara, was the mobilization of reserve units. The goal of the reserve units was to first, ensure access to military civil affairs and psychological operations troops, and second, to ensure the American strategic reserve remained filled to handle any contingencies that may arise. President Johnson denied reserve mobilization, and he refused to raise taxes in order to mobilize the US population. As a result army units in Germany would be used to fill billets in Vietnam, leaving what many felt was the main front in the Cold War short of personnel.

Conclusion

When placed in context, Westmoreland’s request in June 1965 for forty-four allied and US battalions seemed a prudent choice. The context in which Westmoreland made this request was keeping with force structure, doctrine, and civil-military roles at the time. Also, based on Westmoreland’s placement in the chain of command, Westmoreland was not expected to consider the broader war. Westmoreland’s war was the war in South Vietnam. A war that “took on a different and changing complexion in each zone,” in which, “types of operations received varying emphasis.”

113 Sorley, Honorable Warrior, 198.
CHAPTER 2: WESTMORELAND’S WAR IN SOUTH VIETNAM 1965-1967

General Westmoreland has long been criticized for fighting a war of attrition in Vietnam. Scholars such as Andrew Krepinevich blame Westmoreland’s conduct of the war on Cold War Army culture. Following Krepinevich, Lewis Sorley argues that General Westmoreland was the wrong general to command the U.S. war effort in South Vietnam. And John Nagl, in comparing the British war in Malaya to Vietnam, points at the U.S. Army’s failure to learn and adapt as the cause of U.S. defeat in Vietnam. Yet, all three critics consider the Vietnam War in hindsight and they oversimplify. The Vietnam War was in fact many wars in one. Historian Gregory Daddis notes, “War deals with reactive elements, not with fixed values.”116 What Krepinevich, Sorley, and Nagl failed to take into account are the perspective of North Vietnam, the issues with developing the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF), and the fact that Westmoreland faced both a conventional and unconventional threat with limited troops and a reluctant RVNAF.

Critics of Westmoreland’s Strategy

There are many critics of how the Westmoreland and the U.S. Army conducted the Vietnam War. However, there exist three main critiques. Andrew Krepinevich led in 1986 with The Army and Vietnam. The next well-known critic is Lewis Sorley, writer of A Better War: the Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America’s Last Years in Vietnam, and, even more forcefully, Westmoreland: The General Who Lost Vietnam. The most recent critic of U.S. Army performance in Vietnam is John Nagl, author of Learning

116 Daddis, Wesmoreland’s War, 176.
to Eat Soup With a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam. The common thread amongst the three authors is that all three served as Army officers, Krepinevich and Sorley in Vietnam, and Nagl in the 1991 Gulf War and during the Global War on Terror. Additionally, all three argue that the Vietnam War was winnable, especially if Westmoreland’s focus would have been on pacification and advising the ARVN, and not on large-unit operations.

Andrew Krepinevich writes that the strategy of attrition pursued by Westmoreland was particular and based on an inflexible mold.\(^{117}\) Part of that mold has already been discussed in Chapter 1, and was predicated on the idea of mass mobilization and firepower. Krepinevich further claims that the “Army remained convinced that the essence of the conflict was military, not political.”\(^{118}\) Therefore the “Army killed many PLAF, but never denied the enemy his source of strength—access to the people.”\(^{119}\) Additionally, according to Krepinevich, “The Army would not accept the fact that getting people to believe you were going to protect them required an effective government security force that was always going to be there.”\(^{120}\) Krepinevich further assumes that the U.S. failed to produce forces and doctrine capable of waging a successful counterinsurgency campaign.\(^{121}\) Nagl, regarding the effectiveness of the U.S. Army as a learning organization in particular later echoed this view. Lastly, Krepinevich accuses the Army of being impatient for quick results, when Vietnam was not an environment in

\(^{117}\) Krepinevich, The Army and Vietnam, 131.
\(^{118}\) Ibid., 131.
\(^{119}\) Ibid., 197.
\(^{120}\) Ibid., 177.
\(^{121}\) Ibid., 145.
which quick results were obtainable. He concludes that early U.S. victories in large-unit battles, like Ia Drang in 1965, created the idea “that standard operations were working; therefore, no alternative strategies needed to be explored. No more feedback was required for MACV save the body counts that measured the attrition strategy’s progress.”

Lewis Sorley followed Krepinevich a decade later in criticizing U.S. Army performance during the Vietnam War. Yet, where Krepinevich argues that Westmoreland was forced to work within a particular cultural mindset, Sorley attacks Westmoreland personally, while lauding his successor Creighton Abrams’ performance. Among Sorley’s charges against Westmoreland is the idea that the development of the ARVN was not pushed as a priority for three to four years. Additionally, lacking an understanding of U.S. Army counterinsurgency doctrine at the time, as well as misreading counterinsurgency theorists like David Galula, Sorley claims that it was wrong to push the ARVN into a secondary task of pacification. The most powerful charge of all, and one easily rebutted, is that Westmoreland was not intelligent or capable of commanding the U.S. Army in Vietnam. Sorley states “Westmoreland’s strengths eventually propelled him to a level beyond his understanding and abilities. The results were tragic, not just for him but for the Army and the nation he served, and most of all of

123 Ibid., 169.  
125 Ibid., 78.
course for the South Vietnamese, who sacrificed all and lost all.” 126 Sorley claims that Westmoreland was repeatedly requesting troops to “better prosecute his self devised strategy of attrition warfare.” 127 Sorley further claims that from the beginning the Johnson administration was “troubled by Westy’s troop requests.” 128 And he notes Westmoreland “wasn’t worried about where they got the troops anyway.” 129 Sorley argues further that the search-and-destroy approach was not working, and that the U.S. was wrong to take over the main war from the ARVN. 130

Where Krepinevich blames Army culture, and Sorley blames Westmoreland, John Nagl blames the U.S. Army’s failure to learn to adapt as the reason for defeat in Vietnam. The key to Nagl’s argument is the comparison of the counterinsurgency waged by Britain in Malaya through the 1950s and early 1960s, to the U.S. Army’s counterinsurgency in Vietnam. According to Nagl, “The U.S. Army resisted any true attempt to learn how to fight an insurgency during the course of the Vietnam War, preferring to treat the war as a conventional conflict in the tradition of the Korean War and World War II.” 131 Therefore, unlike the British, American army officers had little political-military experience, leading to a failure to understand and adapt to conditions in Vietnam. 132 Nagl finds “The British Army’s flexibility at the tactical level, and its traditional understanding of political-military operations and the principles of minimum force have combined to

126 Sorley, Westmoreland, xix.
127 Sorley, A Better War, 17.
128 Sorley, Westmoreland, 85.
129 Ibid., 85.
130 Sorley, A Better War, 5 and 8.
131 Nagl, Learning to Eat Soup, xxii.
132 Ibid., 201-202.
create an army well adapted to the demands of warfare.”  

Nagl’s way to win the war in Vietnam would have been to break battalions into small teams of soldiers that lived with the villagers. This method, Nagl argues, would have taken fewer resources.  

The arguments of Krepenivich, Sorley, and Nagl have several commonalities. The idea of the U.S. Army not being trained, having neither the forces available nor the doctrine is one aspect that links the three critiques. Additionally, all three argue that the focus in Vietnam should have been on pacification and advising, rather than large-unit operations. In order to concisely handle the arguments put forth by Krepenivich, Sorley and Nagl, the focus of this chapter is on the commonalities each argument contains. The next section looks at how the U.S. Army prepared for counterinsurgency by way of Special Forces, unit training, and doctrine.  

The Army Learning and Preparing  

Prior to the commitment of large numbers of U.S. troops in mid-1965, there indeed existed a U.S. force trained and equipped to conduct counterinsurgency. Called for by John F. Kennedy in 1961, Special Forces, known as Green Berets, were built up to serve as the counterinsurgency force of the U.S.  

The mission of the Special Forces was “to develop, organize, equip, train, and direct indigenous forces in the conduct of guerrilla warfare. Special Forces may also advise, train and assist indigenous forces in   

\[133\] Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup*, 205.  

\[134\] Ibid., 199.  

counterinsurgency operations.\textsuperscript{136} The main purpose of the Special Forces was to advise, and not assume command of indigenous forces. Following the doctrine discussed in Chapter 1, the Special Forces units were part of the Special Action Force (SAF) sent to Vietnam prior to a greater commitment of U.S. ground forces. Special Forces are “specially trained and specifically available for special warfare missions including unconventional warfare, psychological and counterinsurgency operations. It is area-oriented and partially language trained.”\textsuperscript{137}

The 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), who created and were responsible for the Vietnamese Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG), filled this role in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{138} Originally the CIDG consisted of Montagnards, a minority group based in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Authority for the CIDG mission fell under the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) initially, but was transferred to MACV on July 1, 1963.\textsuperscript{139} Under MACV the size of the CIDG program grew to 34,800 fighters by late 1967.\textsuperscript{140} The original intent of the CIDG was to build government support among Vietnamese minority groups by placing CIDG members under the command of South Vietnamese Special Forces.\textsuperscript{141} Issues arose, however, when South Vietnamese Special Forces units refused to allow

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{136} FM 31-21: 	extit{Guerilla Warfare and Special Forces Operations} (Washington DC: HQ Department of the Army, 1961), 18.
\item \textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 16.
\item \textsuperscript{138} Kelly, 	extit{U.S. Army Special Forces}, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{140} Kelly, 	extit{US Army Special Forces}, 82.
\item \textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 10.
\end{itemize}
leadership training for CIDG members, and the South Vietnamese government refused to integrate the CIDG villages due to long-held racial views towards the Montagnards.\(^{142}\)

Prior to 1965, 400-500 Green Berets were able to train and patrol the western border of South Vietnam, interdicting PLAF guerilla units and supplies. It must be remembered that prior to 1965, despite the greater influx of North Vietnamese soldiers, very few larger regular PAVN units had been committed to South Vietnam, so the war was still very much a guerilla operation.\(^{143}\) Upon the commitment of more conventional US Forces, the CIDG program assumed more traditional military operations; surveillance, reconnaissance, civic action, and counter-guerilla offensive operations.\(^{144}\) By conducting such operations, the CIDG was able to reduce the PLAF’s ability to conduct operations against the government through reduced support, safe haven, and freedom of maneuver.\(^{145}\)

\textit{The Value of Education and Training}

As shown in the previous discussion on the evolution of US Army counterinsurgency doctrine, it is evident that the Army was thinking about and planning for operations other than large-scale war. However, even though doctrine shows the attempt to prepare military forces for a particular type of operation, doctrine is only effective if it is part of the education and training of the leaders and soldiers who would


\(^{143}\) Kelly, \textit{U.S. Army Special Forces}, 78-79.

\(^{144}\) Ives, \textit{US Special Forces and Counterinsurgency}, 103.

come to implement it. Here the US Army, despite requirements to conduct conventional operations against the Soviet Union, provided the necessary training and indoctrination.

In the 1960s, the US Army prioritized junior officer (2LT-CPT) and senior officer (MAJ-GEN) education for counterinsurgency. In terms of junior officer education, beginning in 1961, second lieutenants received three hours of instruction regarding the political, social, and psychological aspects of counterinsurgency theory during their basic course lasting five months. First lieutenants and captains who attended their branch advanced course received twelve hours of training focused on similar topics of social, political, and psychological aspects of counterinsurgency. At West Point “cadets studied the theoretical works of Mao Tse-tung and Vo Nguyen Giap while exploring the histories of revolutionary struggles in the Philippines, Malaya, and Indochina.”

To aid senior leaders in understanding counterinsurgency, over two hundred senior officers took advantage of an Army program that exposed them to counterinsurgency by sending them for six weeks to a third-world country facing an active insurgency. As early as 1958, a Department of Unconventional Warfare was established at the Army’s Command and General Staff College (CGSC), and its curriculum added lessons related to historical and contemporary insurgencies. Two years later, in 1960, CGSC students received thirty-three hours of instruction on

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148 Ibid., 238.
unconventional warfare over the ten-month course.\textsuperscript{149} Lastly, military advisors were sent to a four-week (later six-week) course at Fort Bragg, called the military assistance training advisor course, in which Vietnam was the focus and instruction was based on not only military, but also civic action.\textsuperscript{150}

In addition to providing counterinsurgency education to leaders and soldiers, the US Army enforced training standards as early as 1962. First, regular Army units were mandated to execute six weeks of counterinsurgency training a year. This training included patrolling, ambushing, civic action, small-unit tactics, and individual survival skills, culminating in a two-week battalion-sized field problem.\textsuperscript{151} In 1963, 25\textsuperscript{th} ID built mock villages, and conduct exercises based on the experience of returning military advisors from Vietnam. Other divisions that would be deployed to Vietnam followed suit and even included actors to play a civilian population for soldiers and leaders to interact with through civic action.

