THE "OTHER WAR":
AN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF AMERICAN NATIONBUILDING
IN SOUTH VIETNAM, 1954-1975

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This study contributes to a post-revisionist synthesis of the Vietnam War by making two basic points about Americans involved in the multifarious US and South Vietnamese government activities that fell outside the realm of large-scale combat operations (the so-called “Other War”) from the mid 1950s to the early 1970s. Like some revisionist scholars, the author concludes that US “Other Warriors” provided their superiors with generally balanced accounts of the current activities and standings of the various contending parties in South Vietnam. He finds, however, that this group exuded an unjustified optimism regarding the prospect of constructing a strong, prosperous, independent, and democratic Government of Vietnam. The author also agrees with revisionists that, to a certain extent, “Other War” experts understood the nationalist and revolutionary character of the Vietnam War. Still, they never developed a coherent alternative to the dominant US-South Vietnamese model of attrition warfare. Thus, in the author’s view, the root problem with counterinsurgency and nationbuilding in Vietnam was with the concepts themselves. American proponents of the “Other War” largely failed to confront the heterogeneous assumptions that underlay their ad hoc attempt to build a nation in the midst of war.
The evidentiary basis for this dual thesis is the Vietnam-era writings of the “Other Warriors” themselves. This includes the published memoirs, interviews, journal articles, congressional testimony, and research reports as well as the unpublished bureaucratic analyses, end-of-tour reports, letters, memoranda, speeches, and essays of important “Other War” figures. The inspiration for the author’s decision to treat this group of middle-level military officers and civilian bureaucrats and government-sponsored social scientists as a loosely-knit nationbuilding/counterinsurgency coalition derives from two sources: the corporatist model of US foreign relations, championed by historians such as Michael Hogan and Ellis Hawley, and the “revisionist” model of US civil-military relations introduced by political scientist Richard Betts. In order to capture the complexity of American thinking regarding Vietnam’s “Other War,” this study also draws upon a number of intellectual historical, military historical, and sociological accounts of America’s interventionist ethos, US political development theory and doctrine, and the American or Western “Way of War.”
Dedicated to Mom, Dad, and Qin
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I also wish to thank Richard Hunt of the U.S. Army Center of Military History for suggesting possible avenues of research on the “Other War” and for securing permission for me to use the Center’s extensive archives on US pacification and development activities during the Vietnam War.

I am grateful also for the assistance provided to me by the archivists of the U.S. Army Military History Institute, the U.S. Marine Corps Historical Center, the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, the National Archives, and the University of California, Berkeley, Indochina Archive.

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INTRODUCTION

The historiography of America’s twentieth century wars is conventionally described as undergoing a dialectical process wherein the officially-endorsed orthodox position is challenged by “outsider” revisionist interpretations, and then both are subsumed within a balanced, post-revisionist synthesis, which contains, in modified form, elements of both the preceding schools of thought. According to such experts on American foreign relations as Gary Hess and Robert Divine, historical accounts of the United States involvement in Indochina differ from the general trend. Because of America’s defeat and the widespread unpopularity of the war in the U.S., “outsider” academics and journalists were the first out of the blocks with harshly critical views of their country’s role in Vietnam. So it was that the unofficial position became, by default, the orthodox interpretation. Not until the late 1970s did military and civilian participants in the conflict come forward with their own justificatory interpretations. And only since the mid-1980s has a complex and nuanced post-revisionist synthesis on America’s part in the Vietnam War begun to emerge.¹ For my part, I hope to contribute to this synthesis.

by analyzing the wartime perspectives of U.S. military officers, civilian bureaucrats, and
government-sponsored social scientists involved in the planning, execution, and
evaluation of the so-called “Other War” in Vietnam from the late 1950s to the early
1970s.

Before presenting a historiographical and methodological overview of my thesis,
it is necessary to define the “Other War” and to suggest how it might be differentiated
from other terms that have become associated with it and they from one another.
Unfortunately, this is easier said than done. Not all of the relevant concepts originated
during the same period, and “Other War” commentators were not particularly careful in
their use of language, at times making semantic distinctions and other times not. Thus
any attempt to piece together composite definitions is bound to produce the verbal
equivalent of overlapping circles in a Venn diagram, and one should consider the
following explanation as somewhat artificial and open to challenge.

That said, the “Other War” was all that the “Big Unit War” was not within the
context of South Vietnam. It did not include conventional-style combat outside of
populated areas conducted by regular American and South Vietnamese military forces
against the regular units of the National Liberation Front (NLF) and the People’s
Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF). But it did include certain US-GVN conventional force
activities, such as pacification support (clear and hold) operations, resource control

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operations, and military-sponsored nationbuilding (civic action) projects. During the Vietnam era, counterinsurgency was employed in two ways. Loosely defined, it simply referred to the allied campaign to quash the Viet Cong insurgency in South Vietnam. As used by advocates of a counterinsurgency strategy, though, it normally referred to the coercive aspect of the “Other War”: i.e., allied operations undertaken within, or in the vicinity of, populated rural areas designed either to prevent Viet Cong political operatives and armed guerrillas from gaining access to the local population or to locate and “neutralize” the insurgents by killing or arresting them or persuading them to surrender voluntarily. The constructive aspect of the “Other War” was nationbuilding: political, economic, and social activities carried out by civil-military authorities for the purpose of winning the “hearts and minds” of the South Vietnamese people and constructing the basis for a stable, prosperous, and democratic Republic of Vietnam. For its part, pacification referred to most, but not all, counterinsurgency and nationbuilding activities directed at rural village and hamlet residents; at this level, however, they were more commonly labeled security and development programs.

**Vietnam War and Pacification Historiography**

Orthodox historians and journalists (for example, Frances Fitzgerald, David Halberstam, George McT. Kahin, and Arthur Schlesinger) contend that the U.S. intervention in Indochina was futile, contrary to America’s real national interests, and an immoral violation of human rights and state sovereignty. 

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policymakers did not understand the true nature of the Vietnam conflict in either its first or second phases: it was, according to this group of scholars, a war for independence and a social revolution. It was not, as U.S. officials told the public, a combination civil war and war of external aggression. America’s ally in the Vietnam War, the so-called Government of Vietnam (GVN), was corrupt, militarily and politically ineffective, unpopular with most Vietnamese citizens, and impervious to reform efforts that went against the interests of the urban-based politico-military elite. On the other hand, the Communist revolutionary leadership in southern Vietnam (known pejoratively as the Viet Cong) was nearly the reverse image of the GVN. The National Liberation Front was morally upright, organizationally and tactically adept, widely popular, and dedicated to meeting the rising expectations of most Vietnamese for economic security, political participation, and freedom from foreign domination.

There was no real contest between the two South Vietnamese antagonists. The Viet Cong were on the verge of victory prior to the large-scale military intervention of the United States in 1964-65 without substantial help from North Vietnam. Furthermore, Washington’s wrongheaded belief that American power and influence could, in the end, shift the balance of forces in South Vietnam in Saigon’s favor was the result of historical ignorance, ideological myopia, and superpower hubris. Although the manner in which

the U.S. military chose to prosecute the war ultimately made the situation worse for the anti-Communist side, no other strategy would have saved the decadent Saigon regime from its own internal contradictions -- given the presence of a strong and attractive political alternative.

In contrast to orthodox historians, revisionist scholars (such as Harry Summers, Bruce Palmer, Phillip Davidson, Shelby Stanton, Andrew Krepinovich, Leslie Gelb, Guenter Lewy, and Ellen Hammer)\(^3\) are generally agnostic on the question of whether the U.S. should have intervened in the Vietnamese conflict in a substantial way. Some acknowledge that American policymakers in the 1950s and ‘60s allowed their anti-Communist instincts to cloud their geopolitical judgment, particularly in light of the historical mistrust evinced by the Vietnamese with regard to their Chinese neighbors.

What is more, almost all revisionists agree that, once the decision to intervene had been made, the style of warfare adopted by the United States and foisted upon its South Vietnamese ally -- a conventional war of attrition dominated by indirect firepower -- was inappropriate for defeating Viet Cong insurgents or North Vietnamese aggressors. In addition, they tend to agree that the GVN, especially in the aftermath of President Diem’s assassination in 1963, was too weak a reed to support allied hopes for victory in the face of an apparent Communist juggernaut.

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Although revisionist writers have few illusions about the politico-military weaknesses of the South Vietnamese regime, they largely support the contemporary official American view that the Saigon government and armed forces were redeemable. They were not indelibly tarnished by the original sin of their Confucian, Francophile, and urbanite heritage. Their record, especially after the 1968 Communist Tet offensive, demonstrated a willingness to accept political and social reform. For their part, the Communists were not the heroic warrior-politicians that their propaganda and some Western journalists and academics portrayed them to be. Far from being autonomous actors reacting to the oppressive measures of the South Vietnamese regime, Viet Cong leaders were largely the creatures of the North Vietnamese Politburo, which cynically employed whatever means necessary -- including assassination and terrorism -- to achieve its goal of a unified, Communist Vietnam. As for the South Vietnamese people, a majority of whom were rural peasants, they mostly remained either uncommitted to either side or began moving in the GVN’s direction by the late-1960s, in response to the reversal of political-military fortunes that occurred at the time.

In the eyes of revisionists, the American intervention in Vietnam was by no means immoral or doomed to failure. Indeed, the war’s conclusion in the form of a straightforward invasion by North Vietnamese regular forces in 1975 -- as ignominious as it then appeared to many Americans -- suggests that a different allied course, undertaken earlier in the conflict, might have produced an entirely different outcome.⁴ Although

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⁴ What is more, post-unification developments -- such as the establishment of “re-education” camps for thousands of South Vietnamese associated with the old regime, the massive exodus of “boat people” from Vietnam, and the failure of Communist programs of nationalization and collectivization in the South,
revisionists disagree on the precise nature of an alternative strategy, the main elements would have included: 1) sticking more closely by Ngo Dinh Diem and refusing to sanction the coup plans of his rivals in the South Vietnamese military; 2) directing the bulk of America’s military resources at the conflict’s “center of gravity” (i.e., North Vietnam and its armed forces); 3) mobilizing the American people behind an all-out war strategy; 4) unifying the civil and military components of the U.S. effort in support of the South Vietnamese government in Saigon and Washington under a single commander; and 5) providing earlier, smarter and more extensive backing for the GVN’s rural pacification and political and economic development activities.

Among scholars who have focused their attention on pacification and other aspects of the “Other War,” an orthodox-revisionist split has arisen akin to that which exists in the general Vietnam War literature. Pacification revisionists (for example, Robert Komer, William Colby, Shelby Stanton, Larry Cable, Cecil Currey, Andrew Krepinovich, Guenter Lewy, and William Andrews)\(^5\) lament the fact that the US Army and Air Force, acting on the basis of long-held institutional traditions, chose to fight a high-technology war of attrition instead of a people-oriented counterinsurgency war. The

“Other War” did, they acknowledge, attract President Kennedy’s attention, and President Johnson’s too, especially during the time of the Honolulu Conference with Prime Minister Ky in 1966. But in terms of money, manpower and organizational clout, this strategy always remained the neglected step-child to the military’s favorite son, the so-called “Big Unit War.”

Besides contending with bureaucratic prejudice, “Other War” programs suffered from a lack of centralized direction on both the US and South Vietnamese sides. This latter disability was partially remedied in 1967, with the consolidation of most US pacification advisory programs in Vietnam under the Civil Operations and Revolutionary (later Rural) Development Support (CORDS) organization. Following suit, President Thieu decided in 1968 to reactivate his government’s Central Pacification Council. More importantly, the establishment of CORDS, together with the Communist Tet Offensive of 1968 and the attendant American decision to “Vietnamize” the war, galvanized the entire South Vietnamese “Other War” administration. From late 1968 until 1971, the Thieu administration, with US help, made great strides in extending its rule throughout the country’s more populous regions, in promoting economic prosperity and political participation among the nascent middle class, and in breaking the physical and psychological hold of the Viet Cong on the peasantry. In fact, by the end of 1971, the task of nationbuilding was nearly complete. Although the war itself obviously continued, the Communist offensives of 1972 and 1975 substantially demonstrated pacification’s success: the Viet Cong failed to emerge in great numbers to join forces with their
northern comrades, as they had in 1968; and the majority of South Vietnamese met their supposed “liberators” with little more than mute resignation.

Pacification detractors like Jeffrey Race, Harvey Meyerson, James Trullinger, Zolin Grant, David Hunt, Neil Sheehan, and Gabriel Kolko, who fall within the larger orthodox camp, generally approve of the Communist cause and strategy in South Vietnam. According to these mostly “outsider” academics and journalists, the U.S.-GVN campaign for the “hearts and minds” of the South Vietnamese peasantry paled in comparison with that of the Communists. First, the anti-Communist political program contained the wrong message: it focused on incremental change, rather than outright social revolution. Second, it employed the wrong messengers: urbanized, paternalistic, and corrupt government mandarins and foreign imperialists, rather than upstanding, self-made men of peasant-stock. Third, it executed pacification programs in the wrong way: higher-ups provided lower-downs with detailed implementing instructions, instead of allowing local officials a high degree of administrative flexibility. And fourth, it measured progress in pacification incorrectly: in terms of physical control over population centers, rather than in terms of peasant participation in activities supportive of the Saigon regime.

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From an orthodox perspective, any setbacks suffered by the Viet Cong insurgents in the late 1960s and early ‘70s were mostly a result of ruthless American military action, not GVN political action, and would likely not have had a lasting effect, even without the conventional counterbalance provided by the North Vietnamese Army. By the time of the cease-fire in 1973, the Communist politico-military apparatus in the villages remained largely intact (though hidden from anti-Communist view) and its support within the population remained strong (though masked to ward off trouble from government forces). A concerted effort to assassinate the Viet Cong’s senior leadership under the CIA’s Phoenix program actually backfired by fueling the resentment of rural residents and the moral indignation of many Americans. As for the GVN’s much-touted rural renaissance after 1968, it was largely an illusion fostered by the presence of an increased number of South Vietnamese occupation troops in the countryside. Its superficiality was partially exposed by the 1972 Communist Easter Offensive and more fully by the relentless march of Communist forces to Saigon in 1975, which rapidly dissolved the GVN’s armed veneer.

In recent years, a group of post-revisionists (to include, Richard Hunt, Eric Bergerud, Michael Peterson, Robert Chandler, Dale Andrade, and Charles Stuart Callison) has appeared that views US-GVN attempts at pacification critically, yet sympathetically. Elaborating on the thesis first expressed in Douglas Blaufarb’s 1977 work on US counterinsurgency policy, this group contends that the anti-people’s war strategy espoused by officials of the Kennedy administration and practiced in the field by Edward Lansdale, John Paul Vann, and the US Marine Corps Combined Action Platoons...
(CAP) was preferable to the US Army and Air Force strategies of “body counts” and massed bombing raids.\(^7\) If it had received earlier and better support, the war might not have been won for the US and South Vietnam, but it would certainly have proved less costly for all concerned and might have allowed the GVN to survive long enough for the forces of reform within South Vietnamese society to coalesce. Furthermore, post-revisionists conclude, the situation in the countryside did improve considerably from a non-Communist standpoint in the aftermath of Tet, and pacification played a significant role in altering the rural balance of forces. South Vietnamese territorial troops had the upper hand in most South Vietnamese villages. The Viet Cong infrastructure was much diminished, though still functioning, by the early 1970s. In addition, a reduced level of violence -- and the belated passage of a genuine land reform law designed to eliminate sharecropping -- created the conditions for increased agricultural productivity and a better rural standard of living, particularly in the Mekong Delta region.

On the other hand, post-revisionists concede that Saigon made little headway in convincing the South Vietnamese that their futures depended on the continued existence of the GVN. Despite considerable reformist pressure from American advisors and

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apparent high-level acceptance of the need for sociopolitical change, the South
Vietnamese bureaucracy -- at the provincial and district levels -- retained its reputation
for corruption, incompetence, and disdain for the masses. And despite their own
decreasing popularity, the Communists benefited from the apathy and neutrality of the
general population. Finally, the security forces assigned to the “Other War” could not
forestall a full-scale armed assault, nor were they intended to; and nearly everywhere that
the North Vietnamese Army went during its offensives of the late 1960s and ‘70s,
pacification programs crumbled in its wake. At this stage in the war, a
counterinsurgency approach stood little chance of achieving victory without an effective
conventional military shield.

A post-revisionist perspective on America’s role in the Vietnam War, on the one
hand, refuses to condemn the painful episode out of a sense of anger, remorse or dismay;
on the other hand, it rejects the idea that the Vietnam experience offers simple lessons to
guide future US engagements in “peripheral” locales. The orthodox school is right in
contending that Americans should not have thought they could interpose themselves in
the midst of an advanced revolution and alter its direction at an acceptable human and
material cost. Yet revisionists are also right in arguing that a significant number of US
participants in the war tried, if not fully successfully, to comprehend the various
dimensions of the Vietnam conflict and the qualities of the antagonists and to chart a way
out of the “quagmire” that neither left the whole of Vietnam to the Communists nor
destroyed the country in order to “save” it for liberal democracy. Furthermore, while the
history of the Second Vietnam War can be read as a cautionary tale of the perils of
American interventionism in the Third World, it can also be viewed as a rich repository of political-military concepts, attitudes and techniques -- some seriously misguided, some not -- that ought to be considered by those responsible for navigating the United States into post-Cold War interventions abroad.

With this in mind, I have attempted in this study to contribute to a post-revisionist synthesis of the Vietnam War by making two basic points about those Americans involved in the planning, execution, and evaluation of the “Other War” from the late 1950s to the early 1970s. First, “Other Warriors” generally provided their superiors in Saigon and Washington -- and, in some cases, the American public -- with balanced descriptive accounts of the current activities and standings of the various contending parties in South Vietnam, but they tended to exude an unjustified optimism regarding the prospect of constructing a strong, prosperous, independent, and democratic Government of Vietnam. Second, they did, to a certain extent, understand the nationalist and revolutionary character of the Vietnam War, but their collective response to Vietnamese-style “people’s warfare” never developed into a coherent alternative to the dominant model of attrition warfare. Thus, the root problem with counterinsurgency and nationbuilding in Vietnam was with the concepts themselves -- not the ways in which they were organized, implemented, or financed -- and not simply the ideological resistance they faced from senior US Army and Air Force officers and South Vietnamese officer-politicians. It may be true that any largely American-formulated Vietnam War strategy was bound to fail when juxtaposed with a Communist strategy periodically modified to fit the changing circumstances of the Vietnamese environment. But for a
counterinsurgency/nationbuilding solution to have had a reasonable chance of success, “Other Warriors” would have had to seriously ponder the heterogeneous assumptions that underlay their *ad hoc* attempt to build a nation in the midst of war.

**Sources and Methods**

The evidentiary basis for this dual thesis is the Vietnam-era writings of the “Other Warriors” themselves, a group generally composed of middle-level military officers and civilian bureaucrats stationed in Vietnam and Washington, D.C., as well as government-sponsored social scientists from private and quasi-public research institutions. This evidence includes 1) memoirs and analytical studies published by “Other War” participants, such as Edward Lansdale, William Colby, Robert Komer, George Tanham, William Nighswonger, William Corson; 2) “Other War”-related articles in US military professional journals, such as *Army, Military Review*, and the *Marine Corps Gazette*; 3) government-funded research reports on various aspects of the “Other War” prepared by the Michigan State Advisory Group, the RAND Corporation, the Stanford Research Institute, the Institute for Defense Analyses, and the Hudson Institute, among others; 4) bureaucratic analyses of “Other War” doctrine and progress produced for the Department of the Army, CORDS, the Vietnam Special Studies Group, and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Systems Analysis; 5) the end-of-tour reports of civilian and military officials.

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*I have taken a rather broad-based approach to the selection of subjects for this study. My intent has been to analyze a wide range analytical and operational opinion from within my three target groups over a period of approximately twenty years. Although a few of my subjects were either influential with policymakers or had an unusual degree of knowledge or experience with regard to the “Other War,” they were not selected for these qualities. As much as possible, I have tried to capture the complexity of the feedback generated by official or quasi-official sources on the “Other War” – without consideration as to its insightfulness or its impact on high-level officials, opinionmakers, or the general public in the US.*
who participated in the “Other War” campaign in Saigon and in the provinces; 6) the congressional testimony of CORDS officials like William Colby and John Paul Vann; and 7) the unpublished letters, memoranda, speeches, and reports of such important “Other War” figures as Edward Lansdale, John Paul Vann, Victor Krulak, and Melvin Zais.

The methodological inspiration for this study on the perspectives of America's “Other Warriors” comes from both organizational and intellectual historical sources. On the one hand, my decision to focus on certain government-affiliated social scientists and middle-level civilian bureaucrats and military officers -- and to treat them as a loosely-knit nationbuilding/counterinsurgency coalition -- derived from my interest in the corporatist model of US foreign relations, championed by historians such as Michael Hogan and Ellis Hawley,⁹ as well as the “revisionist” model of US civil-military relations introduced by political scientist Richard Betts.¹⁰

Borrowing from Hawley’s earlier work, Hogan contends that the organization of American foreign policy since the early twentieth century has, to a great extent, been a reflection of the domestic political-economic order: that is, a cooperative (albeit neither fully integrated nor attuned) public-private partnership between government agencies and

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various organized interest groups. As an institutional expression, American-style
corporatism (or corporate liberalism) had its roots in the 1890s “search for order” by
leading US industrialists and bankers. Looking for a remedy to the era’s ruthless
competition, overproduction, and boom-and-bust economic cycles, American business
turned to corporatization, bureaucratization, and the rationalization of production
according to the “scientific” management principles of “expert” managers and engineers.
In response, other elements within the private sector -- including labor and agriculture --
expanded and professionalized. Furthermore, progressive politicians, such as Theodore
and Franklin Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Herbert Hoover, perceived a role for the
public sector in regulating the national political-economy and promoting an “open and
secure” international environment. In the realm of defense and foreign affairs, this led to
the growing interpenetration of the two sectors, beginning with the establishment of the
big business-dominated War Industries Board during World War I and culminating with
the creation of a veritable military-industrial complex during the period of the Cold War.

So far, corporatist theorists, among the academic analysts of American foreign
affairs, have concentrated on exploring the connections between government
policymakers and internationally-minded business leaders in the making of economic
diplomacy, particularly in the aftermath of the two world wars. For their part, historians

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11 This corporatist conception of the political process stands somewhere in between earlier pluralist and
elitist models, which viewed government decisionmaking as either the result of an open struggle among
freely competing interests or the outcome of a conspiratorial deal among a few like-minded individuals.
12 See, for example, Ellis W Hawley, The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order, A History of the
American People and Their Institutions, 1917-1933 (New York, 1979); Michael J. Hogan, The Marshall
Plan: America, Britain, and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952 (New York, 1987); Frank
Castiglione, Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe,
1919-1933 (Ithaca, 1984); Melvin Leffler, The Elusive Quest: America’s Pursuit of European Stability and
of science, such as Daniel Kevles, Roger Geiger, and Stuart Leslie, have recently been writing about the rise of organized science in the United States during the Second World War in the guise of partly government-funded and supervised research universities, laboratories, and ‘think tanks’. According to their research, this development was abetted by presidential science advisors during the 1940s and ‘50s as an intermediate (one might say, corporatist) alternative to wholly state-run scientific institutions and independent university and business research facilities. The idea was to focus the attention of scientists on problems of interest to the government without stifling the creative process through excessive bureaucratic interference. By and large, the resulting scientific-governmental partnership was directed at the development of militarily-effective technologies and operational concepts that might be employed, initially, against Germany and Japan and, later, against the Soviet Union and Communist China. For this effort, “hard” scientists (physicists, chemists, mathematicians, and engineers) were recruited to help bring to fruition the US Air Force’s and Navy’s nuclear warfare schemes.

But following the evolution of a nuclear stalemate between United States and the Soviet Union that made a direct superpower confrontation less “thinkable,” a significant portion of America’s national security elite began turning its attention to the supposed

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threat to the West of Communist-led incursions and insurgencies in the Third World. In order to respond intelligently to these more “limited” political-military challenges, policy-oriented social scientists (political scientists, economists, psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists) joined with disaffected military officers and intelligence operators in calling for a public-private partnership in the area of nationbuilding and counterinsurgency akin to that which existed in the strategic nuclear realm. As Robert Packenham, Irene Gendzier, Douglas Blaufarb, and Larry Cable have explained, this diverse group of would-be policymakers found a champion in President John Kennedy for such unconventional anti-Communist programs as the Peace Corps, the Alliance for Progress, and the US Army Special Forces.¹⁴ Even Kennedy’s considerable charisma and authority, however, failed to significantly alter the national security bureaucracy’s penchant for forceful, high-technology solutions to Third World imbroglios such as the Vietnam War. Nonetheless, “Other Warriors” in the Department of Defense (DOD), the Agency for International Development (AID), and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) did fund a substantial amount of research into nationbuilding and counterinsurgency problems and applications at research universities and “think tanks.” As one indication of this, Harvard University political scientist Samuel Huntington estimated in 1967 that the US government was paying for over ninety percent

¹⁴ Two studies of the social scientist-bureaucratic nexus in nationbuilding policy are Robert A. Packenham, Liberal America and the Third World: Political Development Ideas in Foreign Aid and Social Science (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1973); and Irene Gendzier, Managing Political Change: Social Scientists and the Third World (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985). The best overall study of the development of US counterinsurgency doctrine is still Blaufarb’s The Counterinsurgency Era. See also Cable, Conflict of Myths.
of the academic studies on war, society, and politics in Southeast Asia.\textsuperscript{15} For example, social scientists, working for the AID-sponsored Michigan State University Vietnam Advisory Group in the 1950s and early ‘60s, published numerous studies on the condition of South Vietnam’s public administration. For its part, the RAND Corporation launched a multi-year research project in the mid-1960s on the topic of Viet Cong motivation and morale for the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs and the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA). And in the early-1970s, at ARPA’s request, the institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) prepared a three-volume history of the US-South Vietnamese pacification program.

Thus the corporatist model of American foreign relations helps to explain the partnership that arose among organized social scientific groups and certain federal government agencies with regard to the formulation and analysis of America’s “Other War” strategy in Vietnam. Richard Betts’ “revisionist” bureaucratic model, for its part, complements the corporatist interpretation by explaining the coalescence of civil and military roles that occurred within that part of the government responsible for US counterinsurgency and nationbuilding policy. According to Betts, since the early 1960s, military officers in the upper reaches of the national security bureaucracy have been in a quandary over their basic function: Should they remain politically neutral executors of the decisions of their civilian superiors -- from whom they would, in return, expect maximum operational leeway? Or should they attempt to participate in the great debate over policy,

even if this should involve issues outside their particular area of expertise, at the likely cost of civilian meddling in military operational matters?

Although most officers apparently favored the first option (which coincided with established civil-military relations theory\textsuperscript{16} and with the military's own professional credo) organizational, environmental, and political factors at work since the 1930s and '40s conspired to produce a considerable overlap in political and administrative, as well as military and civilian, governmental responsibilities. The federal government outgrew the ability of civilian elected officials and their appointees to make all the necessary policy decisions; and the line between policy and implementation became increasingly blurred. What is more, national and international issues were more often perceived as multidimensional in character: hence, subjects for interdepartmental task forces, outside consultants, and civil-military bureaucrats with extensive cross-training. Finally, certain political leaders -- most conspicuously, President Kennedy and his secretary of defense, Robert McNamara -- took upon themselves the task of "modernizing" the national security bureaucracy in order to break down civil-military barriers and introduce their analytical "whiz kids" into the hitherto independent bureaucratic preserves. While deeply resented and challenged by many inside the bureaucracy, the process of civil-military fusion appears to have been instinctively embraced by "Other War" advocates in Vietnam and Washington. The varied professional careers of such pacification luminaries as

Edward Lansdale, John Paul Vann, Robert Komer, and William Colby attest to this,\textsuperscript{17} as does the existence of CORDS, the hybrid civil-military advisory and support organization that they struggled to create in Vietnam against the opposition of the institutional powers that be.

While corporatist and revisionist bureaucratic approaches to the study of American foreign relations provide an organizational framework for analyzing the US role in Vietnam’s “Other War,” they do not adequately describe the ideological furnishings inside. For methodological assistance in this area, one must look to intellectual historical, military historical, and sociological accounts of nationbuilding and warmaking. Unfortunately, many of these accounts have a rather narrow interpretative scope. Too often, they fail to make connections between intellectual doctrines and larger cultural trends, between political theory and military strategy, and between domestic events and international undertakings. What is more, in an understandable search for ideological order, they tend to emphasize a single root source of American political-military beliefs, when multiple sources exist, and to construct an image of American intellectual and cultural coherence, when tensions and contradictions exist. Ideological

\textsuperscript{17} An advertising executive recruited by the OSS during WWII, Lansdale worked for the CIA (under Air Force cover) as ex-officio advisor to Philippine president Ramon Magsaysay and South Vietnamese president Ngo Dinh Diem during the 1950s; from 1965 to 1968, he served as Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge’s chief pacification official. Vann began his tenure of service in Vietnam in the early 1960s as a US Army advisor to the ARVN. Disillusioned with the military’s approach to the war, he left the service only to return to Southeast Asia, assuming, first, the role of an AID official and, later, a senior CORDS official - - before perishing in a helicopter crash in 1972, while directing military operations against the North Vietnamese Army. Robert Komer and William Colby served as the first two directors of CORDS in the 1960s and early ’70s, under the nominal direction of MACV commanders Generals William Westmoreland and Creighton Abrams. Both had previously been career CIA bureaucrats. After leaving Vietnam, Colby returned to his parent agency -- rising eventually to the directorship -- while Komer was named Ambassador to Turkey by President Johnson and later became a senior research analyst and “Other War” commentator with the RAND Corporation.
studies may also be chronologically bound. They may seek the origin of contemporary American politics and foreign policy in a particular time period -- e.g., the post-Revolutionary era, the Gilded Age, or World War II -- even though different aspects of the US political-military mindset can be traced to different historical origins and have, at any rate, been modified over time. Finally, in some cases, academic treatises on American political-military ideology are skewed to conform either to the author’s critical views of recent US government policy or his prescription for overcoming certain national and international ills.

While not presuming to avoid all of the foregoing pitfalls, this study attempts to capture much of the complexity of American thinking regarding Vietnam’s “Other War” by drawing upon a number of academic perspectives on 1) the interventionist ethos, 2) political development at home and abroad, and 3) the American and/or Western “Way of War.”

The interventionist ethos to which most “Other Warriors” subscribed -- albeit with varying degrees of commitment -- stemmed from a number of historical and contemporary sources. As William Appleman Williams and N. Gordon Levin, among others, have noted, in order to preserve the American liberal-capitalist system at home, 20th century internationalist policy and opinion makers have sought to extend that system’s reach to the remotest corners of the globe, while simultaneously knocking down any barriers imposed by autarchic regimes of either the radical or reactionary kind.  

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not all “Other Warriors” subscribed to this expansive political-economic vision. As Melvyn Leffler has demonstrated, many Cold War-era policymakers and bureaucrats were primarily motivated by strategic considerations. Thus, they sought to secure the West’s military-industrial heartland in North America, western Europe, and Japan by maintaining access to vital raw materials and forward bases in Southeast Asia and other parts of the Third World, as well as to prevent such access to the Communist powers.¹⁹ During the Vietnam War, this seemingly limited geo-strategic conception was magnified through the influence of the “domino theory” and the concept of “credibility.” In the eyes of many “Other Warriors,” the fall of South Vietnam to the Communists would not only seriously undermine the stability of other US allies in the region, but also America’s credibility as a global superpower. On the other hand, as Enrico Augelli, Craig Murphy, Loren Baritz, John Hellman, and Michael Hunt have argued, the United States’ “quest for supremacy” in Vietnam and the rest of the Third World stemmed from reformist-utopian impulses as well as from self-interest.²⁰ Certain “Other Warriors” believed that the American example, in combination with American know-how and resources, could transform South Vietnam into a politically democratic, economically prosperous, and socially progressive reflection of the shining “city upon a hill.” One last component of the interventionist ethos was what Leslie Gelb and Richard Betts have termed “can-doism.” Those who worked for the government on Vietnam-related projects had a personal or

²⁰ Enrico Augelli and Craig Murphy, America’s Quest for Supremacy in the Third World: A Gramscian Analysis (London, 1988); Loren Baritz, Backfire: A History of How American Culture Led Us into Vietnam and Made Us Fight the Way We Did (New York, 1985); John Hellman, American Myths and the
institutional incentive to maintain at least a semblance of belief in the US mission in Southeast Asia and in the war’s progress lest they be judged either uncooperative or ineffectual.\textsuperscript{21}

Like interventionism, nationbuilding and counterinsurgency had different ideological and historical roots. Nationbuilders who stressed the primacy of the Vietnamese village, community values, traditional leadership, collective endeavors, civic responsibility and local autonomy drew their inspiration from America’s conservative-populist tradition,\textsuperscript{22} as well as from the “moral economy” model of development associated with followers of 19th century sociologist Emile Durkheim.\textsuperscript{23} In competition with this view of Vietnamese politics and society was a liberal-nationalist vision (\textit{a la} John Locke and John Stuart Mill) that favored national over local and communal allegiances; focused on economic opportunity and the individual’s desire for material enrichment and increased social status; promoted the development of voluntary political-economic associations and the rule of law; and supported the establishment of an Anglo-American constitutional system to represent and balance Vietnam’s various national

\textsuperscript{21} See Gelb and Betts, \textit{The System Worked}.


\textsuperscript{23} This categorization of nationbuilding doctrine is loosely based on sociologist-historian Charles Tilly’s breakdown of modern Western theories of collective action: i.e., Durkheimian, Millian, Weberian, and Marxian. See \textit{From Mobilization to Revolution} (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978), 12-51. For a moral economy perspective on development, see James C. Scott, \textit{The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia} (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1976).
interests. Somewhat at odds with the foregoing conceptions of nationbuilding was a Weberian bureaucratic-authoritarian model of government that emphasized administrative efficiency; military and civil service professionalism; “scientific” management principles and quantifiable goals; centralized planning and supervision; and the extension of GVN control from the capital to all regions and localities in the country. Proponents of a counterinsurgency strategy for defeating the Communists in Vietnam consciously attempted to differentiate their views from what they perceived as the dominant military approach to achieving victory in that country, what military historians, such as Russell Weigley, John Keegan, Geoffrey Parker, and Victor Hanson, have termed the “American (or Western) Way of War”. Counterinsurgents criticized US commanders for favoring attrition over maneuver, technology over intelligence, material resources over moral strength, conventional over unconventional forces, intensive employment of firepower over selective targeting, and mechanical warfare over psychological and political warfare. Such a doctrine, they claimed, was largely unsuited

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to the Vietnamese physical and human environment and ineffectual against an enemy employing the techniques of revolutionary (Eastern-style) warfare. Still, as products themselves of Western military academies and national security bureaucracies, counterinsurgency advocates found it difficult to offer a coherent doctrinal alternative to the US high command’s traditional way of doing things. On the one hand, social scientist consultants, Marine Corps officers, and civilian pacification officials preached the cause of security for the Vietnamese people, which seemingly required concentrating the population, establishing defensive belts of regular and paramilitary forces, and arming the villagers for the purpose of self-defense. And yet many of these same people also felt the need to take the offensive against the enemy, typically with small bands of specially-trained and equipped forces, either to annihilate him by tracking him down inside and outside the villages, or to coerce him into surrendering out of fear, hunger, or a sense of isolation. Even though they believed themselves to be strategic innovators, counterinsurgency strategists could not entirely escape the Clausewitzian imperative, accepted by all Western-oriented general staffs, that the ideal goal of war was the total defeat of the enemy achieved through a relentless military campaign composed of decisive battles.

**Scope of the Topic**

Before presenting a detailed analysis of “Other Warrior” perspectives and beliefs, a brief descriptive account of their slice of the Vietnam conflict might prove helpful to readers unfamiliar with the bureaucratic jargon, programmatic changes, overlapping jurisdictions and shifting fortunes of the US-GVN nationbuilding and counterinsurgency
effort. Chronologically, the “Other War” has been divided in several different ways. For my part, I prefer to slice it into five periods, corresponding to substantial shifts in the degree of high-level US and South Vietnamese attention to the subject. During the first period of authoritarian nationbuilding (1956-1963), South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, attempted to consolidate their recently established hold on political power -- by extending their fledgling administration into the countryside and relocating the rural population in fortified areas so as to fend off attacks from the resurgent Communist resistance. While American and British officials provided low-key advice and technical support for this initial effort -- and experimented with a few pilot projects of their own -- South Vietnamese authorities were largely in charge of planning and execution of the “Other War” until President Diem’s assassination in 1963. As the name suggests, the interregnum period (1963-1965) that followed featured an absence of sustained GVN and American interest in the “Other War.” Saigon’s “revolving door” administrations, Buddhist-inspired unrest in South Vietnam’s cities, and the Viet Cong’s increasingly strong political and military position in rural areas eventually led US policymakers to conclude in 1964-65 that the GVN’s immediate salvation depended on a massive American military intervention to prevent a Communist victory. Once in country, these new US forces concentrated on defeating the enemy on the battlefield, leaving pacification in the hands of the South Vietnamese, who initially showed little enthusiasm for this supposedly secondary task.

In early 1966, believing that the “Big Unit War” was now manageable and the GVN’s political situation relatively stable, civilian officials in Vietnam and Washington
began making the case to President Lyndon Johnson that the “Other War” required more US and GVN attention. Thus, a period of reemphasis on pacification (1966-1968) was inaugurated at a February summit meeting between Johnson and Premier Nguyen Cao Ky in Honolulu. Although its declaration in support of the “Other War” was vague, the Honolulu conference provided a boost to those in the US bureaucracy favoring the unification under a single manager of America’s numerous pacification support programs. More important to getting pacification on track, however, was the devastation wreaked upon the Viet Cong following their abortive Tet uprising in 1968. In a concerted attempt to capitalize on this military victory, US pacification advisors in the fall of 1968 pressured a reluctant President Thieu into launching a nationwide “Other War” campaign to rapidly reoccupy lost villages and extend the GVN’s territorial control in the provinces.

The period that followed was the heyday of pacification (1969-1971). In part because of Tet and the consequent American decision to begin a gradual withdrawal from Vietnam, and in part because of the apparent success of the recent Accelerated Pacification Campaign (APC), the South Vietnamese government in 1969 embraced the “Other War” more firmly than it had since the days of the Diem regime. Emulating the Americans, the GVN centralized its management of pacification and largely usurped the “Other War” planning function from their US advisors. What is more, Saigon -- with American financial backing -- drastically expanded the size of its forces devoted to the pacification mission. And in a series of campaigns in 1969 and 1970, supported by the US military, the GVN bolstered its security and administrative presence in the villages and attempted to win over rural residents through promises of political autonomy, land
reform, and economic development. According to the highly controversial US pacification measurement system, the “Other War” effort of the late 1960s and early ‘70s resulted in a substantial degree of security and development in over 90 percent of South Vietnam’s rural hamlets. However precarious the GVN’s hold on the peasantry might actually have been, there is little doubt that its position vis-à-vis the Viet Cong had never been stronger. The latter reverted to their initial strategy of “protracted warfare” and did not regularly challenge Saigonese authority, at least during the daylight hours.

Nevertheless, the “Other War” soon entered into a period of irrelevance (1972-1975). The Easter offensive launched by the North Vietnamese Army in 1972 managed to shear off several large portions of “pacified” territory along South Vietnam’s northern and central frontiers. Although the ARVN succeeded in stamping out Communist-inspired uprisings in the central coastal provinces and in the Mekong Delta and even made some territorial gains following the 1973 “cease fire,” the South Vietnamese government never completely recovered the lands it had lost the previous year, and these would serve as staging areas for the North’s final offensive in 1975. In the end, what remained of the GVN’s realm dissolved in the wake of a conventional juggernaut that Saigon proved powerless to halt and Washington unwilling to counter in the way it had in 1972.

Organizationally, the “Other War” effort in Vietnam was composed of two separate, initially amorphous US and GVN structures, each containing a varying number of ministries, agencies, programs, and units. On the American side, many of these interior components also had horizontal ties to parent organizations in the United States.
that were often stronger than any vertical links that existed to the US Mission in Saigon. In theory, the GVN was at all times in charge of the “Other War,” with the Americans relegated to providing advice and support. In reality, as previously noted, the balance of control shifted over the course of some twenty years; the South Vietnamese, however, always supplied the bulk of the pacification-related manpower, and the Americans most of the financial, logistical, and technical resources.

From the 1950s to the mid-'60s, US “Other War” responsibilities were split between the military and a number of civilian agencies. American military officers were attached as security advisors to ARVN units engaged in pacification-related missions, as well as to provincial and district administrations. Special Forces, Marine Corps and, to a lesser extent, regular Army units worked directly with South Vietnamese territorial forces at the village level in Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG), Combined Action Platoons (CAP), and Mobile Advisory Training Teams (MATT). When not searching out and destroying the enemy’s main forces in the Vietnamese mountains and jungles, American divisional forces also engaged in “civic action” and “clear and hold” operations in populated areas. For their part, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Agency for International Development (AID), the United States Information Agency (USIA), and the State Department, respectively, organized minority combat forces, village-level political cadre, and anti-Viet Cong “hit squads”; attempted to stabilize the Vietnamese economy, train the police, and assist community development projects; helped to disseminate GVN propaganda and encourage Communists to defect; and dispensed advice on building a viable democracy. Only gradually were some of these advisory and support functions
combined under the authority of *ad hoc* inter-departmental organizations such as the Joint US Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO) (1965), the Office of Civil Operations (OCO) (1966) and CORDS (1967). 27

The Vietnamese side of the “Other War” effort was similarly disorganized until the second half of the 1960s. During the Diem era, military and civilian ministries -- not to mention the President and his family -- bombarded provincial and district officials with different and often competing sets of instructions regarding the implementation of pacification programs. What is more, local responsibility for the “Other War” was often divided between divisional military commanders and provincial governors. At the national level, the establishment of a super Ministry of Rural Construction in 1965 was supposed to resolve the pacification authority question, but its purview was limited to certain priority areas and other ministries continued to operate independently throughout most of the country. Only with the formation of the Central Pacification and Development Council in 1969 did the GVN acquire the capability to develop a truly national pacification plan. During the same period, provincial governors acquired operational control over all security forces in their sector, including divisional units; in practice, however, ARVN commanders often refused to yield to the authority of their administrative counterparts whom they sometimes outranked.

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27 The first integrated the propaganda functions of USIA, AID and the military services. The second combined most of the civilian pacification support operations under the authority of the US deputy ambassador. And the third brought most civil and military pacification responsibilities together under the authority of a deputy to the MACV commander.
If anything, the programmatic aspect of the allied “Other War” effort appears even more changeable and confusing than its organizational, conceptual, and developmental facets. From the administration of Ngo Dinh Diem to that of Nguyen Van Thieu, a plethora of “Other War” programs, campaigns, laws, and procedures were enacted, dissolved, resurrected, merged, and reconfigured. Despite the welter of titles and acronyms, however, there remained an underlying consistency to these politico-bureaucratic initiatives, and most can be grouped within several basic categories. On the pacification side, these categories included: population relocation-control programs (e.g., agroville, strategic hamlets, and New Life hamlets); social work-propaganda “cadre” programs (e.g., Civic Action, Peoples’ Action, Census-Grievance, Armed-Propaganda, and Revolutionary Development (RD) teams); territorial defense programs (e.g., Civil Guard, Self Defense Corps, Popular Forces (PF), Regional Forces (RF), and People’s Self-Defense Forces (PSDF)); political-psychological warfare programs (e.g., the Chieu Hoi “Open Arms” program to induce Communist defection); and anti-Viet Cong infrastructure programs (e.g., Counter Terror Teams (CTT), Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU), National Police Field Forces (NPFF), and the Phung Hoang “Phoenix” program to locate Communist political operatives and coordinate their “neutralization”). Concerted civil-military pacification campaigns included, in the 1962-66 period, localized operations such as Sunrise, Long An and Hop Tac; and in the 1968-70 period, nationwide operations, beginning with the post-Tet Accelerated Pacification Campaign (APC). Finally, the GVN undertook, often at US insistence, certain political and economic development measures that fell outside the realm of pacification: e.g., Diem’s
Ordinance 57 and Thieu’s Land-to-the-Tiller (LTT) land reform measures; the enactment of a new South Vietnamese constitution in 1966; local and national elections beginning in 1967; and a 1969 law intended to promote village autonomy and self-development.

Having described the historiographical and methodological background of my thesis, as well as the scope of my topic, I shall now turn to the body of my dissertation, which is divided into three parts. Part I searches for the nearest intellectual antecedents of America’s “Other War” doctrine in the nationbuilding-counterinsurgency primers of US social scientists and European and American colonial war veterans of the 1950s and early ‘60s. Part II analyzes the descriptive accounts of “Other War” participants and analysts with regard to the main protagonists in that conflict: i.e., the South Vietnamese government (Chapters 2 and 3), the Viet Cong (Chapter 4) and United States advisory and support personnel (Chapter 5). Part III examines the prescriptive dimension of “Other Warrior” perspectives: moving from models and methods for building a South Vietnamese nation (Chapter 6); to strategies and tactics for ending the Communist insurgency (Chapter 7); to interventionist roles, organizations and measurement techniques (Chapter 8). In the conclusion and epilogue, I summarize the principal findings of my study on America’s “Other Warriors” and discuss the evolution of US academic-bureaucratic thinking on Third World intervention since the time of the Vietnam War.
CHAPTER 1

THE INTELLECTUAL ROOTS OF THE “OTHER WAR”

In order to fully understand America’s “Other War” in Vietnam, it is necessary to explore its intellectual roots in the writings of policy-oriented academics and bureaucratic intellectuals of the 1950s and 1960s. For it is in these general surveys of nationbuilding and counterinsurgency that one can see the proximate source of the assumptions and attitudes that made the “Other War” such a popular (and problematic) cause among a certain segment of the US political elite. As a general rule, authors of the most renowned works on nationbuilding (or political/economic development) were social scientists associated with elite eastern universities and influential research centers who often consulted for, and periodically served in, the federal government. Those writing on counterinsurgency issues, on the other hand, were a more eclectic mix of European and American soldiers, colonial administrators, former intelligence operators, and government-supported academics. Of course, many authors inevitably discussed both aspects of American policy, given the common objective of both disciplines -- that is, keeping the emerging nations of the Third World securely in the Western fold -- and the

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widespread belief that nationbuilding and counterinsurgency were but two sides of the same coin.

In motivational terms, the two overlapping groups expressed a wide range of interconnected political-economic, strategic, humanitarian, ideological, bureaucratic, and personal reasons for American intervention in Third World affairs. Doctrinally, nationbuilders claimed to stand for a liberal-nationalist vision of the world political-economy *a la* Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal and Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society; yet they often harbored conflicting bureaucratic-authoritarian and conservative-populist tendencies that made their Third World agenda less than clear. For their part, counterinsurgents took on the daunting task of reconciling the abundant resources, bureaucratic practices, and technological expertise of the Western military establishment with the supposed political canniness, moral fervor, and individual fighting skills of the Communist revolutionary warfare organization. As for America’s role in these Third World undertakings, neither group could agree on where the US responsibility for nationbuilding and counterinsurgency left off and that of its embattled junior partner began.

**The Interventionist Ethos**

The underlying motives of Western academics, soldiers, and civilian government officials for proselytizing in favor of Third World nationbuilding and counterinsurgency cannot be easily discerned from their published writings. Still, it seems clear that the interventionist ethos of the nationbuilders and counterinsurgents, both individually and as a group, was composed of a complex mixture of altruism and self-interest, abstract
national goals, and concrete personal objectives. At the heart of the argument was the belief that America’s security and “special” way of life could be preserved only through the establishment of open, secure, prosperous, and democratic states worldwide.

Although rarely mentioned explicitly by military officers and civilian bureaucrats whose concerns tended to be narrower, this version of the “Open Door” philosophy was brought to the forefront of policy-oriented discussions by such prominent social scientists as Eugene Staley, Stacy May, Max Millikan, W.W. Rostow, and Ithiel de Sola Pool.