Having looked at the doctrine and training of the US forces prior to Vietnam, it is clear that thought was dedicated to counterinsurgency. The newly built Special Forces functioned throughout the Vietnam War as the US Army’s premier counterinsurgency force. The follow-on regular army units fulfilled their roles as mobile training teams, and later as offensive combat troops. Surprisingly, the system of education and training the US Army had in place, worked as it was meant to, yet America was not successful in

\textsuperscript{149} Daddis, “Eating Soup with a Spoon”, 239.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 271.
defeating North Vietnam. Perhaps, if the doctrine and training was successful, then the man responsible for employing the force in Vietnam was to blame?

*The Man, the Myth, the Legend*

John Nagl blames the Army’s institutional structures for failure, yet Lewis Sorley, a retired Army lieutenant colonel and Vietnam veteran, places the blame on one man, General William Westmoreland. Does Westmoreland bear all responsibility for the failure of the US military in Vietnam, or was he simply performing his duty in support of his nation’s goals? Why did Westmoreland conduct large-scale operations in what Sorley and Nagl claim was a counterinsurgency? To answer these questions, one must first understand who Westmoreland was in terms of military background and education. Only then can one understand the military strategy he employed as commander of MACV in the early years of the war, from 1965 to 1967.

William Westmoreland was a 1932 graduate of West Point and he served as a field artillery battalion commander in Africa and Italy during World War II. During the Korean War, General Westmoreland was given command of the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team. He saw action in 1952 and, following regimental command he was assigned to the Pentagon where he served as Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff, Army G-1 for Manpower Control in the mid-1950s. In 1958 Westmoreland was assigned as Division Commander of the 101st Airborne Division. After successful division command, General Westmoreland was appointed as the Superintendent of West Point in 1960, and at the beginning of 1964 he became Deputy Commander of MACV.

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In July 1964 General Westmoreland assumed command of MACV, and would hold the position until midsummer 1968.

Lewis Sorley assesses Westmoreland as not being intellectual enough to handle the diverse environments of Vietnam, yet Gregory Daddis, South Vietnamese generals, and the command history of MACV suggest otherwise. Daddis points to Westmoreland’s time as 101st Airborne division commander to counter Sorley. In 1958, the 101st Airborne was a division built and trained to leave within six hours to anywhere in the world. As part of the rapid deployment force, the 101st was provided with a list of possible trouble spots. One of the trouble spots was Indochina, where the US was not only involved in Vietnam, but Laos as well in a clandestine nature, with the possibility of the commitment of U.S. combat troops to counter North Vietnam’s influence. To prepare his soldiers for deployment to Indochina Westmoreland created the “Recondo” school, that focused on small-unit tactics, and counterinsurgency operations. Westmoreland’s engagement of counterinsurgency did not end with his command of the 101st. During his assignment to West Point in 1960, he revised the cadet curriculum by adding fifty-eight hours of dedicated study to counterinsurgency over the course of four years, and he made his 101st “Recondo” training mandatory for cadets. Westmoreland also arranged for British veterans of Malaya as well as for Walt Rostow, who was briefly a member of President Kennedy’s national security staff and then a State Department official, to speak to West Point cadets. Based on his past as commandant of West Point, and his time preparing his division for deployment in support of counterinsurgency operations in

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154 Ibid., 2.
Indochina, Westmoreland did have the foresight and knowledge to conduct counterinsurgency.

*Malaya is not Vietnam*

Westmoreland visited Malaya on his way to Vietnam in winter 1963-64. In a manner denoting an intellectual ability to understand complex situations, Westmoreland found that Malaya was different than Vietnam. Malaya was not only different geographically from Vietnam, but the insurgency was not fought by native Malays; therefore, separating the insurgents, who were predominately of Chinese descent, from the native Malayan population was much easier to accomplish. Westmoreland states that his trip to Malaya was “an enlightening visit, yet so many were the differences between the two situation that we could borrow little outright from the British experience.” Westmoreland notes that the British had the advantage of commanding both their own and native civilian officials and military forces. This “enabled them to place a unified committee of three officials-political, military, and police-at every level, from the top to the hamlet, with the political official in over-all charge.” Westmoreland goes on to note that Malaya was “a relatively small insurgency, lacking sanctuaries and major support outside the country.” From his Malaya visit, however, Westmoreland did bring back an understanding that centralized control from top to bottom was of the utmost importance. In an attempt to capitalize on the lesson learned for the need of centralization, Westmoreland hoped to establish a committee composed of

155 Daddis, *Westmoreland’s War*, 56.
156 Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 69.
157 Ibid., 69.
158 Ibid., 69.
the deputies of all agencies in Vietnam, under the direction of the deputy ambassador David Nes.\textsuperscript{159} Ambassador Lodge, however, disbanded this committee known as the Nes Committee, without explanation after only five meetings. Contrary to Nagl’s conclusion, a deeper view concerning the differences between Malaya and Vietnam is necessary, as is the need to debunk the myth of the British’s “minimal use of force” in conducting counterinsurgency campaigns.

In comparing Malaya to Vietnam, Nagl is comparing apples to cucumbers. The insurgency in Malaya was conducted by forty percent of the population, all ethnic Chinese, and at its peak boasted only 7,500 fighters.\textsuperscript{160} Historian David French writes, “Coercion in different guises was fundamental to British conducted counterinsurgency operations.”\textsuperscript{161} In Malaya, the British used collective punishment and population control measures with one purpose, to intimidate the population into not supporting the insurgents. French points to the creation of “New Villages,” wherein ethnic Chinese were forcefully moved into camps that were “in actual fact detention camps, with barbed wire and guards at every post. Everybody was always under pressure as they were treated like prisoners with all their movements being watched.”\textsuperscript{162} Additionally, counter to Nagl’s claim, the British Army used large-unit sweeps in the early years of the war, and by doing so disrupted the Malayan Communists’ ability to establish significant base

\textsuperscript{159} Westmoreland, \textit{A Soldier Reports}, 69.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 175.
areas and concentrate their forces. Westmoreland would use large units in a similar manner, with a similar effect in Vietnam.

Another aspect that must be taken into consideration involves local forces. In Malaya, the British began with 9,000 policemen, and during the first three months of the insurgency were able to enroll 24,000 Malays into special constabularies. Thanks to the Korean War, the Malayan economy was healthy, and supplying and training local forces was not difficult. Let us compare this to South Vietnam. 120,000 soldiers deserted a year and military positions were based political reliability. Also, soldiers refused to leave their local areas, and therefore the RVNAF lacked tactical flexibility. There were also six changes of government in South Vietnam from November 1963 to June 1965. Compare this to Malaya that had a system of colonial rule spanning eighty years. When the factors above are taken into consideration, it is no wonder Westmoreland had difficulty in conducting his three tasks of pacification, advising, and destroying enemy main force units.

John Nagl, as well as Krepinevich and Sorley, assume that a focus on counterinsurgency would have produced a different outcome. By looking at the forces trained and available to conduct counterinsurgency, and the education and training that U.S. Army units underwent, Krepinevich is proven incorrect in assuming Army culture lost the war. Force structure, minus the call-up of reserves, training, education, and

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163 Gentile, *Wrong Turn*, 47.
167 Gentile, *Wrong Turn*, 37.
doctrine all worked in an appropriate manner. Equally proven incorrect is Sorley. Westmoreland did think in depth about counterinsurgency and he put in place educational and training mechanisms to prepare leaders and forces that would later be deployed to Vietnam. As to Nagl’s argument, Malaya was different in several ways from Vietnam, and the British response was similar to the combined approach of pacification and large-unit operations Westmoreland conducted in Vietnam. Yet, the most glaring shortcoming in the analysis provided by Krepenivich, Sorley, and Nagl, is the absence of analysis regarding the actions of North Vietnam, and by proxy, of the NLF.

*The Enemy Has a Say*

Unknown to MACV at the beginning of 1964, North Vietnam’s leader, Le Duan, had already ordered an escalation of the war in the South. Prior to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in August 1964, the decision-making body of North Vietnam, the Politburo, had already given the authorization to go to war in South Vietnam. Under Resolution 9, passed in January 1964, the People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN) was ordered to begin mobilization and planning to infiltrate South Vietnam. The goal of Resolution 9 was to overrun South Vietnam before the US could commit ground forces. By the end of 1964 there were 18,000 PAVN troops in South Vietnam, and on October 11, 1964, PAVN forces began planning a joint offensive with the People’s Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF) in the South. The purpose of this offensive was to annihilitate a part of the enemy’s main force units, destroy strategic hamlets, and expand liberated areas in the

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southwest along the Cambodian border and Central Highlands. On December 4, 1964, the joint PAVN and PLAF forces launched their attack in South Vietnam.

The years of 1965 to 1966 saw “the largest percentage of attacks by battalion sized enemy units or larger, even greater than the years of the two biggest enemy offensives of the war, Tet in 1968, and the Easter Offensive in 1972.” On the orders of Le Duan, and under the command of General Nguyen Chi Thanh, the communist forces fought five battles at regimental level, and two at battalion level between December 2, 1964 and January 3, 1965. Those resulted in the destruction of two regular ARVN battalions, one reserve battalion, and one armored group. The PLAF and PAVN launched a further offensive from May 11, 1965 to July 22, 1965, in which three ARVN battalions were destroyed and the South Vietnamese lost 4,459 soldiers killed. The purpose of these large-unit offensives was to bring a quick end to the war by decisive military victories that were supposed to trigger a general popular uprising and cause the rapid disintegration of South Vietnam before the US could deploy combat troops.

America’s commitment of nearly forty-four battalions in 1965 did little to deter North Vietnam from conducting large-unit attacks. Despite being primarily an US commitment, allied battalions from Australia, South Korea, and Thailand contributed to the forty-four-battalion ground force. Both Le Duan and General Thanh pursued a

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169 Asselin, Hanoi’s Road to the Vietnam War, 204.
171 Ang Cheng Guan, The Vietnam War from the Other Side: The Vietnamese Communists’ Perspective (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 84.
172 Ibid., 90.
program of increasing PAVN and PLAF forces to match the growing numbers of US and Allied troop commitments.\textsuperscript{174} The reasoning behind this is best articulated by General Thanh, “The US should fail much like the French because it, too, lacked manpower to advance pacification and mount major offensive operations to upset the insurgency.”\textsuperscript{175} Hence, the strategy of the PLAF and PAVN from 1965 through 1966 was one in which they would strike with big units in order to draw US and allied troops away from pacification operations. Such a strategy pursued by North Vietnam led Westmoreland to note: “Had I had at my disposal virtually unlimited manpower, I could have stationed troops permanently in every district or province and this provided an alternative strategy. But this would have required millions of men, and I still would have had to maintain a reserve to counter big-unit threats.”\textsuperscript{176}

If North Vietnam had been isolated both politically and geographically like Malaya, the US undoubtedly would have had far more success, yet this was not the case. Aid to North Vietnam from 1954 to 1967 totaled 2.9 billion dollars.\textsuperscript{177} Predominately the aid was provided by the Soviet Union and China; with China taking advantage of the land border, and the Soviet Union using Haiphong Harbor, where eighty-five percent of supplies shipped to North Vietnam were received.\textsuperscript{178} Foreign support was not limited to supplies and equipment. China, in particular, approved of North Vietnam’s war against

\textsuperscript{174} Nguyen, \textit{Hanoi’s War}, 75.

\textsuperscript{175} Wilkins, \textit{Grab Their Belts to Fight Them}, 131.

\textsuperscript{176} Westmoreland, \textit{A Soldier Reports}, 147.


the United States, and offered to send volunteer troops. What resulted was the deployment of 200,000 Chinese soldiers, disguised as PAVN, manning the anti-air defenses along North Vietnam’s coasts, and cities. The obvious result of Chinese deployments was that it freed PAVN troops to deploy to South Vietnam. Also, the foreign aid received by North Vietnam meant that food and industrial production could be sustained by imports, thereby allowing its economy to shift from peacetime to wartime.

Pacification, Advising, and Search and Destroy: A Balancing Act 1965

According to Andrew Krepinevich “the Army remained convinced that the essence of the conflict was military, and not political.” However, Krepinevich overlooks several key facts. First, according to generals within the ARVN, “US intervention pulled GVN from the brink of collapse in 1965.” Second, in 1964, the PAVN General Staff sent four complete regiments of main force units south. According to ARVN lieutenant general Ngo Quang Troung, these main force units were armed with modern weapons like the AK-47 and RPG-2, while the ARVN were fighting with surplus US equipment from World War Two and Korea. Lastly, the belief in a military solution during 1965 is supported by the fact that “the PLAF demonstrated their

179 Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War*, 75.
181 Guan, *The Vietnam War from the Other Side*, 89.
ability to coordinate the efforts of elements of three main force regiments during the attack on Dong Xouit...effectively used mortars...and appeared well fed, in khaki uniforms with Chinese Communist (CHICOM) web equipment."  

From the actions of the enemy, it appeared to Westmoreland the most immediate threat was enemy large-scale attacks conducted by well-trained and equipped enemy units, rather than subversion through insurgency.

Additionally, Westmoreland was limited by being unable to pursue PLAF and PAVN forces into Laos and Cambodia. That left any attempts to stop enemy infiltration and resupply along the Ho Chi Minh Trail on the ground to operations inside South Vietnam along its 900-mile border. If one were to remove the need to conduct pacification operations inside South Vietnam, the Free World Forces, ARVN, and the US would have been able to deploy roughly 2 million troops, including militia, to defend the border between South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. This seems like quite a bit until it is compared to the World Wars and Korea. In World War I it took six million allied troops to man a 455-mile front; in World War II the allies had 4.5 million troops to man a 570-mile front, and in Korea the allies had 1 million troops to man a 123-mile front.  

Based on the experience of the Korean War, the study of Mao Zedong’s three stages of revolutionary warfare, and Giap’s writings, the scope and intensity of the enemy offensive in late 1964 through mid-1965 was consistent with entering the third phase of revolutionary warfare. Critics of this assumption may point to memo from Edward

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Streator of the State Department, to McGeorge Bundy, National Security Advisor. This memo from July 26, 1965 concluded “their pattern of behavior in Vietnam to date and their probable expectations as to the future argue against the hypothesis that the Communist are preparing to enter the third state. Vietcong strength is appreciably less than the Vietminh late in the First Indochina War 1953 to 1954.” But relying on this memo to support an argument that Westmoreland was wrong in focusing on big-unit operations in 1965 is flawed. The analysis provided by Streator did not take into account the presence of main force units, or the addition of modern weapons.

Sorley claims that Westmoreland was repeatedly requesting troops to fight a conventional war in against PLAF and PAVN forces. Was that the reason why Westmoreland requested more troops? As shown previously, the PLAF and PAVN were fighting in a more conventional way, and they held technological superiority over the ARVN in terms of small arms, machineguns, and rocket propelled grenades. For pacification to take root, there must first be security. Also, in addition to not being able to attack sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia, an invasion of North Vietnam, the source of the insurgency and big units, was not allowed. Therefore, an attrition strategy was the only available approach that bought time for ARVN to build up and for the government of South Vietnam to become more stable.

A brief description of how the US was organized for pacification in 1965 is of key interest. After the Nes Committee had been disbanded in mid-1964, the new Ambassador

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189 Lewis Sorley, A Better War, 17.
190 Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, 152.
to Vietnam Maxwell Taylor had established the Mission Council. The purpose of the Mission Council was to bring all the US agencies in South Vietnam, to include the military together in weekly meetings chaired by the Ambassador to coordinate pacification activities.\textsuperscript{191} This was a first in Saigon, yet there was still the lack of a single manager at the district level. Each agency involved, military, CIA, and State Department still possessed separate reporting chains down to the provinces and back to Washington. What occurred was a scramble for limited resources, and duplicated efforts.\textsuperscript{192}

Within the framework of the Mission Council, Westmoreland pursued pacification. However, Westmoreland viewed pacification as primarily the responsibility of the South Vietnamese. In April 1965, the South Vietnamese dissolved their Central Pacification Committee, and established the Central Rural Reconstruction Council (CRRC).\textsuperscript{193} “Pacification” was changed to “rural reconstruction” and the new body was tasked with gaining “popular support through positive social and economic projects while providing the necessary security to insure project completion.”\textsuperscript{194} Additionally, it “provided for better coordination and direction at the national level and defined the responsibilities of corps and division tactical commanders in support of provincial reconstruction activities.”\textsuperscript{195} This reorganization was based on MACV suggestions meant to ensure a unified national pacification effort.

\textsuperscript{191} Westmoreland, \textit{A Soldier Reports}, 69.
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., 210.
\textsuperscript{193} United States Military Assistance Command, \textit{MACV Command History 1965}, 230
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., 230.
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., 230.
In the reorganization, the Hop Tac program, first recommended by MACV in 1964, was revitalized. Hop Tac in 1964 used the “oil spot” method of pacification to bring government control to the “capital complex, Saigon/Cholon, by winning the war in the six provinces (Gia Dinh, long An, Hau Nghia, Bien Hoa, and portions of Binh Duong and Phuoc Tuy)” which surrounded the Saigon area. The essence of this operation was to use ARVN forces to clear away the PLAF, hold in place for security, allowing the government to gain popular support. According to MACV, Hop Tac was only fifty percent effective, yet the South Vietnamese claim it prevented a siege of the capital. The US assumed an advisory role when dealing with pacification, until the commitment of large numbers of US troops in mid-1965, at which point the strength and aggressiveness of the PLAF and PAVN took precedence.

In 1965, General Westmoreland created a three-phase campaign plan. The first phase involved a focus on conventional military operations, yet only as a means to an end. Once the PLAF and PAVN were removed from vital areas in South Vietnam, phase two could shift focus on pacification, and that was set to begin as soon as possible. General Westmoreland was clear in his concept of operations for 1965 that rural construction and pacification was critical to winning Vietnam. At a Commander’s Conference in October 1965, Westmoreland said the following regarding the importance of pacification:

The most critical problem in the Rural Construction effort is to recruit and train Popular Forces Units. The PF are local people. They have a vested interest in their local security. . . We must be alert and work with GVN officials to recruit for the

196 United States Military Assistance Command, MACV Command History 1965, 231
197 Ibid., 240.
PF…. If there are US troops in the areas we should provide a few selected NCO's to work with the PF on a long-term basis. If we can succeed in producing effective PF units we will be relieved of a great part of our security problem. We want to develop the PF into a force that can take over local security. However we must not shove our assistance down the throat of the GVN. We can get them to ask for our help if we approach the matter with finesse. [commanders should]... build up the village and hamlet chiefs. When units go into new areas the Commanders should meet and make a fuss ever the local officials. Advisors should urge their counterparts to do likewise.\textsuperscript{198}

Clearly Westmoreland understood that local security in the countryside, and GVN involvement was key to defeating the PLAF and PAVN. Furthermore, the above quote proves that Westmoreland was aware of how sensitive the GVN and Vietnamese people were to outsiders dictating how to do things.

1966

Westmoreland and the Johnson Administration viewed the year 1966 as turning point in the Vietnam War. The basic objective of the year 1966 was to clear, secure, and assist in the economic development of the heavily populated areas around Saigon, in the Mekong Delta, and in selected portions of the coastal plain.\textsuperscript{199} The achievement of this goal was possible given that American firepower and troop strength was beginning to take a toll on the PAVN and PLAF. As any good opponent does, however, the PLAF and PAVN began to adapt, making conventional military operations difficult. One Viet Cong officer said in 1966, “Their (Americans) idea was to surround us with ground forces, then destroy us with artillery and rockets, rather than by attacking directly with infantry…usually we could get away from that…because we knew the countryside so

\textsuperscript{198} United States Military Assistance Command, \textit{MACV Command History 1965}, 242-243. PF refers to Popular Forces, which were paramilitary in nature and locally based.

well and get out fast.”\textsuperscript{200} This is where Nagl’s second argument concerning the US Army failing to adapt to the conditions in Vietnam does not hold up and the same goes for Sorley’s claim that pacification was ignored in favor of the large-unit war.

As the Vietnamese communists began to adapt in 1966, Westmoreland and his field commanders began to change how American forces operated as well. First, as early as December 1965, Westmoreland stated, “We have learned through long and unhappy experience that preplanned schemes of maneuver with successive objectives…will nearly always fail to make significant contact unless contact is at the choosing of the PLAF…when he thinks he has all the advantage.”\textsuperscript{201} To counter the new tactics of the PAVN and PLAF, long-range reconnaissance patrols (LRRPs) became a standard formation within MACV. A school was started in Vietnam, and a command was established in 1966. The idea of LRRPs kept with the tradition set forth by the 1958 counterinsurgency doctrine that called for specially trained, light, independent units. The US Army still conducted large-scale operations, but did so to keep the enemy constantly moving, and thereby disrupting enemy plans for combat operations. Further innovation occurred within 25 ID, where units conducted combined reconnaissance patrols with personnel comprised of fifty percent US, and fifty percent ARVN. In further repudiation of Nagl’s claim of failure to adapt, in 1966, the 1\textsuperscript{st} Infantry Division (1 ID), found that “saturation patrolling” both during the day and night disrupted PLAF operations.\textsuperscript{202} The 9\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division (9 ID), based near Saigon, learned the importance of gaining the

\textsuperscript{200} Wilkins, \textit{Grab Their Belts to Fight Them}, 149.
\textsuperscript{202} Daddis, “Eating Soup with a Spoon”, 246.
population’s support, and conducted Integrated Civic Action Programs (ICAPS), designed to “collect information on the enemy while providing humanitarian assistance and attempting to improve GVN [Government of south Vietnam] acceptance in local hamlets [and] villages.”

Not only did Westmoreland and the US Army adapt combat operations in 1966, but advising and pacification advanced as well. In 1966 the 1st Infantry Division conducted “Operation Rolling Stone”. In this operation a brigade of the 1st Infantry Division built a road to connect remote villages to the markets available around Saigon and the surrounding hamlets. This was done in close coordination with GVN officials, and ARVN troops were left in place to secure the area. This was in keeping with Westmoreland’s guidance to his division commanders that “civic action plans should be developed to support each operation even if the area has been controlled by the PLAF.”

Also in 1966, the III Marine Amphibious Force located near the DMZ conducted “Operation County Fair”. As part of this operation US Marines worked in cooperation with ARVN forces to conduct medical treatment, issue IDs, provide food and drink, and conduct tactical questioning. In addition to the previous operations, Westmoreland also pointed out in a command letter of 22 October that a special effort by

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204 Daddis, Westmoreland’s War, 101.
205 Ibid., 101.
commanders at all levels was required to portray appropriately the importance of Rural Development (RD) and civic action in the US mission in the RVN.\textsuperscript{207}

In analyzing the military strategy and pacification in 1966, one must discuss the Program for Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam (PROVN). The PROVN study was published on the orders of Army Chief of Staff Harold Johnson in March 1966.\textsuperscript{208} Those historians who are critical of Westmoreland’s execution of the Vietnam War point to PROVN as proof that his strategy was not working. They state that PROVN was critical of Westmoreland’s big-unit operations. However, this interpretation is based on a selective reading. In 1966, twenty percent of US combat units were performing area security, with the number doubling in 1967. Units also reported that they were spending fifty-two percent of their time conducting operations to improve local security.\textsuperscript{209} In addition, the PROVN study found that small-unit actions (employment of less than a battalion) were conducted more often than large unit operations. This is evidenced by the 173\textsuperscript{rd} Airborne and 1 ID, who combined conducted 3,112 small-unit operations compared to seventy-three missions involving a battalion or larger.\textsuperscript{210} Lastly, by 1967, of the 140 recommendations made by PROVN, Westmoreland had implemented ninety-seven fully or partially.\textsuperscript{211}

Westmoreland also advocated the importance of the advisory campaign, and on numerous occasions “emphasized and highlighted the importance of a sound relationship

\textsuperscript{207} United States Military Assistance Command, \textit{MACV Command History 1966}, 530.
\textsuperscript{209} Ibid., 1232-1233.
\textsuperscript{210} Ibid., 1229.
\textsuperscript{211} Daddis, \textit{Westmoreland’s War}, 83.
between the US advisor and his counterpart as well as the contributions of the advisor in the total spectrum of US/FW assistance to RVN. Westmoreland took steps to bring continuity to the advisor mission. In 1966, he extended the tour length of advisers with vital experience and skills from one year to two years. Also, Westmoreland got the Military Assistance Program (MAP) transferred to the regular defense budget. Previously, MAP was restricted based on a worldwide ceiling mandated by congressional legislation. The flow of replacement equipment and supplies was now controlled by the defense department, rather than filled by older US equipment traditionally given to supported countries in an attempt to reduce US stocks. Advisor numbers did not increase, but advising was still an important part of US military strategy in Vietnam even though the big-unit war had escalated.