Chairman of the Political Science Department at MIT and a consultant to the Defense Department on several Vietnam War-related projects, Sola Pool noted in 1968 that, since World War II, most Americans had come to view their country’s “future as dependent upon a healthy development of the whole world. We came to believe,” he elaborated, “that the establishment of more stable political systems, with greater political participation by the people and greater freedom of expression was something that made America secure.” Furthermore, Americans, in and out of government, recognized that “we could not be indifferent to chaos, violence, backwardness, disorder, communism, or fascism in any part of the world.”

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Although political-economic objectives with regard to the Third World were significant in themselves, many American social scientists, government bureaucrats, and military officers admitted that their interest in developing countries was enhanced -- and for some, primarily motivated -- by an acute concern for the Cold War balance of power. As Stacy May explained: “To an important degree, the urgency and scope, as well as the immediate content, of the international development policies of all Free World nations are conditioned by the aggressive thrust of international communism.”\textsuperscript{2} Hence, first on CIS Director Max Millikan's 1961 list of American foreign relations priorities in the Third World was making sure that the emerging nations “able to preserve their independence, especially of powers hostile or potentially hostile to the US”\textsuperscript{3} The realist bent of RAND Corporation senior economist Charles Wolf was even more apparent. In the introduction to a 1967 compilation of essays on nationbuilding and counterinsurgency, he stated that “the value of most of these [Third World] areas will be protected so long as their independence from Soviet or Chinese communist control is secure. If this important condition is satisfied, a wide range of internal and foreign policies in the Third World would be entirely consistent with the United States' interest and objectives.”\textsuperscript{4} In other words, the goal of extending the reach of the Western economic and political system had to be subordinated to the more pressing objective of denying the Communist powers influence over Third World governments and peoples.

\textsuperscript{2} Staley, The Future of Underdeveloped Countries, x.
\textsuperscript{3} Max F. Millikan and Donald L.M. Blackmer, eds., The Emerging Nations: their growth and United States policy (Boston: Little, Brown, 1961), 101-2.
For anti-Communist nationbuilders the most immediate threat to developing
countries was “a skillful combination of political subversion with armed force” directed
toward the billions of rural poor who lived beyond the effective control of weak Third
World governments.5 According to CIA analyst George Carver, many of those who
joined rural-based movements such as the Viet Cong in South Vietnam did so “out of a
desire to redress genuine grievances or in the honest belief that they [were] thereby
helping to build a better political structure for their native land,” but (wittingly or not)
their actions were choreographed by their international Communist masters in Hanoi,
Peking and Moscow.6 For Ithiel de Sola Pool, the insurgents’ story was less noble and
their subversive methods more despicable. According to his research, the Communists in
underdeveloped areas had succeeded in melding endemic “village violence and modern
international warfare.” By aligning themselves with the Soviets or Red Chinese, “village
thugs ... can get recoilless rifles, shaped charges, rockets, and other devices that escalate
terror much beyond what their ancestors could do with sticks and stones, bows and
arrows, or rifles.”7 The Communist powers, in return, acquired the means for
destabilizing countries friendly to the West -- forever denying their people the
opportunity to achieve freedom and material well-being.

For some nationbuilders, particularly those with personal experience in combating
the effects of Communism in the Third World, the abstract geopolitical goal of containing
Sino-Soviet expansion was inextricably linked with the humanitarian desire to save a

nation from Communism. For example, in his 1966 book on the US civilian pacification effort in South Vietnam, the former director of Vietnamese rural affairs programs for the US Agency for International Development, George Tanham, warned of the consequences of a Communist victory in Indochina. “The real objective” of the Vietnamese Communists, he opined, was “the acquisition of total power.” If that were to happen, no political parties other than the Communist will be permitted and there will be no competing political entities... The basic freedoms of speech, press, and assembly, as well as free elections, which the West regards as essential not only to democracy but also to the dignity of man, will not be allowed to develop... Free enterprise and private ownership of land will be abolished... The Communists hold out land to the peasant now, but in the long run he will be deprived of it under a Communist regime.

Consequently, anti-Communist crusaders, such as the CIA’s Edward Lansdale, were determined to actively propagate America’s “revolutionary” ideals overseas. In a published account of his activities in the Philippines and South Vietnam in the 1950s, Lansdale recounted that he had carried his “American beliefs” into these Asian struggles, “as Tom Paine would have done.” For both he and Paine, Lansdale claimed, it had been

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insufficient merely to live in a free society; one had to become a missionary for the cause.\textsuperscript{9}

The belief that Third World nationbuilding was vital to the US in some intangible, moral or spiritual way was emphasized by Millikan and Rostow in their foreign policy Proposal. “American society,” they wrote, “is at its best when we are wrestling with the positive problems of building a better world.” Since their forebears had already conquered the North American continent and gone on to “reconcile” industrialism with democracy, US citizens in the mid-20th century needed “the challenge of world development to keep us from the stagnation of smug prosperity.” What is more, deep within most Americans, “hankering for effective expression, capable of mobilization, [was] a dedication to the fundamental principles of national independence and human liberty under law.”\textsuperscript{10} Not only Americans, but all “the peoples of the world” understood that the United States represented “a continuing, unique experiment in the development of free societies.” Thus, it was practically a sin for the United States to devote itself “almost exclusively to domestic chores and objectives.” As a result, Millikan and Rostow warned, “The nation will risk the long-run danger of helping bring


\textsuperscript{10} Millikan and Rostow, \textit{A Proposal}, 7-8.
about its own spiritual decline, a kind of self-enforced isolation which would further
damage the military and nonmilitary bases of national security.”¹¹

Notwithstanding the high-minded rhetoric of some academics cum policymakers,
the interventionist ethos of the 1950s and ‘60s also reflected the methodological,
programmatic, institutional, and professional interests of the social scientists, civilian
bureaucrats, and military officers who urged a nationbuilding/counterinsurgency solution
to America’s problems in the Third World. For instance, old Asian guerrilla fighters, like
Bernie Yoh and Edward Lansdale, spent much of their time away from the field
preaching about the dangers of Communist-style “people’s warfare.”¹² Others were more
narrowly focused in their advocacy. Some such as AID officials George Tanham and Jan
Vanderbie, National Security Council staff member Robert Sansom and RAND
researcher Guy Pauker wrote tracts in praise of civil aspects of the American war effort in
Vietnam, such as rural assistance, land reform, and economic transfers.¹³ Military
officers, for their part, tended to emphasize their service’s special contribution to the
nationbuilding/counterinsurgency cause -- whether it be Combined Action Platoons
(CAP), civic action, psychological operations, or civil engineering.¹⁴

¹¹ Ibid., 150-1.
¹² As late as 1972, retired General Lansdale was still importuning the political powers that be, trying to get
them “to understand the changed nature” of warfare in a revolutionary era. See “Comments on Volume 1 of
the American Experience in Vietnam,” February 27, 1972, Edward Lansdale Papers, Hoover Institution,
Pacification 1972-1983, Box 23, File 569B.
¹³ Vanderbie’s memoir is practically a paean to the AID provincial representative in South Vietnam. See
Prov Rep Vietnam: A Provincial Representative’s Account of Two years in Vietnam—1966-68
(Philadelphia: Dorrance, 1970). See also Tanham, War Without Guns; Robert L.Sansom, The Economics
Essay on Vietnamization (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp, March 1971).
a Nationbuilder,” Military Review 50, no. 10 (October 1970): 11-19; and William F. Johnston, “Neglected
Drawing upon their experience in Vietnam, another group of ex-government officials and social scientist contractors pressed the case for a centralized civil-military organization designed to assist Third World countries attempting to rebuild their social structures and political systems while fighting a counterinsurgent war. For example, Ambassador Robert Komer, the chief architect of the US-South Vietnamese “New Model” rural pacification initiative in the mid-1960s, contended that America’s difficulties in combating the Vietcong could be attributed, in large part, to the prolonged absence of a specifically-designated, inter-departmental counterinsurgency institution. “Counterinsurgency,” Komer asserted in 1972, had never been attempted “on a sufficient scale... Until 1966-1967 it had plenty of supporters but no major organizational entity speaking for it. It fell between the stools, and so was overshadowed from the outset by the major GVN and U.S. institutions which were playing out their own institutional repertoires.”

Convinced of CORDS success (however belated) in spotlighting the pacification problem, Komer -- along with his successor in Saigon, William Colby, and others such as Defense Department consultant Chester Cooper -- mounted a low-key campaign for the retention of the organizational and procedural know-how related to

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counterinsurgency/nationbuilding acquired by American forces in Vietnam during the
1967-1971 period of CORDS’ ascendancy.\(^\text{16}\)

Joining the dozens of active and retired bureaucrats and military men in the 1960s
proffering particular solutions to the dilemmas posed by insurgency and
underdevelopment were social scientists -- economists, political scientists, systems
analysts, statisticians, and anthropologists -- equally convinced that their professional
training, methods, and outlook gave them at least one of the keys to unlocking the
mysteries of constructing a stable and accessible Third World political-economy. For
example, political scientists Ithiel de Sola Pool, Samuel Huntington, and Allan Goodman
argued during the late 1960s that the social conflict inside South Vietnam was resolvable
through the establishment of the appropriate political mechanism: i.e., one that brought
the interests of countryside into the decisionmaking process and allowed all responsible
parties to participate, up to and including ‘reformed’ Communists.\(^\text{17}\) Drawing inspiration
from one of his discipline’s founding fathers, anthropologist Gerald Hickey attempted in
his musings on Vietnam for the RAND Corporation to foster what Emile Durkheim
termed the “organic solidarity” of Vietnamese society as it passed through the crisis of
modernization.\(^\text{18}\) Systems analysts working on Vietnam War-related projects, such as the

RAND team that examined Vietnam Cong organizational behavior in the mid-1960s, contended that their studies were essentially descriptive rather than prescriptive. In RAND’s case, however, its research was clearly designed to enable US and South Vietnamese forces to pick apart the enemy infrastructure at its most vulnerable points by identifying “required inputs -- information and resource flows -- and outputs -- political-military activities -- of insurgent organizations.”

Nationbuilding Assumptions
If the motives of nationbuilders and counterinsurgents of the 1950s and '60s were complex, so were the liberal-nationalist, bureaucratic-authoritarian, and conservative-populist assumptions that formed the basis of political-economic development theory and doctrine. The typical nationbuilding writer was, first and foremost, a liberal-nationalist whose ideas about the global political-economy had been shaped by America’s seeming success, by the early 1950s, in overcoming the boom-and-bust capitalist economic cycle, spreading the benefits of prosperity to most of its citizens, and staving off both fascism and communism in Western Europe and Japan -- all through the cooperative efforts of ‘big’ government and civic-minded private groups. Much like the Social Darwinists of the late 19th Century, he was convinced that national societies tended to evolve through

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predetermined stages of growth. This linear process known as modernization proceeded from an idealized state of traditionalism to one of modernity, with most nations being caught somewhere in the middle (transitional or developing nations) and the United States, its Western allies, and to some extent, the Soviet Union approaching the end of the developmental road (developed nations). According to these progressives, modern attitudes and institutions "diffused" internationally from west to east and from north to south. Domestically, political-economic elites inculcated the masses in the mysteries of modernity, and culturally dominant groups "assimilated" smaller, generally less modern, ethnic enclaves.

Although divided over many of the specifics of nationbuilding, most theorists and practitioners believed that national development should properly proceed in accordance with a few basic principles. First, slow, gradual change was superior to rapid, wholesale change; put another way, reform was better than revolution. Second, unfettered class or ideological conflict was considered detrimental to development; interest groups should compete, according to defined rules, within the political marketplace for reasonable, tangible goals—within the government serving as an honest broker. Third, attitudes and modes of behavior associated with political development were thought to be functionally and structurally inter-related: the basic units of nationbuilding evolved as a package and could not be separated without adversely affecting the final product. Finally, liberal-nationalist nationbuilders believed that change was primarily an immanent process. For the most part, development occurred because of internal events; it did not require drastic alterations in the international system.
Most of the subjects of this nationbuilding survey started off in the 1950s with the progressive notion, borrowed most directly from MIT economic historian W.W. Rostow, that nations evolved according to a preestablished pattern from a traditional state to a modern state. Rostow believed that it was "useful, in politics as in economics, to view the contemporary world as made up of nations at different stages of growth, whose problems bore a family relationship to those of nations at similar stages in the past as well as the present."²⁰ Some political development theorists, like Stanford University sociologist Daniel Lerner, held that the "phases of modernization" occurred (or should occur) in lock-step order: that is, urbanization, literacy, media participation, political participation, democratic governance.²¹ Others, like political scientist Leonard Binder, director of the University of Chicago’s Center for Middle East Studies, were less dogmatically progressive. In a volume on political development written for the Social Science Research Council’s Committee on Comparative Politics, Binder asserted:

The central point is that things are different after some point in history than they were before. This point may be called a threshold, and it may be thought of as a singular event or a broad band of history through which different countries pass at different times, some more rapidly, some more slowly, some even slipping back, and some even hopelessly bogged down.²²

Whatever the precise steps, there was no turning back once the modernization process had begun. According to Edward Shils, Professor of Management at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School: "The path toward modernization is uncertain, the arrival

is uncertain. But the point at which the journey started is no longer tenable either.”

Nonetheless, most academic theorists took a positive attitude toward nationbuilding. Backward nations were generally on the move toward a higher phase, and those in front were moving still further forward.

While modernity was theoretically an ideal condition, in practical terms western countries more closely approximated this ideal than the tradition-bound states of the Third World. Although rejecting the appellation “Westernizers,” liberal nationbuilders like MIT political scientist Lucien Pye believed there were "certain fundamental standards for government which are the prerequisites of statehood;" and these standards were ones first established in the West, particularly in the United States and Great Britain. Sensitive to the charge of ethnocentrism, Daniel Lerner argued that “modernization appears as Westernization by historical coincidence.” It was “primarily a state of mind” which all the peoples of the world could potentially achieve. Still, in Gabriel Almond’s opinion, “Anglo-American politics most closely represent[ed] the model” of the modern democratic political order. One the founders of comparative political studies in the U.S. and chairman of the Social Science Research Council’s Committee on Comparative Politics in the 1950s and early 1960s, Almond assumed that modern polities possessed certain specific attributes: that is, a constitutional structure

24 Lucien Pye, Politics, Personality, and Nation Building: Burma’s Search for Identity (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1962), 11.
25 See The Passing of Traditional Society, viii. As Lerner explained in 1958, the “Western model” was “historically Western” but “sociologically ... global.” According to Edward Shils, modernization was not a form of cultural imperialism, just the opposite: it promised true independence. “Modern” meant “being Western without the onus of dependence on the West.” See Political Development in the New States, 37.
that separated political and governmental powers; a socialization process that promoted
testimony to the political system; merit-based political recruitment; a mediating role for
associational interest groups; competitive, pragmatic, bargaining political parties; and an
autonomous, specialized media.26 Other academic theorists, like Leonard Binder, S.N.
Eisenstadt and Samuel Huntington, attempted to objectify and expand the definition of
political development beyond the narrow bounds of American and British politics, but the
bottom-line was the same: to develop, nations must travel along the trail already blazed
by the West.27

Beyond the active spread of certain cultural patterns and material benefits from
the developed to underdeveloped regions, Third World modernization also demanded a
similarly conscious modernist diffusion from domestic political-economic elites to the
traditionalist masses. And this required a shift in America’s laissez-faire mentality.
According to Joseph LaPalombara, the director of Yale University’s Institute for Social
and Policies Studies from the early 1960s: “Whereas much of the Western world
developed with relatively little direct intervention by the ‘public sector,’ this history will
clearly not repeat itself.” For economic and ideological reasons, developing nations were
demanding that the government play “a major, even exclusive role” in nationbuilding;
and donor countries had to accept this if they wished to participate in Third World

development decisions. Beyond viewing the government as a major player in the diffusion process, liberal nationbuilders tended to portray that process as a "trickle-down" phenomenon. First, the US government and its handmaidens in the media, business, and academia would foster an international community of political elites, who basically shared American values; and then these elites would transmit some version of these values to their nations’ people. Of course, Third World leaders would have to do more than merely propagandize to win the ‘hearts and minds’ of the populace. Edward Shils considered that the political leadership’s “chances for success rest on its capacity for self-restraint and its effectiveness in legitimating itself through modernizing achievement, through a due respect for the claims of traditional beliefs, and through its recruitment of a stratum of intellectuals of intermediate level who can reinterpret traditional beliefs, adapt them to modern needs, and transform them into modern idiom.”

To many liberal nationbuilders, modernization meant more than just bridging the elite-mass gap; it also involved the assimilation of islands of ethnicity into the national mainstream. Although the growth of nation-states out of a patchwork of tribal groups had "some semi-automatic features," it also required "deliberate pioneers and leaders of national awakening," who acted out of political and economic self-interest. The founding father of American political development theory, political scientist Karl Deutsch, argued in 1953 that, for nationbuilding to occur, “the economic, intellectual, and military resources of a territory and a population [must be knitted] together in an ever

29 Shils, 89.
tighter network of communication and complementarity based on the ever broader and more thorough participation of the masses of the populace...”  

Theoretically, ethnicity and nationality were either coterminous, or ethnic identity was something that would wither away with the increase in ‘social communication’ among various groups fostered by the pioneers of nationbuilding. Separatism within the confines of a nation-state was to be discouraged. Since most Third World countries actually contained a number of ethnic or tribal nations and since the integration of these nations into the larger framework of the nation-state was a cardinal principle of political development, it has been suggested that nationbuilders might better be labeled "nation-destroyers."  

From the reams of political development studies, reports, and books published in the 1950s through early 1970s, several general rules for nationbuilding stand out. First was the notion derived from evolutionary theory and American experience dating back to the days of the Federalist Party that incremental political reform was a better method of change than violent social revolution. According to political development critic Susan Bodenheimer, the progressive mentality of most academic nationbuilders did not "conceptualize the need for radical departures from existing social-economic systems; for if development is a cumulative process, piecemeal reforms should be sufficient to achieve
the desired objectives and thorough structural transformations or revolutions become
unnecessary."32 In true Wilsonian fashion, most nationbuilders advocated a "third
choice" between reaction and wholesale change. To MIT’s Max Millikan, for example,
the fundamental American objectives in the Third World should be “to help make the
evolution to modernization successful enough that major groups will not struggle either
to repress change entirely or to promote it by ruthless and extremist measures” and to
create “constructive alternatives both to regressive clinging to old values and to radical
overthrow of those values and an ill-considered and desperate rush to totally new ones.”33

Underlying the reformist attitude of most nationbuilders was a utilitarian concept
of man and society. Man was “essentially a consumer and society ... a series of
marketlike relations between individuals.”34 The political system, much like the
economic system, was ideally conceived as a mechanistic device designed to distribute
the supply of goods and services in accordance with the demands of various competing
groups. For its part, the state did not pick winners and losers. It did not represent a
particular socioeconomic class or act in accordance with a preconceived ideology (or
ethical framework); rather, it technocratically attempted to "compromise the various
interests in order to (supposedly) serve the general interest."35 If some groups inevitably
wound up with a larger piece of the political pie, this was less a matter of favoritism or

33 Millikan and Blackmer, The Emerging Nations, 98.
economic clout than participatory zeal. While this form of pluralistic, pragmatic politics had yet to sweep the developing world, it had, according to University of California, Berkeley, sociologist and political scientist Seymour Martin Lipset, already triumphed in the West -- despite the existence of a few hopeless romantics, who still insisted on waving "red flags" and marching in "May Day parades." "The fundamental political problems of the industrial revolution have been solved," he wrote in his 1963 book, Political Man: "the workers have achieved industrial and political citizenship; the conservatives have accepted the welfare state; and the democratic left has recognized that an increase in over-all state power carries with it more dangers to freedom than solutions for economic problems."36

The third major precept of nationbuilding was that "all good things go together": meaning that everything that liberal nationbuilders held dear -- that which they considered the essential ingredients of Third World development, e.g., democracy, prosperity, stability, anti-Communism, peace, pro-Americanism -- were functionally related and inseparable.37 According to political development critic, D.C. Tipps, nationbuilding was viewed by its adherents "as a 'multifaceted process,' which not only touches at one time or another virtually every institution of society, but does so in a manner such that transformations of one institutional sphere produce complementary

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transformations in others.”38 The most studied -- and commented upon -- relationship was that between economic development and democracy. For most, the latter was functionally dependent upon the former. The minority view, represented by Lipset, held that a democratic political system was necessary for widespread economic prosperity. “Economic well-being for the masses,” he wrote, “is much more likely to flow from a concern with democracy and equality than vice versa. Consequently all interest in the conditions that foster and maintain democracy is a concern for the good society in all its aspects, economic, social, cultural, and political.”39 Whatever their differences regarding the precedence of various components, however, liberal political development theorists seemed to view them as a part of a single structure. The argument was over what constituted the foundation of modernization, not over whether one or another element might be dispensed with in favor of a ‘traditional’ (that is, non-Western) alternative.

Although labeled structural-functionalists for their conception of modernization as a coherent structure with functionally related parts, most academic nationbuilders focused on the individual national structure as their basic unit of analysis, rather than the global international structure. According to political development critic A. Gunder Frank: “‘Modern sociological theory’ at best appeals to holism and structuralism to explain the existence of parts, or merely to demonstrate the relations among them, but not to analyze or account for the existence of the structure as a whole.”40 Implicitly more than

39 Lipset, Political Man, xxxii.
explicitly, nationbuilders assumed that a society's level of development was the result of "immanent processes of change."\textsuperscript{41} Third World peoples had to pull themselves out of their traditional lethargy by their own bootstraps -- by adopting modern attitudes and constructing modern institutions. The West could, and should, assist this endeavor so that the transition to modernization might be as rapid and smooth as possible. But what liberal nationbuilders did not like to admit was the possibility that Western interventions in the Third World were not altogether altruistic or mutually beneficial; that the Western-dominated international structure might be inhibiting, rather than fostering, national efforts at development.

Most American nationbuilders held fast to the belief that the liberal-nationalist model of development was ultimately the right one for all nations. Yet, as the decade of the 1960s passed from the era of civil rights achievements, the Peace Corps, the 'Green Berets,' and the Alliance for Progress to the era of 'Black power,' search-and-destroy operations, Vietnam War protesters, and intellectual multi-culturalism, members of the development establishment began to express doubts that the path to modernity was either an easy or singular one. Certainly, the process of modernization was bound to be unsettling. Furthermore, modern methods and institutions that worked in the West might not function the same way in Third World countries; indeed, they might actually prove harmful at certain stages in their evolution. For some nationbuilders -- often those with experience living, researching or working in developing countries -- this growing uncertainty about the short-term prospects for building replicas of Western liberal states

\textsuperscript{41} Tipps, "Modernization Theory," 212.
manifested itself in certain conservative populist tendencies. For example, they advised against confusing the trappings of modern nationhood -- parliaments and constitutions -- with operational democratic states. They also acknowledged that Western technocratic practices could not be foisted upon transitional peoples en masse; this would heighten their existing psychological confusion, and give a boost to civil and military bureaucracies at the expense of nascent political parties. For the sake of self-identity and democracy, some room must be left for the traditional inside the new modernist framework. Finally, those providing nationbuilding assistance had to do more than offer advice and support to government bureaucrats and members of the urban elite; they had to nurture the roots of democracy by encouraging rural villagers to become involved in local elections and ‘self-help’ projects.

On the other hand, nationbuilders with bureaucratic-authoritarian tendencies, troubled by the propensity of Third World leaders to take the Stalinist “shortcut” to industrialization, questioned whether Western notions of evolutionary economic development and political pluralism had the necessary cachet to compete with Communism in much of the developing world. Liberal democracy might be the true endpoint of the nationbuilding experience, but elites in developing countries were demanding rapid economic growth and political consolidation. And this seemed to require strengthening the power and effectiveness of the national leadership and administration more than it did fostering the idea of democratic institutions, individual rights, and economic competition. Those who adhered to this view feared that, should the United States decline to back quasi-authoritarian regimes with mildly statist policies in
the short term, they might be replaced by totalitarian governments both unfriendly to Western interests and less prone to evolve in a liberal democratic direction over the long term.

Although they almost never questioned the ultimate value of modernization for Third World countries, most academic nationbuilders acknowledged that the period of diffusion and assimilation of modern attributes was likely to be problematic, not only for the countries themselves, but for outsiders as well. Alluding to the modernizing experiences of Germany, Japan and Russia, Max Millikan noted: “One of the more convincing lessons of recent times is that nations which are going through the process of modernization and unification have had a profoundly disruptive effect on the world around them.”42 What was so disturbing about the “revolution of modernization”?43 In Rostow’s opinion, contemporary problems of nationbuilding in the Third World were exacerbated by the fact that popular “demands for political participation, equity, status in the constitutional order, education, and social welfare--spaced out incrementally before 1914 in a stately historical sequence--tend to come more nearly at once, and at a time when still more basic issues of national political organization have not been solved.”44 In a similar vein, Samuel Huntington blamed the mismatch between popular participation in politics and effective political institutions for the instability associated with

42 Millikan and Blackmer, The Emerging Nations, 146.
44 Rostow, Politics and the Stages of Growth. 22.
modernization in the contemporary era.\textsuperscript{45} David Apter, Lucien Pye, and Daniel Lerner, for their part, pointed to the psychological and cultural ambivalence experienced by many transitional elites toward modernization.\textsuperscript{46}

Academic nationbuilders with some personal familiarity with Third World conditions increasingly advised Americans not to confuse the trappings of modernity with the real thing. Lucien Pye, for instance, wrote that “in both the new countries and the changing old countries the great objective is to achieve the impressive elements of organization that characterize the modern state; and their almost universal problem is that they have the form but not the substance of nationhood.”\textsuperscript{47} As an example of this phenomenon, Daniel Lerner pointed to the "new global fashion to install some voting mechanism as a symbol of modern desires rather than as a functional agency of modern governance.”\textsuperscript{48} Joseph LaPalombara contended that the creation of political parties did not necessarily lead to democracy.\textsuperscript{49} And Leonard Binder envisioned the possibility of a

\textsuperscript{45} Urbanization and associated phenomena, Huntington contended, gave “rise to enhanced aspirations and expectations” which motivated people to enter politics. But without effective political institutions, “such increases in participation” led to “instability and violence.” Huntington also warned that the short-run consequence of capitalist-style development policies was a widening gap between rich and poor which contributed to political disorder. \textit{Political Order in Changing Societies}, 47 and 57.

\textsuperscript{46} Director of the Institute for International Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, in the 1960s, Apter held that one important result of the modernizing process was that individuals might “feel the loss of their moral personalities,” causing the future to appear “as a sea of adventures, not all of them pleasant.” See \textit{The Politics of Modernization} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), xi. Extrapolating from his study of post-World War II Burmese nationbuilding, Pye indicated that in developing countries the “new” was often cast aside because it was viewed as having originated in the West, which had “once conquered or dominated or belittled” non-Western peoples and their customs. See \textit{Politics, Personality, and Nationbuilding}. 4. Finally, Lerner believed that Third World leaders wanted the institutions, power, and wealth that they saw in the West, but rejected the values and modes of political and economic behavior that made the former viable and attainable. See \textit{The Passing of Traditional Society}, 47.

\textsuperscript{47} Pye, \textit{Politics, Personality, and Nation Building}. 3.

\textsuperscript{48} Lerner, \textit{The Passing of Traditional Society}, 67-8.

virtual "Potemkin" social democracy. In such a situation, “popular legitimacy may be required ideologically, but, in fact, no government may acquire such legitimacy.”

The fact that traditional substance might hide behind a modern veneer in many developing countries was not always a cause for concern to nationbuilders with conservative-populist tendencies: there was room for the past inside the future national structure. According to Gabriel Almond, “all political systems are mixed ones in the sense that traditional patterns always exist and are of functional significance in even the most advanced modern system.” MIT political scientist Myron Weiner made a distinction between "traditionalism" (harmful to modernization) and "traditions" (possibly helpful to modernization). In his discussion of bureaucracy and modernization, LaPalombara contended that a strict adherence to the “modern” Weberian legal-rational model of public administration might actually slow down the process of nationbuilding, particularly in its take-off stage. Likewise, for the construction of a modern democratic political system the old-fashioned practices of graft and patronage

50Binder, Crises and Sequences in Political Development, 65-6.
51 As paraphrased in Pye, Politics, Personality, and Nation Building, 37.
52 Traditionalism, Weiner noted in 1966, was hostile to innovation, whereas traditions, which were “constantly subject to reinterpretation and modification,” were not. Furthermore, elites in emerging societies had discovered that “a policy of putting new wine in old bottles” made conservative groups more accepting of change. See Modernization: The Dynamics of Growth (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 7.
53 Economic development, according to him, of society required a “more free-wheeling” breed of bureaucrat than the “law and order” type common in Western countries. See Palombara, Bureaucracy and Political Development, 12.
might prove essential.\textsuperscript{54} Similarly, Samuel Huntington pointed out that well-organized bureaucratic states did not always make the best democracies.\textsuperscript{55}

Some nationbuilders also attacked the bureaucratic aspect of US international development policies. LaPalombara targeted the cultural chauvinism inherent in American administrative assistance programs. “American public administration,” he explained, “like the Taylorism which influenced the shaping of its traditional principles, is not very compatible in societies where science is less than god, where traditional forces are still at work ... and where the administrative legacy ... comes from older European countries.”\textsuperscript{56} Howard Wriggins, a member of the State Department’s Policy Planning Council in the early 1960s, warned of the unintended consequences of instilling the values of efficiency and technical competence in the officer corps of a developing country. “Military training,” he wrote, “may develop in the younger officers an impatience with the halting, often fumbling steps of the more traditionalist civilian leaders or higher officers in modernizing their countries,” leading to coups d’état.\textsuperscript{57}

Unlike some of their bureaucratically-minded colleagues, conservative-populists within the nationbuilding/counterinsurgency community considered that “small was

\textsuperscript{54} Supposedly, a meritocratic form of government, if adopted too early, risked yielding too much power to the bureaucracy “at the expense of political institutional development.” Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{55} Traditional systems, Huntington alleged, such as those in China and France, which seemed quite “modern” in a bureaucratic sense, have often had more trouble opening up politically than traditional systems which were less developed bureaucratically, but were “institutionally more complex and pluralistic,” such as those in England, Japan, and the United States. See Political Order in Changing Societies, 87.
\textsuperscript{56} LaPalombara, Bureaucracy and Political Development, 19.
beautiful” when it came to certain kinds of rural development activities. Roger Hilsman, director of the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research during the Kennedy Administration, believed that large-scale economic modernization did not contribute much to nationbuilding in the near term. In fact, it had a negative effect, uprooting established social systems, producing political-economic dislocation and tension, and raising popular expectations that could not be fulfilled quickly enough. What the peasants really needed and wanted, wrote Hilsman, "was social justice and reform -- at a minimum, the old way of life with the cruelties removed."\(^5\)

Surprisingly, counterinsurgent strategists -- former US and European bureaucrats and military officers, for the most part, with a background in putting down colonial rebellions -- tended to be more populist in their nationbuilding prescriptions than many geo-politically-oriented academics. The former often saw themselves as promoters of a democratic revolution within the villages of the Third World -- a revolution that would put embattled Third World regimes firmly on the side of the average peasant, who had heretofore only thought of government in terms of his obligations to it, not what it might provide him. With reference to the situation in Vietnam in the early 1960s, Hilsman (a former OSS officer in the Far East during World War II) wrote that the “idea government existed for the benefit of the people, that a government could really care, was as

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revolutionary in most of Asia as anything the Communists had to offer.”
According to Hilsman, America's major mistake during the initial period of its involvement in the Vietnam War was to ignore the significance of the rural population to the Viet Cong insurgents. Americans had conceived the infiltration routes from North Vietnam to South Vietnam “as the enemy's supply line and the regular Viet Cong guerrilla as the main body of strength. But the true supply lines in a guerrilla war,” Hilsman wrote, “were the thousands of roads and trails radiating out like spokes of a wheel from each of the sixteen thousand hamlets of South Vietnam. And the main body of the enemy's strength was the people of South Vietnam...”

What should the counterinsurgent power have done in such a situation to coopt the guerrillas base of support in the countryside? According to David Galula, a French Army officer who served in China, Greece and Algeria, the answer was to “start organizing the participation of the population in the struggle” against the insurgents “by placing local leaders in positions of power” selected in “absolutely free elections” to which the people will feel bound “since they are the product of its choice.”

Subsequently, the government should incorporate these new leaders, after assuring itself of their effectiveness and commitment, in regional and national political machines. US Army Lieutenant Colonel John McCuen advocated more direct action by the government among the people as a whole. “Every possible person must be included, influenced,

60 Ibid.
committed,” he declared. “Where the revolutionaries accomplish this through intimating, the governing authorities should do it by persuasion -- persuasion that each individual has something to gain from the [counterrevolutionary] organization.”

Beyond efforts to sponsor pro-government grass-roots organizations, the counterinsurgent regime must offer and deliver “something tangibly better than that which the revolutionaries are offering” -- whether it be land reform or honest administration -- in spite of the opposition within its own ranks that such moves would likely provoke.

Whatever their position on the relative importance of military versus political tasks in counter-guerrilla operations, many counterinsurgent strategists agreed that the government had to make a well-coordinated attempt to win the active support of ordinary citizens, particularly those living in the countryside, on whom the guerrillas depended to meet the majority of their operational needs. Furthermore, they believed, it was the local government's armed forces that were best positioned, at least initially, to take on this nationbuilding responsibility through what was known as “civic action.” According to Galula, when government troops first entered a village previously under insurgent control, “they will find themselves confronted with a huge variety of nonmilitary tasks which have to be performed by military personnel, because of the shortage of reliable civilian political and administrative personnel.”

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64 Ibid, 59.
65 Galula, Counter-Insurgency Warfare Theory and Practice, 94.
Although also theoretically committed to democratic development, establishment-oriented academic and bureaucratic nationbuilders in the US became more willing to endure authoritarian regimes in the Third World as the 1960s progressed. Writing in 1970, political development critic D. Cruise O'Brien observed that -- because of their disappointment with the un-American direction taken by many newly independent states, plus their dismay at the urban rioting and anti-war protests within the United States -- nationbuilders “previously unquestioned political ideal of ‘democracy’ is in the process of being replaced by another ideal, that of ‘order.’”66 Indeed, in the opinion of some, pushing too hard and too quickly for the adoption of democracy could prove counterproductive. W.W. Rostow counseled Americans not to despair if their Third World allies failed to live up to their democratic hopes for them. He agreed with Howard Wriggins that most developing countries were initially too weak to survive the rigors of “conventional, competitive parliamentary politics.” “Democracy,” nevertheless, “lives on to fight another day” under rather lax authoritarian conditions, while “Communist rule ... forecloses more natural paths of evolution.”67 Leonard Binder and Samuel Huntington accused Americans of being overly concerned with limiting and distributing governmental power -- an outmoded Whiggish prejudice -- rather than fostering governmental “capacity,” a much more pressing need in politically chaotic developing

countries. Effective government, Binder argued, required certain restrictions on political participation and freedom of information.68

Counterinsurgency Assumptions

At the same time that the dominant liberal-nationalist model of nationbuilding was being undermined from within by conflicting leftist and rightist tendencies, counterinsurgency doctrine was also beset by its own set of contradictions. On the one hand, counterinsurgency theorists -- educated in the standardized rules and procedures of large US and European military and civilian bureaucracies -- were inevitably influenced by the “Western Way of War,” which sought to bring about an enemy’s capitulation through the studied application of superior technological, organizational, and material means. For example, counterinsurgents exhibited a devotion to the concepts of centralized control and inter-departmental coordination, and other quasi-scientific laws and principles. In addition, they favored a methodical, localized, step-by-step approach to counterinsurgency, rather than the haphazard, global, all-at-once approach, preferred by some ambitious generals and ignorant politicians. Operationally, although they recognized the corrupt character of many Third World governments and elites, most counterinsurgents contended that order (or security) must precede political and economic reform in countries beset by civil strife. On the tactical level, they were fascinated by certain administrative techniques designed to physically separate the target population

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68 Binder, Crises and Sequences in Political Development, 59. According to Samuel Huntington, authority had “to exist” before it could be “limited,” and supposedly it was authority that was “in scarce supply” in countries “at the mercy of alienated intellectuals, rambunctious colonels, and rioting students.” See Political Order in Changing Societies, 8.
from the insurgents (if necessary, by resettlement) and to catch and eliminate the
remaining guerrillas. With the respect to the individual fighting soldier,
counterinsurgents remained convinced that the well-trained Western professional was
more than a match for the average peasant insurgent and should not blindly adopt the
techniques of his guerrilla opponent. Finally, despite the large psycho-political
component of counterinsurgency warfare, counterinsurgents generally argued that the
government side should make use of its inherent numerical and material advantages, as
well as its ability to garner a relatively greater amount of outside assistance than the rebel
side.

On the other hand, counterinsurgency specialists rhetorically rejected the
conventional Western style of warfighting as unsuited to the requirements of modern-day
revolutionary warfare. Their righteous indignation at Soviet-Chinese attempts to subvert
Third World independence covered a grudging admiration for the Communist guerrilla's
ability-- with inferior manpower and equipment-- to motivate the peasantry to do his
bidding. From a close reading of Mao Tse-tung, Che Guevara, and Vo Nguyen Giap,
they concluded that the political aspect of war should receive at least as much, if not
more, emphasis than the military component. Some went so far as to contend that the
soldier's primary job was not to kill the enemy, but to protect the native population and to
help it prosper through "civic action." Others believed that, to properly carry out his
political and military responsibilities, the counterinsurgent soldier had, in effect, to
become a pro-government guerrilla, employing the methods of the insurgents, albeit for
an opposing purpose. This meant increasing his proficiency in the techniques of political
and psychological warfare at least as much as in the military arts. It also meant discouraging the use of large-scale “search-and-destroy” operations and indiscriminate artillery and aircraft bombardments that increased civilian hardship and resentment.

Finally, it meant focusing on the lowly and numerous territorial forces, who lived in the villages and hamlets of contested regions. In the final analysis, they could do greater damage to the insurgent position than the most elite of regular forces operating in remote mountains and jungles.

Counterinsurgent strategists were almost unanimous in their emphasis on two inter-related principles of warfare: unity of command and joint civil-military planning. “Clearly, more than any other kind of warfare,” stated David Galula, “counterinsurgency must respect the principle of a single direction. A single boss must direct operations from beginning until end.”

It was a gross error to assume that the “struggle against the guerrilla” was “a war of lieutenants and captains,” wrote French paratrooper, Roger Trinquier, a veteran of his nation’s Indochina and Algeria conflicts. On the contrary, a successful counterinsurgency effort required that “operations be conducted according to a plan established at the highest command level, [someone] capable at any moment of making quick, direct intercession effectively felt in wide areas.”

Trinquier and his fellow French counter-revolutionnaires preferred that the top post be reserved for a military man. For his part, Sir Robert Thompson, a former British colonial official during the Malayan “emergency” and head of his country’s advisory mission in Saigon in

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69 Galula, Counter-Insurgency Warfare, 87.
the early 1960s, believed that the outside power supporting a counterinsurgency should appoint a civilian “proconsul,” who also served as that power’s ambassador to the country under siege.\textsuperscript{71}

With regard to counterinsurgency planning, US Air Force Major John Pustay advised his fellow Americans to “overcome the tendency to oversimplify and divide military and political activities into two largely separate spheres.”\textsuperscript{72} According to Thompson, the counterinsurgent power needed “an overall plan” that dealt with more than just “security measures and military operations.” It should include “all political, social, economic, administrative, police and other measures” that had any possible connection to the insurgency at hand. Furthermore, this plan should ensure “a proper balance between the military and the civil effort, with complete coordination in all fields.”\textsuperscript{73}

Once the besieged government (or its foreign protector) had appointed a single counterinsurgent commander and worked out an integrated operational plan, a decision had to be made regarding target areas for initial counterinsurgency operations. Most counterinsurgent strategists disdained an all-over-the-map approach to combating guerrilla uprisings, preferring a gradual, inexorable approach known as the “oil spot” strategy.\textsuperscript{74} “Given the limitations of his available resources,” Pustay argued, “the

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\textsuperscript{73} Thompson, \textit{Defeating Communist Insurgency}, 55.

\textsuperscript{74} McCuen, \textit{The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War}, 325. The strategy got its name from the way in which an oil spot tends to slowly expand in all directions, engulfing all obstacles in its path.
counterinsurgency commander can best consolidate the regime's holdings by first
securing those large population and other strategic centers that are critical politically and militarily.” 75 When the government had secured its strategic bases, then its forces should employ these bases as jumping off points for further counterinsurgent operations. A situation to avoid, according to Galula, was "an accidental mosaic, a patchwork of pieces in which one will be pacified, and next to it will be another one not so pacified or perhaps even under the effective insurgent's control." Such an inter-mixing of territories was “ideal” for the guerrillas who would then “be able to maneuver at will among the pieces, concentrating on some, temporarily vanishing from others.” 76 And what was the counterinsurgent side to do about strategically less significant portions of the country where guerrillas might be active? In John McCuen's opinion, the regime in power had to “make the agonizing decision to virtually abandon less populous, less critical portions of the country until its strength will allow it to bring them back under control.” 77

The answer to the dilemma of whether to concentrate on military or political operations was “security first.” Only a “prolonged occupation of the countryside,” which caused rural villagers to feel safe, from guerrilla attacks and internal subversion, could provide the basis both for destroying the guerrillas and building a popular foundation of support for the government. 78 A minority of counterinsurgent strategists -- for example,

75 Pustay, Counterinsurgency Warfare, 91. For his part, David Galula pointed to certain tactical factors that should be considered in choosing the initial target area: 1) the area should be easily isolated and compartmented; 2) its population should be concentrated and dependent on outside supplies; and 3) its residents should have a relatively favorable view of the government as compared to the guerrillas. See Counter-Insurgency Warfare 99-101.
76 Ibid., 86.
77 McCuen, The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War, 32-5.
78 Ibid., 57-8 and Trinquier, Modern Warfare, 38.
the RAND Corporation’s Charles Wolf -- even stated that popular political support made little difference in combating a well-organized rebel force. “Given the characteristics of transitional societies,” he wrote in 1967, “an effective insurgency and guerrilla activity can grow and gather momentum among a population that is passive or even hostile to the movement.” What an insurgent movement absolutely needed to keep itself in business was a steady “supply of certain inputs,” such as food, recruits and intelligence information. And these inputs might even increase if the government and its foreign sponsor chose to dispense socioeconomic largesse to the people in the hope of currying favor.79

From a tactical standpoint, a security-first operation relied upon strategic hamlets and quadrillage (or gridding). In Trinquier's view, the building of strategic hamlets could be equated to “reestablishing the old system of medieval fortified villages.”80 Rather than trying to make strongholds of isolated outposts in the countryside, which the enemy could take or leave, counterinsurgents recommended organizing the defense of entire villages and their inhabitants. In a physical sense, this meant constructing a barrier around the villages, protected by several blockhouses equipped with automatic weapons. After being satisfactorily “vetted” by the police, village inhabitants would each receive a census card, allowing them to depart their villages, but only through guarded gates during the daytime, and never with money or supplies that they might turnover to the guerrillas. As soon as was practicable, counterinsurgent authorities should organize reliable villagers

79 Wolf, United States Policy and The Third World, 50-2.
80 Trinquier, Modern Warfare, 74.
into self-defense units, freeing up regular troops for deployment as mobile reserves.\textsuperscript{81} In David Galula’s opinion, existing villages should be employed as strategic hamlets whenever possible; resettlement might prove necessary, however, “if the rural population is too dispersed to allow the stationing of a military detachment with every group.”\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Quadrillage} worked in concert with the system of strategic hamlets. Whereas the latter provided close-in security for the majority of the people living in rural villages, the former offered in-depth security by throwing “a net of fine mesh over the entire area in which the [guerrilla] bands move.”\textsuperscript{83}

Although obviously not neglectful of the insurgent's military forces, counterinsurgent strategists generally thought that the embattled government should give first priority to destroying the enemy’s underground political infrastructure. “Unless the communist subversive organization in the towns and villages is broken and eliminated,” wrote Sir Robert Thompson, “the insurgent guerrilla units will not be defeated.” Alluding to the familiar Maoist maxim, Thompson added that “if the guerrillas can be isolated from the water, i.e., the ‘little fishes’ removed from ‘the water,’ then their eventual destruction becomes automatic.” This would occur because guerrilla units depended on communist political organizers within the villages to supply them with

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 73-5.
\textsuperscript{82} Galula, \textit{Counter-Insurgency Warfare}, 111-12.
\textsuperscript{83} Trinquier, \textit{Modern Warfare}, 92. According to Roger Hilsman, in a typical quadrillage operation, a guerrilla-infested part of the country was “marked off and divided into sections,” patrolled by professionally-trained, ranger-type units, in constant contact with a central headquarters. When one of these units met up with a guerrilla force, the standard procedure was for headquarters to send reinforcements in the form of paratroops or helicopter transports, which would land behind the enemy and assist in surrounding and destroying him. Once an area was considered pacified, the government would establish administrative control and then move its military forces “on to the next section of land to be cleared.” See “Internal War,” 29.
supplies, recruits, and intelligence on government operations. In John McCuen’s opinion, neutralizing the revolutionary organization and its influence on the population might initially require “some force and sanctions being applied upon the population itself,” although he ruled out the use of torture or terror. David Galula, however, a veteran of France’s infamous Battle of Algiers, argued in favor of bending the law in certain cases in order to gain greater propaganda and/or intelligence value from the capture of rebel party officials. “Leniency,” he wrote, “seems a good practical policy, but not blind leniency.” To take advantage of such a policy, the prisoner would have to make a full confession of past activities and be willing to participate actively in operations against his former comrades.

Within the counterinsurgent community, there existed a split between those who believed that counterinsurgent forces should adopt the techniques of their opponents -- in effect, become pro-government guerrillas -- and those who believed that the professional standards, methods, and resources of Western armies should not be hastily discarded. For his part, David Galula contended that insurgency warfare did not work for the counterinsurgent. “The counterinsurgent,” he wrote, “is endowed with congenital strength; for him to adopt the insurgent's warfare would be the same as for a giant to try to fit into dwarf's clothing.” And Major Michael Spark of the US Marine Corps

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84 Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency, 55-6.
85 Examples of such coercive measures might include curfews, control of movements, regroupment, rationing, martial law, and maximum penalties for aiding the revolutionaries. As for the insurgent political operatives, most counterinsurgent strategists argued that they should be dealt with in accordance with established legal precepts. See McCuen, The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War, 56-7.
86 Galula, Counter-Insurgency Warfare, 126-7.
87 Ibid., 73. For their part, military historians and one-time Defense Department consultants, Peter Paret and John Shy, agreed that “the role for friendly guerrillas in counterguerrilla action” was “very limited.”
declared in his service’s flagship journal that he and his colleagues were not about to become guerrillas. Not only would they thereby forfeit the use of their formidable weaponry and tactics, they could never hope to compete that way with true guerrillas, whose essential characteristic was an ability “to blend in with the local population.”

“Unless we plan to fight in Utah,” Spark wrote, “we should train and refine our capability as a counterguerrilla force.”

This did not mean that the advocates of professional counterinsurgent forces were pleased with the capabilities of contemporary Western military establishments to conduct unconventional operations. “For effective counterguerrilla operations,” Roger Hilsman called for “radical changes in organization, combat doctrine and equipment.”

Specifically, Hilsman recommended the formation of decentralized groups of about fifty professional solders, who would be self-reliant and able to operate autonomously in a hostile environment. Similarly, John Pustay argued in favor of small-scale operations “carried out principally by hunter-killer units of uniformed Ranger-trained regular troops operating out of fixed fortified bases dispersed throughout guerrilla affected areas.” For Thompson, successful counterinsurgency required “a small, elite, highly disciplined, lightly equipped and aggressive army, with a supporting air force and navy of sufficient capability to make the army mobile.” And in Major Spark’s opinion, the U.S. Marine Corps, with slight refinements in training, techniques and equipment, best fit the

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89 Hilsman, “Internal War,” 29.
90 Pustay, Counterinsurgency Warfare, 113.
91 Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency, 62.
counterinsurgency bill. His service, he noted, had “fought guerrillas in small wars during most of its history.” Furthermore, “the emphasis on offensive spirit, the individual fighting Marine, air-ground teamwork, and austere logistics” made the contemporary Marine Corps “the nation's ideal counterguerrilla force.”