1967

As 1967 began, it appeared to General Westmoreland and the White House that the end of the war was in sight. However, the American people and the US Congress were not pleased with the progress, or lack thereof in Vietnam. Intelligence reports from MACV showed that the PLAF was having difficulty recruiting and that PAVN regulars were forced to take over more of the war effort. The importance of Laos and Cambodia had grown as a result of larger troop movements on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and the drop in PLAF morale was causing more of their units to withdraw without being told to do so.
Not only had the ARVN grown in competence and capability, but the large search and destroy missions had kept the enemy off balance enough to allow for national elections.\textsuperscript{216} However, the war was still raging with no sign of negotiation.

In an effort to win back the support of Congress and the American people, Johnson, under the advice of his advisors set about launching a vast public relations campaign. One advisor was Harry McPherson, the special counsel to President Johnson who wrote in a memo in October that, “Bob McNamara thinks he and Secretary Rusk have pretty much lost their credibility on the subject, and I’m afraid I agree.”\textsuperscript{217} Another memorandum written by cabinet secretary Bob Kintner in August 1967 had stated, “That quick victories were needed in Vietnam, because Vietnam was stifling the Great Society by diverting money.”\textsuperscript{218} Under pressure from domestic opponents, Johnson sought to have monthly or bimonthly briefings to the American people and Congress from Westmoreland and Ambassador to Vietnam Ellsworth Bunker. As a result of this public relations program, Westmoreland gave his famous “light at the end of the tunnel” speech before Congress in April 28, 1967, and his speech to the National Press Club in which he stated “we’ve reached the point where the end begins to come into view.” NSC staffer Robert Komer noted, “Operations against PLAF main force units were having a

\textsuperscript{216} United States Military Assistance Command, \textit{MACV Command History 1966}, 313.
deleterious effect on the guerilla units deployed against pacification”, and thus gave Westmoreland’s optimistic assessment credence.\textsuperscript{219}

The biggest changes in MACV’s approach in 1967 occurred in the areas of pacification coordination and advising. In 1967, Westmoreland created Mobile Training Teams (MTTs). The original purpose behind the MTT concept was to allow the maximum training of RVNAF with the personnel MACV had on hand. With 1967 a force cap was placed on US forces in Vietnam, so despite an improved military situation, the advising mission was not going to receive an increase in personnel allocations. Using the MTTs, the US was able to provide advisors to train battalion level commanders, allowing for the training of 143 maneuver battalions by the end of 1967.\textsuperscript{220} The MTT concept led to the creation of Mobile Advisory Teams (MATs) and Mobile Advisory Logistic Teams (MALTS). The structure of the MATs was five personnel, consisting of two officers and three noncommissioned officers. MATs would grow to 354 in total, and not only did they support ARVN Divisions, but they also partnered with paramilitary forces for the purposes of training and certification. The MALTs worked in a similar manner, except these teams were made up of seven personnel. There was one MALT team per ARVN division, for a total of seven.\textsuperscript{221} In addition to providing more focused advisor support, Westmoreland also introduced a program where military assistance was withdrawn from substandard units. In 1967 alone the 22d and 23d Ranger battalions, and the 5\textsuperscript{th} Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR) of the RVNAF lost funding due to substandard

\textsuperscript{220} United States Military Assistance Command, MACV Command History 1967, 237.
\textsuperscript{221} Ibid., 591.
leadership, training, equipment, and low personnel strength.\textsuperscript{222} In August of 1967, two ARVN infantry battalions, one additional ACR, an engineer battalion, reconnaissance troop, and armored car platoon also had funding suspended.\textsuperscript{223} Funding would be reinstated after six months if the unit improved, and to give units a change the MACV staff worked directly with the RVNAF Joint General Staff to improve the units.\textsuperscript{224}

1967 also saw the strongest effort by the United States to synchronize pacification operations with the creation of the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Support (CORDS) organization. In 1966, the Mission Council had become the Office of Civil Operations (OCO), and for the first time it attempted to provide a unified pacification chain of command through Saigon. OCO provided a central location for senior officials from all US agencies to plan and coordinate.\textsuperscript{225} OCO fell under the responsibility of deputy ambassador William Porter, who was unable to devote his complete attention to pacification, as he had to run the daily functioning of the US mission, and had to defer to Ambassador Lodge’s authority no matter the issue.\textsuperscript{226} With the creation of CORDS, President Johnson finally answered Westmoreland’s request for the better integration of pacification operations.\textsuperscript{227}

The first director of CORDS was Robert Kommer, a member of Johnson’s National Security Council staff. In terms of civil-military relations, CORDS had many accomplishments. First, it placed Kommer as a deputy commander under the command of

\textsuperscript{222} Collins, \textit{The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army}, 70.
\textsuperscript{223} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{225} Daddis, “Eating Soup with a Spoon”, 250.
\textsuperscript{226} Jones, \textit{Blowtorch}, 106.
\textsuperscript{227} United States Military Assistance Command, \textit{MACV Command History 1965}, 233.
General Westmoreland, with the military equivalent of three-star general rank. For the first time the U.S. had a single person vested with “authority over seven civilian agencies and considerable say in mobilization of military resources to support pacification, with direct access to the President of the United States.”

Under the CORDS system, four regional deputies served under each U.S. corps level commander. Even more unique was that in some provinces military served under civilians. Within the first six months of operation CORDS expanded from a staff of 4,980 to 8,327, with eighty-five percent of CORDS personnel being military.

Under the direction of CORDS, in Kien Hoa province, the birthplace of the Viet Cong, Viet Cong strength fell from more than 12,000 insurgents in 1967 to 9,000 in January 1968. As for the impact of CORDS and pacification in 1967, the US found that secure hamlets rose from around forty percent to forty-two percent, contested hamlets did rise from around twenty-five percent to about twenty-eight percent, but those hamlets under PLAF control fell from thirty-five percent to thirty percent by the end of 1967. The numbers were derived from the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) that was introduced in 1967. Under HES, hamlets were divided into secure, contested, and PLAF controlled. The HES system appeared to be straightforward, however, given the number of villages, access to the remote areas, and differing interpretations of rating criteria, it

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229 Komer, *Bureaucracy at War*, 119.
232 Ibid.
seemed impossible for HES to be accurate. First, “secure” villages were given the alphanumeric designation of A, B, or C. With “A” being the exception, hamlets labeled “B” and “C” still held some PLAF presence, but local leaders could spend the night, and PLAF taxation did not occur. The issue with having three categories of government control is that only “A” rated hamlets were completely free of the enemy, therefore the number of sixty-nine percent of secure hamlets in December 1967 is misleading. Also, by having a system that was subjective, greater attention was given to increasing scores, instead of improving programs. Additionally, HES data was converted from worksheets to numerical code processed by a computer, making the reports void of context. Lastly, the enemy could skew the score by limiting activity in areas that they wanted the government to withdraw from. Those hamlets that were “contested” fell into the category of “D” and “E”. The differences between secure and contested is that PLAF taxation still occurred, the PLAF were still in control of the village at night, but economic development was progressing. The final category was “PLAF controlled”, and under this designation there was zero ARVN or GVN presence in the hamlet. It should be noted that HES only counted the hamlets targeted for pacification, and ignored those that were not. Despite the flaws in the HES, however, it was a step in the right direction.

236 Ibid., 242.
237 Ibid., 103.
The year 1967 not only saw changes in advising and pacification, but also in the way that the US military viewed Mao Zedong’s three phases of revolutionary war. The long held belief of the US military was that once insurgent forces reached phase three, the defeat of enemy conventional forces would end the insurgency. However, upon further analysis, especially analysis of how the enemy was fighting in each of the Corps Tactical Zones (CTZs), it became clear that the PAVN and PLAF were not fighting conventionally everywhere. Near the DMZ, and further down the east coast of Vietnam, to just north of Saigon, the PAVN were fighting mostly conventional battles in terms of size, scope, and use of artillery and mobility. However, further south in the Mekong Delta and in the capital region, enemy forces were fighting a traditional guerilla war. Acknowledgement of these facts led to the realization that “the doctrine had been oversimplified to the extent that it had come to mean merely a transition from guerrilla tactics to battalion and larger scale (Regiment and Division sized) engagements…not the continued use of guerrilla forces throughout the three phases…Guerrilla and conventional operations were to be employed simultaneously to complement and support each other.”238 For the first time in 1967 there was the acknowledgment that there were many wars occurring within Vietnam, and therefore the ability to focus only on the conventional war or only on the pacification aspects was impossible.

Conclusion

Clearly the Vietnam War was a complex conflict, made more difficult by the enemy and by constraints placed on U.S. forces. The U.S. army was focused on Europe,

yet it still built counterinsurgency doctrine, trained a specific force to execute the doctrine, and inculcated the doctrine through officer, soldier, and unit training. Also, Westmoreland was presented with both a conventional and unconventional threat, generated by an adaptive and nimble enemy. Failure to deal with the PLAF would lead to government collapse. Equally, failure to deal with main unit PAVN and PLAF forces would have led to collapse. Westmoreland balanced pacification, conventional, and advising based on the military means given him, as well as the situation presented by the enemy. The U.S. Army did learn and adapt, and Westmoreland clearly understood the complexity of the situation. For all intents and purposes the U.S. military system worked, yet even then the U.S. lost. Here, the comparison to Marine Corps operations south of the DMZ is instructive.
CHAPTER 3: THE USMC COMBINED ACTION PLATOONS

The war for South Vietnam’s northern provinces was part of a much larger war. In South Vietnam there were in fact two wars being fought; a war against VC insurgents, and a war against PAVN and PLAF main force units. In order to fight both wars, the US needed to balance not only manpower and firepower, but also the volatile Government of South Vietnam (GVN), and its regular and paramilitary forces. Inserted into a decade-long conflict over the unification of Vietnam, the United States Marine Corps (USMC) had to adapt. Of the adaptations made by the marines in Vietnam, the Combined Action Platoon (CAP) is the most recognized in modern studies concerning successful conduct of counterinsurgency. Yet, despite the success of the CAP Program in increasing local security in its assigned hamlets, it did not have a significant impact on the outcome of the Vietnam War. Due to a lack of manpower in support of CAP, actions of the enemy, US doctrinal gaps, and, worst of all, an apathetic South Vietnamese population, government, and military, the CAP never made it past the stage of tactical innovation.

Marines Arrive in Vietnam

In March 1965, the first US Marines landed at Da Nang Airbase to defend US personnel and infrastructure in Vietnam. From Da Nang the Marines would move to defend key areas around Phu Bai Airfield, and Chu Lai. Under the command of LTG Lewis Walt, III MAF was tasked with the primary mission of providing airfield security. However, upon further examination of the situation, LTG Walt realized that 150,000 civilians lived within three miles, which is also within 81 mm mortar range of Da Nang Airbase, and estimated that there were 2,000 regular guerillas within a twenty-five mile
radius.\textsuperscript{239} With this knowledge, LTG Walt realized that a defense in depth was needed to secure the US airbases.

The original purpose of the Marine forces sent to Vietnam was airbase security. It was a mission that began with an order for a battalion to secure Da Nang, and would end with over 75,000 Marines deployed to Vietnam over the next several years. I Corps, of the RVNAF, was responsible for the area in which III MAF deployed in 1965. Consisting of the northernmost provinces of South Vietnam, Quang Tri, Thua Thien, Quang Nam, Quang Tin, and Quang Ngai, III MAF’s area had a population of 2.5 million people, covered 28,000 square miles, and encompassed the Central Highlands and the DMZ.\textsuperscript{240} Eighty percent of the population within III MAF’s Area of Operation (AO) lived among coastal plains, the fertile nature of which were key to feeding not only the population of South Vietnam, but also the VC.\textsuperscript{241} Additionally, the NVA and VC utilized the western portion of the Central Highlands along the border of Laos, to infiltrate South Vietnam.

Upon initial deployment, III MAF executed an enclave strategy. The purpose was to deny the VC access to the population and rice supplies needed to continue to harass US and ARVN forces in I Corps, and the effort was limited primarily to the coast. General Westmoreland was focused on a more offensive approach aimed at VC and NVA main forces for reasons discussed in the previous chapters. LTG Walt shared Westmoreland’s concern regarding large main force units, and he recognized that “there were organized units of Viet Cong coursing freely through the vast countryside between the cities and major towns—units up to regimental size, well equipped, experienced, and a thousand or
more strong.” The enemy indeed was reacting to the landing of the marines by massing their battalions into regimental-sized forces.

The Marine Response

Despite the Marine Corps’ self-perpetuated myth of having the right strategy in Vietnam, with a focus on counterinsurgency immediately upon arrival, reality was far more “conventional.” Beginning in 1965, and escalating in 1966, the marines of III MAF conducted numerous large-unit operations in response to PAVN and VC actions. One such conventional operation was named Steel Gauntlet, an amphibious operation conducted near Chu Lai, utilizing combined arms maneuver, and heavy naval gunfire and aircraft support. Steel Gauntlet was a battle in which marines fighting conventionally met VC main force units defending prepared bunkers and trench lines. Not surprisingly, the marines won the battle; driving the PLAF main force units away from populated areas, with the PLAF leaving behind 600 killed in action (KIA).

The marines of III MAF conducted further combined arms operations in securing National Route 1, which ran 150 miles from Hue to Quang Tri, during Operation Rough Rider. The idea was simple: wheeled convoys, two to three miles long, consisting of infantry, engineers, and artillery observers were to drive back and forth along RTE 1. Upon taking enemy contact, massive air, artillery, and naval gunfire was directed onto enemy positions. Also, in 1965 III MAF deployed five-man reconnaissance (or Stingray) teams.

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244 Walt, *Strange War, Strange Strategy*, 68.
245 Ibid., 68.
246 Ibid., 39-41.
missions of the Stingray teams was to observe enemy main force units, and upon identification, call in massive artillery and air support to destroy the enemy.\textsuperscript{247}

Not all operations were large unit and conventional. General Walt knew that the war could only be won through winning the population within South Vietnam.\textsuperscript{248} In a similar vein to Westmoreland, Walt understood that conventional operations were necessary to allow space to conduct civic action and pacification. In 1965, III MAF conducted Operation County Fair, and in 1966 conducted Operation Golden Fleece. The purpose of Golden Fleece was to deny the VC the ability to collect the twenty-five to ninety percent rice tax twice a year. Golden Fleece worked by moving the rice within a USMC cordon twice a year, and then airlifting the villagers to and from the location at which the rice was held within the same day.\textsuperscript{249} Where Golden Fleece had the Marines playing a direct role, County Fair found them holding an outer cordon around a village, while ARVN personnel conducted medical treatment, political indoctrination, census polling, and tactical questioning, all while offering food and drink to the villagers to gain their support.\textsuperscript{250}

As was often the case, South Vietnamese and US forces withdrew at the completion of the operation, thus giving the VC the chance to return and reassert control over the village. Local security for the villages was supposed to be the responsibility of locally recruited Popular Forces (PF), yet the PF lacked the capability to provide security. A good example of problems regarding the ability of the PF to take over local security

\textsuperscript{247} Walt, \textit{Strange War, Strange Strategy}, 48.
\textsuperscript{248} Southard, \textit{Defend and Befriend}, 17.
\textsuperscript{249} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{250} Ibid., 20.
can be found in the village of Le Mey. Here the Marines cleared and gained control of the village, but left when PF were dispatched to take control. However, due to the PF’s lack of training and insufficient equipment, the Marines had to return multiple times to teach patrolling techniques and render medical treatment. With situations like Le Mey, the Marines realized that there had to be a better solution to secure the population and ensure the PF could conduct their assigned mission of securing the local population.

The need to secure the population and support the PF was deemed critical, yet the Overseas Internal Defense Policy (OIDP) handicapped the Marines. President Kennedy had installed the OIDP in 1962. It specifically assigned responsibility for training national police to the USAID Office of Public Safety. In addition to assigning training responsibilities, the OIDP placed population security and the dismantling of insurgent infrastructure on the host nation’s national police. In theory having a civilian agency follow the military’s withdrawal from an area after eliminating armed resistance makes sense. However, none of the civilian agencies had a representative below the provincial level until the end of 1966. Therefore the training had to be conducted and security maintained with what the Marines had on hand.

Birth of the CAP Program

With the initial commitment of US ground forces to Vietnam, it became clear that there was not enough ARVN, US, and Allied combat troops available to conduct both a counterinsurgency against the VC guerrilla forces and fight a conventional war against

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253 Ibid., 79.
main force VC and PAVN units. Nagl credits LTG Walt with starting the CAPs by “taking advantage of the USMC’s organizational history of pacification in small wars.”

Yet the CAP concept was characterized as a bottom-up strategy formed because the marines needed the PF to increase friendly force numbers. On August 1, 1965, the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, commanded by LTC William W. Taylor instituted a program in the Hue and Phu Bai area reminiscent of Marine tactics used during early 20th century wars in Central America. Under the direction of ILT Paul Ek, the first CAPs were born, and later given approval by LTG Walt, LTG Krulak, and Commandant of the Marine Corps GEN Wallace Greene. Originally referred to as Joint Action Company, the term was changed to show that forces from more than one nation were involved. Within a few months more CAPs were created and organized under Combined Action Companies (CACO). The purpose of the CAP Program revolved around six objectives: destroy VC infrastructure within the village or hamlet; protect public security and help maintain law and order; protect friendly infrastructure; protect bases and lines of communication within the villages and hamlets; organize people’s intelligence nets; participate in civic action and conduct propaganda against the VC. By 1966, there

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were fifty-eight CAPs, and by 1967 Combined Action Groups (CAG) were formed at provincial level to aid in the administration of CAPs and CACOs.  

**CAP Purpose, Selection, Training, and Task Organization**

The first CAP marines were handpicked by 1LT Ek from 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines based at Phu Bai. The criterion for assignment to a CAP at the beginning of the program was based on a volunteer basis. Additionally, candidates for assignment to a CAP had to meet the following qualifications, “have at least four months of combat experience in a line Marine organization, a high recommendation by their commanding officer for duty with a CAP, no recorded disciplinary action, and no manifestation of xenophobia.” To further aid in selection, CMDR Richard McGonigal, a Navy sociologist stationed in Vietnam, conducted multiple surveys, referred to as “Personal Response,” ranging from one to ten percent of III MAF’s assigned personnel, that focused on US attitudes towards the Vietnamese people and vice versa. The main impact of “Personal Response” was the realization that lack of formal education did not hinder a marine’s ability to work successfully in a CAP, and the survey reinforced the need for better cultural training in regards to the Vietnamese people.

Once selected, marines were sent to the CAP school in Da Nang, with some attending a second CAP school that was open for a short time near China Beach. The course was conducted over two weeks, with a focus on basic skills like small unit tactics,

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258 Southard, *Defend and Befriend*, 22.
259 Ibid., 22.
262 Ibid., 48.
land navigation, call for fire, and a small section on Vietnamese culture and language. As volunteers for the CAPs became harder to find due to increased NVA activity along the DMZ, the CAP school had to shift its focus to more small unit tactics and administrative functions to compensate for the lack of combat arms soldiers in the program and the need to assign members directly from the United States.\textsuperscript{263} With reduced quality and quantity of candidates for CAP units, the focus of the CAP school shifted to provide only six hours of Vietnamese language training spread across the two week program, while thirty-nine hours were spent focused on small unit tactics, and eight hours were spent learning the Vietnamese version of chess called Lo Thuong.\textsuperscript{264} The lack of culture and language training proved to be an impediment to the impact CAPs were able to make in South Vietnamese villages. Once training was complete, graduates were sent to serve on CAPs throughout III MAF’s AO.

The organization of the Combined Action Platoons consisted of a squad of marines, which numbered approximately thirteen personnel to include a navy corpsman. An officer did not lead the platoons, as officers were associated with corruption by the Vietnamese people.\textsuperscript{265} Instead a sergeant or lance corporal, at average age of twenty-one, led the squad that partnered with a PF platoon consisting of thirty to thirty-five local personnel.\textsuperscript{266} The job of the CAP was to focus on the village or hamlet in which they were assigned. The CAPs conducted training with the PF, provided rudimentary medical care to the population, and most importantly conducted day- and night-time patrols with

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{263} Peterson, \textit{The Combined Action Platoons}, 48.
\item \textsuperscript{264} Ibid., 48.
\item \textsuperscript{265} Southard, \textit{Defend and Befriend}, 5.
\item \textsuperscript{266} Ibid., 6.
\end{itemize}
the PF. Key to the success of the CAPs was the fact that they lived in compounds set up inside their assigned village. Depending on support from local maneuver battalions, the CAPs coordinated their activities through the CACOs, which resided at district level.

A Marine captain, who was assisted by three to four other marines, led CACOs. The purpose of the CACO was to maintain contact with subordinate CAPs, and liaison with the District Chief who was typically an ARVN major.267 CACO commanders did visit their CAPs, but were hardly ever on ground during an attack. Instead, the CACO coordinated reinforcements from another CAP or a maneuver unit in case of an attack on a CAP village. CAGs worked in a similar manner, except at the provincial level. A Marine LTC, who worked from a major USMC base and provided replacements and resupply to the CACOs and CAPs, manned the CAGs.268 At the height of the CAP Program in 1970, there were 114 CAPs, four CAGs, and nineteen CACOs in III MAF’s AO.269 Yet, with the increased focus on withdrawing US troops in the wake of the Tet Offensive in 1968, and the election of Richard Nixon in 1968, pressure was placed on General Robert E. Cushman, Walt’s replacement as commander of III MAF, to shrink the CAPs to eight man teams with functions similar to the Army’s MTTs.270 Further pressure came when the CAPs were assigned to the Army’s XXIV Corps in 1970. The CORDs representative for XXIV Corps, Francis McNamara, argued that because the CAP dealt with pacification it should fall under the control of CORDs. Colonel Metzger, director of the CAP units fought against this change and succeeded in getting the CAP units

268 Ibid., 16.
269 Peterson, The Combined Action Platoons, 64.
270 Southard, Defend and Befriend, 139.
reassigned under the control of III MAF until the final CAG was deactivated on May 17, 1971. 271

The ARVN and PF

With the commitment of US and Allied ground forces to South Vietnam, the Vietnam War took on an American face. Sixty percent of the ARVN were shifted from fighting VC and PAVN main units to pacification. 272 What resulted was the further marginalization of the PF. Needless to say, PF units, already underpaid, undertrained, and underequipped were pushed even further down on the priority list of the US and GVN.

In 1965, the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces was comprised of 227,000 officers and men in ARVN, 6,500 Marines, and a nominal Air Force. The paramilitary forces of South Vietnam, consisted of the Popular Forces, Regional Forces, and National Police, stood at strength of 150,000, 105,000, and 50,000 respectively. 273 US, Allied, and Vietnamese force strength amounted to 750,000. Despite these high numbers, the RNVAF suffered humiliating defeats at the hands of the Vietcong at Binh Gia, which was sixty-seven kilometers east of Saigon, and had bases overrun in the Phuoc Long Province, and at Ba Ga. 274 The VC in numbers inferior to the strength of the RVNAF conducted its attacks on the RVNAF. Why the RVNAF failed to effectively fight the VC, can be directly traced to the lack of understanding as to what the RVNAF was

271 Southard, Defend and Befriend, 140.
273 Ibid., 82.
274 Terrence Maitland and Peter McInerney, A Contagion War (Boston: Boston Publishing Company, 1983), 78.
fighting for, and poor training and pay. In fact, the pay alone was only around thirteen dollars a month, with no housing provided for a soldier’s family. Additionally, given the political nature by which appointments to high command were made, many leaders in the RVNAF diverted the money they were provided to feed soldiers in the field to line their own pockets, thus reinforcing a cycle of corruption and mistrust of government institutions.

The PF had its origins in the Civil Guard (CG) and Self Defense Force (SDF) militia created by the US and GVN in 1955. Until 1964, the CG and SDF received very little attention from the US, and even less from the GVN. Accordingly, the CG and SDF were not supported by MAP, and therefore had to rely on the ARVN for all their pay, training, and equipment. It was not until increased VC activity in 1964 that the CG and SDF became known as the Popular and Regional Forces. The PF for which the CAP marines were responsible consisted of personnel from the villages in which they were assigned.