Most counterinsurgent strategists, who favored the use of elite anti-guerrilla troops, also believed that the latter would benefit from the full mobilization of the besieged state. For Hilsman, this was a matter of necessity, rather than natural advantage. He calculated that defeating a guerrilla movement required a manpower ratio of fifteen to one in the government's favor. Because the government had to protect vital installations such as bridges and power plants while the guerrilla sought only to destroy, “the government must put many troops on simple guard duty or the whole economy will be brought to a halt.” In John McCuen's opinion, the government ought to employ its superior resources for winning political points, rather than for security purposes alone. "Revolutionaries," he noted, "normally support their promises with negative action; the governing authorities can support theirs with civic action -- building new institutions, housing, and public works."

In spite of his bureaucratic socialization in the “Western Way of War,” the typical American and European counterinsurgency strategist of the 1950s and 1960s did not perceive himself as an organization man. He was an outsider-insider who consciously

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93 On the other hand, a ratio of soldiers to guerrillas of ten to one might be possible if helicopters were available, making it possible for “a battalion to fight one day in one province and the next day in another.” See Hilsman, To Move a Nation, 428-9.
94 McCuen, The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War, 326.
scorned the allegedly outmoded practices and unrealistic attitudes of their detached and, sometimes, corrupt superiors. As the French paratroop commander, Lieutenant Colonel Raspeguy, facetiously asserts to an officer of the old guard in Jean Larteguy’s 1962 novel, *The Centurions*.

I’d like France to have two armies: one for display, with lovely guns, tanks, little soldiers, fanfares, staffs, distinguished and doddering generals... The other would be the real one, composed entirely of young enthusiasts in camouflage battledress, who would not be put on display but from whom impossible efforts would be demanded and to whom all sorts of tricks would be taught.95

More conventionally-minded military officers and civilian bureaucrats evinced an equal measure of distrust with regard to their counterinsurgent colleagues. To many senior American military officers, the very notion of counterinsurgency had a foreign, unsavory and unmilitary air about it. The preeminent theorists in the field were Europeans who had developed their doctrines while fighting for a dying colonialist cause against a Marxist foe whose methods they professed to admire. And many of those Americans first interested in counterinsurgency were not true military men at all, but former OSS and CIA operatives; only the smallest of the four armed services, the Marine Corps, viewed counterinsurgency as a major operational mission. Consequently, counterinsurgency theorists both saw themselves -- and were, to some extent, perceived by others -- as revolutionaries, even though most of their ideals and many of their methods remained thoroughly orthodox.

In the eyes of most counterinsurgency strategists, a largely military approach to combating Communist-backed insurgencies had little chance of success. US Marine

Lieutenant Colonel T.N. Greene wrote that “to beat the guerrilla means to fight not in the sharp black and white of formal combat, but in the gray, fuzzy obscurity where politics affect tactics and economics influence strategy. The soldier must fuse with the statesman, the private turn politician.”96 Whether the inclusion of political (and subsidiary economic and social) considerations in counterinsurgency operations meant that politics should have primacy over military requirements was a matter of contention. For Hilsman, "the central principle of the (counterinsurgency) concept was the need to subordinate military measures to a political and social program."97 And Trinquier wrote that "winning the allegiance of the civilian population [was] one of the most vital objectives of the whole struggle."98 Thompson, however, took the position that militarily defeating the insurgency might demand priority over political and socioeconomic reforms. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that "it would be futile to succeed in defeating the insurgency ... if the end result is a country which is not politically and economically viable, and might fall to the communists at any moment in the future, perhaps without a shot being fired."99

Counterinsurgent strategists flip-flopped in their assessments of the ideal soldier to take on the divergent responsibilities of defeating the guerrillas, destroying the enemy's political infrastructure, and promoting rural development. As previously indicated, some focused on elite professionals, specially trained in the distinct art of counterinsurgency

96 Greene, The Guerrilla--and How to Fight Him, v.
97 Hilsman, To Move a Nation, 578.
98 Trinquier, Modern Warfare, ix.
99 Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency, 10.
warfare and equipped with the best in high-technology weaponry, mobile transport and communications devices. Others, like McCuen and Thompson, thought that the principles and practices of the insurgent were, for the most part, good enough for the counterinsurgent. According to McCuen, "the most logical solution" to the problem of combating a Communist insurgency lay "in developing a counter-revolutionary strategy which applies revolutionary strategy and principles in reverse to defeat the enemy with his own weapons on his own battlefield."\textsuperscript{100} Of course, the pro-government guerrilla must be better at the game of insurgency warfare than the anti-government guerrilla. In Thompson's opinion, it was folly to pit "a large, fierce dog" against "a tomcat in an ally." The answer was "to put in a fiercer tomcat. The two cannot fail to meet because they are both in exactly the same element and have exactly the same purpose in life. The weaker will be eliminated."\textsuperscript{101}

Sir Robert was describing his conception of the government's mobile forces, whose job it was to track down the guerrillas in their mountain and jungle redoubts. In the eyes of many counterinsurgency specialists, however, the most vital role in providing rural security and bonding the people to the incumbent regime was played by the often poorly trained and ill-equipped territorial forces who actually lived and worked in the villages. For his part, John Pustay decried the lack of respect accorded the territorials by the regular military despite the fact that "counterinsurgency war may have its major battles fought by these non-professionals."\textsuperscript{102} The employment of local part-time militia -

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\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 77-8.  
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 119-20.  
\textsuperscript{102} Pustay, \textit{Counterinsurgency Warfare}, 131.  
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- or better yet, unpaid self-defense forces -- to perform defensive assignments had two purposes: one military, and the other, political. From a military standpoint, replacing regular troops with territorials enabled the government to utilize the former "in mobile reserve defense units and in offensive patrol and interdiction operations."103 More important, though, was the political significance involved in arming villagers for their own protection against the insurgents. According to military historians Peter Paret and John Shy, "once a substantial number of members of a community commit violence on behalf of the government, they have gone far toward permanently breaking the tie between that community and the guerrillas."104

More than most military strategists, specialists in counterinsurgency were suspicious of the sledgehammer (or attritional) approach to warfare, which depended upon the mobilization and application of superior resources for victory. Revolutionary warfare was an exercise in mind over matter and so, in large part, was counterinsurgency. This is not to say that many strategists were above making use of certain First World advantages, as noted above. Nevertheless, David Galula indicated that counterinsurgency was "not a problem of means... It is primarily a problem of strategy and tactics, of methods, and organization."105 This emphasis on technique, rather than technology, productive capability, or sheer numbers posed a problem for the United States. According to Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington, America's less than stellar performance in counterinsurgency was attributable to the "strength of American arms."

103 Ibid.
104 Paret and Shy in Greene, The Guerrilla--and How to Fight Him, 52.
105 Galula, Counter-Insurgency Warfare, 71.
Since the mid-19th century, the US had “been able to mobilize overwhelming economic and military power and bring it to bear directly on the enemy, attacking him not where he was weakest but where he was strongest, because we were stronger still.”\textsuperscript{106} Because Americans had not, for some time, had to fight from a position of weakness, they did not know how to confront an enemy who tried to turn material weakness into tactical and strategic strength.

One way in which guerrillas defeated an attrition-minded power like the United States, or an ally that had received American-style military training, was through taking advantage of popular resentment against the so-called "collateral" effects of large-scale conventional ground and air operations by inciting counterinsurgent forces to commit excesses. Pro-government forces should not take the bait, according to counterinsurgency strategists, even if this resulted in a reduction in the number of enemy put out of action. The “shot-gun approach” -- that is, “accepting a few neutral casualties to get a few rebels” -- did not work in insurgency situations “because the few neutral casualties create[d] ten-fold new rebels among the casualties' friends and relatives.”\textsuperscript{107} Furthermore, large unit sweeps tended to “disperse guerrilla bands rather than destroy them.”\textsuperscript{108} And the return of guerrilla forces to an area after a massive clearing operation


\textsuperscript{107} McCaen, \textit{The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War}, 61.

\textsuperscript{108} Trinquier, \textit{Modern Warfare}, 58. Similarly, David Galula wrote that the destruction or expulsion of insurgent forces was “not an end in itself,” for guerrillas, “like the heads of legendary hydra,” could grow again if they were not all destroyed in one fell swoop. See Counter-Insurgency Warfare Theory and Practice, 107.
caused "positive harm" because it indicated to the local population that “the guerrilla mosquito” was “proof against the government sledgehammer.”¹⁰⁹

Not only should the counterinsurgent government avoid providing an inadvertent propaganda victory to the guerrillas through conventional overkill, it should formulate a positive psychological warfare campaign of its own directed primarily at the uncommitted masses, but also at the guerrillas and its own armed forces. One of the more enthusiastic proponents of psychological (or political) warfare, James Burnham, asserted in 1962 that it had the potential to “smash governments and armies” and to “take over territory, peoples, and nations.”¹¹⁰ In his view, most Americans had a naive conception about what constituted an effective psychological-political warfare program. Information and propaganda programs ought not to “teach pale truths about how nice one is,” but “to undermine, divert, and injure one’s enemy.”¹¹¹ More constructively, John Pustay called for counterinsurgent authorities to recast “the social myth associated with the incumbent regime so that it will reflect the changed values of the populace as a whole.”¹¹²

While acknowledging the importance of psychological warfare as a counterinsurgency weapon, other strategists stressed the difficulties of constructing an effective program and the liabilities associated with a bad program. “Propaganda, like terrorism,” noted David Galula, had “an unfortunate tendency to backfire.” To be effective, government propagandists should deal “with local events, with problems with

¹⁰⁹ Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency, 111-12.
¹¹¹ Ibid., 423.
¹¹² Pustay, Counterinsurgency Warfare, 88
which the population is directly concerned.” Whenever possible, their message should be disseminated “on a person-to-person basis” and tailored “to specific groups.”

According to Paret and a successful psychological warfare program told the truth about government victories and guerrilla defeats because the population knew the local balance of forces better than the government. Also, it did "not confuse people potentially sympathetic to the guerrillas with the guerrillas themselves" since the object was "to break, not reinforce, the links between them." 

The American Role in Nationbuilding and Counterinsurgency

Both counterinsurgents and nationbuilders viewed the passage from traditionalism to Western-style modernity (however necessary and ultimately beneficial) as fraught with peril, particularly given the spoiler’s role played by duplicitous and ruthless ‘people’s warriors’ bankrolled by Moscow and Peking. As a result, they recommended periods of Western tutelage and assistance for Third World governments until order might be restored and obstacles to modernization removed. Academic nationbuilders, in particular, felt that social scientific methods and research were indispensable for identifying the problems associated with modernization and for suggesting possible solutions; and they bequeathed a plethora of studies on various aspects of the development process to Third World governments and US aid agencies. At least before the crisis of confidence brought on by the difficulties experienced by the US in Vietnam and elsewhere, most contended that the modernist promised land was within the reach of most Third World peoples.

113 Galula, Counter-Insurgency Warfare Theory and Practice, 122.
114 Paret and Shy in Greene, The Guerrilla—and How to Fight Him, 51.
Sometime during the mid-1960s, however, nationbuilders began soft-pedaling the rewards of American aid to the Third World; political and economic development was increasingly portrayed as the culmination of indigenous conditions and efforts, over which the US had only marginal influence. For their part, counterinsurgent strategists in the 1960s continued to maintain that embattled Third World governments should make use of their ability to garner relatively greater amounts of outside assistance from the West than their opponents could from the Sino-Soviet bloc. On the other hand, they also agreed with Mao that Western military might, by itself, could not defeat an established insurgency; only the local government could by building up its political base from the bottom level of society. In short, nationbuilders and counterinsurgents faced a growing internal struggle between an interventionist ethos -- telling them that Western aid was beneficial both for the donors as well as the recipients -- and a hardheaded pragmatism telling them that Western expenditures in the Third World were not yielding the kind of returns they had initially expected. And, what is more, they had no ‘magic’ formula to turn things around.

Most academic nationbuilders believed that the United States had a special responsibility to help bring the rest of the non-Communist world safely into the modern age. According to Gabriel Almond, America’s post-World War II interests were so all-encompassing that she could no longer remain detached with regard to political instability wherever it might occur, e.g., in France, Indochina, or Indonesia.115 Lucien Pye believed

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that the United States' primary duty was to act as a model democratic society for others to emulate.\footnote{Pye, \textit{Politics, Personality, and Nation Building}, 299-300.} As explained above, this was not simply a matter of power politics, but of keeping faith with America's revolutionary heritage. "Anyone who seeks to understand American foreign policy," wrote Seymour Martin Lipset, "must recognize that it has rested primarily on the commitment of the United States to extend democracy and to oppose political imperialism ever since the country overthrew its own colonial rulers."\footnote{Lipset, \textit{Political Man}, xxvi.}

Unfortunately, according to US political development advocates, most Americans -- unlike the Europeans, the Japanese, and especially, the Soviets and the Chinese -- could not comprehend that the diffusion of modern attitudes, values, and institutions was not a fully automatic process. Americans had been “born free” in the Toquevillian sense. They had "arrived at a state of democracy without having to endure a democratic revolution."\footnote{Packenham, \textit{Liberal America and the Third World}, 18.} Consequently, the American public and political leadership were not entirely convinced of the need or capacity of countries to rapidly modernize themselves, even with generous foreign assistance. What is more, the United States lacked a coherent development doctrine, which integrated the economic, political, administrative, cultural, and military aspects of nationbuilding.\footnote{Millikan and Blackmer, \textit{The Emerging Nations}, xi.} To overcome these obstacles, some social scientists, like Karl Deutsch, argued for further study of the

\footnote{Pye, \textit{Politics, Personality, and Nation Building}, 6.}
nationbuilding process;\textsuperscript{121} others, like W.W. Rostow, who joined the Kennedy administration as chairman of the State Department's Policy Planning Council, preached the cause of nationbuilding throughout the halls of government. Speaking before an audience of graduates of the US Army's Special Forces school in the spring of 1961, Rostow declared that “modern societies must be built,” and America was “prepared to help them.”\textsuperscript{122} If "helping" meant intervening in the internal affairs of another sovereign nation, so be it. The relationship with the developing world transcended “conventional international behavior” and involved “activities within other societies which formerly would have been precluded.”\textsuperscript{123}

If Westerners were to understand the destabilizing nature of modernization and to act in ways that abetted the process, rather than set it back, then in-depth research throughout the Third World, using the latest social science techniques of polling and statistical analysis -- \textit{a la} Lerner's and Pye's pioneering studies of transitional elites in the Middle East and in Burma -- was a necessity. Within organizations like MIT's Center for International Studies and the Committee on Comparative Politics of the Social Science Research Council, field studies such as these were combined with the research of experts on the political economies of the developed nations and works commissioned on various aspects of nationbuilding around the world. According to political development critic Edward Said, in the 1950s and 1960s, “a truly amazing conceptual arsenal -- theories of

\textsuperscript{123} Millikan and Blackmer, \textit{The Emerging Nations}, 132-3.
economic phases, social types, traditional societies, systems transfers, pacification, social mobilization, and so on -- was deployed throughout the world; universities and think tanks received huge government subsidies to pursue these ideas, many of which commanded the attention of strategic planners and policy experts in (or close to) the United States government.”

To those involved in advising the government, it was not enough that social science explain how modernization took place. Lucien Pye, for example, argued for a “doctrine of democratic development” that would offer US officials and, through them, the leaders of new countries, a “systematic guide to the nature of national development which can provide a sound basis for judging progress and for determining priorities for action.”

Likewise, Yale law professor and political scientist Harold Laswell called for nationbuilding models that were “explicitly preferential.” A member of the Research Advisory Board of the Committee for Economic Development in the 1950s and ‘60s, Laswell contended that such models should be detailed and comprehensive, providing “strategic guidance for timing the component elements in sequences of development,” clarifying “goal values,” and identifying “the factors whose combinations account for the facilitation or blocking of progress.”

Seymour Martin Lipset compared the undertakings of contemporary American political development specialists on behalf of the Third World to the investigations undertaken by Alexis de Tocqueville in the United

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125 Pye, Politics, Personality, and Nation Building, 6.
127 Ibid., 295.
States more than a hundred years beforehand. “To aid men's actions in furthering
democracy in then absolutist Europe was in some measure Tocqueville's purpose in
studying the operation of American society in 1830,” he wrote. “To clarify the operation
of Western democracy in the mid-twentieth century may contribute to the political battle
in Asia and Africa.” 128

While most academic nationbuilders agreed on the need for US development
assistance to the Third World and hastened to offer their social science expertise in
formulating and implementing foreign aid programs, they were unable -- either as
individuals or as group -- to develop an integrated, prioritized nationbuilding strategy that
could be presented to the government for its consideration. For example, Max Millikan,
Zbigniew Brzezinski, A.F.K. Organski, W.W. Rostow, and Charles Wolf focused on the
economic dimension of nationbuilding. 129 Other social scientists, however, believed that
economic programs played too large a role in America's nationbuilding activities in the
Third World. 130 Lucien Pye wrote that American aid authorities should expend less effort
on the technical and administrative aspects of development and more on nationbuilding's
psychological and cultural dimensions. 131 David Apter, for his part, stressed the need to
bolster the technocratic elite--what he labeled "non-political information needers," i.e.,
scientists, social scientists, engineers and technologists--as a way of improving the long-

128 Lipset, Political Man, 456.
129 A.F.K. Organski, The Stages of Political Development (New York: Knopf, 1967); Millikan and
Politics 9, no. 1 (October 1956): 55-75; Rostow, Politics and the Stages of Growth; and Wolf, United
States Policy and The Third World.
130 LaPalombara, Bureaucracy and Political Development; and LaPalombara and Weiner, Political Parties
and Political Development.
131 Pye, Politics, Personality, and Nation Building, 288-9.
run chances for democracy.\textsuperscript{132} And Johns Hopkins University sociologist James Coleman viewed the educational system "as the master determinant of change" and "a correlate, if not a requisite, of a democratic order."\textsuperscript{133} Just as they could not agree on the functional components of nationbuilding, neither could social scientists determine whether the private or public sector was most deserving of their ministrations.\textsuperscript{134}

Despite continuing exhortations in favor of greater American assistance and attention to nationbuilding efforts in the Third World, most social scientists usually included a disclaimer in their writings warning against US attempts to control the development process, which was largely a result of indigenous conditions and efforts. According to Max Millikan, the primary responsibility of American aid officials in the Third World was to train central government representatives so that the latter could assume the mantle of advisors and overseers of their peoples' nationbuilding activities.\textsuperscript{135} “American and free-world policies can marginally affect the pace of transition” to modernity, he wrote, “but basically that pace depends on changes in the supply of resources and human attitudes, political institutions, and social structure which each society must generate.”\textsuperscript{136} A few social scientists even concluded that America's policy of developmental interventionism had limited promise and suggested a more hands-off

\textsuperscript{132} Apter, \textit{The Politics of Modernization}, 459.
\textsuperscript{134} Pye recommended a corporatist public-private strategy, while LaPalombara felt that American officials should realistically accede to the Third World's preference for centralized governmental control over the development process. See LaPalombara, \textit{Bureaucracy and Political Development}, ix.
\textsuperscript{135} Millikan and Blackmer, \textit{The Emerging Nations}, 138-9.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 142.
approach to nationbuilding. Zbigniew Brzezinski, a professor of political science at Harvard University in the late 1950s, argued that “the moment may have arrived for a radical shift from the position of an active external ‘doer.’” “In the final analysis,” wrote the future Carter administration national security advisor, “the fate of Asia is up to the Asians and neither the West nor the USSR is in a position to steer economic and political development in these areas.”

Uncertainty with regard to their ability to successfully export the American model of development was combined with feelings of inadequacy provoked by the seemingly widespread appeal of the Stalinist “short-cut” to modernization. Although more forthright and pessimistic than most, Brzezinski displayed the self-doubt that underlay much of the nationbuilders' progressive hopefulness. “In the present epoch,” he wrote, “non-democratic forces enjoy a definite advantage over the democratic countries in being able to export their political structure to the newly liberated peoples...” According to Millikan, Communism promised four things: a tight, unified elite organization; a powerful anti-traditional base of mass support; a proven industrial mobilization technique; and a “secure, disciplined psychological setting” for men cast adrift from their traditional moorings. Although Samuel Huntington remained skeptical of Communist claims regarding economic growth and improved social welfare, he did not doubt the ability of Communist cadres to impose order.

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138 Ibid., 55-6.
139 Milikan and Blackmer, The Emerging Nations, 102-3.
140 Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies, 8.
One striking characteristic about Western counterinsurgent strategists was their romantic fascination with, and grudging admiration for, their Communist guerrilla opponent. In the United States, this fascination stemmed, in part, from counterinsurgency's association, in the early 1960s, with President John F. Kennedy who reportedly exhorted administration officials to "read Mao ... and Che Guevara."\textsuperscript{141} Taking their cue from the president, American counterinsurgent specialists bridled at the established military's notion that the currently available tools of conventional warfare were sufficient to handle the novel threat of Communist subversion in the Third World. "We must give the Devil his due," John McCuen wrote. "Protracted revolutionary warfare is a radically new application and combination of old military, political, and psychological principles and techniques which Mao fused together into a brilliantly successful strategy."\textsuperscript{142} According to Franklin Osanka, the American politico-military establishment could not afford to downplay Communist “skill in utilizing social, economic, and political weaknesses as major assets to guerrilla operations” in the poor nations of the Third World.\textsuperscript{143}

Thus neither counterinsurgents nor nationbuilders found it too surprising that many up-and-coming Third World leaders chose to follow the Communist route to power and modernization. Nevertheless, Max Millikan, for one, refused to give up hope that US aid efforts in the Third World would some day prove their worth in terms of producing reliable Western partners. On the one hand, he admitted that “our present state of

\textsuperscript{141} Hilsman, \textit{To Move a Nation}, 415.
\textsuperscript{142} McCuen, \textit{The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War}, 27-8.
\textsuperscript{143} Osanka, \textit{Modern Guerrilla Warfare}, xii-xiii.
knowledge does indeed require us to go at least part way on faith when we assert that an
intensive and prolonged program of assistance by the free world will materially raise the
chances that the underdeveloped societies can pass through the transitional process
without throwing the world into even more turmoil.” On the other hand, he insisted on
the necessity of developmental intervention; global stability could not be maintained by
leaving developing countries “to their own devices.”\(^{144}\) Counterinsurgents, too, tended to
give qualified support to the idea of outside assistance to governments struggling with
Communist-inspired insurgencies. John Pustay acknowledged, however, that there was a
danger in “accepting extensive economic and military support and especially [in]
permitting the supplier state's technicians and advisors to enter the country in great
numbers.” The besieged government would thereby allow insurgent propagandists to
label it a puppet.\(^{145}\)

But, in the case of South Vietnam, many American counterinsurgents and
nationbuilders found the delicate balance between intervention and laissez faire difficult
to translate into a program of action. Should the Government of Vietnam (GVN) in
Saigon, many asked themselves, be permitted to take the leading role in planning and
implementing the nationbuilding/counterinsurgency program -- despite its apparent lack
of imagination, expertise, rectitude and drive? If not, what sort of tutelage was required?
Should American officials attempt to convince GVN officials of the virtues of a Western-

\(^{145}\) Pustay, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 109-10. Sir Robert Thompson believed that outside assistance
should be kept to a minimum and not used to reshape the allied nation along Western lines. A people's
war, he wrote, “must be won by those on the spot.” Getting the local government to “function effectively
and “take the necessary action itself” was as much as an advisory power has a right to expect.
style liberal state? Or should they circumvent the Saigonese military-political elite and promote a populist-democratic revolution in the countryside? Alternatively, should they accede to the pressures of fighting Communism and be satisfied, for the foreseeable future, with stabilizing the regime in Saigon and extending its administrative control over the rest of the country? On the counterinsurgency side -- given that the US Army and Air Force’s preference for employing conventional forces against the Viet Cong in an attrition role was wrongheaded -- what substitute force structure and strategy was most appropriate for Vietnam? Should the allies adopt the elite professional model, subscribed to by the US Army Special Forces and Marine Corps, that disdained conventional military methods but remained securely within the bounds of the ‘Western Way of War’ (e.g., in terms of training, technology, and offensive military inclination)? Or should they foster the development of a class of people’s warriors a la the Viet Cong, imbued with ‘revolutionary’ democratic ideology and determined to ‘secure’ their slice of turf against the enemy at whatever cost and for as long as necessary? And with regard to both nationbuilding and counterinsurgency, what sort of advisory and support structure and measures of effectiveness were most appropriate for the Vietnamese situation?

Before returning to these dilemmas of nationbuilding and counterinsurgency in Part III, let us first describe how America’s nationbuilders and counterinsurgents assessed the progress and decline of the main protagonists -- the South Vietnamese government, the Viet Cong, and the United States -- in Vietnam’s “Other War.”
PART II: ATTITUDES TOWARD THE PROTAGONISTS
CHAPTER 2

THE EMBATTLED PARTY: SOUTH VIETNAM

THE EARLY YEARS

From the late 1950s until approximately 1967, US government-sponsored academics, military advisors, intelligence operatives, and development bureaucrats involved in Vietnam’s “Other War” were highly critical of the South Vietnamese government efforts and of nationbuilding and counterinsurgency in Saigon and in the countryside. They decried what they considered to be the authoritarian tendencies, Western traits, and quarrelsome attitudes of the national political elite, the ineffectiveness of GVN rural security forces, the counterproductive nature of the regime’s pacification and development policies, and the ineptitude of the provincial administrative bureaucracy. Nonetheless -- whether for reasons of geopolitics, anti-Communist beliefs, reformist instincts, or simply job security -- very few of these “Other Warriors” chose to reject, as either unattainable or undesirable, the United States’ stated goal of an independent, non-Communist South Vietnam. It was not until after the promulgation of a new South Vietnamese constitution in 1966, the subsequent national and local elections, and the GVN’s expansion of popular control following the collapse of the 1968
Communist Tet Offensive -- that these American observers began to express a guarded optimism regarding South Vietnam’s chances to survive and broaden its base of political support.

**Authoritarian Nationbuilding**

The quasi-official American portrait of the period of authoritarian nationbuilding under South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem (1954-1963) featured a forbidding national and local landscape strewn with well-intentioned policies gone awry. At the center of the picture stood President Diem, whom some perceived as a genuine nationalist leader brought down by selfish minions and others saw as the chief representative of a Frenchified, anti-democratic, urban Catholic minority with few nationalist credentials. Nearly all of these American commentators criticized South Vietnam’s public administration for its paucity of trained officials, top-down style of operation, defensive orientation, and obsession with security to the detriment of everything else. Many also lamented the GVN’s decision to continue the French policy of restricting the traditional political autonomy of village elders and elected officials. This problem, they believed, was exacerbated by the failure of the Saigon government to foster a South Vietnamese political identity among rural residents through the creation of truly national political parties and a sophisticated propaganda apparatus. At the level of the society, American social scientists noted the war-induced alienation of most Vietnamese villagers. For some, this was interpreted negatively because of the obstacle it posed to greater popular participation in nationbuilding and counterinsurgency activities. For others, however, the
breakdown of Vietnamese communal values was heralded as a necessary step in the direction of liberal capitalism.

The Diem government’s major endeavors to bring the rural parts of the country under its control provoked a mixture of frustration and wistfulness among American observers. Moderate land reform seemed a politically necessary undertaking, but the Communists had already implemented a far more radical version of agrarian reform in many parts of South Vietnam; what is more, the long-term economic consequences of additional land redistribution did not appear especially beneficial. Social scientists, in particular, had very little that was nice to say concerning the GVN’s agrovillage and strategic hamlet population relocation schemes. For their part, USAID and MACV advisors contended that forced migration, corvee labor, breakneck expansion, limited security assistance, and an emphasis on physical accomplishments were not key components of either program as originally envisioned under the aegis of an Anglo-American advisory team. Therefore, they believed, the overall concept of concentrating the rural population and giving it the means and the motivation to contribute to its own defense continued to be valid. Unfortunately, the Diem regime had fallen down during the execution phase.

In his 1972 memoir of his time as unofficial U.S. advisor to the presidents of the Philippines and South Vietnam during the 1950s, Edward Lansdale characterized the situation in the latter country as one of missed or thwarted opportunities for peaceful, democratic political development. For all his faults, Ngo Dinh Diem had represented a popular, nationalist alternative to North Vietnam’s Communist leadership. Lansdale
recalled that some Vietnamese observers had even believed that Diem’s popular renown exceeded that of Ho Chi Minh.\textsuperscript{1} Having skillfully disposed of his Mafia-like rivals, the Binh Xuyen and their sectarian allies, the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao, Diem had been on his way to establishing a viable democracy.\textsuperscript{2} Unfortunately, the promise of 1956 was vitiated by a selfish and ineffectual South Vietnamese elite, a purposeful and increasingly violent Communist enemy, as well as political errors on the part of the Diem regime. A moral gulf separated the majority of Vietnamese from the French-influenced politicians in the capital.\textsuperscript{3} What is more, the South Vietnamese government lacked sufficient numbers of trained civilian administrators and military officials to operate effectively in the countryside.\textsuperscript{4}

Lansdale, however, did not regard the Diem regime as totally blameless in the matter of South Vietnam’s reversal of fortunes in the late 1950s. Diem’s brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, was a particular \textit{bete noire} of Lansdale, and the American advisor allegedly did his best to overturn Nhu’s reactionary “political innovations.”\textsuperscript{5} Nhu, however, was successful in convincing his brother of the need to emulate the Communists by establishing a government-sanctioned national political front, the Movement for National Revolution, controlled by a secretive cabal of fanatical Diem supporters, the Can Lao party. The result of this authoritarian experiment, in Lansdale’s view, was a “fractur[ing]

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\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., 354.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., 150.
\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., 208 and 229.
\textsuperscript{5} For example, Lansdale describes in his memoirs an aborted Nhu plan for a “community self-help” program reminiscent of the Japanese informer-based, “neighborhood associations” used to control populations in occupied areas during World War II. See ibid., 330-1.
of the body politic” as older political parties were forced underground and many nationalist South Vietnamese joined with the Communists in expressing their disapproval of “a government held together mainly by the Can Lao elite rather than by popular support.”\(^6\) Another political misstep came in 1956, when Diem tried to replace the traditional system of village autonomy with one based on appointed officials responsible to the central government.\(^7\)

Despite their clear anti-Communist sympathies, the first American academics to systematically assess the state of South Vietnam’s political development since its independence in 1954, mostly social scientists associated with the USAID-funded Michigan State University (MSU) Vietnam Advisory Group, also harbored doubts about the GVN’s rural viability. Anthropologist Gerald Hickey considered that the usual problems associated with the transition from tradition to modernity were heightened in the South Vietnam’s case by war-induced social alienation, a loss of village authority, and the inability of the GVN to bring villagers under its political and military sway. Cooperation outside the immediate family or clan was almost completely lacking in his target village of Khanh Hau in the Mekong Delta province of Long An. As a result, villagers had turned “inward” and had become “primarily concerned with survival for themselves and their families.”\(^8\) Unfortunately, Khanh Hau’s traditional elite was in no

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\(^6\) Ibid., 344-5.

\(^7\) Lansdale argued that this change in the character of local government “took away much of the local initiative upon which modern democracies are founded, transgressed the ancient Vietnamese edict that ‘the Emperor’s rule ends at the village wall,’ and gave Communist agitprop cadre a highly effective argument to turn villagers against the Diem regime. Everything that went wrong in a village could henceforth be blamed” upon Diem’s appointed officials, “whether they were responsible for it or not.” See ibid., 356.

position to counter this atomizing trend through the exercise of strong leadership. Its powers were already diminished by previous French administrations and faced a further whittling away under the Diem regime. 9 What is more, the campaigns of terror and counter-terror by the Viet Cong and the GVN, in which local officials were inevitably enmeshed, emptied village office of much of its remaining allure.

Confronting an administrative void at the village level that was created in part by its own centralizing efforts, the Saigon government failed in its attempts to build connections with South Vietnam’s rural majority. Hickey illustrated this point by describing three ill-fated GVN projects in Khanh Hau: recruitment for the presidential political party, the National Revolutionary Movement; public meetings of the Communist Denunciation Committee; and local implementation of the Strategic Hamlet Program. 10 Although recruiting members for the National Revolutionary Movement was one of the prime responsibilities of the village council, Hickey recalled that “membership in the party was relatively small, and villagers ... appeared reluctant to affiliate themselves openly with any political party.” 11 By Hickey’s account, government propaganda efforts also had a minimal impact on ordinary village people. 12 As for the Diem government’s attempt to concentrate the rural population and physically separate it from the subversive

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9 Ibid., 282-3.
10 It should be noted that Hickey was not altogether disparaging of GVN rural programs, in particular, agricultural, educational, and medical projects in Khanh Hau funded, in large part, by foreign public and private charitable organizations, such as UNESCO and the Asia Foundation.
11 Ibid., 202-3.
12 “Villagers dutifully” attended the meetings of the elite-dominated Communist Denunciation Committee, but, Hickey wrote, “most do not appear particularly attentive. Some squat outside the đinh [ancestral shrine] chatting in low tones while a few read newspapers. After one denunciation meeting, a young farmer regaled his friends in one of the nearby shops by imitating the speaker of the evening.” Ibid., 205.
influence of the Viet Cong -- the Strategic Hamlet Program -- Khanh Hau residents generally considered it a failure in most respects. Few relocated families seem to have received the money the government had promised as compensation, and the hamlets' fortification “presented no barrier to the Viet Cong,” whose patrols “simply cut through the barbed wire.” Village self-defense forces reportedly did nothing to stop these incursions. By February 1964, according to Hickey, relocated villagers had begun to return to their former home sites. This not only saved many of them a long walk to their rice paddies, but also spared them from the retaliation promised by local Viet Cong against those who remained in government-controlled hamlets.13

After observing the same situation in Khanh Hau during 1958-59 from a political-economic perspective, MSU’s James Hendry offered a somewhat warmer assessment of South Vietnam’s nationbuilding prospects. As long as “the disruption caused by incessant guerrilla warfare can be eliminated,” he cautiously predicted in his 1964 book, “perhaps the country can make a start toward the promise of development which seems implicit in its land and its people.”14 In general, the people of Khanh Hau were ready to make the leap from a subsistence to a capitalist economy. Indeed, Hendry saw the social atomization that Hickey deplored as a potential economic boon, freeing the individual to pursue his own material enrichment. In addition, villagers did not seem averse to technological innovations that seemed to fit within their rice-centered economic view. Hendry also believed that South Vietnamese government schemes for improving the rural

13 Ibid., 54.
economy, although far from radical, were basically in the interest of Khanh Hau’s many small farmers and, therefore, a net political gain for the GVN. On the other hand, what was good for the small farmer in the short-term was not necessarily good for the country in the long-term. Land reform tended to “perpetuate the marginal” property owner, and to raise “the promise of substantial economic improvement” which it probably could not keep. In Hendry’s eyes, economic development must necessarily proceed along Western lines -- that is, migration of surplus agricultural labor to the cities and consolidation of rural landholdings.

A couple of years after Hickey and Hendry began their intensive studies of Khanh Hau village in 1958, MSU’s Joseph Zasloff, Jason Finkle, and Luther Allen produced several smaller reports for USAID and the GVN on provincial administration in Vinh Long and Quang Nam, the former located in the Mekong Delta region and the latter in central Vietnam. In 1960, for example, Joseph Zasloff provided an unvarnished picture of Vinh Long’s failed agrovillage program in the hope that the GVN would do a better job of implementing the follow-on Strategic Hamlet Program. A political scientist on leave from the University of Pittsburgh, Zasloff criticized the Saigon government for putting excessive pressure on Vinh Long’s province chief to move quickly with agrovillages.

15 Ibid., 49. Hendry undercut his positive comments regarding the Diem land reform program by noting that in the entire province of Long An only 38 individuals, who owned more than 100 hectares of land, were legally bound to redistribute any land to their tenants; and only one of these individuals owned land in the village of Khanh Hau.
16 Ibid., 170.
17 Ibid., 263.
18 The agrovillage program was a rural resettlement scheme proposed by the South Vietnamese government, which preceded Strategic Hamlet Program. Some 23 agrovilles, with a total of perhaps 40,000 inhabitants, were constructed between 1959 and 1961 when the plan was abandoned.
development, which resulted in the district chiefs making speed of construction their highest priority.\textsuperscript{19} Zasloff also faulted President Diem for not allowing administrators to pay rural residents for labor performed in agroville construction and for requiring agroville residents to pay the government for the plots onto which they were being moved.\textsuperscript{20} Significantly, Zasloff objected to the whole concept of forced resettlement in concentrated areas, particularly in the Mekong Delta where dwellings tended to be widely dispersed. Describing the plight of the villagers of Caisan, Zasloff noted that their removal from their traditional homesteads by the government had been “the source of great discontent.” As a result, they were obliged to leave behind not only “their gardens and trees and rice fields,” but their “ancestral tombs” as well. And the peasants’ new homesteads were poor recompense for what they had lost. Because the new agroville lacked cultivable land, former Caisan residents had to make use of their old fields, which they could no longer properly tend, in order to scratch out a living.\textsuperscript{21}

A year following his agroville report, Zasloff presented to the Saigon government an equally bleak assessment of the state of provincial officialdom in Vinh Long. Owing to the “ominous security situation,” he declared, district-level “administrators operate in garrison-like quarters surrounded by barbed wire entanglements whose entrance is guarded by armed sentries.” Zasloff compared the administrative situation in the province in the early 1960s “to the final years of French colonial domination.” Although

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 31 and 20.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 24.
the government appeared to control the province’s towns and the main highways during the day, the Viet Cong forces constantly threatened to take control at night. To protect themselves against nocturnal Communist attacks, village officials often left their homes to sleep under guard in the village communal hall or even the district headquarters.\textsuperscript{22} Security, according to Zasloff, had become an obsession for lower-level officials, to the detriment of social and economic programs designed to raise the standard of living of the local population.\textsuperscript{23} Rural administration in Vinh Long was also hampered, in Zasloff’s eyes, by Saigon’s propensity to restrict the initiative and judgment of subordinate officials. Criticism of higher-ups was considered as “dangerous” in a system where the dominant ethos consisted of “following orders in a military fashion.”\textsuperscript{24} Furthermore, Gallic-style centralization did not even provide efficiency as a substitute for its rigidity. “[A] recognized phenomenon of administration in Viet Nam,” Zasloff wrote, was “‘\textit{la paperassie}’ (excessive paperwork).”\textsuperscript{25}

Zasloff’s MSU colleague in Vinh Long, Jason Finkle, also questioned the top-down style of public administration in South Vietnam. Theoretically, the President received “vast amounts of data” that enabled him to make decisions for the country’s benefit, but this centralization of authority increased Diem’s “executive burden immensely” and made him “appear personally responsible for failures that occur in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Zasloff, \textit{A Study of Administration in Binh Minh District} (Saigon, Michigan State University Viet Nam Advisory Group, October 1961), 49.
\item Ibid., 50.
\item Ibid., 54-5.
\item Ibid., 55.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
provincial government.” And provincial failures were almost inevitable because of the disruption caused by the Viet Cong to even the best government programs, such as the GVN’s 1956 agrarian reform program. As one Vinh Long official explained to Finkle, the Communists had already confiscated large landholdings prior to the establishment of the current South Vietnamese regime in 1954 and had freely distributed them among the local peasantry. Under the government’s land reform program, on the other hand, former landlords had been given the right to sue in court for the return of their property or for some form of compensation. But many of these properties were in insecure areas, and landowners looked to the government for help in collecting rents and taking possession of their former holdings. For their part, most former tenant farmers preferred the land tenure situation to remain as it was; and they were encouraged in their resistance to GVN land reforms by the Viet Cong, who wished to appear as the peasants’ benefactor. The Viet Cong had maneuvered the government into a no-win situation. Saigon could support the landlords’ demand to retake their illegally seized properties and thereby anger the newly landed former tenants; or the GVN could go forward with its own land redistribution program and get little, if any, credit.27

MSU’s Robert Scigliano was gravely concerned by the workings of the Saigon government at the highest level. In his estimation, Ngo Dinh Diem’s administration neither presented a sufficiently nationalistic image nor opened itself to political participation by able individuals not personally beholden to the President. Symbolic of its

27 Ibid., 63-4.
ties to the *ancien régime* was the current government’s choice of a flag and a national anthem, which remained those of the “puppet Bao Dai regime.”  

Beyond its association with the colonialist past, the Republic of Vietnam under Diem had failed to introduce the “substance of representative government.” Although Scigliano believed that some limitation of democracy was understandable, “given the imminent Communist threat” and Vietnam’s status as a politically underdeveloped country, the greatest obstacle to democratic nationbuilding was the character of the national leadership. Ngo Dinh Diem and his family, had convinced themselves that only they were fit to lead their new nation and were making almost no attempt “to draw the Vietnamese people into active partnership.”

Assessing the opinion of the residents of Duc Lap village in Hau Nghia province several months after Diem’s assassination in 1963, R. Michael Pearce of the RAND Corporation concluded that the former president’s popularity had been declining there for a couple of years at least. According to this Defense Department-supported researcher, the people of Duc Lap initially had faith in Ngo Dinh Diem’s ability “to lead them in rebuilding their country and their ravaged village” after the end of the French war. The centralization of national authority under Diem in the late 1950s, however, had begun “to conflict sharply with the villagers’ traditional autonomy in local affairs.” In particular, Diem was personally blamed for the appointment in 1961 of a new village chief, who turned out to be a “corrupt and at times cruel administrator.” According to Pearce, their

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29 Ibid., 98.
30 Ibid., 189.
“increasing loss of faith in Diem” made Duc Lap villagers “easy targets” for the newly created National Liberation Front (NLF). Furthermore, the Viet Cong increased their chances for a sympathetic reception in Duc Lap by “posing” as former anti-French resistance fighters. Many villagers took the Communists at their word that “the struggle against Diem and the Americans was the continuation of the August Revolution” of 1946. Only now the main enemy was America rather than France.\(^{31}\)

Like Hickey and Zasloff before him, Pearce had little complimentary to say about the GVN’s rural resettlement programs of the early 1960s. For one thing, government officials apparently made no attempt to inform the villagers as to the reasons for their resettlement. In addition, those charged with constructing the new hamlets paid scant attention to the housing preferences of Duc Lap residents. “Esthetically,” Pearce opined, “the treeless relocatee hamlets are reminiscent of tract housing in suburban America.”\(^{32}\)

What is more, the strategic hamlets of Duc Lap did not even perform their primary function of shielding the population from the Viet Cong. “Despite the barbed wire and other defensive measures of the strategic hamlets,” Pearce concluded, the Viet Cong remained active within the community, and several agents probably moved into the strategic hamlets along with relocated families.\(^{33}\)

Not all American commentary on Diem-era population security measures was negative, however. USAID provincial representative John O’Donnell, for example,

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believed that the GVN’s Strategic Hamlet Program in the Mekong Delta province of Kien Hoa in 1962-63 nearly met “the requirements for defeating a Communist war of national liberation” and achieving political stability. The Strategic Hamlet Program, O’Donnell recalled in 1967, was primarily a Vietnamese attempt at pacification, albeit with British and American assistance. President Diem’s brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, had been the “prime mover” behind the development and execution of the Strategic Hamlet concept, and its details were coordinated by a small number of South Vietnamese officials within the presidential planning staff. One of these staffers, a former member of the Viet Minh resistance named Tran Ngoc Chau, became Kien Hoa’s dynamic province chief when the Strategic Hamlet Program was being put into effect. Although perhaps exceptional, Major Chau’s Strategic Hamlet plan had been thoughtful, even “daring in some respects.” Furthermore, O’Donnell praised Chau’s courage in setting aside the unrealistic hamlet construction timetable, mandated by higher headquarters. As a result, Kien Hoa’s strategic hamlets stood withstood theupsurge in Viet Cong psychological and military pressure that occurred in the summer and fall of 1963.

Neverthelesst heh O’Donnell acknowledged serious errors of commission and omission with regard to the Strategic Hamlet Program. Like many American observers of his era, he criticized the hamlets’ fortress-like defensive barriers, which normally

35 Ibid., 709-10.
36 Ibid., 713-14.
37 Ibid., 721.
38 Ibid., 723.
consisted of a wide moat and apmut wall topped by a barbed wire fence that nolowewe the perimeter of inhabited areas, as inapproprirate in the context of southern Vietnam. A more significant drawback was the over-emphasis given by both South Vietnamese and Americans to “identifiable physical accomplishments,” such as the numbers of hamlets completed. The program’s weakmst link, though, was its political and propaganda aspects. Without an adequate explanation of the reasoning behind the GVN’s security and development activities, villagers regarded their participation in the project as “a period of unpleasant, meaningless forced labor.” Finally, O’Donnell admitted that the success of the Strategic Hamlet Program had perhaps hinged too much on the “attitude and ability of a few individuals,” such as Maơor Chau. When these independent-minded officials were replaced by more compliant functionaries, pacification “did not move forward and often moved backward.”

While also acknowledging the “many difficulties” created b) the “direction” of the Strategic Hamlet program, yACV staff ofnicer Wēlliam A. Smith ūzquared in 1964 that the concept behind the program was still the “best available ...efor wişping the sar.” Echoing the smntimen of British countermnsurgenoy advíor, Sir Robe-t Thompon, Smēth indicated that current objective{jould not be “to reevaluate the coîcept of the

39. “In Kien Hoa, and for that matter in most of the Mekong Delta,” O’Donnell noted, “the people live in loose population groupings strung out along a road, canal, or river. The hamlet perimeters were in many cases four or five kilometers long, too long to be effectively guarded by the two squads of militia authorized for each hamlet.” Ibid., 718.
40. Ibid., 720.
41. Ibid., 718-19.
42. Ibid., 737.
strategék hamlet program, bu| rather the manner in +hich it’ is implementmd.”⁴³

According to him, the desire nor “pêsonal safetyôe was wdêspread among South
Vietnam’s rural people, and many had come to view the strategic(hamletês the
ýechanism for providing them “needed protection” against the Viet Cong.⁴⁴ This MACV
official laid the primary burden for the failure of the Diem’s pacification program on his
brother Ngo Dinh Nhu, who had allegedly distrustèd the military and prevented the
employmcnt of regular forces in support,of the country’s strategic hamlets.
Provincial,chiefsôlad had to take on the entire securi|y burdôyn, in adition to thmir
conôuction and adminnistration responsibilties.⁴⁵ Fur|hermore, Smith criticized the
GVN for its forced relocation and labor practices that had supposedly not been a part of
original strategic hamlet design. “In many cases,”ôhe admitted, such maladroît behavior
had,”nothing more than fos|er incôœased discontent among the people.”⁴⁶ Still| the
stigma attached, to pacificatioî because of Nhu andôthe faulty administrmtion of some
strategichamлетs| he contended, “should not be allowed to detract” from the program’s
value as a future model.⁴⁷

Interreænum

Followêng the ieath of President Diem, the sour mood prevalent among US social
scientists and government officials in South Viêtname with regard to the GVN, if

⁴³ William A. Smith, Jr., “The Strategic Hamlet Program in Vietnam,” Military Review 44, no. 5 (May
⁴⁴ Ibid., 22.
⁴⁵ Ibid., 19.
⁴⁶ Ibid., 20.
⁴⁷ Ibid., 23.
anything, grew worse. Despite the existence of significant political opportunities in the provinces, most commentators accused the revolving-door regimes of the interregnum period (1963-1965) of retaining the arrogant and ineffectual rural policies of the previous regime. Only a few American officials believed that their GVN counterpart had learned from past mistakes and, were pyrsuing a more enlightened people’s warfare strategy.

Instead, the South Vietnamese government continued to, erode its political base outside the capital by purging Buddhist supporters in the north, discriminating against the montagnard in the Central Highlands, and generally dismissing the opinions of the majority peasant population. Administratively, post-Diem regimes were able to establish a governmental presence throughout much of the country, but this presence was diminished by the outbreak of factional fighting at the village and provincial levels.

Some US observers viewed the New Life Hamlet program as simply the reincarnation of Diem’s Strateoiic Hamlet program. Others were more charitable, pointing to policy changes in understanding force tactics, village relocation, expansional strategy, and measures of progress. Finally, with regard to the South Vietnamese army in the villages, Americans lamented its poor soldierly skills, demoralized condition, and the seeming unavailability of loyal territorial force recruits.