The PF and RF lacked uniform training. The training of the PF rested primarily with the Provincial Chief. PF training was supposed to consist of five weeks of basic training, four weeks of Advanced Individual Training (AIT), and three weeks of basic unit training. In reality, the Provincial Chief, faced with a shortage of ARVN forces, did not want to send the only source of local security away for several months. Additionally, live-fire exercises often consisted of the PF lining up and all firing at the

\[275\text{ Maitland and McInerney, } A\ Contagion\ War, \ 86.\]
\[276\text{ Wiest, } Vietnam’s\ Forgotten\ Army, \ 73.\]
\[277\text{ Ibid., } 112.\]
same target.\textsuperscript{278} Adding to the preparedness issues was that the District HQ responsible for ensuring readiness rarely inspected, allowing the PF to skip military training.\textsuperscript{279} To add insult to injury, PF were paid only half of what ARVN soldiers earned, and thanks to corruption at the province and district levels, even the half pay they were entitled to rarely made it to the PF.\textsuperscript{280}

Not only did the PF have issues with the GVN, but faced discrimination from the ARVN. As LTC (R) Corson observed, “The RF and PF Soldier knows that no matter how hard or long he fights, and not matter how seriously he is wounded or disabled, his service is not equal to service in the ARVN.”\textsuperscript{281} Compliments of the previous French occupation, politics were a way of life within the RVNAF. As a result, PF were denied advancement under the requirement that to be an officer in the ARVN, one had to have a baccalaureate degree, only obtainable through twelve years of expensive formal education.\textsuperscript{282} This was out of reach for a peasant living in rural South Vietnam. Even efforts to increase PF effectiveness by placing regular ARVN officers and NCOs with PF failed due to the feeling that duty with the PF was viewed as “unbecoming of one’s regular force status.”\textsuperscript{283} This mindset of the ARVN led to a PF that was not ideologically connected to the government of South Vietnam, and to poor motivation, and at times complicity with the VC.\textsuperscript{284} Because of the poor treatment the PF received at the hands of

\textsuperscript{278} Southard, \textit{Defend and Befriend}, 114.
\textsuperscript{279} Ibid., 111.
\textsuperscript{280} Ibid., 111.
\textsuperscript{281} Corson, \textit{The Betrayal}, 87.
\textsuperscript{282} Wiest, \textit{Vietnam’s Forgotten Army}, 74.
\textsuperscript{283} Sorley, \textit{The Vietnam War: An Assessment by South Vietnam’s Generals}, 194.
\textsuperscript{284} Southard, \textit{Defend and Befriend}, 112.
the ARVN, the JGS was unable to make its influence felt at the local level, leading to the PF failing to conduct offensive operations. The PF were content to man fixed positions near their home, rather than fight for the national army and government.\textsuperscript{285} This disconnect was obvious when only a third of PF forces polled in a 1967 Simulmatics Corporation report said they “liked” the GVN. Pollsters found that those questioned sought peace rather than victory for South Vietnam.\textsuperscript{286} Needless to say, thanks to GVN corruption, and ARVN discrimination, the PF’s “commitment to ideological and national objectives in the war against the VC was highly questionable.”\textsuperscript{287}

Tactically, those PF who were not part of a CAP were deployed in fixed positions. By the end of US involvement in Vietnam, there were 9,000.\textsuperscript{288} Not only did the fixed positions drain manpower needed for offensive operations by local forces against the VC, but their spread out and non-mutually supporting nature made the PF prime targets for VC attacks.\textsuperscript{289} Most of the PF casualties occurred when the VC attacked the fixed outposts; in the first month of the 1968 Tet Offensive 477 PF and RF locations were overrun.\textsuperscript{290} Observing the RF and PF performance, the commander of the 1\textsuperscript{st} ARVN Division, and later commander of I Corps, LTG Ngo Quang Troung noted, “Experience…indicated that when the shield or screen provided by ARVN and US units on the outside was solid and reliable, allowing no chance for enemy main-force units to

\textsuperscript{286} Southard, \textit{Defend and Befriend}, 112.
\textsuperscript{287} Ibid., 112.
\textsuperscript{288} Sorley, \textit{The Vietnam War: An Assessment by South Vietnam’s Generals}, 197.
\textsuperscript{289} Ibid., 199.
\textsuperscript{290} Wiest, \textit{Vietnam’s Forgotten Army}, 75.
penetrate, then the RF and PF were most effective.” Of note, the PF assigned with CAPs fared much better. PF under CAP leadership had a kill ratio of 4 to 1, with little cost to the US or South Vietnamese government. Additionally, the desertion rate in PF co-located with CAPs was only a fourth of that of PF who did not have CAPs assigned to them.

CAP Successes

The CAPs were successful tactically when it came to governance on the local level. In 1970, it was determined by CORDS that eighty-five percent of the 2.5 million people living in III MAF’s AO lived in a village under US/ARVN control. Additionally, CAP villages had twice the rate of security improvements, and between 1969-1972 eighty to ninety percent of the population in III MAF’s AO were secure from VC taxes. As a further sign of success relating to governance on the local level, ninety-three percent of villages where CAPs were present had hamlet councils, and four out of five hamlet chiefs stayed in their residence at night. This can be compared to villages and hamlets that did not have a CAP present, where the rate of hamlet councils was twenty-nine percent, and only one out of five hamlet chiefs stayed in their residence at night. A specific example of this success can be found in the study of the CAP Lima Six based in Binh Nghia. From 1966-1967 Lima Six conducted numerous combined

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294 Ibid. 29.
operations with the local PF that led to several serious battles with VC forces in the area. Through perseverance, the CAP and PF held their ground, and were able to hand over the village to a secure village government, and the locals created their own People’s Defense Forces.297 In another example, from 1966-1967, 2500 Vietnamese refugees moved back into this area, sabotage of HWY 1 between Tam Ky and Chu Lai decreased, and villagers no longer went three miles away at night to sleep in a safer location.298

Stationary CAPs were also highly effective in civic action. For example, by imbedding within the population, the CAPs were able to provide basic medical and dental care to the rural population through Medical Civic Action Projects (MEDCAP), of which CAPs conducted 1.9 million by wars end.299 Additionally, CAPs introduced Philippine “miracle rice” which allowed farmers to increase rice yield by double planting, and by introducing the fingerling fish to rice paddies the malaria rate dropped, and the fish were able to be sold for a nice profit at the market.300 Villages also gained the ability to trade rice openly through the previously mentioned “Golden Fleece” operations. In 2 CAG’s AO alone, in any given two-month period, nine bridges, thirteen culverts, four dispensaries, three marketplaces, 145 miles of road, six schools, four public restrooms, ninety-five wells, and eight dams/dikes were built.301

297 Peterson, The Combined Action Platoons, 34.
298 Ibid., 35.
299 Southard, Defend and Befriend, 118.
300 Ibid., 113.
Why CAP Failed

_Doctrine_

The Marine Corps had conducted counterinsurgency in places like Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua during the early 20th century. In general, the lessons of World War II and Korea were viewed as the future of warfare, but not all within the Marine Corps, especially not those officers who remembered the *Small Wars Manual*, held the views widely shared in Washington before entering the Vietnam War. Two such officers were General Victor H. Krulak, Commander of Fleet Marine Force Pacific, and LTG Lewis Walt, commander of what would become III MAF. Walt had the privilege of being trained as a young officer by General Lewis “Chesty” Puller, who had taken part in the “Banana Wars”. While many Marines had forgotten about the *Small Wars Manual* by the 1960s, its principles would move to the forefront of the USMC attempts to win in Vietnam. For example, the *Small Wars Manual* defined small war as “operations undertaken under executive authority, wherein military force is combined with diplomatic pressure in the internal or external affairs of another state whose government is unstable, inadequate, or unsatisfactory for the preservation of life and of such interests as are determined by the foreign policy of our Nation.”

Based on this definition, one can see how this manual applies to counterinsurgencies. The *Small Wars Manual* went further to define the ambiguous nature of small wars, or as they will be referred to from this point forward, counterinsurgencies: “One must be on guard to prevent his views

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302 Southard, *Defend and Befriend*, 18.
from becoming fixed as to procedures or methods…Small wars are conceived in uncertainty, are conducted often with precarious responsibility and doubtful authority, under indeterminate orders lacking specific instructions.”

There is further acknowledgement within the manual of the importance of civil-military relationships, and the need for a subtle approach when dealing with insurgencies:

The application of purely military measures may not, by itself restore peace and orderly government because the fundamental causes of the condition of unrest may be economic, political, or social. These conditions may have originated years ago and in many cases have been permitted to develop freely without any attempt to apply corrective measures. An acute situation finally develops when conditions have reached a stage that is beyond control of the civil authorities and it is too late for diplomatic adjustment. The solution of such problems being basically a political adjustment, the military measures to be applied must be of secondary importance and should be applied only to such extent as to permit the continuation of peaceful corrective measures.

The *Small Wars Manual* covers a variety of topics from sustainment, mission command, and training of security forces in its 568 pages.

In addition to having a manual that covered counterinsurgency, the Marines also executed the only large-scale counterinsurgency exercise from February to March 1964. Exercise Silver Lance was run at Camp Pendleton. As part of this exercise, 25,000 Marines, and sixty ships, including three aircraft carriers, conducted full-scale amphibious landing attacks against defended terrain, counterinsurgency, unrehearsed raids, reconnaissance, and ancillary landings. To further show the complexities of warfare, leaders were given 2,000 problems to solve. These problems ranged from requests for textbooks by local members of the government, medical aid, infrastructure

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305 Ibid., 15-16.
and economic improvements, the training of local defense forces, and dealing with an indigenous population that was not entirely friendly.  

There is an issue with the claim made by Marine Corps historians as well as Krepinevich and Nagl regarding the Marine Corps’ suitability for counterinsurgency. First, many of the officers had forgotten about the *Small Wars Manual*. The reason for this is simple. The manual published in 1940, had been overshadowed by the large scale, conventional amphibious operations of World War II and Korea.  

Second, with the advent of the Cold War, nuclear war became the primary concern of the military and US government. For those who point to *Fleet Marine Force Manual 8-2* as an example of superior Marine Corps counterinsurgency doctrine, there is one problem. In 1962, in an effort to ensure unity in counterinsurgency operations across the Army and USMC, the JCS made the Army the primary source for devising counterinsurgency doctrine and *Fleet Force Manual 8-2* is an exact replica of *FM 31-22*. This included lack of guidance in interacting with the host nation population. 

Since marine counterinsurgency doctrine mirrored US Army doctrine, there was no guidance on how to conduct a conventional war and counterinsurgency simultaneously. Another gap in doctrine dealt with an assumption rather than an omission. Counterinsurgency doctrine assumed that under American pressure to reform, the local government would change. Doctrine held that a guerrilla movement’s

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popularity was related to socioeconomic issues, which could be solved by reform.\textsuperscript{311} As shown, the VC was a proxy of North Vietnam, and therefore was fighting to reform the GVN into a part of communist North Vietnam. No amount of socioeconomic concessions was going to placate the VC or North Vietnam, especially after the manpower for the VC came increasingly from the North, and not locally from the South. Nor was it going to win over those in the population who were neutral or aloof given the insular nature of Vietnamese hamlet culture. In the end, the Marine Corps were no better prepared than the Army when it came to counterinsurgency doctrine.

\textit{The Enemy}

In war, the enemy always has a say in how and where one conducts military operations. I Corps was no exception to this rule. Beginning in 1966, NVA infiltration into I Corps led to the marines devoting thirty-five percent of their time conducting large-unit operations, up from twenty-four percent in 1965.\textsuperscript{312} This strategy resembled how the Viet Minh had fought the French. Vo Nguyen Giap’s \textit{People’s War, People’s Army}, translated by the Marine Corps in 1962, was standard reading for all marine leaders. Yet, reading a book is one thing, and understanding it is another. Giap is quite clear that, “Regular units at the battlefront were aimed at annihilation; local army (VC) fought locally in the enemies rear.”\textsuperscript{313} Giap is pointing out that even when a war turned conventional, guerrilla warfare would remain in some form, in an effort to prevent a superior enemy from massing. It worked. “The Regular threat to Northern provinces and

\textsuperscript{311} Hennessey, \textit{Strategy in Vietnam}, 21. \\
\textsuperscript{312} Birtle, \textit{U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Doctrine 1942-1976}, 400. \\
\textsuperscript{313} Vo Nguyen Giap, \textit{People’s War, People’s Army}, Translated by Bernard Fall (New York: Praeger, 1962), 141.
namely Hue forced redeployment of large number of men to the north, weakening security and giving some relief to the hard pressed guerrilla forces.314 Adding to problems, the North launched division-strength PAVN attacks across the DMZ, while simultaneously launching two more divisions at Pleiku, and one out of Cambodia toward Saigon.315 Due to continued PAVN attacks in I Corps, only three percent of the marine force could be dedicated to CAPs, and only twenty percent of villages were able to participate in the CAP program.316 A year later in 1967, there were 470,000 US troops in South Vietnam, but only 74,000 were in maneuver battalions.317 There simply was not enough US manpower, especially in III MAF’s Corps area, to conduct pacification and fight a conventional war.