In the summer of 1964, Rufus Phillips, the American official in charge of support for the GVN Strategic Hamlet program, interpreted the superficial signs of some progress in pacification... to mean that the complementary trend has certainly been reversed. According to Phillips, the GVN lacked a firm politikal base, either among its own officers and civil servants or in the countryside, and South
Vietnam remained “highly vulnerable to a Viet Cong take-over through internal collépse.” 48 Assessing tile reasons for the demióé of the Strategme Hamlet Program in 1963, Phillips contended that the root problem was ineffective security measures for the resettled population. Thý(Diem regime had placed provincial officials under too much pressure to demonstrate quick results. Unfortunately, the post-Diem regime in Saigon was “repealing past mistakes” with respect to the New‘Life Hamlet program.

The average Vietnamese villager was fed up with being “secured” over and over again, and though not enamored of the Viet Cong, had lost his faith in the Government’s ability to protect him. This was a shame, Phillips believed. Many peasant had participated willingly in the GVN’s resettlement effort because of the attendant social and economic benefits and could have continued to support the program had the government provided them with “real security” in the event of Communist reprisals. 49

William Nighswonger’s retrospective assessment of the Strategic Hamlet endeavor and its follow-on New Life Hamlet Program was equally dispairing. According to this former AID provincial representative in Quang Nam, pacification in South Vietnam had been transformed from a “realistic goal” in 1962-63 into a nearly impossible dream by late 1964. 50 What had happened? Most importantly, Vietnamese and American officials during the Diem era had had very different ideas concerning the role of the prospective Strategic Hamlet dweller within the program. The Americans

49 Ibid., 4-5.
purportedly had sought the peasant’s active participation in the pacification process, but
despite its revolutionary rhetoric, the Diem government had displayed little “concern
about the peasant’s interests and probable response to the [Strategic Hamlet] program.”

Even so, strategic hamlet mastermind, Ngo Dinh Nhu, had expected the peasantry to bear
the brunt of making their communities into “self-sufficient” bastions of government
support. In addition, while apparently absorbing the principles of Maoist-style people’s
warfare, Nhu had failed to establish a grassroots apparatus “comparable to the highly
skilled and motivated Communist rural cadre system.”

Finally, Nighswonger outlined specific problems hampering Quang Nam’s pacification program in 1963-4. These
included a GVN campaign to oust local officials suspected of harboring pro-Buddhist
sympathies; inattention to the needs of the Highlander population, and a misguided
emphasis on constructing hamlets in the relatively remote, VC-infested districts rather
than in more populous and defensible coastal areas.

From R. Michael Pearce’s perspective as a researcher working on the Cambodian
border, the new and improved New Life Hamlet program -- announced during General
Nguyen Khanh’s brief presidency in 1964 -- seemed like old wine rebottled. Both were
based on the idea of clustering the population behind barbed wire and barricades to keep
them insulated from contact with the Viet Cong. Both were unpopular with the people of
the village, and both were flawed not so much in their design but in the callous attitudes

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51 Ibid., 59.
52 Ibid., 69.
53 Ibid., 103.
54 Ibid., 105.
55 Ibid., 116.
of the officials charged with carrying them out at the village level. In many of their dealings with the villagers, GVN representatives appeared to do what they wanted without explanation or consideration for the feelings of Duc Lap’s residents. The RAND researcher did give the post-Diem regime faint praise for filling three of the four full-time official positions in Duc Lap, which had at least re-established a governmental presence in the village in the face of Viet Cong attempts to assassinate and kidnap local notables. Nevertheless, factional infighting compromised the effectiveness of the village council. During the period of his initial observation of the village in 1964, Duc Lap went through a leadership crisis that ended in the deposing of a respected, but politically unconnected, village chief and in his replacement by a former underling -- an unpopular and incompetent finance officer -- who just happened to have the support of Hau Nghia’s province chief.

By contrast, W. Robert Warne and Earl Young, AID provincial representatives in Vinh Binh and Phu Bon respectively, reported some success with local pacification efforts in the early 1960s, particularly amongst their provinces’ minority groups. Warne indicated that the post-Diem chief of Vinh Binh had won plaudits from the people of his

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56 Pearce, The Present, 47.
57 As an example, Pearce described an incident that occurred during the building of an airfield near Duc Lap for which land had been summarily appropriated. While waiting for a return flight to Saigon, the RAND social scientist observed an old woman plant herself in the middle of the runway and refuse to move. According to the woman, the government had seized her land without permission and had not even allowed her “to remove the bones from the nine family graves under the spot where she stood.” Pearce judged this to be “a serious charge against the government, as the Vietnamese, and especially rural dwellers, revere their departed relatives, and their graveyards are considered sacrosanct.” Ibid., 65.
58 Ibid., 68-9.
Mekong Delta province for moving away from a system of forced relocation.\textsuperscript{59} Despite a certain amount of “petty corruption or inept administration,” self-help economic projects also proved quite effective.\textsuperscript{60} From a security standpoint, Vinh Binh communities, with a large proportion of ethnic Cambodians or Catholics, were quite adept at keeping the Communists at bay.\textsuperscript{61} According to Earl Young in Phu Bon, the \textit{montagnard} tribesmen of the central highlands region afforded the GVN certain pacification opportunities. Among other things, the traditional living patterns of many highland tribes made them less antagonistic than many ethnic Vietnamese to government-sponsored resettlement programs. Unlike lowland Vietnamese, \textit{montagnards} were semi-nomadic and community-oriented. As they naturally resided in hamlet-sized groups, “it only remained for the Vietnamese Government to provide them with additional material for their fences, arm the village youth, and supply the trained health worker and other community improvements.”\textsuperscript{62}

Nevertheless, Warne and Young, as well as the chief of AID’s rural operations in South Vietnam in the early 1960s, George Tanham, retained largely negative impressions of official Vietnamese attitudes toward the country’s rural population. The root of the insurgency problem, according to Tanham, was the existence of an “urban-oriented ... self-perpetuating power elite, which, although it may be ‘crashed’ by the able country boy, dominate[d] the entire life of the country.” This elite denigrated the peasantry and

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 51.
cared little for its welfare.\textsuperscript{63} Furthermore, these sentiments permeated the GVN bureaucracy, from the ministerial level down to the level of the mobile action cadres charged with grassroots development and security activities.\textsuperscript{64} Warne supported Tanham’s contention that the real problems associated with pacification in South Vietnam “were not so much monetary or material but human.”\textsuperscript{65} The constant turnover of political-administrative personnel at the national and provincial level, he found, had resulted in pacification slowdowns, reversals of direction, and poor program supervision. Like his superior, the Vinh Binh provincial representative held that hamlet-level “political cadres did not have sufficient commitment and dedication to win the people’s support.”\textsuperscript{66}

Heightening tensions in Phu Bon, in Earl Young’s opinion, was the anti-montagnard bias among both officials and the recently arrived ethnic Vietnamese population. Inexperienced in the ways of the market economy, mountain-dwelling tribesmen in Phu Bon and other central highlands provinces were often taken advantage of by Vietnamese traders living in the valley towns.\textsuperscript{67} For their part, Vietnamese government officials seemed not only to ignore the needs of the Montagnard people, but failed even to learn much about them. Young described the health problems of highlanders, crowded into permanent resettlement camps, as “of a kind only read about in modern America.” During Young’s stay in Phu Bon in the early 1960s, there was not one

\textsuperscript{64} Tanham, “Conclusion,” 129.
\textsuperscript{65} Warne, “Vinh Binh Province,” 57.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} Young, “Phu Bon Province,” 75.
doctor resident in the province of 55,000 people and only a few nurses.68 Furthermore, of
the Vietnamese district chiefs in Phu Bon, Young found only one who had taken the time
to master the language of the indigenous people.69

The American military view of pacification during the interregnum period was
similarly mixed. On the positive side, then-Colonel John H. Cushman, a US Army
advisor assigned to the ARVN 21st Division in the southern Mekong Delta in 1963-64,
had found the Strategic Hamlet Program good in concept, “but the execution left much to
be desired.”70 He estimated that only about a third “of the so-called completed strategic
hamlets” in his divisional sector “met the standards required” by the fall of 1963; and
when the Diem regime was overthrown in November of that year, hamlet construction
“virtually stopped” as the country experienced an administrative shakeup at the provincial
and district levels.71 On the other hand, the Military Revolutionary Council that had
initially replaced Diem moved rather quickly to “address itself to formulating its program
to regain control of the countryside.” And according to this Army officer, the new
pacification guidelines announced in 1964 outshone those of the previous regime. The
21st Division was ordered to abandon its reliance on stationary defenses and to create
mobile units trained in “guerrilla tactics.” Instead of constructing strategic hamlets willy-
nilly, they were to “use the ‘oil spot expansion concept,’ gradually extending our control
outward.” Unlike in the old days, peasant families would not be relocated against their

68 Ibid., 83.
69 Ibid., 87.
70 John H. Cushman, “Pacification: Concepts Developed in the Field By the RVN 21st Infantry Division,”
Army 16, no. 3 (March 1966): 23.
71 Ibid., 24.
will. Furthermore, the New Life Hamlet program “would concentrate on substance and not on form.” No longer would the completion of defensive works be measured in terms of “the number of meters of barbed wire.” Finally, those charged with carrying out pacification measures were told not to feel inhibited about “criticizing or making suggestions” about the overall direction of new pacification program. 72

A fellow military advisor in the III Corps province of Long An, Edwin Chamberlain, held a more jaundiced view of the operation of the New Life Hamlet program. As he saw it, the contentious relationship between South Vietnamese military and provincial officials that had existed during the Diem era persisted into 1964-65 in Long An province. On the one hand, district chiefs refused to surrender direct control over territorial security units as they were required to do so. On the other hand, local ARVN officials “failed to maintain a close working relationship” with their district counterparts. 73 Furthermore, backtracking on the relocation issue in the face of popular protest had compromised the protective capability of the fortified hamlets. From Chamberlain’s observation, New Life Hamlets in Long An had become “little more than a consolidation of existing groups of huts in a given area around which was strung a single strand of barbed wire.” Since many of these hamlet perimeters extended for five kilometers or more, local security forces were often unable to prevent guerrillas from cutting through the wire and sneaking inside. More seriously, the inability or unwillingness to relocate villagers also allowed Communist sympathizers and family

72 Ibíd., 24-5.
members to provide comfort and intelligence to the enemy from their existing abodes.\footnote{Ibid., 36.}

In spite of his regiment’s sincere effort in the area of pacification, Chamberlain freely acknowledged its inability to meet the government’s population security objectives for November 1964. But his unit’s failure did not appear to matter to officials in the capital. “Despite evidence to the contrary,” the provinces around Saigon, including Long An, were “declared secured” by the high command, and the work of consolidating so-called pacification gains had begun in 1965.\footnote{Ibid., 37-8.}

Several hundred miles northward, newly arrived Marine Corps Captain Francis J. (“Bing”) West characterized the pacification situation in much the same way. According to West’s retrospective account of the Combined Action Platoon (CAP) program in the Quang Ngai village of Binh Nghia, non-Communist political and security forces had become demoralized and ineffective by 1964-65. Binh Nghia’s mayor and hamlet elders no longer slept in the village at night, preferring the relative safety of the district compound three miles away. Furthermore, the village’s two dozen Popular Force (PF) militiamen spent most of their time huddled in a crude fort atop a steep hill about a half-mile outside the village, venturing out only during daylight hours.\footnote{Francis J. West, The Village (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 10.} According to West, local Viet Cong forces had little to fear from these part-time soldiers. Forced to supplement their meager income by farming or fishing, Binh Nghia’s PF members lacked the “stamina to patrol and walk guard at night and then toil in the hot fields by day.”\footnote{Ibid., 38.}
What is more, they could not even shoot straight. When CAP Marines first lined up the PF’s for target practice, they watched “slack-jawed” as the latter “missed a mud dike five feet high at fifty yards.”

**Reemphasis on Pacification**

Analyses of the GVN condition by American nationbuilding and counterinsurgency specialists during the period following the US-South Vietnamese reemphasis on pacification (1966-68) begin on a pessimistic note and end, for the most part, on a hopeful one. Throughout the period, however, government officials and social scientists alike continued to berate the South Vietnamese political elite for its conservative, corrupt, uninspiring, and divisive style of leadership. Nevertheless, they pointed to certain political developments that seemed to augur well for the future including, the cooperative efforts of those who created the democratic constitution of 1966, the autonomy agreements reached between the GVN and major regional minorities, the holding of national and local elections in 1967, and the growing nationalistic spirit within the South Vietnamese middle class. The socio-economic picture, too, looked brighter than it had in the early 1960s. Although some American commentators argued that the improvement in the South Vietnamese economy had not resulted in a comparable increase in the GVN’s political standing, others believed that better pay and better jobs -- even if largely financed by the United States -- could not help but redound to the benefit of the Saigon regime. Administratively, the situation appeared murkier. Higher-level US officials claimed to see the beginnings of an inevitable movement toward the

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78 Ibid., 44.
establishment of a rational command and control structure for the nation as a whole. Those in the provinces, however, continued to view the Vietnamese military and civilian bureaucracy as hopelessly tangled and resistant to change.

With regard to specific pacification and development programs, opinions varied widely, but the overall attitudinal direction was from pessimism to optimism. Commentators in 1966 came down harshly on the South Vietnamese armed forces, blaming the generally insecure state of country’s rural population on improper troop behavior and poor military leadership, among other things. By 1967, though, some American observers were expressing their satisfaction with the ARVN’s apparently renewed dedication to pacification, and well as the remarkable improvement in the quality of some paramilitary units. In the immediate aftermath of Tet, US officials argued over the severity of its impact on security; however, most believed by the end of 1968 that the pacification program was on the road to recovery and that the rural population was more willing than before the Communist onslaught to take on the burden of self-defense. Throughout the period in question, analysts and officials continued to perceive serious shortcomings in the Revolutionary Development cadre, land reform implementation, the handling of refugees, and the ‘neutralization’ of Viet Cong political operatives. But the tone of their commentary was generally upbeat. These programmatic problems were resolvable, given increased attention and sincere application on the part of the GVN (and the US).

According to U.S. Army planners in 1966, South Vietnamese leaders had long known what they needed to do to win the rural population over to the anti-Communist
side. And yet Saigon had so far failed to come up with a positive program, comparable to the Viet Cong’s, for creating an emotional attachment among Vietnamese to their new nation. In part, this was because of the continued social conservatism of South Vietnam’s ruling class. Too often, GVN spokesmen with “no genuine interest in social reform” made promises, which “self-interested, corrupt” bureaucrats had no intention of carrying out. While acknowledging that South Vietnamese peasants had “profited by the unprecedented interest in their [material] welfare” taken by both sides in the Vietnam conflict, the PROVN report concluded that the rural population had “demonstrated an unlimited absorptive capacity for socio-economic support without a corresponding commitment to the GVN.” In addition, those charged with executing GVN policy at the provincial level and below were restricted in their “potential as nation building leaders” by their “relatively low rank and lack of social position,” as well as place in South Vietnam’s tangled command and control structure. Although they accepted the inevitability of a certain amount of graft in an Asian country, Army planners thought that graft and corruption in South Vietnam “exceeded any acceptable limit” and had “become major obstacles to effective government.” In sum, the South Vietnamese government

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80 Ibid., 43-4.
81 Ibid., 76-77.
82 Ibid., 4-32.
83 Ibid., 1-71 and 5-32.
84 Ibid., 3-42.
was “neither efficient nor effective,” and its precarious existence was made possible “solely” through “US support and by the exercise of military power.”\textsuperscript{86}

To make matters worse, the security component of nationbuilding in Vietnam was in little better shape than the political component. At the heart of the ARVN’s inability to control the bulk of the population were three basic character flaws: its association with the colonialist past, the misbehavior of its troops vis-a-vis the civilian population, and the generally poor quality of its officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs). According to the US Army planners, the “stigma” attached to the South Vietnamese military “‘of siding with the [French] colonialists and resisting the fight for independence persists to this day.”\textsuperscript{87} The ARVN’s initial reputation amongst Vietnamese patriots was not enhanced by more recent unsoldierlike behavior, “ranging from casual ill treatment of local people to downright brutality”\textsuperscript{88} to indiscriminate aerial attacks and artillery fire.\textsuperscript{89} Fundamentally, the ARVN’s lack of success could be attributed to a military system that discouraged good leaders from rising to the top. Officers and non-commissioned officers, PROVN asserted, were more likely to be “selected on the basis of education rather than demonstrated leadership and motivation.”\textsuperscript{90}

The consequences of South Vietnamese governmental callousness and ineffectiveness in the political and security arenas were twofold. Among educated, politically-aware people, the GVN’s inability to fulfill their aspirations heightened

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 1-4.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 1-19.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 5-19.
\textsuperscript{89} PROVN, vol. 1, 35.
\textsuperscript{90} PROVN, vol. 2, 5-65.
tensions and boosted insurgent capabilities.\textsuperscript{91} Among the majority peasant population, governmental stagnation produced political apathy.\textsuperscript{92}

In Saigon, the special assistant to the Office of Civil Operations (OCO) chief, Daniel Ellsberg, reached a similar conclusion in 1966 with regard to South Vietnamese popular attitudes. Even in relatively secure parts of the South Vietnamese countryside, he believed that the GVN was having little success in inducing people either to commit themselves to the anti-Communist cause or to actively resist the Viet Cong.\textsuperscript{93} To support his contention, Ellsberg subsequently related an absurdist tale concerning a visit to the village of Loc Tien in Long An Province. Although declared “secure” according to the existing pacification criteria, this village was far from “secure,” as local American and South Vietnamese pacification officials freely admitted to their visitor from the capital. Pointing to the earthen wall built around the periphery of one of Loc Tien’s hamlets by the village’s Revolutionary Development team, the US district adviser declared it “useless” without a battalion of men to guard it.\textsuperscript{94} Casting doubt on the notion of village elections as an indicator of hamlet security, the same adviser told Ellsberg that the elected chiefs of two of Loc Tien’s elected hamlet chiefs had recently been kidnapped, along with their families, by the Viet Cong.\textsuperscript{95} Even the South Vietnamese head of the village Revolutionary Development team reportedly had misgivings regarding the pacification plan that he had recently helped to fulfill in Loc Tien. “The cadre were not

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 1-20.  
\textsuperscript{92} PROVN, vol. 1, 40.  
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 212-13.  
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 213.
here long enough to accomplish anything,’” he confided to Ellsberg. “But even if they had been here much longer, they could not have changed the people’s attitudes, because the people are afraid.” 96

By contrast, President Lyndon Johnson’s special assistant for the “Other War,” Robert Komor, was arguing in the summer of 1966 that allied prospects with respect to the wartime nationbuilding were improving. The leaders of South Vietnam and the United States had clearly demonstrated their collective will at the February 1966 Honolulu Conference “to move forward” and “make progress” on matters of pacification and development. 97 Furthermore, the establishment by the Saigon government of a “Superministry of Rural Construction” (better known to Americans as the Ministry of Revolutionary Development) in August 1965 indicated that “an integrated management system at the national level” was poised to tackle “the breadth and complexity of the problems” related to pacification. 98 On the American side, the administration’s wholehearted endorsement of the revolutionary development concept placed its involvement in Vietnam firmly within the context of the United States’ idealistic mission abroad. “This constructive ‘other war,’” Komor asserted, “is in our highest tradition. It is for and with the people of Vietnam. It offers them the crucial assurance that their future will be better than their past.” 99

96 Ibid., 222.
98 Ibid., 558-9.
99 Ibid., 551.
The consensus of the mostly government-sponsored social scientists attending the first Southeast Asian Development Advisory Group (SEADAG) conference on Vietnam in May 1967, however, was that the American goal of an independent, non-Communist South Vietnam was unlikely to endure without the establishment of a stable, cohesive national government in Saigon with ties to the people inside and outside the capital. 

According to David Wurfel, a political scientist from the University of Missouri, the strange, hybrid quality of the South Vietnamese political elite, part French intellectual and part latter-day mandarin, not only separated citydwelling rulers from the majority of their subjects in the countryside, but gave Saigonese politicians a conservative cast of mind “unique in Southeast Asia.”

I. Milton Sacks, the head of research and development for AID’s Far East Training Center, emphasized the fractious nature of the South Vietnamese political system which was composed of a “multiplicity of parties,” “movements,” and “warring factions.” Furthermore, South Vietnam’s politics was divided still more by the disdain of civilian nationalists for the dominant military class. From their perspective, too many current generals had fought against their own people in the war against French colonialism; in addition, their Confucian value system did not “hold the profession of bearing arms in high regard.”

Despite their largely negative remarks regarding past US-GVN political development endeavors, several SEADAG conferees looked hopefully toward the future.

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Temple University political scientist Charles Joiner, for example, predicted that the return to civilian government as a result of the 1967 national elections in South Vietnam would increase both popular acceptance of government and administrative efficiency, even if the military continued to play a major role in the new regime.\textsuperscript{103} And plans to elect legislative assemblies at the village, province, and national levels presaged further political and administrative integration.\textsuperscript{104} For his part, Professor Sacks was favorably impressed by the process by which the South Vietnamese Constituent Assembly and constitution had come into being in 1966. Despite their feelings of mutual disdain, military and civilian components of South Vietnam’s political elite had been forced to compromise with one another in this endeavor, making a “virtue out of a necessity, because to turn back or stop the process would be too disruptive and endanger too much.”\textsuperscript{105}

Focusing on the other end of the political development spectrum, Joiner’s Temple University colleague John Donnell painted a confusing picture of the state of South Vietnamese rural pacification circa 1967. On the positive side, Donnell praised changes in the government-sponsored cadre program designed to inject an energetic, sympathetic, and constructive GVN presence into the country’s villages and hamlets. Compared to the much smaller Rural Construction teams of the Strategic Hamlet era, post-1965 Revolutionary Development (RD) cadre spent a longer period of time in a given area, received superior preparatory instruction at the newly established cadre-training facility at

\begin{flushleft}\textsuperscript{103} Joiner, “The Ubiquity of the Administrative Role in Counterinsurgency,” 552.\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 554.\textsuperscript{105} Sacks, “Restructuring Government in South Vietnam,” 520-1.\end{flushleft}
Vung Tau, and were considerably better paid.\textsuperscript{106} In emulation of the Communist practice, RD personnel were also subjected to intensive political indoctrination.\textsuperscript{107} In addition, unlike the situation in the past where pacification teams moved mechanically from village to village as soon as certain pre-established criteria had been met, it appeared that “the needed follow-up” was now taking place to ensure that pacified areas did not regress.\textsuperscript{108} Finally, Donnell perceived the beginnings of a politically-healthy grassroots movement growing out of the Revolutionary Development program “to challenge the urban based, middle and upper-class oriented elites” in the GVN’s military and civil service.\textsuperscript{109}

These positive developments had not, however, prevented the overall pacification program from stalling in 1967. Recognizing a threat to its rural infrastructure, the Viet Cong had gone all out to counter GVN operations in the villages. In addition, the growth in US-GVN pacification activities had exacerbated existing problems of coordination among various bureaucratic agencies with different missions, priorities, and chains of command.\textsuperscript{110} Furthermore, American and South Vietnamese military commanders had not yet indicated their unambiguous support for pacification in the form of continuous screening operations in the vicinity of populous lowland regions of South Vietnam.\textsuperscript{111} Most importantly, the fact that non-Communist South Vietnamese leaders were too often unable to put aside “personal, familial, and factional” differences in the interest of the

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 570.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 571.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 576.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 572.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 574.
nation as a whole had a negative impact on the Revolutionary Development program, whose cadres were often caught up in local rivalries.\textsuperscript{112} Viewing the process of nationbuilding from an economic perspective, Washington-based AID analyst John Bennett presented the 1967 SEADAG conference with a rather optimistic assessment of South Vietnam’s development prospects, claiming that the average South Vietnamese citizen was clearly “on the move upward.” Not only was he likely to have a job; he was earning more as he learned new skills and entered into more productive fields of employment.\textsuperscript{113} This was true of the rural peasant and, even more so, of his urbanized cousin. Both were “better off economically than at any time in recent history.” Of course, he hastened to add, “their welfare may be severely discounted by the local security situation.” Bennett related improvements in the South Vietnamese standard of living to the development of a more diversified, market-oriented economic system, less dependent on the production of rice.\textsuperscript{114} What is more, the process of economic modernization was helped along by the creation of approximately two million refugees since 1964 and the recent rapid expansion in the population of the cities.\textsuperscript{115} Bennett concluded that “we are now dealing with a Vietnamese economy that is much more like those in the West,” where most people lived in or near cities, worked for

\textsuperscript{112} For example, those that existed among ARVN commanders and Dai Viet and VNQDD (Nationalist) party factions. Ibid., 574-5.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
wages, and were protected from economic disaster by governments that were “intimately involved” in the lives of their citizens.\footnote{\textsuperscript{116}}

A few dark spots were nevertheless evident on South Vietnam’s economic horizon. For instance, out of a population of 17 million in 1967 -- about half of whom were considered to be in the active labor force -- one and a quarter million South Vietnamese worked for either the GVN or the United States, the majority in the military or the paramilitary forces.\footnote{\textsuperscript{117}} How these people would be reintegrated into the civilian economy once the war was over was not clear. In addition, South Vietnamese prosperity was apparently fueled, in large part, by imports from the U.S. and elsewhere. This import boom, which had been evident since 1964, was apparently fueled by increased consumption in traditional rice deficit areas, combined with decreased production there attributable to the war, as well as the growing appetite among South Vietnamese generally for Western-style consumer goods.\footnote{\textsuperscript{118}} How the people of South Vietnam would adjust to a drastic reduction in imports at war’s end was again not clear.

Two researchers from the RAND Corporation, Gerald Hickey and Allan Goodman, espied opportunities for political accommodation in South Vietnam in the movement toward democracy taking place at the national and regional levels in the mid-1960s. Although these changes involved elements of accommodation among non-Communist “sociopolitical groups,” they implied that this process might be extended to include Viet Cong supporters under certain conditions. An expert on Indochinese

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 8.} \\
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 3.} \\
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 4-5.}
minority groups, Hickey argued in 1967 that the vigorous defense of their homelands and cultures maintained by certain religious sects and ethnic organizations was a hopeful sign for the non-Communist side, and Saigon authorities were belatedly beginning to see it as such.\footnote{Hickey focused particularly on the Hoa Hao of the lower Mekong Delta and the Central Highlander political-military coalition, the Unified Front for the Struggle of Oppressed Races (or FULRO to use the French acronym).} As evidence of the GVN’s positive inclination toward minority groups, Hickey pointed to the autonomy agreement that the government of Nguyen Cao Ky had reached with the Hoa Hao religious sect in An Giang province in 1966.\footnote{Gerald C. Hickey, Accommodation in South Vietnam: The Key to Sociopolitical Solidarity (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, October 1967), 15.}

In 1967, two teams of researchers from the Human Sciences Corporation, working for the US Department of Defense, reached somewhat different conclusions regarding the impact of refugee flows on South Vietnamese nationbuilding efforts. The team headed by A. Terry Rambo argued, in the case of central coastal province of Phu Yen, that refugee migration had presented Saigon with “a major ‘negative’ gain” by simply denying the Viet Cong the use of a major part of the population.\footnote{A. Terry Rambo et al., The Refugee Situation in Phu-Yen Province, Viet-Nam (McLean, VA: Human Sciences Research Corporation, July 1967), xv.} Furthermore, the deleterious aspects usually associated with refugee movement turned out to be rather insignificant.\footnote{In Phu Yen, such migration had neither “resulted in the creation of a large underemployed and dissatisfied urban mass...nor large numbers of refugees living in the atomic conditions of temporary regroupment camps.” Indeed, almost 90% of the refugees were residing in “more or less integrated into hamlets with at least some pre-existing political and social structure.” Ibid., 109-10.} Still, the GVN had yet to transform the refugee situation in Phu Yen from a negative into a “‘positive’ asset.”\footnote{Ibid., xv.} Refugee policies at both the national and provincial levels were ill-defined.\footnote{Ibid., 68.} Over one-third of the refugees in Phu Yen...
apparently received no government assistance. Furthermore, the government seemed to make little effort to converse with the refugee population in order to bring these people into the anti-Communist camp in more than just a physical sense.

According to Jerry Tinker, refugee migration in the Mekong Delta province of Dinh Tuong exhibited different characteristics from those identified by his Human Sciences colleagues in central Vietnam. For one thing, despite having experienced a substantial movement of refugees, the Mekong Delta’s abundant resources and superior transportation system meant that the refugee situation in Dinh Tuong did not impose the same degree of hardship on the population or the government bureaucracy as it did in Phu Yen. Furthermore, local officials had made an effort to incorporate refugees into the GVN’s pacification program. It was Tinker’s impression, also, that GVN representatives in Dinh Tuong held “few of the negative feelings toward refugees that have crippled refugee programs in some other provinces.” Paradoxically, refugees interviewed by Tinker in Dinh Tuong -- in contrast to the Phu Yen interviewees -- perceived the government and the US military as more responsible than the Viet Cong for their having to leave their homes.

125 Ibid., 104.
126 Ibid., 103.
128 For example, he pointed to a program to resettle “refugees along the principal roads of the province as a means of contributing to road security.” Ibid., ix.
129 Ibid., 50-1.
130 South Vietnamese artillery and aerial bombardment, Tinker noted, “were the causal agents most frequently associated with refugee movement....” Ibid., vi.
Like the refugee project teams of the Human Sciences Corporation, other private-sector social scientists working for the Defense Department projected a cautiously optimistic attitude regarding the likelihood of the GVN’s beating back the Communist insurgency. The Hudson Institute’s Raymond Gastil, for instance, characterized the pacification situation in 1967 as “a stalemate with glimmerings of success.” On the one hand, he expressed distaste for the meaningless rhetoric and “contempt for all that went before” on the part of U.S. and GVN officials responsible for pacification. According to Gastil, the allies mistakenly flouted the Vietnamese tradition of localized autonomy and behaved “as though the village were meaningless and arbitrary,” without distinctive boundaries and political-economic arrangements. He also chastised the GVN pacification bureaucracy and its American advisors for trying to best the Communists at their own game of ideological warfare. When it came to revolutionary sloganeering, Saigon’s cadres could not “compete with the communists.” What the non-Communist approach to nationbuilding had to offer in the form of representative democracy and free market capitalism, Gastil argued, could not be easily reduced to a few stirring, utopian phrases.

On the other hand, Gastil was far from despondent about the GVN’s chances. Despite his unhappiness with certain U.S./GVN attitudes and the spottiness of pacification results, he pointed to several “tangible ... pluses” in the 1967 program, which might bring the whole Viet Cong effort to the point of collapse within a year. Like

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131 Ibid., 10-11.
132 Ibid., 18.
133 Ibid., 33.
RAND's Gerald Hickey, he was pleased by the increasing willingness of regional power
groups, such as the Hoa Hao and some montagnard tribes, to side with the government
and expand their territorial domains. Second, like the Rambo team, Gastil believed that
the flight of refugees into GVN-controlled areas was complicating the Communist
"problem of providing communications, food and recruits." Finally, the Hudson Institute
analyst argued that the proven success of some local Vietnamese officials in
administering various pacification programs indicated that the Viet Cong could be
effectively contested on the national level as well.\footnote{Ibid., 2 and 14.}

For his part, RAND researcher R. Michael Pearce found the situation in his Hau
Nghia village to be worse in 1967 than when he had first visited it in the period after
Diem's ouster. "Unfortunately," he wrote, "what happened in Duc Lap after November
1964 was not the expansion of pacification as planned, but a series of incidents" which
led to "the virtual abandonment of the village" by the GVN.\footnote{The first of these
incidents was killing of the commander of the local South Vietnamese army battalion
and his U.S. advisor in a Viet Cong ambush. R. Michael Pearce, Evolution of a
Vietnamese Village, part 3, Duc Lap Since November 1964 and Some Comments on
Village Pacification (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, February 1967), ix.}
It was not just that the
government had lost a battle and would have to start over in its endeavors to win the
support of villagers. The real problem was that the village had already experienced
pacification once, and having failed, the government was going to have to work twice as
hard the second time around. Duc Lap residents would be less likely next time to place
their security in the hands of GVN forces who might abandon them again.

\footnote{Ibid., 2 and 14.}
\footnote{The first of these incidents was killing of the commander of the local South Vietnamese army battalion
and his U.S. advisor in a Viet Cong ambush. R. Michael Pearce, Evolution of a
Vietnamese Village, part 3, Duc Lap Since November 1964 and Some Comments on
Village Pacification (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, February 1967), ix.}
Despite his sobering analysis, Pearce remained hopeful that the GVN and its US ally would eventually prevail in Hau Nghia. As he saw it, the success of the Viet Cong in the countryside could not be attributed to their enviable “organization, dedication, and discipline.” The defeat of South Vietnamese pacification efforts, he wrote, “attests not so much to a Viet Cong victory as to a GVN failure.”\textsuperscript{136} The government of South Vietnam had simply not tried hard enough to gain the active support of its rural citizenry. One glimmer of hope, he believed, was the aid that the United States was selflessly providing to the South Vietnamese, most of whom -- in Duc Lap at least -- had learned the falsity of Viet Cong propaganda that the Americans had come to their country to take the place of the French.\textsuperscript{137}

The “big picture,” statistically-driven view of the “Other War,” presented in the monthly reports of researchers working for the US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Systems Analysis, was similarly negative with regard to the condition of the GVN in 1967. A March report by Southeast Asia Division (SEAD) analysts described how the principle of village control over local security forces had been subverted through bureaucratic intrigue.\textsuperscript{138} On a more practical level, the South Vietnamese government

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 77.
\textsuperscript{137} Pearce, \textit{The Past}, xi.
\textsuperscript{138} The language of a crucial administrative decree was apparently changed under pressure from the South Vietnamese Ministry of Defense so that village chiefs obtained the authority only to “request the Popular Forces to provide support.” See Thomas C. Thayer, ed., \textit{A Systems Analysis View of the Vietnam War 1965-1972}, vol. 10, \textit{Pacification and Civil Affairs} (Washington, DC: Assistant Secretary of Defense for Systems Analysis, Southeast Asia Intelligence Division, February 1975), 38-9, NTIS, AD/A-039 317, microfiche.
was having great trouble “recruiting and retaining high quality” officials in rural areas.\(^{139}\)

A September report noted that one of eight South Vietnamese was, or had been, a refugee. This development, SEAD analysts concluded, had not only caused a “severe strain” on GVN social welfare agencies, but had helped to transform South Vietnam from a rice exporting nation to “a heavy importer” in that most refugees had originated from agricultural regions of the country. Analysts acknowledged that the refugee situation had a positive side “in the form of an increase of population under the control of the GVN.” “However,” they stressed, “the fracturing of the rural society, urbanization and the difficulties of refugee life tend to make the gain of somewhat doubtful value in terms of nationbuilding.”\(^{140}\)

The military’s assessment of the GVN’s pacification situation in 1967 was somewhat brighter. Brigadier General William Desobry, the senior US military advisor in IV Corps (lower Mekong Delta) in 1966-67, acknowledged in his end of tour report that, until recently, little had been accomplished in terms of pacification. South Vietnamese troops had found it difficult enough to operate in the region, much less pacifying the people and had focused their efforts on whittling down Viet Cong strength.\(^{141}\) It was not until 1967 that a “meaningful pacification and development program” had been established. Each ARVN Division had selected critical Revolutionary

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\(^{139}\) For example, SEAD analysts indicated that “total desertions” of Revolutionary Development “workers rose 354\% from January to May 1967,” with the jump in the Central Highlands region being almost twice the national increase. Ibid., 40.

\(^{140}\) Ibid., 108.

Development targets and had allocated five maneuver battalions to population control. As a result of this dedicated effort, the GVN had increased its control to approximately sixty percent of the southern Mekong Delta population by the end of the year.\textsuperscript{142} Also, during this period, actions against the Communist political organization were becoming more successful.\textsuperscript{143} Advances were being made, too, in psychological operations programs designed to turn the heads of wavering Viet Cong soldiers and cautious peasants.\textsuperscript{144}

Still, significant problems continued to plague various pacification and development programs in IV Corps. The anti-Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI) campaign, in particular, suffered from a myriad of enforcement and intelligence problems. The South Vietnamese legal code hindered efforts to apprehend and convict captured Viet Cong political operatives. In addition, the National Police Field Forces were incompetent to perform their anti-VCI strike force mission. Communist penetration of -- as well as corruption within -- the Revolutionary Development cadre, the Police Special Branch, and the South Vietnamese Army also hampered anti-VCI program development.\textsuperscript{145} In the area of intelligence collection, “difficulties” had arisen in obtaining sufficient information on VCI locations and activities “to generate an accurate target.” On the operational side, Desobry noted that many “infrastructure targets” resided in areas outside

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{143} Desobry attributed this, in large part, to the effectiveness of the CIA-trained South Vietnamese Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRUs). Ibid., E-3-C-1/2.
\textsuperscript{144} The Chieu Hoi defector program, which had apparently “fall[en] into the doldrums” for several years, registered “a massive returnee input,” partly as a result of “renewed [high-level] interest” and American advisory pressure on the South Vietnamese during 1967. Ibid., E-4-1.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., E-3-B-2.
government control. Finally, despite the enforcement successes of the Provincial
Reconnaissance Units, Desobry doubted that “their effectiveness as the primary
neutralizer of the VC infrastructure” would increase without better intelligence and
operational support from other allied agencies.146

For his part, the commander of Fleet Marine Force Pacific, Lieutenant General
Victor H. Krulak seemed reasonably satisfied with South Vietnam’s military and political
achievements since the arrival of the Americans in-force in 1965. During a luncheon
speech to the Honolulu Rotary Club in the fall of 1967, he noted that two and a half years
before his Marines in I Corps “could scarcely spread their arms out without being in a
hostile country,” whereas today could “get in a jeep near the Demilitarized Zone and
drive for several hundred miles down Highway 1, the so-called “Street Without Joy,”
without incident.147 As a further sign of progress, he pointed to the holding, at the local
and national level, of “free democratic elections” in 1967 -- “something the Viet Cong
had tried and failed to prevent.”148 Still, building a nation in the midst of war was not
going to be easy. Krulak told a General Officers Symposium in 1967 that it would take
five years to show meaningful progress in pacification.149 Making this objective more
difficult was the fact that the South Vietnamese army was not devoting itself to
pacification-related duties. In a letter to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in

146 Ibid., E-3-C-2.
147 Victor H. Krulak, Luncheon Speech to the Honolulu Rotary Club, Honolulu, HI, 19 September 1967,
Personal Papers Collection, Victor H. Krulak Papers, PC # 486, Box 2, Location 1A27, Speech File, July-
148 Ibid., 8-9.
149 Victor H. Krulak, General Officers Symposium, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific Operations, Honolulu, HI,
undated, Personal Papers Collection, Victor H. Krulak Papers, PC # 486, Box 2, Location 1A27, Trip
January 1967, Krulak doubted whether ten percent of total ARVN battalions were involved in protecting the people from harassment, depredations and oppression from the Viet Cong.” The majority of GVN military units, Krulak suspected, were “busy reacting to the initiatives of the Main Force or involved in static defensive activities of limited productivity.”

Further down the Marine Corps chain of command, Captain Francis West indicated that the GVN’s role in the pacification of his village in Quang Ngai was rather complicated: helpful in some respects, deleterious in others. On the one hand, West recorded the dramatic improvement in 1966-67 of those Vietnamese with whom the Marines worked most closely, the members of the village’s Popular Forces unit. On the other hand, West displayed a much less benevolent attitude toward local Vietnamese politicians, policemen, and GVN-sponsored Revolutionary Development workers. There were some noteworthy exceptions, but these mostly tended to be mavericks bent on flouting the governmental system rather than working within it. Although unwilling to accuse them of corrupt acts or malevolent intentions, this CAP observer was openly disparaging of Binh Nghia’s youthful band of Revolutionary Development cadres, whom he considered lazy, hapless, and out-of-touch with the beliefs and customs of the local

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151 The local security chief, for instance, was an ex-Viet Minh battalion commander, who “had a fanatic’s belief in the injustice of the Communist cause,” but nevertheless copied his enemies’ “superb” organization and propaganda tactics. More typical of local officialdom was the appointed village chief, a corrupt absentee landowner, who employed his connections with the regionally-dominant VNQDD (Nationalist) party to defeat the mayoral candidacy of the poor elected hamlet chief befriended by the Marines. West, The Village, 174 and 176.
inhabitants. “The Marines,” West wrote, “never saw an RD bending his back in a paddy, while the teenaged RD’s themselves laughed when the old farmers sarcastically asked their advice on planting.”

With the publication of his book, Betrayal, in 1968, Lieutenant Colonel William Corson, a Marine Corps CAP commander in Vietnam from 1965 to 1967, became the enfant terrible of the pacification community. In this and a subsequent article, Corson systematically trashed every South Vietnamese and American attempt at pacification from Ngo Dinh Diem’s Civic Action Teams to Robert Kommer’s CORDS agency, with the notable exception of his own CAP program. He considered the Revolutionary Development program to be “essentially a giant public-works program with little or no real emphasis on social revolution.” As for the RD cadre, they possessed “no real authority to carry out the reforms that were part of their assigned mission” in the face of opposition from local government officials. Going beyond mere criticism of the GVN’s pacification machinery, Corson attacked every aspect of South Vietnam’s sociopolitical system. At the level of high policy, he accused Premier Ky of choosing Alexander’s simple, but ruthless, solution to the “Gordian knot of pacification.” Rather than slowly unraveling it by “actually winning support for his government,” Ky intended to “cut it by killing anyone who does not actively support him.” The problem of South

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152 Ibid., 151. In his estimation, when the RD’s departed Binh Nghia in April 1967, claiming they had pacified the area, “they left behind little evidence of their stay” beyond a weed-ridden “Anti-Communist Vegetable Garden” and “a rickety bamboo fence,” which the local Viet Cong authorities promptly ordered taken down. Ibid., 206.


154 Corson, The Betrayal (New York: W.W. Norton, 1968), 120.
Vietnamese governmental corruption, according to Corson, had reached the point where only a small percentage of the massive quantities of American material were making it down to RD cadres in the villages.\textsuperscript{155} He also deplored the rigid class structure in South Vietnam which he attributed to the fact that “education [was] a closed corporation, open only to the social elite.”\textsuperscript{156} Although he found nothing inherently wrong with a land system based on absentee ownership, he believed that too many South Vietnamese landlords had illegally “reacquired” control of properties supposedly taken from them by the Diem-era land reform and continued to charge their tenants exorbitant rents.\textsuperscript{157}

Corson’s negative outlook was shared by William Desobry’s former colleague in III Corps (upper Mekong Delta), Deputy Senior Advisor Colonel Gus Peters, who openly questioned the so-called pacification achievements of 1967-68. What exercised him most was the organizational unification of the military and civil aspects of pacification on both the South Vietnamese and American sides. With respect to the GVN, he claimed that elevation of the province chief to the position of military and civil leader “seriously reduce[d] his effectiveness as a military commander.” According to Peters, the province chief could not simultaneously run the local government and “efficiently employ the regular troops under his operational control.” Furthermore, many regular South Vietnamese army officers considered the assignment of their battalions to a provincial pacification support role as “demeaning.” Taking away their right to go head to head

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 122-3.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 124.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 129-30.
with the enemy’s main forces, sapped their units’ “enthusiasm” and “tended to induce a static [military] situation.”

In early 1968, however, a favorite American rural development policy -- land reform -- received an upbeat, if mixed, review from an AID-funded study by the Stanford Research Institute (SRI). According to the study’s director, William Bredo the GVN had managed since the mid-1950s to “eliminate the worst features of Asian landlordism.” As a result of the Diem regime’s Ordinance 57, South Vietnamese peasants were no longer in thrall to absentee landowners with thousands of hectares of riceland who pursued a life of idle luxury in Saigon and other urban areas. Furthermore, the GVN was on the right conceptual track with regard to agrarian reform. It sought to maintain a system in which both the landlord and the tenant had a stake “in achieving a highly productive and modernized agriculture.” What is more, the government, unlike the Communists, insisted on carrying out the process of expropriating and redistributing landlord properties in accordance with the law, and provided former tenants with permanent title to expropriated land that they purchased.

On the downside, Bredo indicated that the “benefits of widespread land ownership” had been limited during 1961-65 “by war, political instability, and difficulties of administration.” As late as 1968, only 59 percent of expropriated lands had been distributed to new owners; and less than

160 Ibid., 2-3 and 148.
161 Ibid., 1.
15 percent of those receiving land had obtained permanent title to it.\textsuperscript{162} The GVN’s attempt to hold rents paid by tenant farmers below 25 percent of the value of their annual harvest had also been substantially thwarted by “the forces of supply and demand.” Furthermore, sharecropping contracts, which predominated in the central lowlands region, had been specifically exempted from regulation in the 1956 legislation.\textsuperscript{163}

As AID provrep in the central Vietnamese provinces of Quang Nam and Quang Tri from 1966 to 1968, Jan Vanderbie had few illusions regarding the GVN’s chances of eroding the Viet Cong’s rural base of support. Summing up his experience with GVN officialdom, Vanderbie wrote in his 1970 memoir that “little by little we found out that the Vietnamese government channels were blocked when it came to action leading to meaningful change.” The reason for this recalcitrance, Vanderbie concluded, was that “the rulers in Saigon preferred the status quo and resisted all efforts that threatened to upset their hold on the situation.”\textsuperscript{164} What is more, this conservative attitude at the top had percolated down through the ranks of the military and the civil service. The South Vietnamese army, according to Vanderbie, “probably had the ability” to mount an effective counterinsurgency campaign, but preferred to “play ... it safe” and withdraw into its “well-defended compounds” come nightfall.\textsuperscript{165} And South Vietnamese civil servants had developed an elaborate scheme -- partly, American-inspired and, partly,

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 20-21
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 26.
homespun -- for avoiding responsibility for failures in the pacification and development programs. 166

Vanderbie also contended that the GVN’s unique “system of checks and balances” at the provincial and ministerial levels frustrated the efforts of Americans, like himself, who were genuinely “committed to revolutionary development.”167 Hesitant to give full power to a single provincial official, the South Vietnamese government normally divided responsibility between the province’s administrative chief and the division commander stationed in the corresponding military sector.168 Although the South Vietnamese had supposedly managed by 1966 to consolidate pacification-related authority at the national level in the Ministry of Revolutionary Development (MORD), this reorganization had not translated into a concerted attempt to assist the rural population, in part because the MORD depended on the cooperation and support of other ministries. The supposed “cutting edge of the pacification drive,” the Revolutionary Development teams, remained in any one place just long enough to “stabilize” the situation before turning their responsibilities over to the regular ministries which lacked the capability for operating in “contested” areas. In addition, the RD teams were deliberately concentrated in the relatively small number of semi-secure hamlets designated each year in the official “revolutionary” plan for each province as “new life hamlets,” which meant “that

166 The former technique Vanderbie called: “Overwhelm them with facts and figures.” And the favorite Vietnamese method he dubbed the “I can make better plans than you” approach. In the latter case, the former AID official explained, “The ink is barely dry on the agreement for a particular program when, lo and behold, some VIP unfolds an entirely new plan. So, if one program fails -- as it will -- the blame will be placed on the other program (which will also fail) because too much effort was required for the first program.” Ibid., 29-30.
167 Ibid., 162.
168 “This situation was as absurd,” in Vanderbie’s opinion, “as having two captains on a ship.” Ibid., 36.
whatever benefits were contained in the MORD program became available to only a small segment of the population.” The so-called secure population had to rely on assistance provided by the regular Saigon ministries, little of which apparently trickled down to the hamlet level.\textsuperscript{169}

The GVN’s aversion to redistributing wealth and power downward, Vanderbie held, prevented even officially-endorsed pacification and development policies from going into effect. For instance, during his tenure in Vietnam, American pressure on the South Vietnamese government finally paid off in the form of a “very reasonable land reform law.” Nevertheless, the law was never implemented.\textsuperscript{170} In addition, the government’s 1967 plan to allow village/hamlet elections and expand the powers of village officials similarly failed to achieve its objective of strengthening the government’s hold over the rural population. The Saigon elite did not want to yield “its position of unchallenged authority.” As a result, the newly elected village councils were too strongly tied to the central government and “could not move without permission from Saigon or the provincial authorities.” Far from bringing the government closer to the people, the 1967 local autonomy initiative actually drove them further apart in that “it caused the villages to look at the elections as another mockery of solemn promises.”\textsuperscript{171}

With the onset of the Tet offensive in the winter of 1968, Defense Department systems analysts in Washington and CORDS chief Robert Komer in Saigon engaged in a

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 106-7.
\textsuperscript{170} “Too many [GVN] officials were landlords,” Vanderbie reasoned, “and it was one thing to please the Americans with signing a law into existence, but quite another thing to carry out the intention of the document.” Ibid., 110.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 111.
war of numbers in the formers’ monthly pacification newsletter regarding the extent of
the damage inflicted on the pacification program by the Communist armed forces. As
early as January 1968, SEAD analysts concluded that the enemy’s offensive had
apparently “killed the revolutionary development program.”172 Viet Cong control of the
countryside, they held, was virtually complete and would likely remain that way in a
psychological if not a physical sense.173 For his part, Robert Komer accused the SEAD
team of jumping to conclusions unwarranted by an objective interpretation of the
statistical facts.174 Attempting to placate Komer, SEAD analysts modified their initial
assessment of Tet’s impact, acknowledging that more recent “reports indicated that RD
resources came through the crisis more intact than first reports estimated.” Still, the
systems analysts pointed out that the Tet offensive had “eroded” GVN influence in from
15 to 17 percent of hamlets previous considered largely under government control.175
Furthermore, the HES data demonstrated that there had been “at least a temporary
security ‘vacuum’ in the rural countryside immediately after Tet.”176

During the spring and fall of 1968, SEAD reports continued to emphasize the
downside of the pacification recovery process, which again provoked an angry rebuttal
from Ambassador Komer. For example, systems analysts reported that the statistical data

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Security (Washington, DC: Assistant Secretary of Defense for Systems Analysis, Southeast Asia
Intelligence Division, February 1975), 66, NTIS, AD A039316, microfiche.
173 Ibid., 68.
174 According to the CORDS chief, the February Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) results had shown a
reduction of 804 hamlets and 1.3 million South Vietnamese from the “secure” or “relatively secure”
categories, but only 201 hamlets had apparently fallen under absolute Viet Cong dominion. “A serious
loss,” argued Komer, “but hardly tantamount to rigor mortis.” Ibid., 81.
175 Ibid.
176 Ibid., 84.
for June indicated that GVN forces had regained less than a third of the hamlets lost during Tet.\textsuperscript{177} In response, Komor contended that SEAD was using old and partial data.\textsuperscript{178} Conceding its lack of up-to-the-minute information, SEAD countered Komor’s assertion of “pacification momentum” by arguing that, even in areas not directly targeted by the Communists, friendly and enemy forces had remained “at a standoff between February and June.”\textsuperscript{179} The so-called “churning” of the population back and forth between the two antagonists was not a new phenomenon, but had existed since the inception of the pacification program. More than two-thirds of hamlets targeted for pacification in 1968, SEAD analysts contended, had also appeared in the previous year’s plan.\textsuperscript{180}

On the eve of his final departure from Vietnam in 1968, Edward Lansdale remained somewhat hopeful that the majority of ordinary South Vietnamese were coming together in opposition to the Communists. “The South Vietnamese people, particularly its large religious, ethnic and military groups,” he argued, had shown that they did not consider the Communists “as a positive alternative to the GVN” and appeared ready to form “a fairly unified national front against the enemy.”\textsuperscript{181} Furthermore, they had shown

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 96.
\textsuperscript{178} Statistical information available to him in the fall apparently showed a “solid 81 percent recovery [in GVN population control] in essentially five months, April-August, despite [a] Mini-Tet [offensive] in May.” Furthermore, by the end of August, the Viet Cong population control percentage had slipped to a near record low, which went “far to explain why [the Communists] must bring in, at great trouble and expense, NVA troops to replace VC.” Ibid., 101.
\textsuperscript{179} The September pacification report concluded, “in addition to the 3.0 million population regressed during Tet (of which 1.2 million were ‘recaptured’ by the end of June), 1.2 million people were involved in a struggle for control which resulted in no substantial gain for either side.” Ibid., 107
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid.
a greater willingness since Tet “to commit themselves to their own defense.”\textsuperscript{182} True, this popular aversion to the NLF, did not “imply wholehearted endorsement of the present Saigon regime;” however, it did demonstrate “support for the constitutional system.” Genuine Vietnamese nationalism was especially strong among organized labor, urban intellectuals, junior military officers, and religious leaders.\textsuperscript{183} On the negative side, Lansdale characterized South Vietnam’s political leadership circa 1968 as “divided and uninspiring.” South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu, in particular, had yet to emerge as a “strong leader,” and his hold on power remained somewhat tenuous, based as it was on personal connections, rather than on cooperation among various non-Communist nationalist groups. Furthermore, despite their anti-Communist leanings, South Vietnamese nationalists still had “no national political organization to match the 100,000 cadres of the Communist People’s Revolutionary Party (PRP) in South Vietnam.”\textsuperscript{184}

Thus the hopefulness of American “Other Warriors” in 1967-68 with regard to the Republic of Vietnam was imbued, to a certain extent, with dread. Notwithstanding indications of South Vietnamese military-political viability, US academics and bureaucrats working on nationbuilding and counterinsurgency projects remained uneasy about South Vietnam’s future and divided among themselves over which signs boded well for Saigon and which were deceptively positive or insignificant. For all those who enthused over South Vietnam’s string of elections, expanded administrative control, and

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 4-5.
land reform achievements, there were others (and sometimes even the same individuals in a different paragraph or subsequent article) who pointed to the conservatism and factionalism inherent within Saigon’s political elite, President Thieu’s authoritarian tendencies, and the GVN’s seeming inability to translate its pacification gains into active popular commitment to the cause of an independent, non-Communist South Vietnam.

This divided consciousness would carry over into pacification’s heyday, which began in 1969.
CHAPTER 3

THE EMBATTLED PARTY: SOUTH VIETNAM

AFTER TET

For American bureaucrats, military officers, and academic researchers involved in South Vietnamese nationbuilding and counterinsurgency projects, the years 1968 and 1969 were the ones when the US-South Vietnamese “Other War” strategy finally began to bear fruit. They attributed this, in large part, to the South Vietnamese leaders’ astonishment over the Communist Tet Offensive and the American public’s intensely negative response to it, followed by the belated realization that they -- and not the Americans -- were ultimately responsible for their own political survival. This led, in turn, to a series of “enlightened” decisions: 1) to mobilize the population for national defense, 2) to expand the military and paramilitary forces devoted to territorial security, 3) to become serious about land reform and economic and political development in the countryside, 4) to reach out to local opinion leaders in the hope of garnering their support, and 5) to begin the process of replacing incompetent and/or corrupt military commanders and provincial administrators. Although “Other War” analysts disagreed at the time on the extent of the impact of these decisions on various parts of South Vietnam, few
doubted that the GVN was, at long last, on the right track toward winning the “hearts and minds” of the people.

After shaking off their initial shock over the Communists’ Easter (Nguyen Hue) Offensive of 1972, these “Other War” observers quickly resumed their generally optimistic demeanor. The repeated failure of the enemy to crush the Republic of Vietnam in one massive conventional swoop seemed to demonstrate Saigon’s ability to endure the worst with its military and political institutions more or less intact. True, the results of the offensive seemed also to underline the fragility of South Vietnam’s nascent “democracy,” as well as the GVN’s tenuous hold on important regions of the country. But, all in all, American nationbuilders maintained their faith that South Vietnam could, with US help, evolve along a Western path of political development even while fending off a growing military threat from the North that was rendering the “Other War” irrelevant.

**Heyday of Pacification**

In 1969, American “Other Warriors” claimed that the South Vietnamese countryside was in the throes of a decisive shift in the balance of rural power and popular allegiance. The GVN’s Accelerated Pacification Campaign (APC) of the previous autumn had reportedly returned the situation in the countryside to its pre-Tet condition and, in some provinces, had even brought about improvements, as measured by market activity, road safety, and reverse refugee flows. Assessments of rural political and economic development were even more encouraging. The GVN had finally granted real power to the village councils. Peasant prosperity was on the rise, especially in the
Mekong Delta region, and it seemed as though more and more rural fence-sitters were
expressing their confidence in the Saigon government and shunning the Viet Cong. Still,
the much-hoped-for turnaround in the “Other War” had just commenced, and
bureaucratic commentators admitted that substantial problems remained. In northern
South Vietnam, the autocratic regional commanders had done little to reform their
inefficient and corrupt administration. Furthermore, some US analysts feared that the
momentum in the realm of territorial security might not endure, given the continued
operation of the Viet Cong political machine and the weaknesses of GVN paramilitary,
police, and hamlet militia forces.

Despite his harsh assessment of early US Vietnam policy and his complaints
regarding the creeping militarization of CORDS, Ogden Williams saw hope for South
Vietnam’s future in the galvanizing events of 1968. The chief of the Chieu Hoi advisory
effort from 1966 to 1969 and former supervisor of USAID provincial representatives in
South Vietnam, Williams wrote in his end-of-tour report that “the Tet attacks on Saigon
and other cities” had instilled within South Vietnam’s political leadership “a sense of
urgency which previously had been lacking.” Even more important, he thought, was the
effect of President Johnson’s decision not to run again for the US presidency, which had
supposedly reversed “the fatal ‘blank check’” of American policy toward the GVN and
had awakened the South Vietnamese to the realization that “‘big brother’ might actually
go away and leave them to their destiny.”\footnote{Ogden Williams, “End of Tour Comments,” March 1969, Edward G. Lansdale Papers, Vietnamese Conflict 1961-1975, US Involvement, Box 29, File 655, The Hoover Institution, Stanford, CA, 3.} Master of its own fate, the GVN still had to
confront the issue that had dogged it since the withdrawal of the French colonialists in
1954: the political-administrative vacuum in the countryside. In Williams’ view, the
situation in An Giang province on Vietnam’s southern tip, where the Hoa Hao religious
sect had firmly established its rule, provided an excellent example of what a non-
Communist “victory” in Vietnam would look like.² But could the GVN spread its
influence throughout the countryside prior to the withdrawal of the remaining US forces?
Williams answered in the “affirmative ... somewhat as an act of faith,” believing that
“self-preservation” could act as “a very powerful motivation.”³

Another departing CORDS official responsible for territorial security forces, US
Army Colonel C.E. Jordan, expressed a similarly hopeful view with regard to US-GVN
pacification efforts. Writing in the spring of 1969, he argued that the revamped South
Vietnamese pacification organization represented “a compromise tailored to meet the
complexity of the enemy threat and the existing political situation in RVN.” Despite the
system’s “complexities and obvious weaknesses,” Jordan thought that it could “be made
to work.” With regard to his specific area of expertise, however, he listed many problems
in need of continued “aggressive” American advice and assistance “at every level of
command.” He wrote, for instance, that “far too many” territorial forces were “still
employed in and around province and district capitals in static roles,” restricting their
availability for pacification-related duties in the countryside. Moreover, those RF and PF
units assigned to rural hamlets and villages tended to remain “buttoned up” in their

² Ibid., 1.
³ Ibid., 3.
outposts at night, “allowing the Viet Cong to have free run” of the area.⁴ And despite their familiarity with the enemy and terrain, paramilitary operations rarely resulted in head-to-head encounters with Communist guerrillas. They were too often pro forma affairs, which he characterized as “walks in the sun.”⁵ According to Jordan, the fundamental problem affecting territorial forces remained “a lack of aggressive, effective leadership,” which he attributed to “overcentralization of authority,” a high rate of officer and NCO casualties, and discrimination in favor of regular force members in terms of schooling, pay, and promotional opportunities.⁶

For his part, I Corps (northern South Vietnam) Deputy Senior Advisor for 1968-69, Colonel Rowland Renwanz, admitted that the political system in his region improved only marginally during his tour of duty. The GVN bureaucracy remained too militarized, too inefficient, and too corrupt. It was true that the regional military commander did not “have absolute control,” since the official governing institution in I Corps, the Joint Coordinating Council, consisted of both military and civilian members. Nevertheless, he questioned whether this “US inflicted” body had any real power. Renwanz was more hopeful regarding political development at the local level, where the village councils had become responsible not only for civil affairs but also for local security forces. Still, he thought that their low levels of experience and education -- in addition to their often

⁴ Ibid., 8.
⁵ Ibid., 8-9.
⁶ Ibid., 14 and 19.
corrupt and nepotistic practices -- continued to place local I Corps administrators “far below western standards.”

From his vantage point as 101st Division Commander in 1969, Major General Melvin Zais perceived that the situation in his part of the northern South Vietnam was returning to normal. In letter home to a personal friend in November, Zais claimed that he smelled “victory in the air.” The entire region was basically “pacified,” the economy was “booming,” and life was returning to normal. This did not mean that the enemy was on the verge of absolute defeat, but that the United States could, in good conscience, withdraw its combat forces and leave what fighting remained to the GVN. As he told his son, Jimmy, later in the month, South Vietnam could very soon get along “with the same type of aid” that the Russians and Chinese were providing to the North Vietnamese.

In part, Zais’ optimism stemmed from “very evident resurgence of confidence” of rural South Vietnamese in the ability of their government to protect them and give them a say in decisions affecting their future well-being. As evidence for this, the 101st Division commander pointed to the increasing flow of peasant refugees heading back to their ancestral villages, “clearing the rubble of war and rebuilding their homes.”

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was also a sign of support for the GVN. In sum, asserted General Zais, the South Vietnamese government was growing “stronger every day,” notwithstanding the remarks of cynical American journalists who hung around the “bars of Saigon” and were allegedly ignorant of the attitudes of “the people living in the villages and hamlets.”

At the other end of the country, Major General Julian Ewell and Colonel W.F. Williams, also presented a generally upbeat assessment of the pacification situation in early 1969. Commander of the 9th Infantry Division in IV Corps (lower Mekong Delta), Ewell acknowledged that the development phase of pacification, which was scheduled to receive more attention in 1970, might prove more difficult than the current security phase. A truly democratic South Vietnamese political system, in particular, was a long way off, since general allied policy was “to make the railroad run regardless of political considerations.” Still, Ewell believed that the train would eventually run in a constitutional direction, as more elections were held and strong political leaders began to emerge. For his part, Williams, commander of the US 3rd Brigade, 9th Division in Long An and Hau Nghia provinces in 1970, was generally pleased with the progress of pacification during his tour of duty. He had special praise for the performance of government paramilitary units in Long An and Hau Nghia, about a third of which, he considered, “compared favorably with most US units.”

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14 Ibid., II-22.
sharp distinction between the conduct of South Vietnamese regular forces in the two provinces. In Long An, the “strong and forceful” province chief, Colonel Tu, enjoyed centralized control over all security forces, including those of the ARVN, which he employed with great military success. But Hau Nghia was “in essence controlled by the 25th ARVN Division Commander.”

Back in Washington, assessments of the security phase of the pacification program made by systems analysts at the Office of the Secretary of Defense progressively brightened throughout 1969 and 1970. A February 1969 report indicated that “the relatively secure population” in South Vietnam, as measured by the statistically-driven Hamlet Evaluation System, “increased by 1.7 million people” during the fall of 1968, which exceeded the increase for all of 1967. And according to Southeast Asia Division (SEAD) analysts, unlike population control increases announced in the past, this was no statistical ruse, but the actual outcome of friendly and enemy activities over the previous quarter: i.e., the US-GVN Accelerated Pacification Campaign (APC) and the readoption of a “protracted warfare” strategy on the part of the Communists. For its part, the United States had greatly increased its participation in the pacification effort. In addition, the APC’s focus on security and simple development projects and its limited territorial scope reduced the administrative worries of GVN province and district chiefs.

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15 According to Williams, “the relative ineffectiveness of the forces in Hau Nghia, when compared with those in Long An,” could be attributed primarily to the different command structures. Ibid., 11-22/3.
17 “Prior to the APC,” declared the systems analysts, “only .5% of US operations and 5% of US expenditures in South Vietnam supported pacification.” During the APC, on the other hand, MACV commanders estimated that “half of their operations supported pacification.” Ibid., 125.
and allowed them to “concentrate all their resources on straightforward tasks in a relatively few target hamlets.” Furthermore, “the emphasis on quick results and ‘developing the momentum of 1969’” required GVN forces to achieve only “minimum security conditions” before leaving one hamlet and moving on to the next.\(^\text{18}\) Nonetheless, the progress made in pacification in 1969 seemed real enough.\(^\text{19}\)

SEAD reports in 1969 and early 1970, however, raised doubts about the durability of GVN security gains and the capability of South Vietnamese pacification forces. For instance, systems analysts attributed the success of the APC, in part, to a lull in enemy operational activities, which could not be expected to last.\(^\text{20}\) Also, despite its Tet losses, the Viet Cong continued to have nearly twice as many members of its political infrastructure in South Vietnam’s villages and hamlets as did the GVN. Thus analysts questioned whether the South Vietnamese and Americans would be able to follow-up their advances in rural security with effective political programs, given the relatively small numbers of non-Communist cadre.\(^\text{21}\) Even with regard to physical security, progress remained only relative.\(^\text{22}\) Furthermore, security consolidation would depend on the untested or dubious qualifications of the citizen-based People’s Self-Defense Forces

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\(^{18}\) Ibid., 133-4.
\(^{19}\) According to a February 1970 SEAD report, the GVN territorial expansion over the past year meant that “very little contested...or VC controlled population remains (only about 9% of the rural population)...” Ibid., 145.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., 123.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., 125.
\(^{22}\) A detailed examination of the HES data in July 1969 showed that almost 40 percent of the South Vietnamese population still resided “in hamlets subject to long range fire at night, occasional sniping, and mines on roads in their hamlets.” The Viet Cong continued to assassinate about 45 people each month in supposedly “secure” hamlets, and one-fifth of these same hamlets harbored one or more guerrilla Platoons. Ibid., 139.
(PSDF) and the National Police. And the personnel problems confronting the territorial forces were being compounded by the rapid expansion in GVN territorial control.²³

Taking a more detailed look at the pacification numbers, evaluators from the interdepartmental Vietnam Special Studies Group (VSSG) -- which reported to the National Security Council -- noted that the situation in the upper Mekong Delta province of Long An had changed dramatically between the fall of 1968 and the fall of 1969.²⁴ VSSG evaluators attributed allied pacification gains in Long An to achievements in the areas of security, politics, and economics. The number of local security and development forces had increased steadily during the year under examination: RF and PF had grown by 40%, and RD cadre had more than doubled. Paramilitary performance had reportedly also improved through the provision of modern weaponry and better training.²⁵ The change in the quality of the provincial leadership was even more pronounced. Prior to a September 1968 administrative shakeup, Long An’s province chief had been described as “below par,” its District chiefs as “ineffectual,” and its deputy sector (provincial military) commander as “the worst ever.” The appointment of a new province chief and regional military commander, however, resulted in better leadership at the upper and lower levels

²³ For example, a May 1969 SEAD report indicated that the South Vietnamese government had “assigned about twice as many [security and development] cadre teams to support the 1969 pacification program as were available for the 1968 APC,” but these forces were expected to cover two and a half times as many target hamlets by the end of 1969. Ibid., 128-129 and 147-8.
²⁴ According to their study, in September 1968, “no more than 10,000” of Long An’s approximately 244,000 people could be classified as being “under GVN control” and even fewer enjoyed “good security.” During 1969, however, South Vietnamese government rule was extended to “over 100,000” provincial residents while the population controlled by the Viet Cong shrank from approximately 183,000 to about 54,000. Vietnam Special Studies Group, “The Situation In The Countryside,” January 10, 1970, The John Paul Vann Papers, 1 January to 21 May 1970, U.S. Army Military History Institute Archives, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 41.
²⁵ Ibid., 43-4.
of Long An officialdom. Finally, the VSSG report indicated that “rising rural prosperity” in 1969 had “contributed to a growing sense of well-being and a more favorable psychological climate” among Long An’s residents.

Another VSSG team, headed by Bruno Kosheleff and Stan Jorgensen of AID/Vietnam and the State Department respectively, discovered, in the northern province of Quang Nam, that recent allied military victories over the Communists -- combined with the herding of the rural dwellers into more concentrated and defensible locations and the transformation of “large tracts of previously inhabited lowland areas into free fire zones” -- had brought over ninety percent of Quang Nam’s people under the “influence” of the Saigon government by late 1969. And by early 1970, the security situation appeared almost benign. Responsibility for defending populated areas of the lowlands had been turned over to the Popular and Regional Forces, while allied conventional units had taken up the job of patrolling “unpopulated lowland areas and the mountain foothills.” Pacification cadres were, at long last, free to move about their assigned villages and hamlets.

Nevertheless, it seemed that pacification and development personnel were not entirely up to the job. Kosheleff and Jorgensen noted inconsistencies in Popular Forces’ performance, which depended on the quality of the individual platoon leader, as well as a “continued American main force presence” to provide military and psychological

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26 Ibid., 45.
27 Ibid.
28 Vietnam Special Studies Group, “The Situation in the Countryside: Quang Nam Province,” 16 March 1970, 4-5, The National Archives, Record Group R6472, MACCords (101986) (235633), Suitland, MD.
29 Ibid., 13-14.
support.\textsuperscript{30} In their opinion, the village-level militia concept was unworkable in a province like Quang Nam, where the “overwhelming part of the male population” had either been drafted by the government, had been killed, or was fighting for the other side.\textsuperscript{31} They believed, as well, that the effectiveness of the Revolutionary Development cadre was hampered by overlapping authority, inadequate oversight, and political manipulation; by a lack of local control and coordination with other pacification agencies; and by poor discipline, esprit de corps, training, and cultural affinity with the people.\textsuperscript{32}

As for the people of Quang Nam, whom the allies had uprooted by their pacification strategy, they were “apparently grateful to the GVN for the widespread improvements in security” and did not complain overmuch about allied “air strikes, bombardment, or defoliation which forced them into refugee camps.”\textsuperscript{33} But Kosheleff and Jorgensen recognized the perils of relying on a strategy of military force and population relocation to resolve extremely complex political and economic problems. The allied approach to pacification seemed to be working, at least temporarily, in cutting the people off from significant Communist influence and establishing more-or-less secure enclaves in which they might live, but it had created additional problems harmful to the long-term success of pacification in Quang Nam.\textsuperscript{34} For the VSSG analysts, the economic consequences of refugee creation were probably most important in Quang Nam, a province which lived close to the subsistence margin in the best of times. Their report

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 21-2.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 24-7.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 51-2.
\end{footnotesize}
indicated that “one-half of the lowland rice growing area [had] been abandoned.” And even though 3,800 tons of American rice were being flown in monthly to the city of Danang, the South Vietnamese government was allowing Quang Nam residents to buy only three kilograms of this affordable rice each month per person.\textsuperscript{35}

Kosheleff and Jorgenson also acknowledged that the South Vietnamese government faced a Herculean task in dealing with Quang Nam’s refugees because no land was available for resettlement and sending them home was still “impossible because of the lack of security.” Even so, the South Vietnamese government -- with American acquiescence -- was making the refugees’ plight even worse than it needed to be. Taking his cue from President Thieu, the Vietnamese I Corps commander and head of the regional Pacification and Development council, General Lam Van Phat, was insisting, for political reasons, that no new refugees had been created within his jurisdiction during the period 1969-70. Consequently, “1969 refugees who were generated regularly and quite intentionally” by the allies were being “denied official recognition,” preventing them from obtaining the six-month rice allowance, housing payment and allotment of tin roofing that was their due.\textsuperscript{36}

In political matters, the South Vietnamese army, in the form of General Lam, held nearly absolute sway over Quang Nam and the rest of I Corps. According to the VSSG team, he and his cohorts had become a law unto themselves, an impediment to the flow of

\textsuperscript{35} This compared to a minimum monthly adult requirement of 15 kg. of rice. Apparently, “even the 3 kg. allotment is often unavailable, as rice goes on sale at Government outlets with no prior notice for only two to three days each month before supplies run out.” Ibid., 39-40.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 40-1.
information between the central lowlands region and Saigon, and an obstacle to
democratic nationbuilding.\textsuperscript{37} Unfortunately, the province’s established political parties
did not present a viable alternative to the current military-dominated system. They
remained “fragmented, lacking in coherent doctrine and positive direction.” Their
leaders reportedly appealed only to a small segment of the electorate and seemed
uninterested “in the problems of the persons they ostensibly represent[ed].”\textsuperscript{38} The non-
Communist leadership void in Quang Nam extended down to the district, village, and
hamlet levels. There, administrative jobs were generally held by “politicos clinging to
the thin prestige and material rewards” that were the compensation for officeholding.\textsuperscript{39}

To make matters worse, adequate replacements for these hangers-on were not easily
found. Military mobilization, together with the lingering effects of the VC assassination
campaign, had stripped the Quang Nam hinterland of much of its non-Communist
leadership potential, with the sole exception of the military.\textsuperscript{40}

In the United States, government-sponsored social scientists held a more
optimistic view of the South Vietnamese political leadership and its rural development
policies. Articles published by the RAND Corporation and the Southeast Asian
Development Advisory Group (SEADAG) in 1970 praised the results of South
Vietnamese constitution-building and election-holding over the previous several years.

They also claimed that the GVN, with President Thieu at its head, was finally jettisoning

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 31-2 and 55.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 35.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 37.
its derogatory conception of the countryside and beginning to actively court the peasant vote. Economically, South Vietnam was seemingly making tremendous strides. True, this boom was being fueled by American aid, but its effects were being felt across all classes and in urban as well as rural parts of the country. Furthermore, recent government policies -- designed to restore the traditional autonomy of the village and to divide remaining large landholdings among tenant farmers -- had allegedly resolved the most pressing peasant grievances against the government. Still, as some social scientists acknowledged, it was unclear whether Saigon could channel this incipient sense of rural satisfaction into a national commitment to eradicate Communist influence in the countryside.

RAND researchers Gerald Hickey and Allan Goodman heralded the process of “inter-group accommodation” that had commenced with the establishment of a new South Vietnamese national legislature. According to Hickey, the 1966 constitutional assembly had served as “the first real open forum for political, religious, and ethnic representatives in South Vietnam.”41 For his part, Goodman argued that the members of the new legislature had matured considerably, in a political sense, during their first two years in office. “In 1967 political leaders,” he wrote, “tended to feel that their enemies were principally each other; in 1969, they had come to view their principal opponent as

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the Viet Cong." Previously faction-ridden parties were coalescing and actively reaching out to the population for support.42

By early 1970, RAND’s Guy Pauker was also feeling more confident about South Vietnam’s political chances. This was not because of steps taken by the Saigon government to accommodate groups previously excluded from power or because of an end to factional infighting within various political parties. Nor did it have much to do with what Pauker perceived as a marginal increase in the GVN’s popularity since 1965.43 According to him, the most significant recent development in Vietnamese political history was economic in nature and was primarily attributable to US economic assistance. Pauker declared that “the enormous input of American resources” since the mid-1960s had accomplished “a feat of political alchemy, namely the transformation of the government of South Vietnam into a regime that could be viable...”44 As he saw it, South Vietnamese economic progress had been relatively broadbased, touching all social classes and rural as well as city dwellers. What is more, the South Vietnamese people knew the source of their enhanced standard of living, and would support the anti-Communist war effort as long as the United States continued dispensing its largesse.45

At the 1970 conference on Vietnam of the Southeast Asia Development Advisory Group (SEADAG), the mood among government-sponsored social scientists and bureaucrats was also on the upswing. For example, State Department analysts James

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44 Ibid., iv.
Bullington and James Rosenthal contended that South Vietnam’s ruling elite had finally discarded its counterproductive, rapacious attitude toward the countryside. By this point, all the major non-Communist parties had got the message that the country’s villages and hamlets “must be secured and developed and the rural population’s loyalty enlisted positively if the Communist challenge” were to be deflected.46 The two analysts credited the administration of South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu with recognizing not only the necessity of winning physical control of the countryside, but also the desirability of exploiting the “virtually untapped” reservoir of potential peasant support to which he had better access than any of his non-Communist political opponents.47

The result had been an array of new rural security and development programs -- including the 1970 Land-to-the Tiller land reform and a nationwide, hamlet-level militia organization, the People’s Self-Defense Force (PSLF). In addition, Thieu had pushed through legislation increasing the responsibility and autonomy of newly elected village officials and ingratiated himself with them in the interest of building a political base in the countryside that circumvented the established, urban-based political parties.48

The non-Communist political opposition, Bullington and Rosenthal admitted, had generally not kept pace with the government in terms of its rural-oriented activities. There were a few exceptions, however. The Tan (“New”) and “Revolutionary” factions of the Dai Viet party had, in the late 1960s, increased their organizing efforts,

47 Ibid., 652.
48 Ibid., 653-4.
respectively, in the provinces ringing Saigon and in the northern coastal provinces. In addition, the minority religious sects continued their long tradition of using their bases of rural adherents as a means of securing a role in national affairs. In their opinion, non-Communist rivals of the Thiệu regime faced several obstacles to obtaining additional rural support. First, opposition groups favored an ideological approach to politics, as distinguished from the government’s “bread and butter” economic approach, which the two Americans considered more appealing to the masses. The two major secular parties, the Đài Viets and the VNQDD (Nationalist Party), also faced the handicap of having been underground organizations – a consequence of their persecution by the French, the Communists, and the GVN – and, therefore, unused to open-style campaigning. As for the religious organizations, their communal orientation hindered them from expanding their political influence beyond their constituencies of believers. Finally, Bullington and Rosenthal acknowledged that residual arrogance among the Saigonese intellectual elite reduced the likelihood of serious opposition overtures to win over rural voters.

Lining up behind the positive consensus with regard to the GVN’s recent rural policies, William Bredo and Roy Prosterman offered praise for the South Vietnamese government’s March 1970 land reform law. Prior to the passage of this “sweeping”

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49 Ibid., 655-6.
50 Politically-active leaders of the majority Buddhist religion, though, had so far not achieved much success in reaching out beyond their urban strongholds. Ibid., 657-8.
51 “What ‘programs’ they offer,” asserted the State Department analysts, “are more general and philosophical than pragmatic and still seem designed to recruit and sustain an elitist cadre corps rather than stimulate mass popular support.” Ibid., 656.
52 Ibid., 658-9.
legislation, according to Bredo, a senior project leader with the Stanford Research Institute, the Saigon government had not stood “a chance of winning the allegiance and support of farmers through its various agrarian reform measures.” Prosterman, a law professor at the University of Washington, agreed. In the 1950s, he asserted, President Diem had missed his opportunity to compete with the Communists on the issue of land reform, as the non-Communist leaders in Mexico, Japan and South Korea had done with such success. Furthermore, subsequent South Vietnamese regimes in the 1960s had compounded the problem by allowing landlords to ride into villages with the Army under the cover of the US-backed pacification program. But the situation was altogether different now. The so-called Land-to-the-Tiller law practically eliminated “tenancy as a problem in South Vietnam” by creating up to a million new land owners and struck “at the roots of the Viet Cong rural support.” Neither Bredo nor Prosterman, however, chose to emphasize the complexities of implementing land reform, or the fact that the new government land retention limit of 30 hectares was still six times the maximum allowed by the Viet Cong, or the possible peasant perception that the GVN program represented a belated admission of the superiority of the Communist rural strategy.

While giving the GVN credit for advances made in the countryside in the late 1960s, SEADAG participants Allan Goodman and John Donnell harbored serious -- albeit somewhat different -- reservations concerning the long-term consequences of

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Saigon’s nationbuilding policies. As he had in his RAND article, Goodman welcomed
the advent of a new constitutional framework in 1967, which created the possibility of
greater participation by rural people in the political process.\textsuperscript{56} In contrast to Bullington
and Rosenthal, however, Goodman suspected that the government was misguided in
continuing to employ a primarily “developmental rather than a political approach to the
countryside.”\textsuperscript{57} For example, neither the GVN’s new land reform program nor previous
pacification and development schemes had established local political organizations to
compete with those of the Viet Cong.\textsuperscript{58} Goodman implied that a rural policy based on
economic hand-outs could not stimulate peasant support to the degree that a well-run
political machine could. In addition, he held that the GVN’s new legislative institutions,
despite their potential, had so far “largely functioned as ‘decorations’” for the military-
dominated executive branch. What is more, provincial legislators neither provided much
in the way of tangible benefits to their constituents, nor -- given the plurality-based
electoral system -- fully represented the varied interests within their districts.\textsuperscript{59}

For his part, Temple University political scientist John Donnell claimed to see a
“real difference” in the way that Diem and his successors had dealt with local
communities. In particular, he called the resumption of village and hamlet elections in
1967, after a hiatus of more than ten years, “a real breakthrough.”\textsuperscript{60} On the other hand,

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 674.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 675-6.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 682-3.
Donnell surmised that the end result of GVN rural-oriented programs and policies since Diem’s ouster in 1963 had been to reinforce the traditional attitude of “villagism,” which was “a far cry from nationalism” in his view. According to Donnell, “villagism” bound rural inhabitants to their local leaders, but contained no element of broader identification. He argued that parochial attitudes could not be countered by rural development programs originating in the capital and occasional visits by high-level officials to the countryside. The government had to find a way to promote “cooperation and cohesion” among people from different villages, districts, and provinces.

Moreover, a sense of South Vietnamese nationhood could not exist without “truly national political parties,” of which there was then only one: the National Liberation Front.

In their 1970 SEADAG study, A. Terry Rambo and Neil Jamieson argued that GVN gains in the countryside were more profound than Donnell suspected. Through interviews with Vietcong defectors and refugees from Communist-controlled areas of South Vietnam, they determined that a transformation had occurred in the relationship between the South Vietnamese government and its rural subjects. As a result, the GVN’s competitive position vis-à-vis the Viet Cong was significantly improved. In the early 1960s, they indicated, the Diem regime had “ruled as if by divine right.”

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61 Ibid., 690.
62 Ibid., 698.
63 Ibid., 699
Communication flowed from the top-down, rarely the other way around. The Viet Cong, on the other hand, through a careful process of selection and training, had created a corps of officials “with a different model personality structure than the GVN cadres.” Their characters were “innovative” rather than “authoritarian.”65 But this gross disparity in cadre quality had begun to change in 1966 with the GVN’s establishment of the National Training Center at Vung Tau under the “dynamic” leadership of Lt. Col. Nyugen Be, a former Viet Minh battalion commander. The resulting Revolutionary Development cadre, according to Rambo and Jamieson, were “much better trained and more deeply indoctrinated than were the old Strategic Hamlet cadre of 1962-1963 or the New Life Pacification cadre of 1964 and 1965.”66

In his landmark study of Long An province, though, former Army district advisor turned political scientist Jeffrey Race contended that, as late as 1970, South Vietnamese government officials remained obtuse about the need to elicit the support of the bulk of the Vietnamese peasantry through a “reordering of various social groups.”67 The GVN was addicted to a “reinforcement strategy,” when it should have been pursuing a “preemptive strategy.” Rather than tending to its social base by dealing forthrightly with popular grievances and aspirations, Saigon relied instead on superior resources and physical force to rein in the population and defeat the Communist insurgency without

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65 Ibid., 84-5.
66 Ibid., 84.
essentially altering the rural social hierarchy.\textsuperscript{68} Race recognized, however, that Saigon’s choice of strategy was not simply a matter of misunderstanding the nature of the conflict in the countryside. The GVN faced a “strategic dilemma”: it could continue with the same old failed policies, or it could promote radical social change in the countryside and redirect its military effort toward smaller-scale, less collaterally destructive, actions in populated areas, thereby endangering its base of support among the landlord class, the army, and the civil service.\textsuperscript{69}

In writing about the period 1965 to 1970, Race acknowledged that “important changes” had occurred on the anti-Communist side, which had shifted the balance of forces somewhat in its direction. Still, he remained pessimistic about allied chances for ultimate victory. According to Race, the most significant change was a return to political stability in Saigon following the election in 1967 of Nguyen Van Thieu as president and Nguyen Cao Ky as vice-president. True, political stability at the national level “did not in itself lead to an improvement in the government’s position in Long An,” but it was a necessary first step toward that goal.\textsuperscript{70} Furthermore, changes in the GVN’s overall approach toward rural pacification -- for example, improvements in village administration, land reform proposals, and the expansion of local paramilitary forces -- were beginning, in mid-1969, to make life more difficult for communist forces in Long An.\textsuperscript{71} Yet, from the perspective of late-1970, Race refused to predict the demise of the

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 192.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 244.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 211.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 270.
Viet Cong, which had been “in difficult straits before” and reemerged as powerful as ever “because it continued to satisfy needs the authorities in Saigon did not.”  

In marked contrast to Race, top American pacification advisory officials seemed nearly ecstatic by the achievements of the reinvigorated post-Tet South Vietnamese nationbuilding effort. Former CORDS chief Robert Komer claimed retrospectively that he had perceived “genuine signs” in early 1968 that the allies were “at last getting the upper-hand,” militarily and politically, in the rural areas of South Vietnam. This conclusion was confirmed by the launching of the Communist Tet offensive against South Vietnamese towns and cities, which Komer equated to a “radical shift from a rural-oriented Maoist strategy.”  

“The shock of Tet ... finally galvanized a dawdling GVN” into fully mobilizing the population, expanding its paramilitary forces, and creating a village-based militia, the People’s Self-Defense Force (PSDF). Despite the Tet-induced withdrawal of allied troops from rural areas to participate in the battles for Saigon and Hue, the Viet Cong failed to take advantage of the temporary security vacuum. And the much improved rural security situation made possible by the Accelerated Pacification Campaign (APC) during the fall of 1968 permitted the GVN to shift its emphasis in 1969-70 to political and economic development. Despite American primacy over pacification during the late 1960s, Komer gave the credit for reviving local government mainly to the South Vietnamese administration of President Nguyen Van Thieu, whom he praised as “the most pacification-minded of all top GVN leaders.”

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72 Ibid., 276.  
74 Ibid., 20-22.
Appearing before US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in the summer of 1970, Komer’s successor as CORDS chief, William Colby, agreed that the momentum of the war had been shifting in a US-GVN direction since 1968. In part, Colby attributed this to the bracing effect of Tet on the South Vietnamese people and its government.\textsuperscript{75} It was the “Pacification and Development Program and American assistance to it,” however, that Colby believed was chiefly responsible for the war’s turnaround.\textsuperscript{76} President Thieu’s launching of the Accelerated Pacification Campaign in November 1968 changed the “nature of the war.” By massively and systematically moving into the countryside to establish security and attack the Viet Cong apparatus, the GVN and its allies had adopted “the techniques and programs of a People’s War.” It was the Communists -- increasingly reliant on the forces of the North Vietnamese Army -- who were now conducting a primarily conventional war.\textsuperscript{77} In 1969 and 1970, the Thieu government broke decisively with Diem’s authoritarian legacy and began to “build up a real political base in the people” by holding elections, creating a hamlet-based self-defense program, and “by bringing the local leaders in and assuring them that they have the authority over what is happening in their localities.”\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{75} Although a “real disaster in a psychological sense…, the Tet attacks did generate a considerable national effort, a national will, a national resolution [for ordinary South Vietnamese] to…participate in the [GVN] program” as opposed to remaining politically uncommitted. The North Vietnamese offensive, according to Colby, “also galvanized the Government” to announce a general mobilization of the population and to introduce beneficial new programs, such as anti-Vietcong infrastructure Phoenix program and the People’s Self-Defense Forces. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, \textit{Vietnam Policy and Prospects 1970, Civil Operations and Rural Development Program}, 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970, 50.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 12.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 13.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 36 and 45.
Testifying after his superior, John Paul Vann, a former Army advisor and AID official and current regional CORDS administrator, told the senators of his long held pessimism with regard to the war, as well as his optimistic conversion during the previous several years. Vann admitted that, up until 1968, he had been "highly dissatisfied with the manner in which the war was being conducted in Vietnam" and expected Saigon would lose.\textsuperscript{79} In part, this stemmed from his despair over the instability at the top of Vietnamese society. In part, this was the result of his experience with the pacification program, which had been a repetitious, mechanistic process from 1962 until 1968.\textsuperscript{80}

Once the GVN had overcome the military effects of Tet, it had gone on the offensive politically, stealing the "enemy’s thunder by engaging in a people’s war on our side."\textsuperscript{81}

This substitution of political mantles was not as unbelievable as some Americans back home might think. Most South Vietnamese supporters of the NLF in were not actually Communists, but used the Viet Cong as a means of expressing their unhappiness with the government.\textsuperscript{82}

True, political identification with the Saigon regime was lagging behind the provision of greater security throughout the country, but nationbuilding, Vann believed,

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 98.
\textsuperscript{80} "[W]e would start off every year with about 4,500 hamlets under government control," according to Vann. The program goal required that "a thousand to 2,000 additional hamlets" be brought under "government control." Pacification officials would invariably "achieve 59 to 75 percent of that objective, but amazingly at the end of the year we would still have only 4,500 hamlets" within the GVN’s orbit. "The reason for this was obvious," contended Vann: "we were going out and occupying a hamlet for 2 or 3 months, going through the routine of pacifying it, but then moving on to another hamlet and leaving the first one empty." Ibid., 102.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 100.
\textsuperscript{82} For some time, US advisers had recognized that "about 95 percent of the people in South Vietnam...were potentially our friends and allies if they could get what they were fighting for, which was better government." Ibid., 102.
was a “sequential” process; pacification officials had designed it that way. “First you produce a reasonable climate of security in which the people dare to participate and maintain security, and then you develop programs which invite the people’s participation in a political sense.” This, Vann argued, had been substantially accomplished at the village level by 1970. It was in rural areas, though, that the Thiệu regime had experienced its greatest increase in popular support because of the government’s success in improving security and in implementing programs beneficial to the average peasant.

In the eyes of most government-sponsored researchers, military advisors, and civilian bureaucrats, 1971 was another banner year for nationbuilding and counterinsurgency in South Vietnam. The consensus was that the US-GVN invasion of Cambodia in 1970 had not only improved security in the South Vietnamese provinces bordering that country but had brought increased popular respect for the government’s revamped security forces. What is more, ordinary Vietnamese appeared to be taking advantage of the quasi-peace and forsaking wartime ideologies in favor of getting rich. Politically, development seemed to be running on separate national and local tracks. For most US commentators, President Thiệu’s unopposed reelection in 1971 was a disappointing step backward toward Diem-style authoritarianism. On the other hand,

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83 Ibid., 185.
84 For example, Vann noted that, since 1967, the “government’s success in conducting its elections have very substantially brought the Buddhist groups into an acceptance of the overall constitutional structure as a framework within which to try to remove the incumbent government, rather than going out into the streets.” Ibid., 201.
85 Ibid., 240-1.
administrative decentralization and ‘riceroots’ democratization had brought war-torn village communities together again. Also perplexing was the divergent rates of military, economic, and political progress in the two most populous regions in South Vietnam: the central lowlands and the Mekong Delta. While the latter seemed to be experiencing ever greater security and prosperity, the former existed in a state of uncertainty -- with the North Vietnamese Army bearing down from the north, unpopular and ineffectual military commanders running the local government, and the United States military picking up stakes and returning home. Finally, US observers, while trumpeting the decline in Viet Cong-related activities throughout the country, ruefully noted the GVN’s stubborn resistance to the American notion of targeting the enemy’s political infrastructure, preferring, instead, to let sleeping dogs lie.

Although recognizing periodic upsurges in disruptive enemy activity, Defense Department systems analysts emphasized the positive results achieved during the consolidation and development phases of the US-GVN pacification program (mid-1970 to 1971). For example, a June 1970 SEAD report noted that pacification scores in the countryside had “recovered from two straight months of enemy high point activity.” More importantly, both the socio-economic and political situations, as measured by the 1970 version of the Hamlet Evaluation System, had significantly improved as a consequence of village self-development programs, social welfare payments to refugees and displaced persons, and “an overall revitalization of interest and activity at the local level.”

pacification in the eleven South Vietnamese provinces bordering that country. In 1971, SEAD analysts indicated, pacification scores “continued to improve nationwide,” although at a slower rate than in 1969 and 1970 because of the progressively smaller number of VC hamlets available for reoccupation by government forces.

Information on rural public opinion, provided by the Defense Department’s Popular Attitude Analysis System (PAAS), showed a greater acceptance of GVN rule on the part of the South Vietnamese people, as well as a desire to set aside wartime issues in favor of returning to normal, peacetime pursuits. From mid-1970 on, provincial Vietnamese evinced an increased respect for the effectiveness of government military and paramilitary forces. Moreover, their “sense of security was accompanied by heightened aspirations for peace and a growing concern with economic problems.” From a political standpoint, rural residents seemed to be coming around to the idea that elections were “the best way of replacing officials.” Still, Pentagon systems analysts worried that “the psychological entrance to the South Vietnamese political system” might be localized since some of the 1971 polling data suggested that people increasingly liked their village

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87 An August SEAD report stated that, during the spring of 1970, the percentage of population free from any Communist main or local forces increased by about a quarter in the border provinces, but only by five percent in non-border areas. Ibid., 191.
88 Ibid., 208.
89 Ibid., 249.
90 Ibid., 179.
administration but had less positive views concerning the “distant” government in Saigon.\textsuperscript{91}

In 1971, SEADAG conferees were somewhat less enthusiastic regarding South Vietnamese political developments at the national level than they had been the previous year. On the positive side, Theresa Tull acknowledged that the current political situation represented “a marked improvement over the difficult years” following Diem’s overthrow and the 1967 presidential elections.\textsuperscript{92} Nonetheless, elements of the old-style of South Vietnamese politics persisted. The military continued to act as a powerful force behind the scenes, blocking movement toward fundamental social change and a political settlement of the war. Furthermore, elections had not yet had the salutary effect of bringing the country’s factionalized parties together into a few cohesive blocs.\textsuperscript{93} For his part, Donald Kirk argued that President Nguyen Van Thieu’s overwhelming reelection in 1971, in which he ran unopposed, was not the symbol of national unity that he claimed, but rather a step backward in South Vietnam’s political development.\textsuperscript{94}

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item \textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 177.
  \item \textsuperscript{92} Not only had these elections “lent legitimacy to the Republic of Vietnam’s top leaders,” but they had “also contributed to political stability by providing a constructive channel for opposition activity, a mechanism for orderly change, and opportunities for upward mobility.” See Theresa A. Tull, “Broadening the Base: South Vietnamese Elections, 1967-1971,” in eds. John C. Donnell and Charles A. Joiner, \textit{Electoral Politics in South Vietnam} (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1974), 35.
  \item \textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 36.
  \item \textsuperscript{94} Despite the fact that Thieu “seemed to have decimated, silenced, and humiliated an entire spectrum of opponents during the campaign,” the ultimate tendency of the “single-candidacy phenomenon,” according to Kirk, “may have been to weaken the political system Thieu’s government was pledged to defend.” See “Presidential Campaign Politics: The Uncontested 1971 Election,” in Donnell and Joiner, \textit{Electoral Politics in South Vietnam}, 53. For a more upbeat contemporary assessment of the 1971 presidential election, as well as South Vietnamese national politics generally, see Howard R. Penniman, \textit{Elections in South Vietnam} (Washington, DC and Stanford, CA: American Enterprise Institute and The Hoover Institution, 1972).
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Notwithstanding the continued prominence in Saigon of elements of the *ancien regime*, former CORDS official Stephen Young contended that the local South Vietnamese political situation looked quite promising. The inauguration of multilevel elections and the decentralization of power away from Saigon had begun to pull the people of South Vietnam together and to dampen the ethnic, religious, and class hostilities that had previously fueled the insurgent flame.\(^95\) According to Young, the US-inspired policy of democratic political development, adopted by the GVN in the late 1960s, had belatedly provided the non-Communist side with “a *chinh nghi* a, a righteous cause.” What is more, the elements of that cause -- democracy, elections, and civilian rule -- were traditionally held in high esteem by the South Vietnamese people.\(^96\) For the first time, GVN supporters had a positive doctrine with which to do political battle with the Viet Cong. In addition, the devolution of real power to elected village chiefs -- in the form of control over local pacification forces and funds -- enabled them to personally demonstrate the concern of GVN officialdom for the average South Vietnamese. The old stereotype of the government as an agent of coercion was giving way to the view of government as a provider of social and economic benefits.\(^97\)

For the commander of US ground forces in III Corps during 1970-1, Lieutenant General Michael Davison, the really significant event of his tour had been the allied invasion of Cambodia. This attack on the enemy’s base structure in that ostensibly

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\(^96\) Ibid., 78-9.