In addition to driving the pace of battle, the North Vietnamese were well organized to fight the war. Their three-tiered system consisted of regular army (RA) units, regional forces (RF), and militia self-defense force, also known as the Vietcong (VC). Vital to North Vietnam’s success was control of the countryside, of the hamlets and villages of South Vietnam. Utilizing the idea of “doc lap”, or independence, the leadership of North Vietnam made clear that this was a “People’s War”, and the Vietcong were fighting for the people.318 The North went so far as placing political cadres in villages to further indoctrinate the people, and ensure PAVN, PLAF, and VC forces had

315 Ibid., 141.
318 Ibid., 8.
the sustainment necessary to fight in South Vietnam. As Giap said, “Without the people we have no information…They hide us, protect us, feed us, and tend to our wounded.”

_South Vietnam: It Was Their Country_

With the US unable to supply the amount of manpower required to fight both a conventional war and counterinsurgency in Vietnam, the importance of South Vietnam’s government and military to contribute militarily and politically to the war was more vital than any weapons or personnel the US could provide. When it comes to the failure of the CAP program, the GVN is inevitably to blame. Corson writes, “The significance and importance of honesty in operation in a “people’s war of national liberation” has been totally lost upon the GVN in their attempt to control South Vietnam.” This in itself sums up why the US was not successful in Vietnam. However, there is more. GVN leaders did not like the idea of stationing U.S. soldiers inside Vietnamese villages; the GVN viewed this as colonialism. The result was that the GVN never fully supported the CAPs with the necessary manpower requested by the marines. As a result marines did most of the fighting and CAPs suffered two and half times the casualties of standard marine units. The political nature of the military also had an impact. Due to positive publicity and increased reputation from working closely with the marines, two village chiefs were removed by Saigon. PF leaders were also dismissed or transferred due to

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319 Quoted in Hemingway, _Our War Was Different_, 17.
320 Corson, _The Betrayal_, 107.
322 Ibid., 400.
their political affiliation.\textsuperscript{324} This was all done regardless of competence of the village chief or PF leader.

In addition to resisting US troops in Vietnamese villages and politically motivated removals of leaders on the local level, the GVN in Saigon lost a great deal of continuity with the constant changing of government. As mentioned previously, there were five changes of government from 1963 to 1967. As a result, positions within the government were constantly going to individuals who were close supporters of whatever general was currently in power. For example, in 1965, ARVN LTCs appointed by President Air Vice Marshall Nguyen Cao Ky ran all forty-four provinces that constituted South Vietnam.\textsuperscript{325} Another example of what can only be called political chaos arose with the relief of I Corps commander Nguyen Chanh Thi in 1966.\textsuperscript{326} The ensuing backlash divided the loyalty of the South Vietnamese military, and in a few cases led to fighting among RVNAF ground and air units. The US eventually had to diffuse the crisis. The US military was there to fight a war, not become involved in South Vietnamese political struggles. Given this lack of civilian authority, the military made both military and civilian policy, ceding very little power to the people of South Vietnam. This alone ensured the continued lack of a coherent conventional and counterinsurgency campaign strategy.

The PF did not help the GVN either. Village chiefs, who were the link between the district level and PF platoons, would keep soldiers no longer in the unit on their

\textsuperscript{324} Sorley, \textit{The Vietnam War: An Assessment by South Vietnam’s Generals}, 159.
\textsuperscript{325} Maitland and McInerney, \textit{A Contagion War}, 88.
\textsuperscript{326} Walt, \textit{Strange War, Strange Strategy}, 114.
roster. This was termed “Ghost Soldier”, and the reason behind it was rather simple. Villagers had to pay taxes for the PF, and these taxes went into the hands of the village chief; more PF on the payroll, equaled more money for the village chiefs to keep for themselves.\footnote{Southard, \textit{Defend and Befriend}, 111.} Also not helping matters were villagers taking safer assignments in the GVN or military in cities like Danang. Jobs in urban areas paid better and it was safer.\footnote{Ibid., 113.} This was understandable: in 1966 the PF made up twenty percent of the RVNAF, yet accounted for fifty-four percent of RVNAF casualties.\footnote{Ibid., 113.} In addition to seeking safer employment, those who did join the PF would cede control to US forces in battle.\footnote{Ibid., 105-106.} The CAP, however, was meant to train and provide advice, not command the PF. There was also the issue of PF being among deceased enemy combatants, leading one marine corporal to lament, “Man, I just don’t know whose side that guy [PF] is on, I don’t want to go to sleep in that bunker.”\footnote{Ibid., 116-117.}

How the CAP program could have ever worked without the full support of the GVN and ARVN, and more importantly by the villagers themselves is beyond understanding. Beginning in 1967, only fifty percent of ARVN forces were assigned pacification duties, and the attempt to bring community projects and political indoctrination by using revolutionary development teams (RD) was only present in 250 hamlets throughout South Vietnam.\footnote{Hennessy, \textit{Strategy in Vietnam} 15, and Southard, \textit{Defend and Befriend}, 108.} Additionally, the RD failed to promote the
government, lacked the understanding of local needs, and had high desertion rates.\footnote{Southard, \emph{Defend and Befriend}, 108.} No amount of US effort could have replaced the people, government, and military of South Vietnam caring enough to secure their own freedom. An ARVN General commented that, “No CAP village fell, as long as the US protective shield was nearby.”\footnote{Sorley, \emph{The Vietnam War: An Assessment by South Vietnam’s Generals}, 159.} That highlighted the problem: security in CAP villages remained high, as long as marines were present, but what happened once they left? Michael Peterson, author of \emph{The Combined Action Platoons} concludes, “I do not believe that if MACV had employed a nationwide CAP Program that the United States would have won the war. Vietnam was a problem for which there was no American solution.”\footnote{Peterson, \emph{The Combined Action Platoons}, 125.} The end result of the South Vietnamese being unable to take responsibility for their own country is why by 1969 only two of the 114 CAPs were able to leave their hamlets due to a high level of local security and governance.\footnote{Townsend, “Combined Action Platoons in the Vietnam War”, 30.}

\textit{The US Military...Good Intentions.}

To this point, assessing the failure of the CAP Program has centered on the GVN, yet the US was not completely blameless. First, perhaps for fear that committing to the CAP Program would have bound the fate of local security and pacification to a long-term US military presence, the program was not given the full attention it deserved.\footnote{Birtle, \emph{U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Doctrine 1942-1976}, 399.} American policy-makers were also culturally ignorant. The Vietnamese people are nationalistic, but they are also isolationist and sensitive to signs of colonialism. This is
why the Vietnamese people seeing the US as having supported President Thieu’s and Premier Ky’s severe crackdown on Buddhist protestors in Da Nang in 1966 had bad implications.\textsuperscript{338} When asked what the impact of the CAP was on the Vietnam War, Lance Corporal Paul Hernandez, a former CAP Marine, replied: "CAP was a short term success because the locals knew nothing of politics and just wanted to be left alone to grow their rice and live as they and their ancestors had for generations. When the CAP's pulled out in May 1971 and left their villes, they reverted back to what they had done prior to the CAP's coming in."\textsuperscript{339}

Most Americans failed to understand Vietnamese culture regarding civic action projects. First, despite all the great things done for the villagers, by providing materials free of charge or at a nominal fee, the marines were actually offending the Vietnamese people.\textsuperscript{340} Also, in all the improvements of roads, wells, and schools, there was little consideration given to whether the villagers wanted those things, and even if the villagers did, they could not maintain them once the marines left. By delivering supplies and flooding the economy of South Vietnam with US dollars and goods, high inflation ensued, and removed the motivation for the South Vietnamese government to commit to long-term improvement in the conditions of the rural population. The US organized and conducted medical and food distribution operations unilaterally. However, civic action would continue with the main marine units, but for the CAPs, civic action was nonexistent following the Tet Offensive. Within a year post-Tet, eighty-five percent of

\textsuperscript{338} Peterson, \textit{The Combined Action Platoons}, 28.
\textsuperscript{340} Peterson, \textit{The Combined Action Platoons}, 103.
CAPs became mobile. The result was an increase in killing VC, but marines became invisible to the population as they spent more time outside the village conducting operations. Where CAP outposts prior to Tet served as focal points of civic action and hamlet security, they became resupply warehouses, and places for marines to rest and refit away from the population.

The CAP Program was a failure due to Americans doing too much, with too little. Historian Andrew Wiest criticizes the US for taking over the war and the marines were part of the problem. First, by the CAPs taking the leading role in civic action, and the training and equipping of the PF, the ARVN were allowed to stall their own military leadership problems. In addition to the problems caused by assuming too much responsibility for the war, the marines dispersed their forces to gain in the guerrilla campaign, initially ignoring the PAVN threat until forced to fight along the DMZ. Dispersion was one reason why Westmoreland remained unenthusiastic about the CAP Program. Westmoreland “disseminated information on the platoons and their success to other commands, which were free to adopt the idea as local conditions might dictate; but would have been fragmenting resources and exposing them to defeat in detail.” If implemented throughout Vietnam, the US would have played into North Vietnam’s hands. As Mao Tse-Tung noted, “Concentration may be desirable when the enemy is on the defensive and guerrillas wish to destroy isolated detachments in particular

343 Southard, Defend and Befriend, 106.
344 Wiest quoted in Southard, Defend and Befriend, 131.
345 Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, 166.
localities." This may explain why attacks against CAPs increased from fourteen percent from January to October 1967, to forty-seven percent from November 1967 to June 1968.\footnote{347}

The US also failed in providing proper guidance and progress measuring tools; allowing for a clear understanding of how CAPs fed into the overall pacification picture. Developed by CORDS, the purpose of the Hamlet Evaluation System was to show which hamlets were under GVN control, contested, and under VC control. This system was focused on administrative, political and economic factors, but not military, and depended on district advisors who did not visit all the hamlets to gather the data.\footnote{348} This system would not become universal across US civilian and military leadership in III MAF until 1969. Until 1969, III MAF used a different system focused on the destruction of enemy units, enemy infrastructure, establishment of local security and governance, and status of development.\footnote{349} While the system may not appear to be extremely different, the fact that there was not a single adhered to method of measuring pacification until four years after the CAPs began is a failure to link the tactical successes gained by the CAPs to overall pacification in South Vietnam.

Shortage of manpower cannot be overstated when considering the limited ability of the US to fight both a conventional war and an insurgency simultaneously. The result

was undesirable marines being sent to fill CAPs. Additionally, manpower shortages meant CAPs could only fill nine of their authorized fifteen personnel slots. By 1965, the US military had 2.6 million personnel on active duty across all the branches of the armed forces. Of these 2.6 million personnel, the US committed 60,000 to Korea, 250,000 to West Germany, and 20,000 to Latin America. What this represents is an example of how the peak deployment of 585,000 US troops to Vietnam by the end of 1968, especially with President Johnson refusing to call up the reserve, ensured the US did not have enough troops available to meet both the Soviet threat in Europe and conduct a simultaneous conventional and counterinsurgency war in Vietnam.

Was CAP an Alternative?

Despite all this evidence, there are still those like Krepinevich, and USMC Majors Brewington and Williamson who think the CAP Program, if fully implemented, could have resulted in a different outcome of the war. When compared to data available during the war, their theories appear flawed and driven by hindsight. Those available measures include a defense department report published in 1967 and basic estimates relating to population density in Vietnam.

Brewington writes in response to Westmoreland’s claim that he did not have the manpower to place a squad in every village: “If encadrement of every village and hamlet

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had been the requirement, it could be met by utilizing 167,000 U.S. troops, far fewer than the 550,000 eventually assigned to South Vietnam. Within the 550,000 ceiling there could have been a CAP force together with several Army divisions to counter any moves by major Communist forces, and casualties would have been minimized and population security enhanced.”

Krepinevich uses the same 1967 DOD study as Brewington, and like Brewington writes: “Given a 550,000-man ceiling, a force mix providing for CAP operations could have effected, with several airmobile or ROAD division held in reserve to counter any large scale VC/NVA incursion into areas undergoing pacification.”