\(^97\) Ibid., 82 and 87.
neutral country had brought political and psychological benefits to the anti-Communist side similar to those achieved by the Communists following the 1968 Tet Offensive. The Saigon government “suddenly became associated with success, while the enemy increasingly became identified with failure.” As a result, the GVN was exerting more political control in III Corps than ever before. Certainly, serious social problems -- related to inflation, taxation, corruption, and the lack of governmental responsiveness -- remained to be tackled by the GVN, but “conditions” had been “set for a stable and secure future.”

When discussing individual pacification programs, however, Davison appeared less assuredly optimistic. He acknowledged that the South Vietnamese hamlet militia had taken on a more important security role as a result of the ongoing withdrawal of US forces, but their “defensive capability” continued to be “marginal at best.” PSDF leaders were reluctant to leave their villages to attend training courses, and on-site training “suffered from the magnitude of the task and the wide dispersion of personnel to be trained.” The value of the people’s militia was, therefore, almost wholly political in the sense that it fostered citizens’ involvement in their own defense. It had little military utility. Furthermore, allied programs designed to attack the Viet Cong infrastructure and the “shadow supply system” suffered from a host of ills. According to Davison, after completing the tedious process of deciding which elements of the enemy’s logistical

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99 Ibid., 18.
structure to target, American officials “had to cope with the web of collusion, accommodation, and payoff” between South Vietnamese government bureaucrats and the Viet Cong, which rendered resource control efforts only modestly successful. ¹⁰⁰ Likewise, US advisors had to overcome basic Vietnamese cultural and practical obstacles to the destruction of the Communist political apparatus. ¹⁰¹

General Zais’ successor as XXIV Corps commander, James Sutherland, provided a mixed review of allied accomplishments in the northernmost provinces of South Vietnam during the period 1970-71. On the whole, Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces were pacified, but security was “static” throughout much of the region. In Quang Tri this was because the North Vietnamese Army had to be held at bay by a cordon of allied regulars protecting the province’s lowland areas. In Quang Nam the province chief seemed more interested in “keeping the lid” on the political activities of the non-Communist opposition than in goading his territorial forces into patrolling more aggressively, and the withdrawal of the US Marines from the province had triggered a serious security problem. According to Sutherland, Quang Tin was the only “real bright spot” in I Corps. Not only was this province pacified, but the South Vietnamese had taken complete responsibility for its security. ¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 13-14. ¹⁰¹ “It is unlikely,” Davison wrote, “that a villager will divulge information to a representative of the central government about members of his or other families who may be VCI. On the other hand, the GVN district, village or hamlet chief may be a party to a de facto accommodation with the VCI.” Ibid., 15-16. ¹⁰² US Department of the Army, Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development, “Debriefings of Senior Officers: LTG James W. Sutherland,” 31 August 1971, US Army War College Library, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 19.
In terms of specific pacification and development programs, Sutherland expressed praise for I Corps’s territorial forces, the Chieu Hoi defector initiative, and efforts to increase the region’s rice and meat production. In anticipation of the American departure from Vietnam, each province in I Corps had undertaken sweeping territorial force operations against the Viet Cong, which had proven “highly successful,” especially in southern part of the region.\(^\text{103}\) In addition, a recent emphasis on the exploitation of Chieu Hoi defectors for intelligence purposes had resulted in renegade Communists leading allied units on an increasing number of raids against their erstwhile comrades.\(^\text{104}\) Finally, the food production situation in I Corps had measurably improved by mid-1971.\(^\text{105}\)

Programmatic disappointments, however, seemed to counterbalance, if not outweigh, pacification achievements. With regard to the Phoenix program, LTG Sutherland asserted that “some progress has been made during the past few months,” but most of it was in the realms of “administration and booking.” Many South Vietnamese officials continued to view this as an American program rather than a GVN program and passively resisted its implementation.\(^\text{106}\) Accomplishments in the area of land reform were also rather slight.\(^\text{107}\) In addition, problems associated with I Corps’ 60,000-plus

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\(^\text{103}\) Ibid., 7.
\(^\text{104}\) Ibid., 8.
\(^\text{105}\) Ibid., 8.
\(^\text{106}\) Ibid., 8.
\(^\text{107}\) The “principal problem,” according to Sutherland, involved the distribution of communal property, which comprised a large percentage of the rice land under cultivation in central Vietnam. Opposition to this policy had caused the government in Saigon to postpone a final decision on the matter “pending further study of the impact of the [land reform] program on the desires and welfare of the people.” Ibid., 11-12.
refugees, “war victims,” and “displaced persons” were “substantial,” and would get even worse, if the US Congress continued to underfund assistance programs in this area.\textsuperscript{108} Finally, Sutherland lamented the small proportion of total nationbuilding resources being directed at “economically depressed” central Vietnamese provinces, which lacked the agricultural and industrial potential of the south and suffered from “a low priority” when competing with the Mekong Delta provinces for development funds.\textsuperscript{109}

At the time of his arrival in Hau Nghia province as a district advisor in 1971, Army Lieutenant Stuart Herrington found his South Vietnamese counterparts willfully obtuse with regard to the true state of pacification, as well as uninterested in programs that their American counterparts were trying mightily to promote. According to his advisory colleagues, the South Vietnamese were “just go[ing] through the motions to please the Americans” when it came to the anti-Communist infrastructure campaign. In fact, Herrington discovered that the Duc Hue district’s “impressive files” on Communist political operatives” had failed to result “in the launching of a single specifically targeted operation against a single Viet Cong agent.” This had not, however, prevented the district’s office from receiving “a satisfactory rating in all areas” from the Phoenix Directorate in Saigon.\textsuperscript{110} On the enforcement side of the anti-VCI program, “friction” existed between the South Vietnamese police and the military at all levels of

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 27.  
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 27-8.  
command.\textsuperscript{111} Attitudinal and operational problems also plagued the pacification program designed to encourage Viet Cong defection. Government military and political authorities seemed to have “little use” for Chieu Hoi ralliers and scoffed at the “notion that a properly handled Communist returnee could be a priceless source of information.”\textsuperscript{112} What is more, Herrington considered the methods employed at the regional interrogation center as “a throwback to the Spanish Inquisition.”\textsuperscript{113}

**Period of Irrelevance**

Between the spring of 1972 and the winter of 1975 -- a period when the conventional aspect of the Vietnam conflict increasingly overshadowed the “Other War” - - Americans involved in the South Vietnamese nationbuilding and counterinsurgency effort embarked on an emotional roller coaster akin to the one they had taken following the outbreak of the 1968 Tet Offensive. At first sight, the Communists’ 1972 Easter Offensive appeared quite devastating for pacification, especially to Americans stationed in the northern provinces of South Vietnam, where popular disgust with the ineffective and cowardly response of GVN leaders was palpable. Very quickly, however, US commentators altered their despairing tone. They began to praise the fighting abilities of the South Vietnamese soldiery -- in particular, the lowly territorial forces -- to note the marked improvement in public attitudes toward their government in the wake of the 1972

\textsuperscript{111} “Military men,” Herrington noted, “made no secret of their contempt for the police, whom they saw as a lazy, corrupt branch whose specialty was the acceptance of petty bribes at province checkpoints.” Ibid., 181.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 17.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 74-5.
invasion, and even to credit President Thieu for his steadfastness at the diplomatic
negotiating table and his choice of dynamic, new regional and provincial administrators.

Of course, these social scientists and bureaucratic analysts continued to hedge
their assessments of the GVN’s nationbuilding chances. South Vietnam was not yet a
fully democratic state, and President Thieu was not a full-fledged democratic leader.
Local security appeared manageable in most populated areas, but then the Viet Cong
organization still existed (in a diminished form) and the South Vietnamese police was
still not up to the job of maintaining order in the countryside. What is more, American
commentators seemed to realize -- at least, intellectually -- that the success of the whole
pacification and development game depended on preventing the North Vietnamese Army
from continually crashing in uninvited. Nevertheless, many appeared to retain their faith
in the GVN’s ability to keep picking itself off the ground after each massive politico-
military disruption.

In the eyes of Stuart Herrington and Major General Howard Cooksey, the Easter
Offensive seemed to bring out the best in South Vietnam’s territorial security forces.
“The Hau Nghia province militia forces earned the reputation for being the best in
Vietnam,” Herrington wrote, despite having received little support from South
Vietnamese regular units.114 Overall, he was struck by the “unusually high morale of the
South Vietnamese military” during Hanoi’s 1972 invasion, especially considering that the
average Vietnamese soldier “could not feel the positive things about his government that

114 Herrington accused the ARVN 25th Division of “bad conduct and a lack of aggressiveness” in
“randomly calling air strikes against unseen targets” in the battle for Trang Bang district. Ibid., 133.
we Americans tend to feel about our system.”

The senior US military advisor in I Corps in the post-Easter Offensive period, Cooksey described a remarkable South Vietnamese military-political comeback, similar in extent to the one that had occurred following Tet 1968. In the spring of 1972, the region’s territorial forces -- despite having done relatively well against the North Vietnamese invaders -- were decimated and disorganized in the northern provinces of I Corps and demoralized in the south.

Following the appointment of a new corps commander during the summer, however, the paramilitary’s condition began to improve. The Vietnamese began to follow the US Marine example of allocating regular soldiers to serve with RF/PF units in the villages. Partly as a result of the new combined units, Cooksey found that population security at the time of the Vietnamese cease-fire in January 1973 “was the best it had been since the [Easter] invasion.”

From Cooksey’s description, I Corps’ civil administration was in complete disarray when he had first arrived on the scene in the spring of 1972. All the major cities of central Vietnam were under siege by Communist forces, and thousands of families were homeless. It was clear to the civilian population that the GVN’s “top leadership had failed” in their primary duty to protect them. To make matters worse, government officials and wealthy Vietnamese were known to have sent their families to safer locales.

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115 Ibid., 188-9.
117 Although Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, and Quang Tin -- the southernmost provinces within I Corps -- “had fared better,” “fear and a sense of impending disaster prevailed” even there. Ibid., 32.
in the south, resulting in open “public contempt” for their leaders.\textsuperscript{118} But three months later, the governmental situation had been turned around, thanks largely to the efforts of the new I Corps commander, General Ngo Quang Truong, whom Cooksey credited with projecting “an image of purpose and calmness” that had permeated the ranks of the regional bureaucracy. During the summer and fall of 1972, GVN investigators began to “root out” many of the region’s worst officials. In addition, the corps commander issued directives that ensured a closer relationship between his military and civilian subordinates through “monthly coordination meetings” that dealt with all aspects of civilian government operations. Much to Cooksey’s surprise, given the “near chaotic situation” in the spring, I Corps was even able to meet the central government’s challenge of increasing local tax revenues without provoking much popular resistance.\textsuperscript{119}

Not all aspects of government were getting better, however. While the managerial side of government had improved, Cooksey admitted that the recent trend toward democracy had been “reversed.” Aside from suspending local and provincial elections, Saigon had given province chiefs the authority to replace and appoint all hamlet and, later, village officials. By the end of 1972, this policy had resulted in the replacement of 458 hamlet chiefs in I Corps, more than a quarter of those in office.\textsuperscript{120} Cooksey also blamed Saigon for its apparent indifference toward central Vietnam, as expressed in the region’s meager share of governmental revenues as compared to the southern part of the

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 32.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 32-4.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 33.
country, which had the further effect of making I Corps an “undesirable assignment” for most competent administrators.\textsuperscript{121}

Army Lieutenant Colonel William Tausch, who served as a deputy senior advisor in the Mekong Delta region for two years, considered his province of Kien Hoa to be in fine shape at the time of his departure in early 1973. Kien Hoa residents were not only more committed to the GVN than ever before, but they were becoming more and more fed up with the Viet Cong.\textsuperscript{122} Furthermore, the rather peaceful atmosphere currently existing in the province would certainly cause the rural population to react with “disfavor” once the Viet Cong returned to their old terrorist ways.\textsuperscript{123} The high quality of Kien Hoa’s territorial forces and the continued availability of air support were also causing military problems for the enemy.\textsuperscript{124} On the socioeconomic front, Tausch praised the province’s Revolutionary Development cadre as “the hardest working group in the entire system.”\textsuperscript{125} More tangible provincial improvements included increased production of miracle rice, additional land under cultivation, paved roads, and a boom in home construction. Finally, under the supervision of the “very knowledgeable and professionally competent” deputy province chief, Kien Hoa’s administrative bureaucracy was being thoroughly modernized.\textsuperscript{126}

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 35.
\textsuperscript{122} According to Tausch, the Communists had offered the people “ideological promises,” whereas “the GVN brought a symbolism of security, roads, schools, dispensaries and a chance of prosperity.” US Department of the Army, Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development, “Debriefing of Senior Officers: LTC William H. Tausch, Jr.,” 10 February 1973, US Army War College Library, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 6.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., Addendum 1.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{126} According to Tausch, the curriculum of the national cadre training academy at Vung Tau was a mere “orientation course” compared to the province’s civil service strict instruction regimen. Ibid., 11.
Despite his generally positive assessment of the situation in Kien Hoa, Tausch pointed out a number of areas related to security and development that needed improvement. He had harsh words for the government’s main propaganda organ, the Vietnamese Information Service (VIS), which he accused of failing to “take the lead” in broadcasting news favorable to the GVN, such as the South Vietnamese army’s “decided victories” following the Communist Easter offensive.\textsuperscript{127} Although largely complimentary toward the paramilitary, Tausch believed that Kien Hoa’s territorial forces were weak in the area of intelligence. “Frequently,” he wrote, “there was a complete absence of any information on the enemy,” even though whole battalions were clearly moving from one district to another.\textsuperscript{128} Tausch could not make up his mind concerning the effectiveness of the village militia. Admittedly, the PSDF did not hold up very well under combat, but it had been designed as an early-warning force. What is more, the existence of an armed citizenry served as a “deterrent to the freedom of movement of the VC.” Taush’s criticism of the National Police was more serious, however, especially in light of the recently proclaimed cease-fire. Ideally, controlling expected low-level, Communist-inspired violence should become the primary duty of the National Police, but, according to Taush, this assignment was likely to remain to beyond their capabilities for some time.\textsuperscript{129}

Closing out his third tour in the neighboring Mekong Delta province of Long An in early 1973, Deputy Senior Advisor Lieutenant Colonel Robert Lockridge portrayed the

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 8 and Addendum 2.
Vietnamese people as more committed to the GVN than ever before. This was the result of a combination of factors, including popular revulsion to Communists’ destructive military campaigning in 1972 and their unwillingness to abide by the 1973 cease-fire.\textsuperscript{130} But the GVN could take a large share of the credit as well. According to Lockridge, great strides in both security and development had brought unprecedented “prosperity and independence” to Long An. During the Easter Offensive, local security forces had finally “come of age,” thanks to the province chief’s careful selection of unit leaders.\textsuperscript{131} Even the notoriously bad National Police were in better shape than they had been two years earlier.\textsuperscript{132} On the development side, the picture was equally, if not more, bright. Lockridge proclaimed the Village Self-Development Program “a rousing success,” in that it had forced villagers to work together and assume responsibility for their own communities’ advancement. Revolutionary Development cadres, for their part, had “proven to be one of the most effective means of by-passing red-tape and rapidly getting to the people.”\textsuperscript{133} Finally, the Land-to-the-Tiller program “had done more in Long An to bring the people to the side of the GVN than any single program.”\textsuperscript{134}

But like his colleague, LTC Taush, Lockridge had a number of complaints with respect to the GVN’s pacification and development program. In his estimation, South

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{132} The construction and staffing of village police stations, Lockridge stated, had “at last brought the police to the people.” Despite the slow reaction time of the village constabulary, “at least the people now [had] a definite place to go to seek assistance.” Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 9
\textsuperscript{134} Lockridge even recommended that the 1971 land reform be made the subject of future historical research. Ibid., 15-16.
Vietnamese propaganda and public relations were still quite poor.\textsuperscript{135} Provincial officials generally proved incapable of making people aware of pacification-related success stories or of tangibly demonstrating to the average peasant the government’s concern for him and his family.\textsuperscript{136} Serious structural and personnel problems remained in the security area, too. Despite the basic soundness of the GVN soldier, the Army of Vietnam remained at best “a quasi military organization,” whose officer corps lacked professional sophistication.\textsuperscript{137} For his part, the individual policeman possessed “neither the education nor the intellect to do his job.” And while certainly adept at corruption, local police chiefs lacked the military skills to take on the added responsibility of being deputy village chiefs for security.\textsuperscript{138} With regard to the anti-Viet Cong infrastructure program, Lockridge observed that “rarely had any program received “so much impetus [sic] ... and proportionately accomplished so little.”\textsuperscript{139}

The head of the Third Regional Assistance Command (old III Corps) in 1972-73, Major General Marshall Garth, expressed many of the same sentiments regarding GVN pacification and development efforts as did his subordinate in Long An, Robert Lockridge. By and large, though, Garth was optimistic about South Vietnam’s nationbuilding endeavors. At the time of his departure in March 1973, most of the region’s highways were open to merchants and “market supplies were generally

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 9-10.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 2 and 6.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 7-8.
\textsuperscript{139} During his time in Long An, Lockridge claimed that he had known of only two operations against the VCI that had been triggered by Phoenix. Since the withdrawal of the Americans, the program had become “almost hopelessly stalled in bureaucratic paperwork.” Little effort was being expended on collecting “hard intelligence,” and even less on targeting specific individuals for “neutralization.” Ibid., 14.
plentiful.” As a result of the GVN’s 1971 land reform, 111,171 hectares had been
distributed to those who tilled the fields.⁴⁴⁰ Although qualified teachers remained in short
supply, Garth’s region had made “significant quantitative progress” in terms of students,
teachers, and classrooms at both the elementary and secondary levels.⁴⁴¹

According to Garth, the “overwhelming political factor” in the Mekong Delta
since his arrival in 1972 had been maneuverings on the part of the GVN and the
Communists in anticipation of the expected cease-fire. And, in his view, it was the
government side that was destined to come out on top in this political-military endgame.
The South Vietnamese military was “energetically and successfully ... driving enemy
forces out of ‘contested’ hamlets,” and stepping “up its efforts to eliminate the VCI and
destroy the enemy shadow supply system.” President Nixon’s landslide re-election and
President Thieu’s successful gambit to postpone the date of a cease-fire beyond the fall of
1972 had apparently dashed the enemy’s hope of a speedy and complete US withdrawal
from Vietnam. In addition, South Vietnamese President Thieu’s refusal to sign a
disadvantageous peace accord had allegedly increased his approval in the eyes of the
public. Finally, “the massive arrival of material for the GVN and the intensive air strikes
on North Vietnam” by the United States in December of 1972 had, according to Garth,
weakened “the enemy’s will to continue the armed conflict” and strengthened “the
military capabilities of the GVN.”⁴⁴²

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 16.
⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 18.
⁴⁴² Ibid., 18-19.
In their 1974 book, SEADAG organizers, Charles Joiner and John Donnell acknowledged that some of their social scientist colleagues might have been over-optimistic concerning South Vietnamese nationbuilding opportunities during the previous several years. Joiner pointed to the continued dominance of the military within the GVN, President Thieu’s authoritarian tendencies, the weakness of the legislative and judicial branches of government, the government’s manipulation of local elections, and the continued fragmentation and parochialism of non-Communist political parties. Above all, he recognized the fragility of South Vietnam’s nascent “democratic” institutions to the effects of a conventional military invasion such as that mounted by the North Vietnamese Army in 1972. “Elections, political parties, and legislatures notwithstanding,” asserted Joiner, “sheer firepower can eliminate overnight a decade of political development.”

Donnell, too, sought to downplay the significance of recent South Vietnamese nationbuilding efforts. What had occurred politically in South Vietnam since 1967, he believed, was “more aptly described as ‘predemocratic’” than democratic, and there was “no guarantee” that the situation would “necessarily develop beyond that.” Like Joiner, he ridiculed South Vietnamese opposition parties with their “tiny constituencies,” “paternalistic style,” lack of “programmatic alternatives,” and “sterile anti-communism.” If anything, Donnell expressed greater disappointment regarding

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145 Ibid., 152.
President Thieu’s political activities of the last several years. Thieu’s Democracy Party, organized to support his 1971 presidential bid, was an instrument of authoritarianism with no real constituent base outside the army and the civil service. Furthermore, the president’s December 1972 decree, ordering opposition parties to either join nationwide coalitions or be dissolved, further diminished the chances that non-GVN, non-NLF nationalists might gain a real share of political power. Apparently, Thieu had reneged on his implicit promise made in 1967 to create a broadbased, democratic nationalist front capable of confronting the Communists’ authoritarian political organization.

Yet the two political scientists seemed unwilling to give up on South Vietnam’s experiment in democratic nationbuilding. Joiner admitted that this American goal was “certainly still a quite distant ideal” in 1974. But South Vietnam had made great strides politically. “Significant numbers of people” had become “enmeshed in the legal political process.” It was true that South Vietnamese political institutions had taken a beating in 1972 and 1973, but they had not disintegrated. In sum, he believed that “it would be a mistake to underestimate the ability of the southern Vietnamese ... to struggle one more time to build and rebuild what they have lost.”

Aside from their continuing belief in the South Vietnamese people’s desire for an independent, liberal-democratic polity, die-hard American “Other Warriors” found two other reasons for their inextinguishable optimism regarding the Republic of Vietnam’s

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146 According to Donnell, the Democracy Party likely suffer the fate of the Diem regime’s defunct National Revolutionary Movement. Ibid., 159.
147 Ibid., 162-4.
149 Ibid., 10.
150 Ibid., 11.
chances for survival and further development: the alleged failure of the Communist
people’s warfare strategy by the end of the 1960s; and the presumed ability and
willingness of the United States to make up for the remaining military, political, and
socioeconomic shortfalls of its embattled ally. Thus the following two chapters are
devoted to a historical analysis of “Other Warrior” perceptions regarding Viet Cong and
US involvement in the intricate processes of nationbuilding and nation-destroying inside
South Vietnam.
CHAPTER 4

THE SUBVERSIVE AGENT: THE VIET CONG

Prior to the Communist Tet Offensive of 1968, American “Other Warriors” often admired the Viet Cong, however grudgingly. On the one hand, they mostly considered the National Liberation Front to be a subversive force controlled by duplicitous and power-hungry ‘foreigners’ (that is, the Communist Lao Dong Party in Hanoi). On the other hand, many American social scientists, civilian bureaucrats, and military officials involved in the “Other War” campaign acknowledged the depth of the Communists’ roots in the South Vietnamese countryside, the hardness of the Viet Cong’s politico-military organization, and the flexibility of Ho Chi Minh’s ‘people’s warfare’ strategy. Still, the Communist contagion, though far advanced, was not necessarily deadly. According to US “Other War” experts, the enemy committed a serious error by ‘militarizing’ and ‘northernizing’ the war effort in 1964-65, thus negating its previous political advantage over the Saigon regime and providing the allies with an opportunity to attack systematically its military superstructure.

To these “Other Warriors” and to many Vietnamese in the south, the results of Tet confirmed their belief that the Communist Party had forfeited the revolutionary mantle.
and had revealed to the South Vietnamese people its true self-seeking and brutal nature.

By the early 1970s, the Viet Cong were being portrayed as a much diminished and increasingly desperate band of terrorists and thugs. But even during the heyday of pacification between 1969 and 1971, US analysts admitted the difficulty of “neutralizing” the Communist infrastructure at a pace commensurate with the withdrawal of American forces from South Vietnam. Despite its weakened state, the Viet Cong remained the most powerful political force in the country and, perhaps more importantly, had the backing of the North Vietnamese Army, whose ability to wipe out GVN political gains -- if not win the war outright -- was demonstrated during the Easter Offensive of 1972.

**Virulent, But Not Deadly**

In his memoirs of his days as an ex-officio advisor to President Ngo Dinh Diem in the 1950s, Edward Lansdale forthrightly acknowledged the superior training received by Vietnamese Communist cadres in the art of “people’s warfare,” especially when compared to the less rigorous and relevant mix of traditional and Western instruction provided to aspiring GVN bureaucrats. “The best Vietminh teams,” Lansdale discovered, “were composed of personnel trained for political-military action in an isolated school, where their final examination was conducted personally, individual by individual, by Ho Chi Minh himself -- similar to what Mao Tse-tung had done in China.”¹ Unlike their South Vietnamese and American counterparts, Asian Communist leaders understood the importance of subordinating tactical military goals to the political end of winning the

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Vietnamese people over to their side.\textsuperscript{2} Yet, despite their belief in the primacy of politics, Vietnamese Communists did not dogmatically stick to a single strategic course. For example, beginning in 1956, they altered their agitation-propaganda strategy in favor of a more violent, terrorist-style approach and then saw this flexibility pay off in the stalled South Vietnamese pacification program of the late 1950s.\textsuperscript{3}

In the early-to-mid 1960s, American social scientists under contract to the US Department of Defense and the Agency for International Development sought to discover the secret of Communist success in the recruitment procedures, organizational methods, and populist policies of the Viet Cong. Some researchers found that moralistic cadre behavior, sophisticated sales and indoctrination techniques, and a combination of popular xenophobia and nationalism went a long way toward explaining the NLF’s appeal to South Vietnam’s rural population. Others believed that Communist exploitation of village grievances -- in particular, the uneven distribution of rice land -- was primarily responsible for the depth of Viet Cong support in the countryside.\textsuperscript{4} As for the source of Communist organizational resilience, government-sponsored academics pointed to three related factors: the multifaceted nature of the Viet Cong decisionmaking process, the emphasis on learning from past encounters with the enemy, and the ability to modify general directives based on local conditions.

\footnotesize{
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., 233.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., 352.
\textsuperscript{4} Most social scientists contended that Marxist-Leninism -- as a formal political ideology -- played an insignificant role in the recruitment of Viet Cong adherents.}

Despite the seeming irrepressibility of the Viet Cong in South Vietnamese rural areas, most US researchers believed that the Communists were not without exploitable faults. The righteous image of the NLF cadre contained elements of inflexibility and hauteur, to which ordinary, down-to-earth peasants objected. Living within a Communist society was also less glorious than the Viet Cong had initially pictured it. Forced labor and military service, high taxes, and isolation from the rest of the country made conditions rather onerous in VC-controlled areas. What is more, these day-to-day difficulties were exacerbated by periodic allied sweeps and air-artillery attacks on suspected enemy villages -- for which the peasantry, according to some American analysts, blamed the Viet Cong. In general, the militarization of the war in the mid-1960s had done grievous damage to the Communists’ popular standing. Unable to win on the battlefield against newly arrived Americans forces, the Viet Cong were supposedly on the verge of “losing the mandate of heaven.” As a result, rural South Vietnamese were beginning to pour out of Communist-controlled territory, further eroding the NLF’s base of manpower and logistical support. Finally, some social scientists suggested that the legendary Communist organizational system and vaunted land reform policy were flawed. The former was overly bureaucratic and slow to react to changing events, and the latter was beset by peasant skepticism regarding its promise to transform all tillers of the soil into permanent land owners.

In two reports issued in 1964 and 1965, RAND Corporation consultants John Donnell, Guy Pauker, and Joseph Zasloff concluded that commitment to the Communist cause was sustained by mixture of respect -- bordering on reverence -- for local Party
officials, nationalist idealism, and, to a lesser extent, attraction to certain Communist policies, such as educational opportunities. “The [Viet Cong] cadre has a more heroic image in South Vietnam,” wrote Donnell et al., “than in older European or Asian Communist movements...”5 In a 1965 follow-on report, Zasloff noted that “[e]ven defectors who were critical of the communist cause seemed to retain a certain awe of the Party” because of their ascetic lifestyle, hard work, and model behavior.6 Entry into a Viet Cong military unit was akin to taking vows in a religious order: normal sexual and familial needs were redirected toward a higher purpose.7

Second in importance as a recruiting tool to the bond between leader and follower was the inspiration provided by nationalist idealism. This was particularly true of southern Vietminh regroupees, who had fled South Vietnam at the time of the 1954 cease-fire and subsequently returned at the Party’s behest. “Though none of our respondents put it into words,” observed the RAND researchers, “we drew the strong impression that these Southerners, who had lived in the North and walked back down over a good part of Vietnamese territory, had developed a sense of the oneness of their nation.”8 To the dismay of the American social scientists, the Viet Cong interviewees strongly maintained that their nationalist struggle had its roots in the southern part of the

7 “A monkish solidarity,” they wrote, “is achieved in the main forces by a strict puritanical sexual code, and by compensatory strong emotional ties within the unit heightened by an emphasis on the ‘father image’ of the military commander and the ‘mother image’ of the political officer.” Donnell et al., Viet Cong Motivation and Morale, x.
8 Ibid., 17.
country. The Communists had successfully instilled within them the idea that theirs was “a revolution by, and for Southerners, with only some welcome assistance from Hanoi.” So great was this nationalist sentiment of fighting against foreign invaders and their puppets that substantial battlefield casualties had little effect on “the Viet Cong’s faith in ultimate victory.” Communist veterans countered assertions of South Vietnamese material superiority “with the familiar statement that ‘the GVN ha[d] airplanes, armored personnel carriers, and better weapons, but ARVN troops [fought] only for pay.’” They, by contrast, were “fighting for a just cause.”

One-time RAND consultant and former Army district advisor Jeffrey Race believed that the appeal of the Viet Cong to the South Vietnamese peasantry was largely socioeconomic in nature. Having talked at length with former government and Communist officials serving in Long An province in the 1950s and early ‘60s, Race found that the ex-Viet Minh and Viet Cong were “far more accurate observers of the social scene” the GVN administrators. This observation, Race believed, was borne out best in the two groups’ divergent opinions with regard to land reform. Whereas government officials “uniformly dismissed the significance of land ownership,” the former revolutionaries “uniformly emphasized its importance.” And these contradictory attitudes were reflected in the two sides’ land reform policies. The Communists had distributed Long An riceland far more broadly than had the

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9 Ibid., 48-49.
10 Ibid., 74.
11 Jeffrey Race, War Comes to Long An: A Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), xiii.
12 Ibid., ix.
government’s 1956 agrarian program. What is more, they had done this “without the killing and terror” that most Westerners associated “with communist practices in land reform.” Indeed, Race contended that most of the violence relating to land disputes was provoked by the government “in its attempts to reinstall the landlords.”

Focusing more generally on the Viet Cong’s “style of politics,” Nathan Leites uncovered additional aspects of the Party’s rural mystique. Unlike Jeffrey Race, Leites argued that the Viet Cong’s success with its land reform policy had at least as much to do with its moderation with respect to previous Communist agrarian revolutions than with its radicalism compared to the government’s plan. Except for a brief, disastrous turn to the left in 1965, the Viet Cong had “not catered to the land hunger of the poor by massive, ruthless expropriations of all landowners….” Fearing the wrath of the politically and financially significant “middle farmers,” the Communists had eschewed “‘instant’ agrarian revolution” and had restricted “agrarian reform to the confiscation of land of only very rich or politically undesirable owners.” Another significant factor in the peasants’ acceptance of Viet Cong administration had to do with the Communist cadres’ legalistic and straightforward behavior toward the people. This did not mean that the Viet Cong dispensed with violent tactics but that everyone understood their rules of the game. As a result, those targeted for coercion were carefully “investigated,

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13 Ibid., 166.
14 Nathan Leites, The Viet Cong Style of Politics (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, May 1969), xii-xiii.
15 “Generally speaking,” Leites asserted, “the populace, which associates vague and sinister warnings, constant suspicion, and repeated minor harassment with the style typical of the GVN, prefers what it regards as characteristic of the Viet Cong, whose cadres try to confine themselves to clear threats and spell out, for the individual’s choice, the consequences of compliance and noncompliance.” Ibid., xxii.
documented, and classified.”\textsuperscript{16} Furthermore, when innocent individuals were injured, the Party was more likely than the GVN to admit its mistakes and offer compensation.\textsuperscript{17}

But the punctilious external behavior of Viet Cong cadre masked a darker trait that damaged peasant-insurgent relations. This was the “sinister construction that the Party places on innumerable phenomena of innocent appearance,” which had apparently reached the point where anyone with a girlfriend could be accused of having an “illicit relationship.” What is more, “minor criticism of policy or practice, even an innocent slip of the tongue” could cause one to be labeled pro-imperialist. Such hypersensitivity on the part of the Communist cadre, Leites contended, “often provoke[d] the very disloyalty” that the Viet Cong sought to avoid.\textsuperscript{18}

Beginning in 1965, some RAND analysts began to focus on Viet Cong vulnerabilities stemming from changes in Party strategy and the massive US military intervention in Vietnam. According to Leon Goure and C.A.H. Thomson, the Communists’ “apparent decision to expand their forces ... added to their military, political, and psychological vulnerabilities” and led them “to sacrifice some of their important political and psychological advantages to military considerations.”\textsuperscript{19}

Furthermore, recent battlefield defeats challenged the Communists’ claim to “the mandate of heaven” by virtue of their superior military prowess and the inevitability of

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., xxiii.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., xxv.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., xxiv.
their march to power.\textsuperscript{20} The most important weakness in the Viet Cong’s position at mid-
decade was the fact that so many ordinary South Vietnamese were currently living in
Communist-controlled hamlets whose conditions they found “much more onerous than
those they had experienced under the GVN.”\textsuperscript{21}

In his 1966 study, W.P. Davison added to the list of peasant grievances against the
Viet Cong. “[E]verybody in Viet Cong areas,” he wrote, was “subject to heavy
taxation.”\textsuperscript{22} As a result, many peasants had ended up fleeing to government-controlled
areas or cutting their production to subsistence levels. Other grievances included the
special benefits accorded cadres and their family members, who, despite Communist
egalitarian pretensions, “frequently behaved in a haughty manner.”\textsuperscript{23} But most often
peasants complained about “the misery, death, and destruction caused by the bombing
and shelling of Viet Cong villages.” According to Davison, the residents of Communist-
controlled areas were more likely to blame their Viet Cong overlords for provoking these
attacks than they were to blame the Americans and the South Vietnamese for actually
mounting them.\textsuperscript{24} Still, he was careful to qualify his remarks concerning the decline of

\textsuperscript{20} Viet Cong propagandists, Goure and Thomson wrote, “exaggerate to cushion the truth about their
defeats, and to distort the situation in areas in Viet Cong control. When events palpably belie such
fabrications [however], the factual-minded Vietnamese who characteristically makes his judgments on the
basis of what he sees and experiences personally, more and more rejects the Front’s propaganda and doubts
the word of the cadres.” Ibid., 63.
\textsuperscript{21} The RAND researchers pointed, for example, to complaints registered by interview respondents
concerning heavy-handed Viet Cong indoctrination and the severing of communication between families
and their sons serving in the Communist armed forces. Ibid., 66-7.
\textsuperscript{22} “Income taxes, collected in money and rice,” Davison wrote, “are supplemented by a variety of other
taxes as well as by forced contributions of rice and forced purchases of troop-support bonds. The Front
authorities have attempted to make taxes progressive, but the cumulative effect of the many indirect taxes
has been to throw the tax burden most heavily on the poor.” W.P. Davison, Some Observations on Viet
Cong Operations in the Villages (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, May 1968), v.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 154.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 154-5.
Viet Cong control in South Vietnam in the early-to-mid 1960s. The Communists, he
admitted, maintained a certain hold on the imagination of rural residents because they
offered them “national pride, social equality, and land reform.”\textsuperscript{25} More importantly,
however, the Viet Cong political-military control apparatus remained substantially intact,
and Davison warned that unless “a way [could] be found to loosen the grip of the
organization and to provide new leaders at the village level, the Viet Cong structure [was]
likely to survive.”\textsuperscript{26}

Focusing on Viet Cong military operations in the Mekong Delta in the period
1964-66, RAND researchers M. Anderson, M. Arnsten, and H. Averch seemed impressed
by the thorough, multifaceted decisionmaking process associated with the Viet Cong
political-military machine. Supposedly, “no military operation” went ahead “unless the
associated political and social factors [were] favorable.”\textsuperscript{27} Furthermore, the Communist
organizational ethos emphasized learning from past actions, adaptation to changes in the
enemy situation, and meticulous preparation for future undertakings.\textsuperscript{28} Yet, the RAND
social scientists reasoned, it was possible that all this planning and coordination might be
turned into a handicap, especially given the relatively slow means of communication
available to the Viet Cong. This belief was echoed by David Elliot and W.A. Stuart after

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 153.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., xii.
\textsuperscript{27} M. Anderson, M. Arnsten, and H. Averch, \textit{Insurgent Organization and Operations: A Case Study of the
\textsuperscript{28} According to Anderson et al., the Viet Cong employed “a large number of after-action reports, lesson
plans, field manuals, and operations research reports.” They engaged in “thorough self-criticism sessions”
after every military engagement. They learned all that they could about US-South Vietnamese tactical and
technological weak points. And they buttressed their own operational activities with considerable
intelligence information and extensive planning. Ibid., x-xi.
observing the Communist position in Dinh Tuong province a year after Anderson et al.

“Despite its strengths and its successes,” they concluded, “the Viet Cong system” was not
only “bureaucratic and cumbersome,” but “sensitive to interventions” designed to
“disrupt communications and balance.”

In apparent contradiction to his earlier RAND report, John Donnell contended in
1967 that the Viet Cong had been less successful than its predecessor, the Viet Minh, in
“its appeal to pure patriotism” for military recruitment purposes. This did not mean,
however, that the Communists had resorted to the technique of simple mass conscription
to meet its increasing manpower needs. According to Donnell, the inducements
employed by the Viet Cong recruiter to persuade the young peasant to join up were
diverse, personalized, and at times, underhanded. Enemy propagandists took advantage
of “existing shortcomings” in Vietnamese society by making promises of additional land,
better education, and career opportunities, as well as superior treatment to that offered by
corrupt and abusive GVN military and civilian authorities. In some cases, attractive
lures were dangled before potential recruits to bring them into the net. In the final
analysis, Donnell concluded, indoctrination that enmeshed “the individual ... in an

31 “[T]he Front, he wrote, “could still afford to be relatively selective as well as patient in its recruitment” and preferred the use of “persuasion over threat or force” even in areas so firmly under its control that conscription could have been easily done. Ibid., x.
32 Ibid., xiii.
33 “[I]n this category,” stated Donnell, “is the subtle use of women, who are respected in Vietnamese society for character and intelligence as well as charm, and whose judgment and valor can be expected to have a powerful psychological effect and moral influence on the young men to whom they are exposed.” Ibid., xvi.
organizational network [via] psychological and social as well as political ties” was more important to the process of recruitment than conscious decisionmaking. The average peasant’s enlistment in the Viet Cong armed forces seemed to be based on cult-like psychological coercion, if not outright physical force.\footnote{34}{“Impressionable young recruits without a fixed political goal, without experience beyond the hamlet, and separated from their families,” asserted Donnell, “are apt to be deeply impressed by the seasoned cadres, with their quiet endurance of hardships, their dogged pursuit of revolutionary ideals, and their willingness to forgo personal gratification and the pleasures of family life.” \textit{Ibid.}, xvii.}

More pessimistic than many other RAND researchers of the mid-1960s, Konrad Kellen doubted whether a weak element -- or combination of weak elements -- existed in the Viet Cong edifice that would eventually cause the whole structure to collapse. In his view, any vulnerabilities in the opposing system could not undermine its mutually-reinforcing components. Kellen, for example, recalled with awe the ideological unshakeability of even the low-level Communist prisoners he had interviewed in Vietnam. With regard to one captured Viet Cong sergeant, the RAND analyst recalled the “forthrightness with which no captured Nazi ever spoke to his interrogator.”\footnote{35}{The Vietnamese presented his case, according to Kellen, with “fervor, clarity, and [a] tone of deep conviction.” The precepts of Communist Vietnamese dogma, which had become “deeply his own, virtually burst forth as he verbally assailed and pressure[d] his interrogator.” Konrad Kellen, \textit{A View of the VC: Elements of Cohesion in the Enemy Camp in 1966-1967} (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, November 1969), 67-9.} Such a virtuoso performance left Kellen wondering how many more there were “like him” among the South Vietnamese population.

Even more firmly embedded within the psychological makeup of Viet Cong followers than Communist-inspired beliefs, Kellen believed, was a “territorial instinct,” conditioned by “past invasions and occupations,” which caused many Vietnamese to
struggle “blindly against the ‘invader,’ regardless of who that ‘invader’ is or what he wants.” Despite the avowed anti-colonialist intentions of the United States, the RAND researcher surmised that this inherent xenophobia “might be very hard to neutralize with rational arguments or positive efforts.” Also, if one could identify powerful incentives for Viet Cong cadres to come over to the GVN side, the Party’s “around the clock” surveillance system would likely prevent many defections. Finally, a strong careerist impulse within Viet Cong officialdom served to dampen any latent desires to leave the movement. Thus this RAND analyst’s dire conclusion was that the Viet Cong might “not have a breaking point at all” and would “neither give up nor disintegrate, but [could] only be physically annihilated.”

But if the Communist politico-military organization was internally quite resilient, might it not be subverted by removing its popular base of support? A social scientific team headed by A. Terry Rambo — a consultant with the Human Sciences Research Corporation — seemed to suggest as much in a July 1967 report for the Department of Defense. As far as the Viet Cong were concerned, he wrote, refugee migration to areas under GVN administration in the central highlands province of Phu Yen had “directly attacked their basis of power in the rural areas without offering [them] new exploitable opportunities of sufficient value to balance this loss of control of population.”

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36 Ibid., 69.
37 Ibid., 70-1.
38 “After all,” Kellen noted, “the VC is also a powerful in-group in Vietnam, with roots deep in the population. To belong to it — despite the external risks and hardships — seems to provide many with a sense of security and belonging.” Ibid., 71.
39 Ibid., 74.
partly because Phu Yen refugees overwhelmingly placed the onus for their displacement on the Communists rather than on the GVN.\textsuperscript{41} Reportedly, Viet Cong demands for labor and taxes were “particularly important causal factors in refugee movement.” Furthermore, refugees seemed to resent the “‘political re-education’ sessions” which the Communists forced them to attend.\textsuperscript{42}

By contrast, a 1968 Stanford Research Institute (SRI) study, sponsored by the US Agency for International Development (AID), pointed to the early and far-reaching Communist agrarian policies as a fundamental problem for the GVN in its efforts to win over the Viet Cong-controlled population.\textsuperscript{43} In those parts of South Vietnam exposed to Communist influence since the 1940s, argued William Bredo, the GVN had little opportunity of becoming the champion of the land-poor peasantry since landlordism had largely been abolished there.\textsuperscript{44} To make matters worse, by permitting land owners to retain up to 100 hectares of their property, the South Vietnamese government reform plan paled in comparison to the Viet Cong policy of allowing a maximum of five hectares per

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{41} “Over two-thirds of the refugees,” the Human Sciences team reported, “cite fear of terrorist or coercive acts as being factors in their decision to move. And of the refugees who cite such factors, the Viet Cong are listed as the causal agents by all but 2.3%.”
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\item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 37.
\item \textsuperscript{43} For an alternative social scientific view, see Edward J. Mitchell, \textit{Inequality and Insurgency: A Statistical Study of South Vietnam} (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, June 1967). A RAND economist, Mitchell contended that the conventional American assumption that the promotion of greater equality of land tenure in South Vietnam would help the GVN cause was probably erroneous. Based on a statistical analysis of factors related to government control in South Vietnam, he concluded that GVN forces were more likely to hold sway in areas where land inequalities were greatest; therefore, expropriation and redistribution of large properties might have the effect of actually assisting the spread of Viet Cong rural domination. Although reportedly influential with certain U.S. government officials (such as Henry Kissinger), Mitchell’s analysis was disputed on both logical and statistical grounds by land reform advocates in and out of government.
\item \textsuperscript{44} William Bredo, \textit{Land Reform in Vietnam}, vol. 5 (Menlo Park, CA: Stanford Research Institute, December 1968), 142.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
farm family. Furthermore, the GVN land distribution program devoted little attention to the property-owning desires of farm laborers -- whereas the Viet Cong attended first to the wants of landless peasants. Finally, Bredo judged the Communist administrative procedures with respect to land redistribution to be superior to those of the Saigon government. The Communist redistribution system was also more expeditious, since the Viet Cong focus was on moving people onto forfeited properties rather than on establishing legal rights to tenancy or ownership.

Nevertheless, unlike RAND’s Jeffrey Race, Bredo and his SRI team considered that the Communist land program contained serious flaws that the GVN might exploit, provided that the Saigon government adopted a superior agrarian reform law of its own. First of all, there was the matter of the ultimate goals of the two sides. “The policy of the present government of the Republic of Vietnam (GVN),” Bredo asserted, “is to enlarge the land ownership base within the existing socio-economic framework of a private land tenure system, whereas the Communists employ land reform as a means to political power and wish to eliminate not only landlordism but also all private property, with collectivized agriculture as the end result.” Although this ultimate objective was carefully hidden from the beneficiaries of Communist land reform, a number of peasants

\[45\] Ibid., 139-40.
\[46\] Ibid., 172.
\[47\] “In contrast to GVN land reform policies which are highly centralized,” he noted, “the Viet Cong adapted its land policy to local conditions, leaving it to the Viet Cong leadership to determine how, where, and when to apply land reform measures to achieve optimal results.” Ibid., 31.
\[48\] According to Bredo, there was “no VC equivalent to the time-consuming application, title search, and registration procedures; cadastral surveys; lease contracts; registers; and most of the formalities associated with GVN administration of land affairs.” Ibid., 148.

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in Viet-Cong controlled areas had apparently applied to purchase their newly acquired lands from the GVN -- "not altogether convinced of the sincerity of the Viet Cong or the permanence of the arrangement."\textsuperscript{50} Lastly, there was for the Viet Cong the increasingly contentious issue, also mentioned by several RAND researchers, of how to treat the properties of the "middle" peasantry. "The elimination of all but the relatively small landlord" in Viet Cong-controlled areas by the early 1960s had reduced "the amount of land available to the VC for further redistribution," and thus the hitherto protected "middle" peasant, who played a "pivotal" role in Viet Cong strategy, had become "the target of confiscation," provoking an ideological storm within Communist ranks that continued to rage.\textsuperscript{51}

Like their social scientist colleagues, bureaucratic "Other Warriors" in the mid-1960s believed that the Viet Cong was a formidable -- albeit potentially beatable -- adversary. Some of these Washington and Vietnam-based analysts and officials held that the true source of the Communists' power lay in their sophisticated propaganda and organizational system, which captivated peasants and intellectuals alike. Others stressed the Viet Cong's exploitation of long-held rural grievances. And still others pointed to the Viet Cong's success in countering the allied campaign to pacify the countryside through killing and intimidating "Other War" functionaries and keeping conditions generally insecure. Most expressed bitterness with regard to the devilish 'duplicity' of the Communists -- that is, in their ability to hoodwink the Vietnamese people into believing

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 141.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 150-1.
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they were acting on the ‘people’s’ behalf, while actually acting for their own selfish ends. Fortunately for the allies, bureaucratic prognosticators claimed to see signs that the Viet Cong’s allure was fading among the population. Because of the militarization of the war by the Communists -- and the consequent American military intervention -- the NLF’s successful political strategy had been downgraded. Furthermore, the anti-Viet Cong attitude prevalent among minority groups, such as the Cambodians and the Catholics, was becoming more widespread among ethnic Vietnamese increasingly caught up in the fighting. Finally, according to bureaucratic ‘Other Warriors,’ the fiction of the NLF’s independence was becoming more apparent with the “northernization” of the Communist war effort. Respectable South Vietnamese of all political stripes were reportedly rejecting the Viet Cong, perceiving it to be a mere “tool” of the Hanoi regime.

To United States Information Agency (USIA) analyst Douglas Pike, Viet Cong progress in the early 1960s was largely the result of an Orwellian propaganda and organizational campaign directed towards a socially and psychologically weakened Vietnamese peasant population. With a mixture of admiration and disdain, the Saigon-based Orientalist summarized his sentiments regarding the Vietnamese Communist approach to people’s war in the introduction to his 1966 work on the Viet Cong, published under the auspices of MIT’s Center for International Studies. “The concept of revolutionary guerrilla warfare is,” Pike acknowledged, “a superb strategy, efficacious as an antidote to modern arms and in harmony with the world’s temper, efficiently harnessing social forces already loosened.” The Communists possessed the uncanny ability to oppose “the aspirations of the people while apparently furthering them” and to
proclaim "their love for peace" while "advocating war as a weapon of social change."

Giving the Viet Cong credit where it was due, Pike found that their success in the
politico-military arena was more a matter of their "brilliant strategy" of revolutionary
warfare than it was a result of the mistakes and unresponsiveness of the Saigon regime.\footnote{Douglas Pike, \textit{Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam} (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1966), 28.}

According to this longtime Communist watcher, the Viet Cong had not succeeded
thus far through the use of terrorist threats and idealistic promises (although these were
both weapons within their well-equipped arsenal.) They had done so through
organizational and communications means.\footnote{For example, they excelled at making specialized appeals to particular target audiences: that is, Vietnamese living in contested areas or under GVN control (\textit{dich van}), enemy soldiers and civilian functionaries (\textit{tin\'h van}), and Vietnamese residing in areas under Communist domination (\textit{dan van}).} Pike argued that Vietnamese Communist
leader Ho Chi Minh’s "primary genius was clearly in the field of organization." Ho had
learned in his struggle against the French that it was easier to absorb a nationalist rival
and thereby broaden one’s base of followers via a united-front organization "as a prelude
to amputating its leadership" than it was to mount a frontal attack against an independent
opponent.\footnote{Ibid., 42.} The Communist-dominated National Liberation Front (NLF) in South
Vietnam was the evolutionary descendant of this strategy. Most important to the Viet
Cong hopes of victory, however, were the persuasive activities of "agit-prop" cadres at
the village level, who used communication as a "weapon [to] strike at the vitals of the
GVN."\footnote{Ibid., 120.}
The heart of the Viet Cong’s “communication system” was the liberation
association. Through this mechanism, Communist cadres had managed to enmesh
Vietnamese villagers within a “self-contained ... social organization” whose bonds were
much stronger than those created through “mere surface acceptance of the [national
liberation] message by the individual.”56 Although a technique best attuned to the needs
of underdeveloped countries, Pike felt that Americans could recognize the potency of the
liberation association by comparing them to US voluntary organizations.57 Akin to the
Boy Scouts, the Masons, and the Daughters of the American Revolution, Communist-
dominated liberation associations held out specific attractions to different groups in
society.58 But here the resemblance to American voluntary groups ended. From Pike’s
description, the liberation associations bore more of a likeness to coercive religious cults
than to the Boy Scouts. Once caught in the Viet Cong’s organizational web, Vietnamese
villagers had little choice but to remain and be subjected to systematic indoctrination in
the simplistic and distorted Communist world view. According to Pike, NLF followers
did not “enlist in the cause... for one or more rational or emotional reasons;” quite the
opposite. Recruitment came before wholehearted acceptance of the organization and its
message: that is, “conversion followed subversion.”59

56 Ibid., 124.
57 “The Boy Scout movement,” he indicated as an illustration, “transmits and inculcates a whole complex
of beliefs, the scope of which is indicated by the twelve Scout laws.” For its part, “[w]hat the NLF did was
deliberately create [a comparable] organizational structure specifically to transmit information, data,
beliefs, and values.” Ibid., 126.
58 “For the farmer, for example, the Farmer’s Liberation Association meant land reform; for the village
women the Women’s’ Liberation Association meant status and more equal rights with men.” Ibid., 166-7.
59 Ibid., 376.
Despite its undoubted subversive successes, Pike claimed to see signs that the Viet Cong’s organizational grip over the South Vietnamese populace was slipping. The combination of a more militaristic Communist strategy and the related American decision to intervene in Vietnam meant that grassroots political activities were beginning to play a less important role in the national liberation movement. Southern and northern Vietnamese Communists had debated since the early 1960s, according to Pike, the issue of “whether it would be possible to win through victory in [a] revolutionary guerrilla war” that mobilized the civilian population and attrited and immobilized — but did not physically destroy -- the enemy’s military establishment. By and large, southerners believed this was possible; northerners, however, believed that a war of liberation would have to pass through a final, conventional military phase in order to completely vanish the enemy. “In the end,” Pike wrote, “Northerners won the NLF debate, and military activities increased in scope, tempo, and nature.” And the United States responded with a massive Air Force bombing campaign and the dispatch of large numbers of ground forces to South Vietnam. This action-reaction sequence had been fatal to the Communist cause since the Viet Cong could not hope to “slug it out militarily with the United States,” even if “aided by large numbers of regular troops from North Vietnam.”

In an article in the Reporter that appeared in February 1966, Pike contended that even longtime backers of the revolutionary cause in the South no longer closely identified themselves with the Communists. “The idealistic attraction has faded,” he wrote. “Viet Cong supporters now mutter guardaedly about the ‘revolution betrayed,’ and splinter

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60 Ibid., 107-8.
groups call themselves ‘true Communist revolutionaries.’” The militarization, Americanization, and northernization of the war were turning the common people against the NLF. They resented the “increased taxation, forced conscription, and brutal and bloody [control] measures” that came with the doctrinal shift in favor of conventionalized armed struggle. What is more, the self-proclaimed defenders of the people were now popularly perceived as “magnets,” attracting U.S. bombs and artillery shells that devastated Viet Cong-dominated hamlets and villages. Pike also indicated that the influx of northern cadres as replacements for the six thousand highly-trained Viet Cong leaders lost on the battlefield since 1961 was also unpopular among many South Vietnamese, who resented “the highhanded manner of the Northerner, a feeling exacerbated by deep and long-standing regional prejudices.”

Like Pike, Saigon-based CIA analyst George Carver sensed that the Viet Cong’s sociopolitical position in South Vietnam was not as strong as many Vietnam War opponents in the United States proclaimed. “No Vietnamese of what could accurately be described as of significant personal prestige or professional standing,” Carver asserted in Foreign Affairs magazine, had “ever been willing to associate himself publicly with the NLF or lend it the use of his name.” Why did the Viet Cong include no “respectable” individuals among its membership? According to Carver, politically-aware South Vietnamese understood that the Communists’ anti-imperialist, pro-nationalist message

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62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., 23.
was misleading and that the Viet Cong was itself a tool of North Vietnamese aggression.

The NLF had “no universally appealing theme in any way comparable to the Viet Minh’s espousal of anti-French nationalism.” Furthermore, knowledgeable Vietnamese were not easily fooled by Viet Cong protestations regarding its “freedom and independence from northern control,” since they could see for themselves North Vietnamese troops comprised an increasingly large portion of the Communist military forces.\(^65\) This was not to say that there were not genuine patriots serving with the Communists in the South. Nevertheless, Carver characterized the NLF as “a contrived political mechanism with no indigenous roots,” which certainly did not represent the “sole legitimate voice of the South Vietnamese people.”\(^66\)

Still, George Tanham -- head of AID’s Rural Affairs office in South Vietnam during the period 1962-65 -- admitted in 1966 that Viet Cong political-military activities had made it “increasingly difficult” for Vietnamese officials and US Provincial Representatives to travel in many rural parts of the country, “much less carry out meaningful programs.”\(^67\) He attributed the relatively greater degree of Viet Cong progress in the countryside to the fact the Communists had “been waging a revolution while the Government of Vietnam and the United States [had] been primarily fighting a war.” The Viet Cong had detected the smoldering sense of “dissatisfaction and desire for change” among the urban and rural residents of South Vietnam and had exploited it to

\(^{65}\) Ibid., 371.

\(^{66}\) Ibid., 372.

“build their own organization and influence.”$^{68}$ Although terror had played an important role in ridding many rural areas of a GVN administrative presence and shaping the popular will, it was not the essential element in the Communists’ control strategy. The Viet Cong message was especially appealing to young people because it fulfilled certain “latent and unarticulated psychological needs of the young” that were no longer adequately provided for by such “traditional institutions [as] the family, the village, the tribe, and religion.”$^{69}$ But this succoring of the young by the Communists was merely a tactic, masking their “real objective” of acquiring “total power” throughout the whole of Vietnam. Once the southern part of country came under its sway, Tanham argued, the Party would do away with competing political parties, “the basic freedoms of speech, press, and assembly, as well as free elections.” And despite the current Viet Cong policy of “land-to-the-tiller,” “free enterprise and private ownership of land [would] be abolished” under a future Communist regime.$^{70}$

In the period immediately prior to his taking on the job of CORDS chief in May 1967, Robert Komer refused to underestimate the serious challenges faced by those on the frontlines of the “Other War” in Vietnam. The Communist enemy, he told President Johnson, sought “to throttle Vietnam’s economy by systematic disruption of its transport, communications and commerce,” as well as by terrorizing and harassing those in the civil society who sought to cooperate with the government in its plans for “modernization and

$^{68}$ Ibid., vii.
$^{69}$ Ibid., 19.
$^{70}$ Ibid., viii - ix. 

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social justice.”71Because the Communist insurgency depended upon the maintenance of rural insecurity, poverty, and injustice, the Viet Cong were determined to thwart the GVN’s Revolutionary Development program in the countryside. 72 Still, according to Komer, this was no reason to give up on pacification and development. Rather, Americans and South Vietnamese should redouble their efforts in this area in order to hit the Communists where it hurt.

“Other War” enthusiasts in the US Army and Marine Corps in the early-to-mid 1960s were similarly determined to grapple with the unconventional aspects of the Vietnam conflict. Like their bureaucratic and social scientist counterparts, they acknowledged the insidiousness of the threat to the GVN. Viet Cong guerrillas had established themselves throughout the South Vietnamese countryside and were reinforced by battle-hardened units of regulars. For the moment, the Communists had the best of the GVN politically as well. As the challenger, they could make promises and pose as the agent of change without having to deliver on their promises or explain their proposed ‘new society’ in too explicit terms. And the Viet Cong assassination campaign -- by targeting the best and worst of South Vietnamese provincial administrators -- was decreasing the GVN’s chance of countering the Communist line with progressive achievements.

Nevertheless, most of these American military officers believed that the balance of power was shifting perceptibly in South Vietnam. The operations of highly trained
and well-equipped American troops had begun to strip Viet Cong guerrillas and political operators of their conventional military protection, leaving them exposed to the longer-term lethality of pacification. What is more, the American military, at least in some parts of the country, was demonstrating its willingness to endure costly Communist armed attacks without backing away from its commitment to protect South Vietnam’s citizens. This change in the conventional military situation had reportedly led the Communist leadership in Hanoi to reduce the tempo of its operations and lengthen its timeframe for victory. For many US officers, the Communists’ switch to a ‘protracted war strategy’ was a sign of renewed allied vigor and enemy weakness. Still, some worried about the consequences of a long-lasting, if low intensity, war in Vietnam on American morale and interventionist will.

Former US Army advisors John H. Cushman and Edwin Chamberlain publicly acknowledged that the South Vietnamese military faced a well-organized opponent in the Viet Cong organization of the Mekong Delta. By 1963-64, according to then-Colonel Cushman, the Communists had established “several large battalions and well over a dozen separate district companies” of full-time guerrilla forces on the Ca Mau peninsula south of Saigon. In addition, virtually every hamlet and village in IV Corps had its own Viet Cong squad and platoon, respectively, providing armed backing to the political side of the insurgency.73 Prior to 1964, Cushman wrote, the pervasiveness and strength of the Viet Cong apparatus had persuaded many average Vietnamese that they should “search

73 John H. Cushman, “Pacification: Concepts Developed in the Field By the RVN 21st Infantry Division,” Army 16, no. 3 (March 1966): 22.
for alternatives to the tedious task of fighting the VC.” By 1966, however, he considered
that public defeatism was fast disappearing in IV Corps as a result of the GVN’s “new
and improved” pacification program.74 For his part, Edwin Chamberlain felt less
sanguine about the prospects for quashing the Viet Cong insurgency in Long An
province. Unlike Cushman, Chamberlain associated the post-Diem pacification program
with deceit and tactical ineffectiveness. Still, he believed that the continued state of
insecurity in his part of South Vietnam had more to do with the unfavorable conventional
military situation. In Chamberlain’s view, the failure of the South Vietnamese army in
1963-64 to “hunt down and destroy” the Communist regular military organization in
Long An had negated any chance for pacification’s success during his tour of duty.75

Although US Army planners in Washington questioned whether the Viet Cong
could simply be killed off, they admitted that a strategy designed to chip away at the
Communists’ rural base of support had its own pitfalls. For one thing, the Communists
were in a more advantageous political position than were the GVN and the US.76 Beyond
this negative advantage, the Viet Cong possessed several positive attributes that made
them quite a formidable adversary: strong nationalist credentials, an entrenched rural
infrastructure, and a truly revolutionary message. The Communists had apparently
convinced many rural Vietnamese that they represented a “new society” based on

74 Ibid., 23.
76 According to the authors of PROVN, the enemy was “opposing a ‘government’ that cannot validly claim
the active loyalty of a majority -- even a significant minority -- of the [South Vietnamese] people...” Consequently, the Viet Cong did “not have to deliver” on their political promises until after they had won
the war. The allies, on the other hand, had “to deliver in order to win.” US Army, Deputy Chief of Staff for
Military Operations, A Program For The Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam
(PROVN), vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, March 1966), 2, NTIS, 199-], microfiche.
“achievement, loyalty, dedication and motivation” as opposed to corruption, nepotism and parochialism — qualities associated with the GVN.\textsuperscript{77} Despite this heroic image, the Viet Cong had their faults. On the military side, these included inflexibility in the area of command and control, difficulty in concentrating its forces, the necessity of remaining constantly on the move, and an austere logistical support network.\textsuperscript{78} On the political side, the 1966 PROVN report noted “indications of a growing Vietnamese resentment” of coercive Communist practices. The time was coming, it predicted, when the Viet Cong persona would change from nationalist savior to “would-be-conqueror and oppressor.”\textsuperscript{79} Somewhat at odds with the prevailing Army perspective, US Marines held a positive view of allied counterinsurgent achievements in the mid-1960s. In the Marine Corps Gazette, Lieutenant Colonel David Clement related the tale of the “successful” Marine pacification of the village of Le My in I Corps, which Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara visited during his tour of South Vietnam in 1966. Nevertheless, despite his enthusiastic endorsement of the community development process -- the building of a marketplace, the holding of elections, the participation of the villagers in decisionmaking -- Clement ended his tale on a discordant note: the assassination of Le My’s village chief.\textsuperscript{80} In Captain Francis West’s telling, Marine-style pacification in the central Vietnamese fishing community of Binh Nghia in Quang Ngai province began

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 32-42 and vol. 2, 1-54/5.
\textsuperscript{78} PROVN, vol. 1, 37.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 37-8.
\textsuperscript{80} Attempting to minimize this event, he noted that the American press had blown the incident out of proportion, “well knowing it marked the end of a success story.” Still, Clement acknowledged that the “mystical aura of [Le My’s] success had been ominously diminished” by the mayor’s death. David A. Clement, “Le My: Study in Counterinsurgency,” Marine Corps Gazette 51, no. 7 (July 1967): 24.
ominously but moved inexorably toward a happy conclusion. The village virtually “belonged to the Viet Cong” by 1965.\textsuperscript{81} Still, despite the shortcomings of most GVN officials and cadres, the capacity of the US Marines and Vietnamese Popular Forces to endure the Communist onslaught on Binh Nghia for over a year and a half eventually provoked a change in the enemy’s local strategy.\textsuperscript{82} The price in lives of attempting to take the allied Combined Action Platoon (CAP) by storm became too great, and following the withdrawal of North Vietnamese main force units into the mountains, local Communist forces in and around Binh Nghia “avoided pitched battles.”\textsuperscript{83} What is more, beginning in the fall of 1967, the Viet Cong stopped trying to prevent the spread of pacification in the village “on a daily guerrilla basis,” making the US Marine presence superfluous.\textsuperscript{84}

At a higher level within the Marine Corps hierarchy, Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak also observed a change in the Communist strategic approach in response to allied battlefield victories. Unlike West, however, Krulak worried about the longer-term repercussions of this change. As he explained in a letter to Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, the enemy had taken “a severe beating” in 1965-66 as a consequence of its decision to move into the final, conventional stage of the revolutionary war cycle. Chastened by their losses, the Communist high command had shifted course from trying to defeat the allies in massive, combined arms operations to deploying threatening forces

\textsuperscript{81} Francis J. West, \textit{The Village} (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 8 and 10.
\textsuperscript{82} Besides stiff and continuous CAP resistance, West mentions another possible factor in the Communist decision to withdraw from Binh Nghia: latent village resentment toward the Viet Cong movement, which had originated locally in the rival fishing community across the river from Binh Nghia. Ibid., 146.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 143.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 189.
on South Vietnam's borders and intensifying the employment of guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and subversion inside the country. This had been a “sagacious” and “far reaching” decision on North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh’s part, according to Krulak. The Marine Corps commander warned Secretary McNamara that Ho was “putting his hopes on manpower erosion and protracted combat among the people, expecting that the demand for more fighting men to meet the needs of the slow-moving guerrilla war will cause U.S. resolution to waiver.”

Isolated, But Still Dangerous

Given the prevailing belief that the Communists had adopted a lower profile strategy in the face of American military might, the extent and ferocity of the Tet Offensive of 1968 caught many ‘Other Warriors’ by surprise. Once recovered from their shock, however, they tended to express some satisfaction regarding the post-Tet situation in South Vietnam, attributable, in large part, to their conviction that the Viet Cong had overreached militarily and had depleted much of its political capital as well. According to government-supported social scientists, Vietnamese peasants were sick to death of Communist restrictions on their daily activities and ability to make a living -- not to mention the perennial insecurity associated with harboring guerrillas and thus exposing themselves to allied attacks. Still, these academics balked at predicting the Viet Cong’s imminent demise or willingness to come to terms with the Saigon regime. The fabled Viet Cong infrastructure apparently remained largely intact, and the ‘blood debt’ on both

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sides of the Vietnamese conflict remained too high to contemplate a ‘true’ political settlement in the near future.

Despite the strength of the Viet Cong organization, as well as continuing cadre efforts to retain the voluntary support of the peasantry, it was RAND researcher R. Michael Pearce’s opinion that the insurgent’s environment was evaporating. “The morale of the peasants has ebbed,” he wrote in May 1969, “and most of them merely go through the motions of supporting the Viet Cong.” The “peasant-insurgent relationship” in South Vietnam had been turned on its head.86 Pearce believed that the draining away of Communist support could be attributed to peasant resentment against the guerrillas for making them the object of ARVN attacks and for imposing overly strict controls on their freedom.87 Unlike his colleagues Jeffrey Race and Nathan Leites, he argued that the Party’s social policies at the village level had had a deleterious impact on the Viet Cong’s rural popularity. For one thing, many peasants disliked being lorded over by fellow villagers turned Communist cadre who had been “illiterate and poor” joining the Party.88 For another, many of those who had lost land under Viet Cong felt that they had been unfairly treated. According to Pearce, this group included many middle peasants “who owned barely enough land to support their families.”89 In addition, because of the Party’s policy of restricting commerce with GVN-held areas -- while simultaneously demanding more from the local population in terms of supplies and manpower -- the

86 Modifying Mao Tse-tung’s famous people’s war dictum, Pearce claimed that it was now “probably more accurate to say ‘When the water goes down to the bottom of the river the fish show.’” R. Michael Pearce, The Insurgent Environment (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, May 1969), 105.
87 Ibid., 99.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid., 104.
overall economic condition of “liberated” areas had deteriorated significantly since the mid-1960s.\textsuperscript{90} Nevertheless, the RAND analyst acknowledged that the waning of peasant support for the Communist cause might not be enough to defeat the insurgency -- if the resilient Viet Cong organization could maintain its grip on the countryside..

Harvard University Professor Samuel Popkin characterized most of South Vietnam as pacified by 1970 -- in the sense that it had been physically secured. In a presentation before the Southeast Asia Development Advisory Group, Popkin noted that the Viet Cong were currently in a paradoxical position. Internationally, they were stronger than ever as a result of the 1968 Tet Offensive. But, for much the same reason, their domestic position was weaker than it had been since the late 1950s.\textsuperscript{91} In contrast to Pearce, Popkin contended that “it would be a mistake to assume either that this military progress in the countryside is permanent, or that it is an indication of any fundamental improvement in the relations between the Saigon government and its constituents.”\textsuperscript{92} The Vietnamese people might be tiring of the exactions demanded by the Viet Cong, but they still bore no love for the GVN. Perhaps more importantly, the allied program to “neutralize” the Communist military-political apparatus in the countryside -- the Phoenix Program -- had achieved “limited success, at best.” Not only did the Viet Cong continue to maintain “the most extensive political network in the country,” but government policemen -- seeking to fulfill their quotas of Viet Cong operatives -- were alienating

\textsuperscript{90} Despite declining rice production in Communist villages, Party leaders had introduced additional measures “to separate the peasant from his meager fare and provide more rice for the Viet Cong.” Consequently, not only were the peasants poorer than ever, they lacked the incentive to increase their crop yields for fear the Communists would confiscate any surplus. Ibid., 101.


\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
rural residents by making arbitrary arrests and failing to involve elected village officials in the detention process.\textsuperscript{93} Therefore, maintained Popkin, announcements of the Viet Cong’s demise were, at best, premature.

Although not yet ready to sue for peace, the Vietnam Special Studies Group (VSSG) concluded in 1970, the enemy had lost touch with its popular base in several key provinces in the Mekong Delta and Central Vietnam. Decimated by their Tet offensive and subsequently chased from the villages by the allied counteroffensive of late 1968, Communist units had dispersed and retreated to the mountains and swamps, where they faced shortages of supplies and reinforcements. As for the Viet Cong agents who stayed behind, they apparently were encountering increased animosity from the civilian population, particularly in areas that had been spared the violence of war prior to Tet. Still, VSSG researchers did not foreclose the notion that the Viet Cong might emerge once again as a potent political-military force. Even the most optimistic among them worried that the withdrawal of US troops from the countryside -- though partially covered by an enlarged South Vietnamese security presence -- provided local Communists’ an opening for a possible return to power. More pessimistic analysts pointed to intelligence estimates indicating that -- despite the relative inactivity of Communist military units inside South Vietnam -- their potential for doing harm remained considerable. And despite their less than enthusiastic popular reception, Viet Cong cadre seemed already hard at work repairing their grassroots political network.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 664 and 667.
According to an early 1970 VSSG analysis of the situation Long An province, GVN gains there were less a matter of increased pacification effectiveness on the part of the allies than they were the result of a drastic decline in overall Communist politico-military effectiveness. In particular, they noted, “the losses suffered” by the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army in 1968 had “deal[ed] a blow to the quality and capability of the enemy main forces from which they have yet to recover.” Since the spring of 1969, Communist conventional units had appeared to split into smaller formations, with most remaining in their base areas and avoiding contact with allied forces. For their part, provincial guerrilla and political cadre organizations were much reduced in size.94 This anti-Communist trend was not “irreversible,” but improvement would probably require a complete American military withdrawal, plus a considerable additional effort on the enemy’s part. True, the Communists had thus far compensated for their numerical losses in Long An by bringing in mostly North Vietnamese forces from other areas. The reorganized Communist politico-military organization, however, had been unable to rollback South Vietnamese control gains. VSSG analysts admitted that this was attributable, in large part, to the presence of a US brigade in Long An. Consequently, it remained to be seen whether the enemy’s main forces would “continue to be ineffectual after the departure of the U.S. troops, especially in view of the normally weak performance of ARVN in Long An.” Looking at the bright side, the VSSG team concluded that “the increase in GVN local security forces will at a minimum make the

enemy’s efforts to rebuild his forces and reassert his control considerably more difficult than before.”

Although not one of the historical “centers of Communist strength” in Vietnam, the north-central province of Thua Thien had largely fallen under Viet Cong control in 1967-68. According to VSSG analysts, however, a complete reversal of fortunes was evident by the close of the allied Accelerated Pacification Campaign (APC) in January 1969. As in Quang Nam and Long An, they concluded that changes in the conventional war had had a “major impact on security and control in Thua Thien.” Here, it was not so much Communist military losses or allied military reinforcements that had made the difference; rather, it had been the withdrawal of the bulk of the enemy’s main forces from populous lowland districts into the western mountains. According to the VSSG team, this exodus had occurred for a number of reasons: among them, a desire to avoid additional causalities in the aftermath of Tet; allied disruption of the vital logistical system running through the A Shau valley; and the “successes of pacification, which [had] increasingly denied the enemy food and other supplies, manpower, intelligence, and any safe resting areas in the lowlands.” Beyond the improved main force situation, at least one other factor had reportedly nudged the Thua Thien pacification program in a favorable direction. As the shock of Tet had worn off, provincial political attitudes began to change with respect to the main Vietnamese antagonists. “This shift was not so much

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95 Ibid., 47.
96 Ibid., 67.
97 At that point, “VC control had plunged to only 1%, and GVN control exceeded 40%.” Ibid., 69.
98 Ibid., 70-1.
away from pro-Viet Cong sympathies (which were never especially strong),” wrote VSSG investigators, “as away from fence-sitting attitudes and toward strong anti-Communist (and somewhat pro-GVN) leanings.” During Tet 1968 and its aftermath, the people of Thua Thien had “for the first time got a close look at the Viet Cong and NVA,” and their “terrorist atrocities” had supposedly “disabused” the average citizen of any “romantic notions” they might previously have had regarding the Communists. What is more, the improved military situation by the fall of 1968 had left the anti-Communist side looking “like a winner,” causing people to place more trust in their government.  

According to VSSG field evaluators Bruno Kosheleff and Stan Jorgensen, Quang Nam too was a much altered province, militarily and politically, at the end of 1969 than it had been in 1967. Historically, the South Vietnamese government in Saigon had not played much of a role in the politics of central Vietnam. It was the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dong (VNDQD or Vietnamese Nationalist), the Dai Viet, and other regionally-oriented parties that had dominated the non-Communist political scene. Most of GVN’s loyal supporters had “long fled the area ... along with all vestiges of GVN officialdom.” For its part, the Viet Cong had “succeeded in driving the roots of their political organization deep into the rural Quang Nam society.” Nevertheless, Kosheleff and Jorgensen described the Communists’ situation in 1970 as being rather desperate. From September 1969, they noted, the enemy’s main force units had remained “largely passive” in an

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99 Ibid., 73-4.
100 Vietnam Special Studies Group, “The Situation in the Countryside: Quang Nam Province,” 16 March 1970, pp. 3-4, The National Archives, Record Group R6472, MACCORS (101986) (235633), Suitland, MD.
operational sense, and “no reinforcements had arrived from the north to supplement
understrength NVA regiments since October.”

In addition, military casualties during
1968 and 1969 had seriously affected the morale of Communist troops serving in the
province. On the political side of the ledger, rural residents of Quang Nam were now
openly complaining of the “unbearable” burden imposed on them by their former
Communist overlords. Still, the VSSG team hedged their negative assessment of the
Communist position considerably. For all the damage that the allies had inflicted upon
them, the Viet Cong in Quang Nam still possessed “a more coherent, well-directed
political philosophy” than did the government or any other non-Communist party.

CORDS officials found the political standings of the Communist Party and
government in the countryside in 1970 to be just the reverse of what they had been five
years before. Testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in June, IV
Corps administrator John Paul Vann indicated that, since 1965, the Communists had
transformed a popularly-based “civil war” or “insurgency” into “a war of invasion.” This
change in the character of the war had become readily apparent to most South
Vietnamese, causing them to “reject the enemy ... in large numbers.” The people were
turning their backs on the local Party cadre “because he had changed from being a South
Vietnamese, oftentimes a relative, to being a North Vietnamese invader” -- as “alien,” in
many respects, as the French or Americans. The deaths of numerous local Communist

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101 Ibid., 11.
102 Ibid., 34.
103 Ibid., 47.
104 Ibid., 35.
105 U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Vietnam Policy and Prospects 1970, Civil
Operations and Rural Development Program, 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970, 99. See also John Paul Vann,
cadres during the Tet offensive further contributed to the allied military advantage. According to Vann’s estimate, “more than half, possibly two-thirds of the leadership, particularly the field combat leadership, that the enemy had developed for his South Vietnamese forces over a period of two decades was lost in 1968.” As a result, the southern-based enemy leadership in 1970 was “a far cry,” in qualitative and quantitative terms, from the pre-Tet 1968 cadre class.106

By contrast, even during pacification’s peak period in 1970-71, systems analysts at the Office of the Secretary of Defense in Washington continued to harp on the allied failure to deal with the Viet Cong political infrastructure and raised the issue of a growing regional disparity in the level of “Other War” success. A fall 1970 Southeast Asia Analysis Report (SEAPRO), for example, indicated that over half of the respondents to a US-sponsored poll of South Vietnamese rural dwellers “reported that the VCI, plus small-to-medium sized enemy forces, could still enter their hamlets at night.”107 A year later Southeast Asia Division (SEAD) analysts concluded that “at current neutralization rates,” the 60,000-strong Viet Cong membership would “still pose a serious threat in 1972-73.” The Communist cadre’s demonstrated ability to hang on and then “resurge strongly,” warned the report’s authors, “could lead to an intensified, protracted struggle which the GVN might well lose” without the massive American help it had received beginning in

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106 Ibid., 112-13.
1965. Such a resurgent threat, they alleged, was already becoming a problem in the coastal lowlands of I Corps and in a portion of II Corps.\textsuperscript{108}

Military accounts of this period stressed the sharp reversal in the Viet Cong's fortunes, but some admitted the difficulty of accurately assessing the Communists' potential to resume their struggle. During a follow-up visit to Quang Ngai province in 1970, Marine Captain Francis West found the local South Vietnamese Popular Forces quite capable of dealing with the residual Viet Cong threat. Indeed, West declared, the village of Binh Nghia had recently become “so peaceful that the new American district advisor had termed it an ‘R & R’ (Rest and Recreation) center.” The following year, West concluded that “the war [had] passed Binh Nghia.” Although there remained a few “Viet Cong secret agents and sympathizers” here and there, “the savage struggle of 1966 and 1967” no longer existed.\textsuperscript{109} In the Mekong Delta province of Hau Nghia, Army Lieutenant Stuart Herrington observed a more complicated relationship in 1971 between the local civilian population and representatives of the Viet Cong. Most ordinary Vietnamese, according to him, seemed rather flexible in their political views. Even if one did not actively support the Communists, one respected their power and tried not to offend them.\textsuperscript{110} Often, even local GVN officials preferred not to challenge the basis of Viet Cong authority in villages under their control lest they open themselves and their families to Communist retaliation.\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid, 249.
\textsuperscript{109} West, \textit{The Village}, 286-7.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 39.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 52.
Despite Communist political-military advantages and a wavering population, Herrington “sensed by mid-1971 that the revolution in Hau Nghia was in great trouble.”\textsuperscript{112} For the most part, this was the result of ever increasing military pressure on the Viet Cong. According to Herrington’s Viet Cong confidante, “the Americans with their helicopters and artillery changed the face of the war overnight” and forced him and his former comrades into a life on the run. The Tet offensive of 1968 had been a “watershed event” for the Hau Nghia Communists, causing them to doubt whether they had any chance of defeating the allies,\textsuperscript{113} while the 1970 Cambodian incursion had left them “literally” with “no place to hide” from the increasingly lethal war.\textsuperscript{114} Herrington also credited the revamped 1971 Phoenix program -- in which he played a role -- with making life in Hau Nghia’s villages more difficult for the remaining Viet Cong. As a result of American pressure, a new and more amenable province chief, and the rapid exploitation of anti-Communist intelligence -- supplied, in large part, by Chieu Hoi returnees -- Viet Cong political operatives had been forced underground.\textsuperscript{115} Nonetheless, Herrington acknowledged the ambiguous results of the 1971 village war. The assassination of an important Viet Cong defector and the new province chief had caused Herrington “to rethink [his] assumptions about the Vietcong movement.” Despite their weakened condition, a small group of hard-core Communists “had made a mockery of the government’s efforts to provide security of the people.”\textsuperscript{116} Furthermore, despite the

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 65.
allies’ successful attack on the village shadow government, there was “simply no
evidence to support a conclusion that the Vietcong’s losses had been the government’s
gains.” 117

The Communists’ Easter Offensive renewed the cycle of analytical pessimism and
qualified optimism with regard to the “Other War” that had begun with the 1968 Tet
Offensive. Through brute military force, it seemed, the Communists had undone several
years of US-supported pacification expansion and Viet Cong “neutralization.” But upon
further reflection, the South Vietnamese armed forces -- and particularly, the paramilitary
forces -- had held up better than expected under the combined VC-NVA onslaught; and
the ruthlessness of the Communists had apparently made them more unpopular than ever
with average South Vietnamese. If the prospects for a genuine political settlement
between the Viet Cong and the Saigon government were still dim -- because of the
baleful influence of the Hanoi regime over its southern cadres -- the “Other War”
campaign was nevertheless back on track by the time of the cease-fire in early 1973.

According to an August 1972 SEAPRO report, the North Vietnamese Army
invasion had caused the GVN to lose almost one-third of the population it had previously
controlled in I Corps. Furthermore, the incidence of terrorism so far that year had
exceeded Tet levels and might “reach an all-time high.” The article warned that unless
progress in pacification were resumed, security conditions might deteriorate further and
“future recovery” would become “exceedingly difficult.” In any event, “a recovery rate

\[117\] Ibid., 94.
similar to that experienced after Tet 68” seemed unlikely.\textsuperscript{118} Still, in their last report on Vietnam in January 1973, SEAD analysts announced that the percentage of secure hamlets in South Vietnam had climbed back up to almost 80% by the end of 1972. What is more, all regions of the country had apparently participated in the pacification upswing.\textsuperscript{119}

Likewise, Herrington wrote that the 1972 Communist invasion had brought a halt to the anti-VCI campaign in Hau Nghia. Thanks to the efforts of three NVA regiments, Herrington and his Vietnamese counterparts were forced to “shelve [their] plans for an attack on the Duc Hoa district VC organization in favor of more urgent business.”\textsuperscript{120} The worn-out Party operatives of Hau Nghia had been granted “a reprieve just when their backs had been to the ropes.”\textsuperscript{121} But, like the earlier Tet Offensive, the Easter Offensive proved quite costly for the Communists in terms of battlefield losses and diminished support among Hau Nghia’s residents. It “soon bogged down to a bloody stalemate, and then became a slow, but inexorable reversal for the Communists...”\textsuperscript{122} Herrington estimated that, during the month of May alone, two of the three NVA regiments in Hau Nghia suffered over 50 percent casualties, whereas allied casualties were less than 5 percent. On the political front, North Vietnamese behavior during the Easter offensive further setback the patient efforts of the Viet Cong to gain the allegiance of the local

\textsuperscript{118} Thayer, \textit{A Systems Analysis View of the Vietnam War}, 273.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 116.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 169.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 113.
peasantry. Herrington recounted the disappointment expressed by one NVA prisoner of
disarmament: He and his fellow northerners received when they entered South
Vietnam. Most South Vietnamese, the prisoner woefully admitted, “desired peace, not
liberation -- and they therefore tended to blame him and his comrades for perpetuating the
war.”\textsuperscript{123} By mid-1972, in his opinion, the Communists had lost the battle for the “hearts
and minds” of the South Vietnamese people. He emphasized, however, that this loss did
not necessarily equate to a popular victory for the Saigon government.

In 1972, USIA analyst Douglas Pike also characterized the Viet Cong as more
“beleaguered” than ever.\textsuperscript{124} The escalation of the war beginning in 1965 and the
increasing military involvement of large-scale forces from the North -- culminating in the
largely conventional invasion of South Vietnam by the North Vietnamese Army in the
spring of 1972 -- had left the Viet Cong without a major role to play.\textsuperscript{125} In its weakened
condition, Pike surmised, the Viet Cong might be amenable to a deal with the GVN. On
the other hand, the Viet Cong’s northern patron was likely to oppose any deal that
resulted in continued independence for South Vietnam. According to Pike, the question
was which side -- the southern Communist leadership or Hanoi -- would hold the political
upper-hand in any future negotiations with Saigon. “[T]he degree there is indigenous
control of the NLF,” he wrote, “there is more NLF interest in principle in a political
settlement than in the past. Conversely, to the degree the DRV continues to maintain

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 150.
\textsuperscript{124} Douglas Pike, “The Possible Role of Elections in a Political Settlement with the NLF,” in eds. John C.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 113-14.
control, there will be no interest.” North Vietnam’s ultimate goal had always been
unification, and the Viet Cong were, in the eyes of the Hanoi leadership, nothing more
than a means to this end.\textsuperscript{126}

From the perspective of American ‘Other Warriors,’ like Pike and Herrington,
their war was essentially over by the time of the Easter Offensive, or even earlier.
Because of the Communists’ ‘error’ in turning away from their original ‘people’s
warfare’ strategy and the achievements of the post-Tet US-South Vietnamese pacification
program, the Vietnam conflict had largely degenerated into a conventional military
slugfest by 1972. The National Liberation Front had become irrelevant to the war’s
outcome. True, the Viet Cong organization continued to exist throughout much of the
countryside. But the Communists’ conduct since the early 1960s had left the Viet Cong’s
revolutionary image in tatters. With its depleted and increasingly ‘foreign’ leadership,
the Viet Cong had lost its knack for communicating with the rural populace. And South
Vietnam’s improved security forces had greatly curtailed the ability of Viet Cong units to
operate openly and in-force. Years of “Other Warrior” pressure on top decisionmakers
in Saigon and Washington on behalf of nationbuilding and counterinsurgency programs
had finally paid off. The main question for ‘Other Warriors’ in 1972-73 was whether the
United States -- having belatedly discovered the correct approach to victory in Vietnam --
would continue to hold off the North Vietnamese hordes long enough for the GVN to
complete the process of recovery from two decades of Communist subversion and its own
maladministration.

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 120.
CHAPTER 5

THE PROTECTIVE POWER: AMERICA

To early American proponents of the “Other War” in Vietnam, the US government took an excruciatingly long time to assume its proper role as the GVN’s nationbuilding and counterinsurgency mentor. Until the late 1960s, they accused the majority of US policymakers and action officers in Washington and Saigon of behaving like disinterested spectators one moment and meddling know-it-alls the next. As a result, GVN officials stuck to their corrupt and ineffective ways, regardless of occasional US complaints or their low standing with their own citizens. Only in certain provinces did American advisory personnel start to make progress in the “Other War” through concrete security and development projects and a sincere appreciation for the welfare of the South Vietnamese population. Nevertheless, after the reorganization of the US pacification machinery in 1966-67, which resulted in CORDS, prominent “Other Warriors” began declaring that they finally possessed the necessary tool to integrate and nationalize local pacification projects and to maximize their leverage for the purpose of raising the priority of the “Other War” in the minds of recalcitrant South Vietnamese leaders. Still, certain old-time “Other Warriors” doubted whether many Vietnamese ‘hearts and minds’ could
be won by handing the primary responsibility for pacification over to the military or by putting Saigon-based bureaucrats at the center of the nationbuilding process.

**Assuming Responsibility**

Pioneer bureaucrats of the “Other War,” like Edward Lansdale and William Houghswenger, considered that America’s disability in the realm of mentorship stemmed from cultural misunderstanding, a faulty political-military strategy, and bad wartime management. Top US officials allegedly had little knowledge of Asia as a region, were indifferent toward the singular aspects of South Vietnam’s predicament, ran roughshod over GVN priorities and sensibilities, distanced themselves institutionally from their Vietnamese counterparts, and inadvertently inflated the expectations of the South Vietnamese people with regard to governmental performance. Strategically, Americans were inferior to the Communists in their appreciation for political warfare. What is more, they employed an unduly restrictive definition of pacification, gave mostly rhetorical support to the concept of democracy in South Vietnam, and declined to compete seriously with the Viet Cong in the ideological domain. Finally, bureaucratic mistrust and a diffusion of advisory and support authority made it next-to-impossible for the US to pressure the Saigon government into instituting needed political-military reforms. Many of the old pacification hands were skeptical that CORDS could solve the problem of organizational disunity, but nevertheless agreed that, for all their faults, Americans had provided South Vietnam with the possibility of enduring nationhood by keeping the Communist armed forces at bay, at least temporarily, and by offering the Vietnamese people a taste of capitalist prosperity and democratic spirit.
Despite his recognition of certain GVN sins, Edward Lansdale, in his memoirs, was even more critical of his own country’s advisory effort in South Vietnam during the 1950s. The fabled political warfare expert regretted how little the American military valued revolutionary warfare experience as compared to the Communists.\(^1\) He disparaged US Ambassador J. Lawton Collins as being “from the world of ‘big picture’”\(^2\) - someone who could not appreciate the difference between managing the Pentagon or a major U.S. corporation and exercising positive influence within the less structured political system that existed in South Vietnam.\(^2\) Bureaucratic mistrust also hindered American support for grassroots pacification efforts, in Lansdale’s opinion.\(^3\) He also recalled several futile attempts on his part to modify America’s diplomatic strategy with regard to South Vietnam. In 1955, for instance, he objected to Washington’s decision to coerce President Diem into broadening his base by bringing into the Saigon government what Lansdale considered to be self-aggrandizing sect leaders.\(^4\) The political warfare expert also argued strongly against a subsequent decision of the Eisenhower administration to back Diem’s plan to establish a government-based political party.\(^5\)

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\(^2\) Ibid., 203-4.

\(^3\) For example, the US Agency for International Development (AID) reportedly offered “only the minimum possible support after much pressure” for the GVN’s village-based Civic Action program. As Lansdale came to understand the situation, American development bureaucrats were “afraid” that this Diem-supported initiative was “some scheme” hatched by the South Vietnamese President’s closest US confidante and undercover CIA operative (i.e., Lansdale) “to flood the country with secret agents...” Ibid., 211.

\(^4\) Ibid., 259.

\(^5\) Under the current political conditions, Lansdale informed the Ambassador G. Frederick Reinhardt, such a party would have to be organized “along clandestine lines, secret cell by secret cell,” forcing “all other nationalist parties ... to conceal their activities.” In Lansdale’s opinion, such an authoritarian undertaking was not conducive to the development of “a viable, open system of democracy.” After traveling to Washington to plead his case against the Can Lao party to the CIA director and Secretary of State, Allen
Upon his return to South Vietnam in 1965 in the train of another US ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, Lansdale resumed his crusade against his government’s wrongheaded approach to the Vietnam War. His goal was twofold. He wanted to get American officials in Saigon and Washington to appreciate the war’s political component, and he wanted to bring US policies and actions into sync with Vietnamese cultural beliefs and nationalistic attitudes. Lansdale also objected to Ambassador Lodge’s unduly restrictive view his job as the mission’s top pacification advisor. Lodge apparently believed that pacification consisted of “bring[ing] law and order to a village, along with good government.” The ambassador seemed deaf to the notion that “there was a very large political portion to the [pacification] problem.” In addition, under this compartmentalized system, the political message being transmitted by diverse American sources was culturally-biased. Although a strong proponent of US-style democracy, Lansdale contended that materialistic and utilitarian notions embedded within America’s “Other War” policies were in conflict with Confucian-based Vietnamese political principles. Americans’ cultural myopia also hindered efforts to develop solutions.

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6 “We [Americans],” Lansdale wrote in a 1966 thinkpiece on pacification, “have concentrated on dealing with [the Communist threat] militarily by the constant enlargement of the RVNAF as an establishment directed from the national level. At the same time, much less attention has been devoted to the significance of the civil effort at the provincial and district level, where the popular pacification war is being fought.” Edward G. Lansdale, “A Concept of Pacification,” 1966?, Vietnamese Conflict 1961-1975, Pacification, File 578, Edward Lansdale Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford, CA, 2.


8 “American political philosophy, coupled with American ‘propaganda’ and programs,” Lansdale wrote in 1968, “have given many South Vietnamese the idea that [the] central government can and should actually ‘give’ them something.” Because the GVN could not fully meet this expectation, “the gulf between the people and the government” was widening. Edward G. Lansdale, “A Political Strategy for Vietnam,” 241
acceptable to their South Vietnamese allies. US officials had repeatedly “tried to effect changes in Viet-Nam in ignorance or disregard of Vietnamese values, feelings, perceptions, and ways of doing things.”\textsuperscript{9} What is more, the programmatic orientation of America’s nationbuilding policies had led “to the formalization and impersonalization of relationships with the Vietnamese,” who considered only “informal and personal” ties to be truly meaningful.\textsuperscript{10}

Contributing to the United States’ inability to engage in revolutionary warfare, in Lansdale’s view, was the inappropriate structuring of American military and political institutions, both at home and overseas. With the exception of the President, no single individual or organization was responsible for the entire war effort. And the “various coordinating groups and task forces” that tried to substitute for this lack of a unified command structure could not do so “as provision of personnel and funds for various aspects of the war continued to rest in each bureaucratic agency concerned.” Lansdale acknowledged that the establishment of CORDS in 1967 had theoretically drawn most US pacification assets in Vietnam under one roof. Still, even after the conclusion of the Tet offensive, the dean of America’s “Other Warriors” found that CORDS had neither achieved its goal of “establishing GVN presence in the countryside, nationwide,” nor gained the unequivocal backing of the US and South Vietnamese military in support of this objective.\textsuperscript{11}

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 23.
\item \textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 5.
\item \textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 3.
\end{itemize}
Concerning the US effort on behalf of nationbuilding in the early-to-mid 1960s, AID provincial representative William Nighswonger blasted officials at the Saigon level and above, while largely sparing civilian and military advisors in the field. In his view, South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem -- after successfully fended off American pressure to democratize his government -- was able, by the early 1960s, to finagle from the U.S. government “increased aid without the strings of political reform.”\textsuperscript{12} Policymakers in Washington had become so fixated on boosting Diem’s image with his people that they neglected “to ask whether he should be helped at all.” As a result, U.S. involvement in pacification had been restricted “to the level of projects and programs,” enabling the South Vietnamese president to engage in “political cosmetology instead of basic change.”\textsuperscript{13} For its part, the United States continued to declare its support for democracy in South Vietnam, but this rhetorical concern for Vietnamese political development had become “‘a purpose without a policy.’”\textsuperscript{14}

Nighswonger, however, generally lauded the activities of his fellow AID provincial representatives, as well as U.S. Marine Corps units stationed in his target province of Quang Nam. In contrast to South Vietnamese government officials, he maintained that AID’s “Office of Rural Affairs had given a great deal of attention to assessing peasant motivations and reactions concerning the strategic hamlet program.” Despite a US policy shift in 1961-2 in favor of “crash programs purporting to provide more immediate benefits,” Nighswonger and his fellow provreps maintained their

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 70.  
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 255.
tradition of “carefully keeping in mind the express needs of the peasant, and ... not requiring more than he can give without serious personal deprivation.” With regard to the Marine Corps units stationed in the vicinity of Danang in 1965, Nighswonger wrote that they had begun their pacification task well. Nevertheless, he worried that the Marines had come “too late to conserve the key pacification resource,” rural youths, who had already left their homes to join the Viet Cong. In addition, Quang Nam’s peasants were skeptical that the Marines would remain in their villages long enough to protect them against Communist retaliation.

Nighswonger’s superior, AID Rural Affairs chief George Tanham, in his 1966 book, credited his subordinates with helping to improve “the material situation in certain social and economic fields and in many places” of rural South Vietnam. More importantly, these Americans had demonstrated, through their constructive efforts in hamlets and villages throughout the country, that “United States aid and support to Vietnam have not been solely military.” Yet Tanham admitted that it was still far from clear whether AID in Vietnam had achieved its “major objective of assist[ing] the GVN to gain the loyalty and active support of the people.” Achievement in this area depended, most of all, upon the attitudes of local GVN officials and on the extent to which particular programs met the needs and desires of the heterogeneous population of South Vietnam.