Obviously Brewington borrowed from Krepinevich and both missed the point. First, pacification could only be achieved by the host nation. The US can set conditions, but at the end of the day the host nation government has to win over its people and be able to stand on its own. Second, by not being under pressure from army and marines, the VC and PAVN would have been able to strike at will, wherever and whenever they wanted. A few divisions in reserve may sound good, but the US did not have enough air mobility, nor were there roads to mass force in short time. American forces thus would have to be fed piecemeal into battle, spread over a large area, making communication, resupplying, medical evacuation, artillery and air support extremely difficult. Taking both author’s points into account, the population security might have been enhanced, at least until the US left. As for US casualties, they would have been less only until the first large scale North Vietnamese attack, and that offensive may have forced the US to withdraw.

Williamson takes a different, yet equally flawed approach. He writes, “10 million villagers lived in rural South Vietnam and on average one CAP platoon controlled a village of 5,000 people. Taking this as a model, pacification requires 2000 CAP platoons, or 32,000 American servicemen.” Again, like Brewington and Krepinevich, Williamson assumes that the US could win a counterinsurgency in a foreign country if only we tried hard enough. He ignores the basic modern military tenet, in which the ratio of support to combat soldiers is five to one. Therefore, the committed number would have had to be much higher, which would have put the US in a similar situation as 1965. Who was going to secure the support areas? Also, Williamson assumes that pacification was the only war occurring in Vietnam. Yet there was a conventional war, a war that the ARVN had been losing prior to the commitment of US ground forces in mid-1965. 2000 CAPs would have served no purpose if the North was able to annihilate the ARVN even earlier than it eventually would do in 1975.

Conclusion

The CAP program was an excellent program that was under-resourced, under-appreciated, and therefore successful only on the tactical level. The reasons for this inability to achieve long lasting stability of the South Vietnamese countryside can be traced to several mistakes by the US and South Vietnamese government. First, the US did not have the manpower, nor the national will to deploy enough troops to Vietnam in order to fight both a counterinsurgency and a conventional war. To do both, the US would have had to deploy close to a million troops, and it did not have them available.

The CAP Program certainly had some success, yet, success in counterinsurgency takes more than foreign forces conducting MEDCAPs and handing out supplies. A successful counterinsurgency requires more than US marines dying in defense of South Vietnam. Counterinsurgency requires the dedication of the host nation and its people, as they are the only ones who can win and defend their own freedom. This dedication was clearly lacking on the part of the people and government of South Vietnam. Hence, South Vietnam no longer exists, and America has only the names of over 58,000 Americans inscribed on a black wall in Washington D.C.
CONCLUSION: 1968 TO THE PRESENT

The Vietnam War did not end for the US in 1968. The war would continue for five more years, and claim thousands more American lives. With the withdrawal of all US forces in 1973, the physical aspects of the Vietnam War ended, yet the psychological and emotional scars of Vietnam would continue to hurt the US to the present day. Revisionist historians like Sorley and Nagl wish to view the years following Tet as the years of the right man, with the right strategy. As for the Army, Vietnam was best left forgotten, and the force reorganized for conventional warfare. Both revisionist history regarding the final years of the U.S. military presence in Vietnam, and the Army’s desire to forget Vietnam happened would lead to similar mistakes after 9/11.

Abrams, Right Man, Right Strategy?

Despite the success of the Allied forces in stopping the Tet Offensive, American political will was broken, and a new phase of the Vietnam War began. Under President Richard Nixon, this new phase included Vietnамization. The military man responsible for overseeing this new phase was Creighton Abrams, former deputy commander of MACV under General Westmoreland.

General Creighton Abrams became the third commander of MACV, and the “tactics changed within fifteen minutes of Abrams taking command.” Revisionists like Sorley would go on to say that for all intents and purposes, the Vietnam War was won by 1970. Yet, despite the old adage which states that numbers never lie, numbers actually say what one wants them to say.

356 Sorley, A Better War, 17.
Let us look at the claim by those like Sorley that Abrams focused a majority of the Army’s operations on pacification. From January 1969 to January 1970, the percentage of operations classified as “combat” still made up between seventy-three to ninety-two percent of all military operations in South Vietnam. ³⁵⁷ Compare this to Westmoreland’s number of eighty percent in August of 1967. Although the percentage of pacification operations did increase by January 1970, this was due to massive military pressure post-Tet.³⁵⁸ Yet, the increase in pacification operations did not create a major shift in the population’s loyalties, allowing the PLAF to maintain a constant presence and not be destroyed.

Scholars like Krepinevich, Sorley, and Nagl who argue that large-unit operations and unobserved artillery fire dropped under Abrams are incorrect in their claims. Under Westmoreland, from mid-1967 to mid-1968, unilateral large-unit US operations stood at 3,328.³⁵⁹ Compare this to the number of unilateral large-unit operations executed under Abrams: 4,557 from mid-1968 to mid-1969 and 3648 from mid-1969 to mid-1970.³⁶⁰ The drop off in the years from mid-1970 to mid-1972 resulted from the redeployment of over 200,000 US and Allied soldiers. Large-unit operations were just as important under Abrams as they were under Westmoreland, if not more so. In terms of unobserved artillery fire classified as Harassment and Interdiction (H/I), Abrams was able to use a “bureaucratic sleight of hand” to make it seem as though unobserved artillery fire was not

³⁵⁷ Birtle, “PROVN”, 1232.
³⁵⁸ Ibid., 1233.
³⁵⁹ Ibid., 1230.
³⁶⁰ Ibid., 1230.
a large part of how he operated in Vietnam.\footnote{Birtle, “PROVN”, 1234} In 2\textsuperscript{nd} Quarter 1968, under Westmoreland’s command, H/I expended thirty-one percent of all artillery shells. Upon Abrams assumption of command, the number of H/I missions fell to zero. Yet, fire missions categorized as “other”, increased from three percent in 2\textsuperscript{nd} Quarter 1968 to twenty-five, thirty-three, thirty-one, and thirty-seven in the quarters covering a little under a year after Abrams took command. \footnote{Ibid., 1234-1235.}

When it comes to arguing Abrams succeeded at pacification where Westmoreland failed, Sorley points to HES numbers that state ninety percent of the population in the South was under GVN control by 1969.\footnote{Sorley, \textit{A Better War}, 219.} Yet, secure is a relative term. A-rated hamlets were the only hamlets completely free of a PLAF presence, and only twenty-nine percent of hamlets were A-rated in December 1971. A year later in 1971 the number of A-rated hamlets rose to thirty-four percent, leaving over sixty percent of hamlets with a PLAF presence prior to the 1973 cease-fire.\footnote{Boylan, “Good Night Saigon”, 238.} Yet another example of the US depending on numbers devoid of context. Additionally, as of June 1969, ninety percent of all those imprisoned as PLAF were free within six months.\footnote{Ibid., 246.} This shows that corruption was still rampant throughout South Vietnam’s government and military structure. Why was there a PLAF presence in over sixty percent of South Vietnam’s hamlets? Why were PLAF allowed to go free? The answers to these questions are at the heart of the matter when it comes to Vietnam. First, the local security forces were recruited from areas where they
had neighbors and relatives fighting on the side of the PLAF. This led to an attitude of “live-and-let-live.” The bottom-line in Vietnam was that no matter what the US did, there was never going to be success without a stronger South Vietnamese government presence in the villages. Therefore, Abrams like Westmoreland was no closer to victory.

Post-Vietnam Army

The effect on the post-Vietnam Army was profound in terms of restructuring and doctrine. Yet, rather than capitalize on the lessons learned from Vietnam, restructuring and doctrine returned to the pre-Vietnam idea of conventional warfare against the Soviet Union in Europe. The reason behind this according to Robert Cassidy is that Vietnam was the “anathema to the mainstream American military, hard lessons learned there about fighting guerrillas were neither embedded nor preserved in the US Army’s institutional memory.”

In 1972, General Creighton Abrams became Army Chief of Staff. Under Abrams the reserve forces were integrated into the force structure to ensure that no major deployment would be possible without them. Also, the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) was created. With TRADOC the Army for the first time had doctrine, training, and service research consolidated under one commander. By 1982, the Army introduced the operational level of war in FM 100-5, which provided a link

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368 Conrad Crane, Avoiding Vietnam: The U.S. Army’s Response to Defeat in Southeast Asia (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2002), 5.
369 Ibid., 3.
between strategic ends, and tactical means, ensuring a unity of effort.\textsuperscript{370} With the integration of reserve forces, the creation of TRADOC, and the acknowledgement of the operational level of war, it initially appeared as though the Army was set to learn from Vietnam. Yet, this initial feeling proved fleeting.

In the post-Vietnam Army counterinsurgency disappeared. During the 1980s, instructors at the Army’s Command and General Staff College (CGSC) attempted to resurrect counterinsurgency in the Army’s officer education system. Looking for lessons learned, the officers from CGSC flew to the Special Operations School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Once at Fort Bragg, the Special Operations School staff told the CGSC instructors that they were instructed in the 1970s to throw away counterinsurgency files.\textsuperscript{371} Additionally, FM 100-5, updated in 1993, had a section on insurgencies and counterinsurgencies consisting of only three paragraphs, and using El Salvador not Vietnam was an example of counterinsurgency operations.\textsuperscript{372} It appears as though the Army returned to its comfort zone of war against the Soviet Union. Large battles at the National Training Center (NTC) would decide who the good commanders were, and would ensure that the higher level of Army leadership remained unchallenged intellectually. As a result of the Army’s failure to inculcate lessons from Vietnam, the next war would prove a rude awakening.

\textsuperscript{371} Crane, 12.
\textsuperscript{372} Ibid., 13.
Iraq—Vietnam, Part 2?

Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, America found itself at war with a worldwide threat yet again. This time instead of Communism, the threat was global radical Islam. In his 2002 State of the Union Address, President George W. Bush would say,

States like these [North Korea, Iran, and Iraq] and their terrorist allies constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. We’ll be deliberate; yet time is not on our side. I will not wait on events while danger gathers. The United States will not permit the world’s most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world’s most destructive weapons.\(^{373}\)

Though more than thirty-five years apart, President Bush’s words echo sentiments similar to President Johnson when asked about US involvement in Vietnam. The response of the US in the War on Terror and in Vietnam are similar, and as a government and people the US must realize that military strength can only take one’s objective so far. In Vietnam, it took over two years before there existed a civilian foil to Westmoreland in the case of CORDs. This foil has yet to make itself known in both Iraq and Afghanistan. However, even if there is a combined civil-military approach, one key factor in determining the success of a counterinsurgency is more important than anything the US can do—that is having a partner host nation willing to govern and secure itself. Operationally, MACV and General Westmoreland fought a war that was both conventional and unconventional, and used limited military means in the best way possible in an attempt to win in Vietnam.

During the 1980s, then Major David Petraeus wrote an article for *Parameters* titled “Lessons of History and Lessons of Vietnam.” In it Petraeus writes, “History in

\(^{373}\) Ricks, *Fiasco*, 35.
general, and the American experience in Vietnam in particular, have much to teach us, but both must be used with discretion and neither should be pushed too far.\textsuperscript{374} Iraq is not Vietnam, and Afghanistan is not Iraq. Not only are conflicts different, but so too should the manner in which conflicts in different countries are waged differ. Counterinsurgency is not a one size fits all, and by assuming that the US can gain a different outcome by conducting a war, especially counterinsurgency, in a manner different from a similar war in history, the US is doomed to repeat the same mistakes. This thesis has shown that the manner in which wars are waged is an every changing process, reactive to each individual case. “War deals with reactive elements, not…with fixed values.”\textsuperscript{375} Not all communists were the same, nor are all terrorists in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century the same. A BDM Corporative Study conducted in 1968 found, “The American experience in Vietnam points to the danger of having one fundamental principle—anti-communism—elevated to the status of doctrine for all regions of the world.”\textsuperscript{376} The US is making the same mistake today with radical Islamic terrorism. Will the US take a harder look at the Vietnam War, and consider an alternative narrative, and in doing so, will the US change course and find a path to victory that eluded General Westmoreland and MACV in Vietnam? This is yet to be determined, yet, hopefully the evidence provided in this thesis presents a new step towards understanding how and why the Vietnam War was fought from 1964-1968 in the manner that General Westmoreland chose.

\textsuperscript{375} Daddis, \textit{Westmoreland’s War}, 176.
\textsuperscript{376} Berman, \textit{Planning a Tragedy}, 132.
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