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15 Ibid., 59 and 188.
16 Ibid., 105.
17 Ibid., 116-17.
19 Ibid., xii-xiii.
20 Ibid., 126-7.
AID Provincial Representative Jan Vanderbie, in his 1968 memoir, expressed
great disappointment over America’s “failure to give positive and creative direction to the
revolution” in South Vietnam. 21 Unfortunately, the US had not used the “breathing spell”
created by its 1965 intervention-in-force to give to the Vietnamese a government that
“appealed to the slumbering aspirations of the common man.” 22 Vanderbie attributed the
fact that the United States had not succeeded in halting the war of national liberation and
substituting a “western brand of ‘revolutionary development’” 23 to a number of factors.
First, there was a dearth of US information about Southeast Asia, 24 and those Americans,
like Vanderbie, who acquired some knowledge of the Vietnamese situation through
experience in the field, were transferred just as they were becoming effective. 25 There
was also an absence of vision. Rather than attempting to shore up the central government
in Saigon primarily through military means, the United States should have engaged “in a
genuine competition” with the Communist Vietnamese at the local and regional level,
“demonstrating that we have more to offer in ideas, flexibility and compassion.” 26 The
US nationbuilding effort in Vietnam was also beset by bad management, and the 1966-67
reorganization of the U.S. pacification advisory only made matters worse by
bureaucratizing and militarizing field operations without bringing any appreciable gains

21 Jan H. Vanderbie, Prov Rep Vietnam: A Provincial Representative’s Account of Two Years in Vietnam,
22 Ibid., 140.
23 Ibid.
24 According to Vanderbie, as US involvement in Vietnam deepened, “the few experts available to top
policy makers became increasingly pessimistic [and were] gradually replaced by can-do guys, loyal and
energetic fixers, unsoured and unburdened by expertise.” Ibid., 141.
25 Ibid., 172-3.
26 Ibid., 3.
in terms of South Vietnamese compliance.\textsuperscript{27} The effect of CORDS was such that “while military advisers and some fresh new State Department proteges were getting appointed as senior provincial advisers (purely on the strength of their sponsors), experienced and capable field personnel were shuffling papers in Saigon.”\textsuperscript{28}

American social scientist commentators on the early years of the “Other War” criticized their government for its political and cultural insensitivity, on the one hand, while lauding specific US pacification and development initiatives, on the other. Addressing fellow SEADAG conferees in 1967, Asia Society President Kenneth Young lamented that the United States had not done much to promote South Vietnam’s political viability, despite its involvement in various nationbuilding projects in that country since 1954.\textsuperscript{29} Besides the basic fuzziness of U.S. political development doctrine, there was what Young dubbed the “transference problem.” Social science had yet to discover the psychological means by which American policies and technical advice could be smoothly introduced “into the mind of a Vietnamese or into a Vietnamese organization.”\textsuperscript{30} In early 1968, a group of government-backed social scientists headed by M. Dean Havron of the Human Sciences Research Corporation published a report for the Defense Department Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) berating US officials in Vietnam for

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\item \textsuperscript{27} “The USAID provrep died in July 1967,” Vanderbie declared, the month that CORDS was inaugurated. “Strangely enough,” he continued, “it wasn’t the Communists who forced his demise, it was the U.S. bureaucracy that terminated the last hope for a rural development program which could compete with what the other side had to offer. The provrep was replaced by a bureaucrat – a military bureaucrat, in most instances.” Ibid., 4.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 127-8.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 507-8.
\end{itemize}
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hanging on to “ingrained American values and institutionalized practices.” Their
presence and employment, Havron claimed, did not always serve the non-Communist
cause well in a Vietnamese socio-cultural context.\textsuperscript{31} He pointed, for example, to the
obsession among U.S. aid agencies with the external manifestations of development in
South Vietnam, such as bridges, roads and strategic hamlets. Unfortunately, American
nation builders had fallen down “in the far more difficult job of helping to develop
communities ... with the will and unity to defend themselves.”\textsuperscript{32}

Other social scientists, working on Defense Department projects in the mid-
1960s, had kinder words for particular American-inspired pacification programs. The
Hudson Institute’s Raymond Gastil extolled the Marine Corps’ Combined Action (CA)
program.\textsuperscript{33} True, Vietcong operatives continued to reside in many villages, and
Combined Action Marines were reluctant to leave a village in the hands of their
Vietnamese proteges, but “the village climate ha[d] changed.” CA units were gaining
foreknowledge of enemy attacks and were therefore able to preempt them. As for the
average peasant, his allegiance would likely shift with the change in the “the local tide of
the war.”\textsuperscript{34} The U.S.-backed Chieu Hoi program -- established to promote and exploit
the results of Communist Vietnamese defection -- was also favorably portrayed in a 1967
Simulnetics Corporation study. According to project director Ithiel de Sola Pool, most

\textsuperscript{31} M. Dean Havron et al., \textit{The Use of Cultural Data in Psychological Operations Programs in Vietnam}
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., vi.
\textsuperscript{33} The goal of this program was to provide village-level security by pairing a squad (13 men) of carefully
selected Marines with a platoon (40 men) of Vietnamese Popular Force militiamen
\textsuperscript{34} Raymond D. Gastil, \textit{Four Papers on the Vietnamese Insurgency} (Hudson, NY: Hudson Institute, 8
GVN officials had initially expressed doubt as to “whether ex-Viet Cong could be trusted.” Lately, however, skepticism had given way to the recognition that the Chieu Hoi program was “taking a heavy toll of the Viet Cong” and that the “reabsorption of some hundreds of thousands of their fellow citizens” was within the realm of possibility.35

US military officers involved in the “Other War” prior to Tet were believers in the promise of pacification. Like their social scientist and civilian bureaucratic colleagues, however, military “Other Warriors” described a laundry list of systemic, conceptual, and operational obstacles to the achievement of pacification and development on a nationwide scale. Few military men seemed to doubt America’s ability to assist the South Vietnamese in winning the “Other War.” Marines, especially, heralded their service’s long experience in counterinsurgency warfare, appreciation of the need for popular support, determination to carry out the population security mission, and populist identification with Vietnamese villagers. On the downside, uniformed ‘Other Warriors’ complained about the absence of an integrated plan of action and a single commander or institution in charge of all wartime operations. Marine officers, for their part, castigated the Army-dominated high command for its attrition-based strategy, its lip service treatment of the Combined Action program, and its waste of precious Corps resources on strictly conventional military missions. In addition, officers from both services expressed disdain for their government’s supposed policy of non-intervention in South Vietnamese

internal affairs and its tolerance of GVN ineffectiveness and corruption. Finally, the less
cocksure among them acknowledged certain pacification-related problems that had no
easy solution: the difficulty of finding mature American soldiers who respected the
Vietnamese; the loss of civilian lives and destruction of civilian property that were the
inevitable result of allied operations in populated rural areas; and the devastating
consequences of the Viet Cong assassination campaign against local GVN administrators.

Despite the gravity of the GVN’s situation in 1966, Army pacification planners
working for the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations proclaimed -- with imperial self-
confidence -- that there was “nothing in the nature of men, money, equipment or advice
required to achieve our objective in SVN that the US cannot provide in full measure.”36
Already, the American military presence had had a beneficial, if largely inadvertent,
impact on the modernization process there by catapulting the Vietnamese people into
“technological development” and helping to rid their society of “many of the factors
resistant to change.”37 US nationbuilding efforts, however, were hamstrung by poor
planning,38 narrow-minded thinking,39 conflicting bureaucratic interests,40 a non-
interventionist political stance, as well as an ineffective attritionist bias toward
counterinsurgency.41 The consequences of intellectual and organizational disarray within
the American advisory team were stagnation and regression in South Vietnamese

36 US Army, Deputy Chief of Staff for Military Operations, A Program For The Pacification and Long-
Term Development of South Vietnam (PROVN), vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army,
March 1966), pp. 1-8, NTIS, 199-], microfiche.
37 Ibid., 4-8.
38 Ibid., vol. 1, v.
39 Ibid., 31.
40 Ibid., vol. 2, 1-6.
41 PROVN, vol. 1, 53.
pacification and development programs.\textsuperscript{42} Without a political vision and the will to implement it, US officials allowed their Vietnamese counterparts to believe that American silence on internal political matters meant total support for the GVN, “including its arbitrary decisions, its corruption and its inefficiency.”\textsuperscript{43} In the socio-economic realm, Americans had paradoxically both “failed to provide the resources needed to support reduction of the insurgency” and contributed to the overheating of that country’s economy.\textsuperscript{44} Finally, in the military realm, the US focus on killing as many Viet Cong as possible “permit[ted] the very continuation of some of the very factors that stimulated VC growth.”\textsuperscript{45}

US Army Colonel Gus Peters, the deputy senior advisor in III Corps in 1967-68, was not overly impressed by recent US attempts to achieve organizational unity in the area of pacification and development. Although reluctantly accepting the idea that the CORDS program should continue in the “interests of ... stability,” he charged that the newly forged link between American military and civilian advisors in the field and pacification headquarters in Saigon “subverted and degraded” the chain of command. Furthermore, Peters perceived an anti-military bias on the part of many CORDS personnel and urged the latter to remember that “the military side of the house (to include ARVN) is not the enemy.” Specifically, he urged CORDS officials not to try to divorce province and district chiefs from the influence of the corps and division commanders.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., vol. 2, 1-7.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 3-9.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 4-9.
\textsuperscript{45} Army planners warned that “the ‘kill VC’ approach breeds more VC who will have to be killed [and] could result in the eventual ‘winning’ of the war in a country that becomes depopulated in the process.” Ibid., 1-75.
Peters also criticized the increased authority accorded South Vietnamese provincial officials, as well as the recent decision giving CORDS’ civilians operational control “over better than one-half of the military advisory effort.” Besides contradicting the principle of unity of command, Peters warned that this move threatened to undermine US relations with the South Vietnamese army, which was “not impressed, influenced, nor desirous of military advice imparted by civilian authority.”

For his part, US 9th Division Commander, Major General George O’Connor, held a relatively favorable view toward the changes made in US pacification operations in 1967-68. While lauding the added security provided by his unit’s forces to the people of Dinh Tuong and Kien Hoa provinces, however, he acknowledged that the 9th Division’s introduction into the “crowded environment” of the Mekong Delta had been “a mixed blessing.” According to O’Connor, there were political repercussions from simply setting up and conducting normal military operations. He noted the ambiguous socio-economic consequences of the American military presence in the Mekong Delta. According to attitudinal surveys, farmers in Dinh Tuong and Long An largely benefited from the protection provided by US troops, which enabled them to cultivate more land and escape the grip of the Viet Cong tax collector, but many villagers recognized “only the increase in prices resulting from our presence” and the Communist “retaliation in the

47 “For example,” he wrote, “the first requirement is for a place to billet the troops. Since all available dry ground is already occupied, somebody will have to be displaced... Likewise, friendly troops operating in an area cause destruction of crops, dikes and often make the roads impassable to civilian vehicles.” US Department of the Army, Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development, “Debriefing of Senior Officers: MG George G. O’Connor,” 14 March 1968, US Army War College Library, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 3.
form of mortaring and ground attacks.”\textsuperscript{48} The spread of American culture was also a matter of concern to Vietnamese traditionalists in the Mekong, who disdained “the free and easy way of Americans, particularly between the sexes” and worried that “their children would take on American manners” rather than abiding by traditional Vietnamese customs.\textsuperscript{49} Determining humane, but effective, rules of engagement in a populous region in which the Viet Cong had effectively intermingled with the local villagers was another, almost insurmountable, problem.\textsuperscript{50}

Whereas US Army officers in the mid-1960s were, so far as the record reflects, reluctant “Other Warriors,” their Marine Corps counterparts seemed to have been more comfortable with their pacification responsibilities. Colonel Norman Stanford, chief of the Marine Corps’ Civic Action Branch in 1966, contended that his service had, over the past several decades, gained a wealth of experience in counterinsurgency warfare. He challenged the notion, popular among certain social scientists and government bureaucrats, that a successful pacification campaign required the employment of novel tactics and technologies. All that was truly required of a successful pacifier, he contended, was “a sound understanding of the tactical principles developed over the years by such leaders of practical military thought as Pete Ellis.”\textsuperscript{51} Stanford was disdainful of

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} “When the enemy blends in with the people,” wrote O’Connor, “it is difficult to decide when and how to use our firepower.” For example, how was one “to decide whether or not to take a chance of killing some women or children, who may or may not be VC dependents, in order to reduce the sniping on your own troops when you are receiving an occasional round from a group of hooches?” According to O’Connor, it was not unusual for the Communist guerrillas to “take over houses from otherwise friendly Vietnamese [or] to run from one house to another [in a hamlet], firing one or two shots from each, hoping to draw retaliation from U.S. forces.” Ibid., 5.
the 1960s-era civilian specialists in counterinsurgency and warned his Marine Corps audience against “falling back on the deductions of these mercurial thinkers who have long advocated specialized forces and tricky solutions for the counterinsurgency mission. Their institution retained the necessary experience and resilience to handle the current crop of so-called “people’s wars” without the help of “arm chair strategists.”

From his vantage point in Quang Ngai province, Marine Captain Francis West observed that the arrival of a squad of American Marines in Binh Nghia village, in early 1966, did not immediately alter the situation for the better. First of all, there was some difficulty in finding the right kind of Marines for the job: that is, ones who “could get along with villagers” and actually liked Vietnamese. Furthermore, once the Marine squad had been assembled, these 19 and 20 year-old Americans faced the daunting challenge of inspiring their Vietnamese Popular Force (PF) counterparts to take on a well-entrenched enemy familiar with the territory and respected by the village population. Even after West’s CAP unit had mastered the art of patrolling Binh Nghia’s byways, they had to weather a battalion-size VC/NVA sneak attack on their hilltop fort during the fall of 1966. Nevertheless, the CAP concept eventually proved its worth. By July of 1967, the peak of the fighting had passed. “Despite tactical victories,” the enemy

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52 Ibid., 43.
53 Francis J. West, The Village (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 11. According to West, Marine Corps surveys indicated that over 40 percent of III MAF soldiers and officers harbored negative feelings toward their allies.
54 Ibid., 19.
55 As a result, the platoon lost a third of its men, as well as the trust that had grown up between the Americans and village residents during the previous nine months. Ibid., 132 and 135.
had failed to crush the combined unit or force the Americans to leave. What is more, "his own determination to defend Binh Nghia had waned."\textsuperscript{56}

In large part, West attributed this reversal of fortunes to exemplary qualities within the U.S. Marine contingent, such as doggedness, empathy, and honesty. It never occurred to the CAP Marines to view the setbacks that they had faced in 1966 "as the brink of defeat." In addition, the people of Binh Nghia regarded the them differently than they did other American soldiers. They trusted these men who lived (and often died) in their midst. They invited them into their homes. "They were not the anonymous giants of the tanks, jets and helicopters."\textsuperscript{57} These men were not intellectuals; over half had not graduated from high school. Yet, as depicted by West, they had the captivating simplicity and honesty of a Frank Capra hero.\textsuperscript{58}

Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak remained convinced that the US Marine Corps was on the right track with regard to its counterinsurgency policy. As he saw it, the Marines had been fighting a people’s war from practically the moment they walked off the beaches of Danang in 1965.\textsuperscript{59} Consequently, the I Corps headquarters in northern South Vietnam had been spared during the 1968 Tet offensive, whereas most of the other

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 243.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 247.
\textsuperscript{58} After being harangued by some South Vietnamese university students critical of the American intervention in Vietnam, the leader of the CAP Marines in Binh Nghia apparently responded with some exasperation: "Look...you want to know what we're doing here? Ask Suong. Ask Khoi. [Members of the Popular Forces] Ask anyone. Ask the VC. We're here to fight VC. We're here to help people who seem to be friends of yours." The Marines were neither generals nor politicians. They were simple folk, doing a job that had been delegated to them as best they could. And the average Binh Nghia villager, according to West, could appreciate their point of view. Ibid., 172.
major US-GVN installations in the country had suffered damage at the hands of the Communists. Such success as the Marines had achieved in Vietnam was “attributable in large measure to information from people whom we had helped to deliver from the guerrilla oppression.”\textsuperscript{60} Unfortunately, the US Army -- and, in particular, the longtime Vietnam theater commander, General William Westmoreland -- encouraged the South Vietnamese tendency to focus on the conventional side of the war. Thus pacification and development had mistakenly become the province of “militia type Vietnamese forces” and “a few Vietnamese Regulars.” As Krulak reiterated to a group of his comrades in 1967, their service had contested this strategic prioritization from the beginning, believing that “the people ... must come first.”\textsuperscript{61} It was, for this reason, that the Marines had created the Combined Action program in I Corps. Regrettably the Marines’ “secret weapon” was getting “too much lip service” and too little financial, logistical, and personnel support.\textsuperscript{62} More importantly, III MAF as a whole was being diverted from its initial security mission to the conventional military mission of fending off the North Vietnamese Army at the Demilitarized Zone separating the two Vietnams, although the Marines continued to put what effort they could into the pacification project.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 17.
Even more critical than Krulak of America’s strategic approach in Vietnam, former CAP commander, William Corson, laid much of the blame for pacification’s continued stagnation on the shoulders of the US government. From the time of Diem and Nhu, wrote Corson in 1968, the Other War had been “sabotaged” by civilian and military bureaucrats working for rival US agencies.⁶⁴ Among the United States’ deliberate missteps was the decision “to work through the de facto government” in Saigon, thereby enabling “the GVN to prevent our actions from being translated into meaningful activities that in fact would achieve some gain for the populace.”⁶⁵ Corson also faulted US officials for their limited strategic understanding and superficial nationbuilding precepts. Ever since the 1966 Honolulu Conference between President Johnson and Premier Ky, “pacification” had become a buzzword in American governmental circles. Nevertheless, very few US officials knew “what they were talking about.” Although they claimed to see the “Other War” as something akin to a “social revolution,” most of the American materiel destined for Vietnam continued to be employed “in strictly military operations.”⁶⁶ Furthermore, GVN officials realized they could take advantage of their ally’s haziness on the subject of pacification by making superficial concessions: for example, with regard to elections, political parties, and universal suffrage.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ibid., 15.
⁶⁶ Corson, Betrayal, 59-60; and “Pacification Program,” 88.
⁶⁷ Corson, Betrayal, 131.
For Corson, the 1968 Tet offensive offered definitive proof that pacification, as practiced by the GVN and supported by the US, was pretty much a “dead issue.” A year’s worth of optimistic reports could not cover up the fact that the South Vietnamese government had “abandoned the countryside” following the Communist offensive and permitted the enemy to simply “walk in” to the villages without a fight.\textsuperscript{68} Indeed, the only bright spot on the pacification horizon after Tet, it seemed, was Corson’s own CAP program. Almost alone among the myriad US-sponsored “Other War” programs, it had endured the Communist onslaught and had demonstrated “for the first time since we confronted a war of national liberation ... how to defeat Communists in an insurgency environment.”\textsuperscript{69} According to Corson, the secret of CAP’s success -- beyond the feeling of security it instilled in Vietnamese villagers through the continuous presence of a squad of well-armed Americans -- was the individual CAP Marine’s ability to blend into the Vietnamese environment. Much like Francis West, Corson painted a romantic picture of the typical CAP member. He was neither a “callous” foreign legionnaire nor an intellectual phony. According to Corson, the Marines, whom he had commanded in Vietnam, were “the new American populists,” “the sons of blue-collar America, [who] had dropped out of the protest stream in order to replace empty words with meaningful action.” They were “carpenters,” who knew how to “build” a nation from the bottom up.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 239-42.  
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 184.  
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 190-1.
Systems analysts at the Office of the Secretary of Defense agreed with Corson that the Marine CAP program had emerged from Tet in better shape than most other pacification programs. In statistical terms, CAP hamlets far outshone their non-CAP counterparts in I Corps. According to Southeast Asia Division (SEAD) analysts, the "tangible benefits of the CAP program ... included better intelligence and increased security" for 88,000 rural residents of Central Vietnam.\(^{71}\) The Marines' familiarity with the locals had greatly lowered the barrier to the exchange of information on Viet Cong activities.\(^{72}\) In addition, day-to-day training and support of Popular Forces (PF) units had increased their morale and tactical effectiveness.\(^{73}\) Finally, CAP troops had fully demonstrated their combat mettle during Tet by protecting Danang, the only major city in South Vietnam not penetrated by the enemy.\(^{74}\) On the downside, the CAP program had not yet attained its original objectives of creating three effective PFs for every one Marine and permitting the Americans a graceful exit from the Vietnamese hamlets. Nor had the US Marine Corps fully overcome villager ambivalence regarding its grassroots initiative.\(^{75}\) Systems analysts found that the residents of CAP hamlets welcomed "the


\(^{72}\) Ibid., 38.

\(^{73}\) Apparently, no PF had deserted from a CAP unit during the last five months of 1968, and that year's CAP "kill ratio" far exceeded the overall Popular Force ‘kill ratio’ in I Corps. Ibid., 27.

\(^{74}\) Ibid., 37-8.

\(^{75}\) According to a 1968 SEAPRO report, however, only 1.4 effective PFs then existed per US Marine and not a single paramilitary unit in the CAP program had "been brought up to the point where the Marines [could] withdraw." On the contrary, the US Marines were taking two and a half times as many casualties, per man, as their Vietnamese comrades in the CAPs. Ibid., 35.
improvement in day to day security” but worried that the Communists would specially “target” their villages because of the US presence.\textsuperscript{76}

In contrast to their relatively generous treatment of CAP, SEAD analysts highlighted deficiencies in the US-sponsored Phoenix program that tracked and targeted Communist political operatives in South Vietnam. At the end of 1968, the Viet Cong’s rural strength was reportedly still so great that the enemy could stop or start their military activities at will “without external assistance,” while “maintain[ing] partial control over the vast majority of South Vietnam’s population.”\textsuperscript{77} Phoenix’s victims were mostly “low-level members” of relatively unimportant Communist-backed organizations. Within the top ranks of the Viet Cong leadership, “attrition” was “less than 1% per year.”\textsuperscript{78} According to SEAD analysts, “the Phoenix system” operated under severe GVN constraints regarding the collection of VCI-related intelligence, as well as the targeting, arrest, sentencing, and incarceration of suspected Communist political operatives. Such jurisdical impediments, they believed, prevented Phoenix from performing its function as a centralized anti-infrastructure agency. For instance, the Phoenix organization did not directly collect intelligence on the Viet Cong. Rather, it collated and analyzed information received from other allied intelligence agencies and was dependent on the latters’ cooperation. In addition, Phoenix was involved in only about 10 to 20 percent of all allied anti-infrastructure operations. The actual process of

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 61.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
arresting or killing the enemy agents was mostly accomplished by other organizations. 79

Finally, Phoenix officials had no control over the fate of those Viet Cong operatives
whose identification and capture they did coordinate. 80

Settling into the Job

By 1969, US “Other Warriors” were sensing that their government had begun to
take seriously its job as political, military, and ideological mentor to the South
Vietnamese regime. This sentiment did not, however, prevent old-time nationbuilders
from griping about the diplomatic performance of American officials with regard to the
GVN. Paradoxically, some “Other War” bureaucrats continued to criticize Washington
for allowing wily South Vietnamese leaders too much liberty to use American resources
without exacting more than rhetorical promises of reform. Others, by contrast, decried
what they perceived as American efforts to take charge of the counterinsurgency-
nationbuilding show, and even offered praise to the major Communist powers for their
alleged ability to indoctrinate their followers without raising nationalistic hackles. Still,
most bureaucratic “Other Warriors” agreed that the US-inspired “new model”
pacification program -- inaugurated in 1966-67, yet only put into effect in the wake of the
Tet offensive -- was a significant improvement over its ramshackle and ill-supported
predecessor. In particular, officials at CORDS lauded their organization for bringing a
greater degree of strategic flexibility to the “Other War” campaign, creating a

79 Ibid., 63.
80 SEAD analysts estimated that “two-thirds of the prisoners arrested and held [in South Vietnamese jails]
during the period January-October 1968 were subsequently released or escaped...” This occurred for a
number of reasons, including: the bribery of South Vietnamese police officers, GVN administrative
inability to cope with the large prisoner population, and periodic prisoner amnesties announced by the
South Vietnamese government for propaganda purposes. Ibid., 71-3.
bureaucratic interest in pacification’s success, expanding and integrating hitherto localized pacification projects, making the military more aware of the political dimension of the “Other War,” and providing a single pacification and development chain of command from Saigon down to the district level. Nevertheless, some pre-CORDS officials were skeptical that the new bureaucratic entity could place the allies on the right strategic track. They worried that, by putting CORDS under MACV’s command, the civil aspect of pacification might fail to receive the attention it deserved and that the organization itself might be subsumed within the military’s vast bureaucracy. What is more, even CORDS supporters recognized that the new pacification agency represented a belated, ad hoc, and relatively underfunded attempt to grapple with the complexities of Vietnam’s “Other War.”

For Chieu Hoi advisory chief Ogden Williams, America’s greatest fault with respect to Vietnam was in overestimating “the capacity, motivation and viability of the non-Communist Vietnamese leadership elements.” In his March 1969 end-of-tour report, Williams half-seriously suggested that it might have been best for the United States, back in the 1950s, to have “let Ho Chi Minh conduct the Draconian reforms which Vietnamese society required and then do business with him or his successors thirty years later.”

Alternatively, American officials should have seized the opportunity to assist those non-Communist Vietnamese forces who favored a fundamental overhaul of their political system once Diem had been removed from the scene in 1963. Instead, Williams

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contented, the United States “allowed the infant revolution to die in its cradle” and a military dictatorship to emerge in its place.\(^82\)

Although generally impressed with recent American support for the GVN’s pacification program, Williams expressed some reservations concerning priorities and organizational structure. Referring obliquely to the placement of CORDS under MACV’s command in 1967, he argued that the reorganization of the US pacification advisory effort did not “reflect the realities” of the situation in the countryside, where the “civil aspects of pacification [were] at least equal priority to the military” aspects.\(^83\) This longtime “Other War” bureaucrat also lamented the growth of “minor Pentagons” at the regional level, a problem compounded by the incorporation of CORDS into the US military corps establishments.\(^84\) Finally, Williams questioned whether CORDS could continue to retain its unique identity as a civil-military organization with responsibilities transcending those of a normal military staff, warning of bureaucratic pressures within MACV “to reduce CORDS to the status of a simple ‘J’ [Joint] staff indistinguishable in function from any other.”\(^85\)

Not surprisingly, CORDS chief Robert Komer was less critical of his bureaucratic brainchild. What had made the “new model pacification programs” more successful than its predecessors, he boasted, went beyond the high-level emphasis given to the “Other War” from 1966 onward and the paradoxical effects of Tet 1968. It was also their

\(^{82}\) Ibid., 2-3.
\(^{83}\) Ibid., 5.
\(^{84}\) Ibid., 4-5.
\(^{85}\) Ibid., 6.
greater operational flexibility and their superior organization. Flexibility enabled pacification forces to move progressively from a security focus and “rapid territorial expansion” to a development focus and “consolidation and improvement.” But this ability to alter the course of pacification would not have been possible, according to Komer, “without the creation of a new bureaucratic vested interest in pacification.” Until the reorganization of the US and GVN pacification machinery in the mid-to-late 1960s. “everybody and nobody had been responsible” for the ‘Other War.’

What the establishment of CORDS within MACV did for the US side was to “convert innovative small-scale experiments in pacification into a consistent, large-scale effort.” Henceforth civil and military programs progressed in harmony. Furthermore, taking full responsibility for pacification support had made the US Army more conscious of the fact that the Vietnam conflict was “as much political as military.” Komer admitted that, by stressing organizational unity and rapid results, the United States had opted for quantity over quality in terms of pacification, but that “given the real-life circumstances of wartime Vietnam ... making quantity substitute for quality was almost the only realistic approach.”

Komer’s successor as CORDS chief, William Colby, also claimed that behind the post-Tet Offensive improvement in GVN politico-military strategy and performance was a more effective US pacification advisory and support structure. Prior to May 1967, Colby told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1970, American recommendations

87 Ibid., 27.
88 Ibid., 24.
with regard to the "Other War" policy had lacked clout. Vietnamese provincial officials, he noted, had often dealt "with four or five separate Americans, each giving different advice."\(^89\) CORDS, however, transformed this situation by instituting a single pacification chain of command and ensuring civil-military cooperation from Saigon to the district level. True, he acknowledged, CORDS seemed to be a "Rube Goldberg" creation in that its organizational lines of responsibility cut "across many ... familiar civil-military or departmental distinctions." But this ad hoc institution was designed for a novel mission (that is, revolutionary warfare), and despite CORDS’ ungainly appearance, it seemed to be working well with its Vietnamese counterparts.\(^90\)

As American forces were being withdrawn from Vietnam, Robert Komor (now a RAND Corporation policy analyst) continued to defend the "new model" pacification program of the late 1960s and early ’70s. The main problem for the US in Vietnam, he wrote in 1972, was not flawed strategic thinking, but the fact that Americans had not put their best ideas into effect until it was nearly too late. America’s pacification strategy did not fail in Vietnam, "it simply was never tried on any major scale until 1967-1971." And even at that point, "pacification remained a small tail to the very large conventional military dog." This occurred because no major allied agency in Vietnam included pacification within its "institutional repertoire,"\(^91\) and no "integrated conflict management" structure existed "to pull together all the disparate aspects" of the allied

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\(^90\) Ibid., 11.

war effort. Yet, following the establishment of CORDS and the advent of Tet, South Vietnam’s performance in the area of pacification had improved significantly. What the 1969-1971 turnaround proved, Komor argued, was “that vigorous emphasis on pacification was feasible and might have led to a more satisfactory outcome -- especially if undertaken much earlier.”

From retirement in the United States, Edward Lansdale provided a somewhat different perspective on America’s failure in Vietnam. The problem with the US effort to assist the South Vietnamese in nationbuilding, he believed, was more cultural than organizational in character. As Lansdale related to historian Peter McInerney in 1982, it was no wonder that the South Vietnamese had resisted what they considered to be an American takeover of pacification policy. President Johnson, Lansdale argued, “would have been just as xenophobic if Canadians or British or the French had taken charge of his dreams for a Great Society, told him what to do, and spread out by the thousands throughout the U.S. to see that it got done.” Somehow the Communist powers had done a better job of passing along their methods of nationbuilding without raising the nationalist hackles of the Vietnamese. “We didn’t see Chinese and Russian advisers with the VC or NVA,” Lansdale observed in a letter to Chester Cooper in 1972, “yet Chinese and Russian know-how was well assimilated by the Vietnamese Communists.” This strongly suggested, according to the old political warrior, that Moscow’s and Peking’s educational systems had done “a far more effective job” of inculcating their foreign

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92 Ibid., ix.
93 Ibid., xi.
proteges “in political science, government, and communism’s subject matter” than US
war colleges and universities had in transferring American values and methods to future
South Vietnamese leaders.\(^9^5\)

Lansdale’s rather harsh view of Americans’ tutelary capabilities was not generally
shared by military participants in the “Other War,” however. Field commanders, in
particular, touted their units’ counterinsurgency achievements in cooperation with
ARVN. As a result of their combined efforts, the majority of the surviving Viet Cong
had been driven from their village refuges and into the remotest corners of the country by
1970. As for those Communists who stayed behind or ventured beyond their isolated
base areas, they had become the target of US-directed campaigns designed to destroy the
enemy’s economic support network and eliminate its political infrastructure. And these
military “Other Warriors” seemed equally effusive about nationbuilding. According to
them, constant US prodding and substantial American resources were finally causing the
GVN to do the right thing by its people. Some civilian and military observers of the
pacification effort did recognize a downside to the US Army’s and Marine Corps’
security and development activities. For example, the South Vietnamese military did not
seem to share their American counterparts’ fixation with uprooting Communist political
operatives. Furthermore, the US Army continued to treat nationbuilding as a secondary
mission, at best. Finally, even field commanders admitted that the relentless drawdown
of US forces in South Vietnam cast doubt on the future of allied pacification projects.

\(^9^5\) Edward G. Lansdale, “Letter to Chester Cooper Commenting on Volume 1 of the American Experience
in Vietnam,” 27 February 1972, Pacification 1972-1983, Box 23, File 569B, Edward Lansdale Papers,
Hoover Institution, Stanford, CA, 4.
US 9th Infantry Division commander, Lieutenant General Julian Ewell, had few qualms about his unit’s pacification and development achievements in the eastern Mekong Delta during 1968 and early 1969. For this confident leader, progress in the realm of population security was largely a matter of getting the word out and overcoming bureaucratic resistance. Of course, in the beginning of his command, it had taken “lots of effort to insure that the eight subprograms and goals were clearly understood” and then “lots of blasting to clear log jams and red tape to get the paperwork, funds and actual programs rolling.” In this latter regard, he acknowledged that President Thieu’s newly established Central Pacification and Development Council had provided essential help in jolting the South Vietnamese side of pacification into action. Yet, once the organizational glitches had been ironed out, security programs in Ewell’s area of operations had apparently moved forward without much trouble. As the 9th Division commander came to understand, the Viet Cong organization in the eastern Mekong had been “more facade than substance.”

By contrast, pacification evaluator Gary Murfin found provincial officials in Ewell’s former area of operation to be uneasy, even fearful over the imminent withdrawal of the 9th Division in the summer of 1969. Many respondents believed that the recent expansion of Kien Hoa’s paramilitary forces was a definite security benefit. GVN officials, though, were concerned that past incidents of misbehavior toward the local population on the part of the Regional and Popular Forces might become more common.

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in the future. And almost no one believed that South Vietnamese government troops in Kien Hoa could do more than hold onto existing GVN-controlled territory “without more firepower and increased mobility.” According to Murfin, villagers -- especially those residing in the vicinity of former American bases -- were worried about their personal safety, fearing “Viet Cong retaliation for their acceptance of Americans in their community.”

And several Kien Hoa provincial officials expressed their disappointment that the American military intervention in Kien Hoa was ending when it was, believing that “total pacification” was just around the corner.

Although officials in Dinh Tuong appeared “mildly apprehensive” about the departure of 9th Division elements from their province, they were “not panicked by the prospect,” and “some local officials even seemed pleased” that the Americans were leaving. They pointed out that US involvement “in accidental shootings, highway accidents and even theft” in Dinh Tuong had Americans “unpopular” with locals.

Furthermore, according to a senior US psychological warfare expert, the two years that the 9th Division had spent spearheading the pacification effort in that province had been a political and propaganda “boon” to the Viet Cong and a “disaster” for the South Vietnamese army. He predicted that greater involvement by the ARVN 7th Division in provincial security would “result in a new upsurge in the pride and self-respect” among soldiers and civilians.

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98 Ibid., 11-12.

99 Ibid., 3-4.

100 Ibid., 9 and 11.
socioeconomic downside to the American withdrawal from Dinh Tuong. The South Vietnamese government lacked the resources to take responsibility for the over 100,000 people to whom US medical teams had been ministering. Furthermore, although they would probably not starve, local civilian employees of the 9th Division faced a fifty percent drop in income if forced to return to the farm.  

Other military participant-observers contemplated the downside of US attempts at pacification and development in those parts of the Mekong Delta where American troops remained. There was a danger, Lieutenant General Michael Davison noted, that Americans might steal the affections of the South Vietnamese people from their government. By nature, the American GI was “compassionate and charitable to those less fortunate than himself,” Davison wrote in his end-of-tour report, and this impulse had been the genesis of numerous goodwill endeavors throughout III Corps, sponsored both by units and individuals. “Unfortunately, many of these projects had resulted in a reliance on US personnel” that ran counter to the purpose of the Vietnamization program.  

For his part, former Special Forces advisor Gerald Tippin contended that the Army’s nationbuilding difficulties stemmed not from an over-devotion to the practice of civic action, but from an institutional reluctance to engage in nationbuilding activities.

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101 Ibid., 6-7.
102 As an example, Davison pointed to the presence of a “well staffed and equipped” dispensary within his area of operations, run by the South Vietnamese, that was being ignored by local people “conditioned to [receiving] medical care from the Americans.” US Department of the Army, Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development, “Debriefing of Senior Officers: LTG Michael S. Davison,” 8 July 1971, US Army War College Library, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 25.
Involvement in constructive projects, Tipplin alleged, lacked the advancement potential of more destructive specializations.  

Lieutenant General Melvin Zais, however, figured that much of the GVN’s increasing popularity in the northern provinces of South Vietnam in 1969-70 could be attributed to the well-oiled nationbuilding machinery of the US military. For example, the 101st Airborne Division had stepped into the development breech in Thua Thien Province, integrating “the capabilities of many diversified agencies,” supplying “materials not otherwise available,” and furnishing the “spark and drive” that drove the South Vietnamese to see reconstruction and resettlement projects through to “a successful conclusion.”  

Although he acknowledged the difficulty of measuring the impact of the Division’s civic action projects on public opinion, Zais argued that “the genuine friendliness of those affected” and their greater willingness to volunteer information about the enemy demonstrated their appreciation for the American effort. But apart from its measurable effects, civic action was simply the right thing to do. By engaging in nationbuilding projects, the 101st Airborne Division had proven its commitment not only to “the destruction of foreign and internal aggressors but also ... to the welfare of the common man.”

Still, the troops of XXIV Corps were apparently no slouches in the counterinsurgency department either. Aggressive rice-denial and anti-infrastructure

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105 Ibid., 32.
106 Ibid., 34.
campaigns mounted jointly by the Americans and the South Vietnamese during the previous several years were squeezing the Communists “dry.”

Exploiting intelligence information “that the enemy’s food supplies were pitifully low,” the US and GVN forces had during the spring of 1969 seized enough rice from Communist caches “to feed 3,200 NVA troops for a year.” Furthermore, once the autumn harvest season had begun, the allies had organized “ambushes in the lowlands and along the edge of the piedmont” in a successful effort to interdict enemy “rice collection parties” descending from the mountains.

According to Zais, the most significant aspect of the I Corps economic warfare campaign -- which continued to gain momentum in 1970 -- was the allies’ ability to bring “the population into the business of denying food to the enemy.” For its part, the anti-infrastructure campaign in the central coastal provinces had supposedly depleted the Viet Cong’s ranks of “trained, specialized personnel,” forcing the Communists to rely on cadres of “lesser caliber and experience,” to reduce the overall size of some of their units, and to assign more and more North Vietnamese to understrength Viet Cong formations.

Zais’ replacement as XXIV Corps Commander, Lieutenant General James Sutherland, was not quite so sanguine about the future of pacification and development in northern South Vietnam. The socioeconomic effects of a full-scale American withdrawal,

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109 Ibid., 18.
110 Ibid., 19-20.
he predicted, would “be felt by virtually all inhabitants in descending degree from those who are directly employed at US installations...” The psychological effects would likely also be profound. Because the South Vietnamese people had come to “equate US presence with their security,” they might feel insecure even if they were, objectively, secure. What is more, the Viet Cong would undoubtedly exploit any nascent feelings of abandonment and resentment against the Americans. Already, Sutherland noted, confrontations between local Vietnamese and American soldiers were growing in frequency as the US withdrawal gathered momentum.\footnote{As a precaution, Sutherland recommended that remaining US military forces in I Corps “maintain a lower profile” and, if necessary, even “develop enclaves in selected areas with excursions limited to convoy movement.” US Department of the Army, Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development, “Debriefing of Senior Officers: LTG James W. Sutherland,” 31 August 1971, US Army War College Library, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 21.}

Stuart Herrington, an enthusiastic young Army lieutenant on his first overseas tour in 1971, reacted to his assignment as a district-level advisor in Hau Nghia Province with extreme frustration. Recently schooled in the latest counterinsurgency techniques at the Vung Tau academy, he expected his South Vietnamese colleagues in Huc Hue district to cooperate with him in his plans to root out the Viet Cong. When they politely, but effectively, thwarted his proposals for operational changes in the local Phoenix program, left to mount his own independent operation against the local Viet Cong, using intelligence derived from Chieu Hoi defectors.\footnote{Stuart A. Herrington, \textit{Silence Was A Weapon: The Vietnam War In The Villages} (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982), 15-16.}

As he matured in his advisory role, however, Herrington came to the realization that GVN officials could not easily be faulted for the often poor working relationship that
existed between them and the Americans. To these people, the Americans “were both the redeemers and the curse of South Vietnam.” The United States was needed “to pull Saigon’s chestnuts out of the fire” in 1965-66, but this fact had not endeared the South Vietnamese military to their American saviors. Consequently, “an exceptionally sensitive American officer” was required to overcome the resentment he was bound to face from those he was sent to advise. Unfortunately, such an officer -- who also spoke Vietnamese, appreciated his allies’ culture, and understood the nuances of GVN bureaucratic politics -- was exceedingly rare.\textsuperscript{113} Thus, “what ultimately emerged was a situation in which the Americans looked down on the Vietnamese, who were at the same time looking down on the Americans.”\textsuperscript{114}

For Marine Lieutenant General Victor Krulak, the US military’s difficulties in Vietnam stemmed less from a lack of cultural sensitivity than from a misguided strategy. Up to the time of his retirement from the Marine Corps and beyond, this counterinsurgency advocate continued to harp on what he considered as the Army’s ill-advised focus on conventional military force in Vietnam, as well as on the need for Americans to accept the reality of protracted warfare against a determined, yet beatable, foe. In an April 1970 speech in San Diego, Krulak declared that “the terrifying array of military strength which we and our allies possess” was of little utility in a

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 191.
\textsuperscript{114} Upon encountering opposition to their plans, American advisors tended to accuse their GVN counterparts of dishonesty, parochialism, and a lack of initiative bordering on cowardice. For their part, provincial officials “began to regard their American advisors as spies whose reporting of enemy activity... via the HES report could do nothing but reflect adversely on the local Vietnamese hierarchy.”\textsuperscript{115} In Herrington’s opinion, the Phoenix program “most typified” the mutually frustrating allied relationship. “It was a classic example,” he believed, “of an attempt to graft an American-conceived plan onto a stubbornly resistant Vietnamese situation.” Ibid., 193-4.
counterinsurgency war. Americans in Vietnam had to confront the reality that the war was “not just a shooting affair, but that it embodied politics, religion, sociology and economic balance, too.”

Pacification, the former Marine general warned, could no longer be treated as a dependent variable, achievable only after the destruction of the Communist regular forces. Nevertheless, Krulak told his San Diego audience to remain resolute: the war in Vietnam would not be over quickly, but it was certainly not a hopeless enterprise. “As we hurt them more,” he declared, “as we give continuing evidences of long-pull toughness in SVN and long-pull resolution at home,” the Communist Vietnamese would bend to the American will.

But did Krulak and like-minded Marines have the answer to the pacification dilemma? In March 1970, the Vietnam Special Studies Group (VSSG) team of Bruno Kosheleff and Stan Jorgensen presented a decidedly mixed review of American activities in Quang Nam Province, the focal point of Marine Corps efforts in South Vietnam. On the one hand, US military assistance had apparently played an essential role in crippling the enemy’s main force, thus laying the groundwork for the 1968 and 1969 pacification campaigns. Furthermore, American firepower and high technology had proven instrumental in the effort to clear the lowlands and concentrate the Quang Nam population within GVN-controlled areas. Finally, Kosheleff and Jorgensen held that

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116 Ibid., 34-5.
117 Ibid., 40.
the Marine Corps Combined Action Platoon (CAP) program and the related Combined Unit Pacification Program (CUPP) had provided a needed boost to the GVN’s primary pacification security units, the Popular Forces.\(^{119}\)

On the other hand, the VSSG analysts were scathing in their criticism of alleged Marine Corps acquiescence in the GVN’s disregard for Quang Nam’s refugee population, as well as the Americans’ apparent lack of preparation and motivation with respect to the pacification mission. In order to avoid offending the sensibilities of his Vietnamese counterpart, the III MAF commander, General Herman Nickerson, had reportedly refused to confront I Corps chief, General Lam Van Phat, on the issue of governmental responsibility for the innocent victims of allied clearance operations, designed, in part, to stimulate mass migration to GVN-controlled areas.\(^{120}\) Kosheleff and Jorgensen also discovered during their research that most US advisers in Quang Nam had very little conception of “what pacification [was] about.” They tended to spend their tours idly fulfilling “quantified goals” and lacked a personal stake in their programs and a “coherent philosophy” that explained what they were doing in Vietnam.\(^{121}\)

In the post-Tet period, Defense Department systems analysts kept up their relentless attack on the American-inspired anti-Communist infrastructure program. SEAD analysts complained that US assistance to the South Vietnamese National Police

\(^{119}\) Interestingly, Kosheleff and Jorgensen found that the most important benefits of Marine support to the paramilitary were not the “teaching [of] new techniques or [the] altering [of] attitudes.” Rather, the VSSG evaluators believed that the crucial gains, stemming from the American presence in the hamlets, were the guarantees of “quicker and more accurate” artillery, air support, and medical evacuations and “more staying power” in the event that the combined platoon came under enemy fire. Ibid., 20-1.

\(^{120}\) Ibid., 42.

\(^{121}\) Ibid., 54-5.
had left it ill-equipped for its new role as the primary enforcement arm of the Phoenix system. Explaining the substantial performance gap between rural and urban cops in South Vietnam, a 1969 SEAPRO article indicated that the police had not effectively operated in the countryside for years, received no special rural training, did not “normally volunteer” for often-hazardous rural assignments, and remained outside the control of village authorities. Because most rural policemen only visited their village jurisdictions during the day, returning home to their families in town at night, they learned little about the locations and activities of local Viet Cong leaders.\textsuperscript{122} Even the National Police Field Forces (NPFF) -- a division of the National Police especially designed to track down members of the Viet Cong infrastructure -- launched their attacks against the Communists in a largely random fashion.\textsuperscript{123}

Southeast Asia reports in 1970 and 1971 continued to question the effectiveness of the Phoenix program. Nevertheless, systems analysts argued that the anti-infrastructure effort was improving and defended it against accusations that it was essentially a CIA-sponsored campaign of political assassination. According to their estimate, a goodly portion of the large crop of Chieu Hoi defectors in 1969 could be attributed to Phoenix.\textsuperscript{124} Furthermore, the allies had finally agreed to “more restrictive criteria for defining members of the VCI,” in the hope of apprehending fewer lowly

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\textsuperscript{122} Thayer, ed., \textit{Pacification and Civil Affairs}, 54-5.
\textsuperscript{123} SEAD analysts estimated in March 1969 that only 1-2\% of NPFF “neutralizations” were actually Viet Cong cadres. Ibid., 75.
\textsuperscript{124} Less committed Viet Cong were presumably turning themselves in to avoid being targeted by GVN anti-infrastructure forces. Ibid., 81.
\end{footnotesize}
peasant supporters of the Viet Cong and more high-level Communist officials. On the morals charge, SEAD analysts pointed out that “only 2% of all VCI neutralized were specifically targeted and killed by Phoenix forces.” What is more, systems analysts claimed to have received “very few reports from the field” suggesting that Phoenix forces were summarily executing Communist political suspects. Conceding their inability to know for sure whether any assassinations were taking place in South Vietnam, they nevertheless contended that “such misuse is likely to be quite small.”

Stepping back from analysis of individual pieces of the “Other War,” social scientists at the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) -- under the direction of Chester Cooper -- produced a three-volume assessment in 1972 of America’s involvement in Vietnamese pacification and development for the Defense Department’s Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA). Drawing on the collective experience of “Other War” veterans like Edward Lansdale and Sir Robert Thompson, Cooper and his co-authors pointed out serious shortcomings in America’s initial approach to understanding and managing the Vietnam conflict. For over a decade after the United States had become seriously involved in the affairs of Indochina, they wrote, this region remained “virtually terra incognita.” The amount of information compiled on this region allegedly paled in comparison to what US missionaries, businessmen, and academics had been

125 An October 1969 SEAPRO article indicated, however, that the US military’s estimate of the number of Viet Cong political operators in South Vietnam had actually risen during the first nine months of that year. While better intelligence possibly accounted for this rise, the numbers certainly did not show any significant diminution in Communist organizational strength. Ibid., 79-80.
126 The analysts acknowledged, however, that such a record could be read as a sign of the latter’s incompetence rather than high moral character. Ibid.
127 Ibid., 100.
accumulating for decades about China, Japan, and even Korea. Even during the period after the Geneva Conference of 1954, when US politico-military involvement in South Vietnam was on the rise, “there was little American understanding of the history, culture, and sociology of the area and its people.” Furthermore, despite America’s Revolutionary and Indian-fighting traditions, US leaders in the 1950s and ‘60s retained little understanding of the methods for defeating a “people’s war.” According to the authors, the flurry of interest within the upper reaches of President John F. Kennedy’s administration with regard to Third World insurgency and counterinsurgency “could not compensate for a lack of practical American experience” with actual antagonists engaged in revolutionary warfare.

The result of this knowledge deficit was a devastatingly long period of floundering -- on the part of those responsible for pacification advisory programs -- before the pieces began falling into place in the late 1960s. With regard to the security side of pacification, the IDA study indicated that not until the late 1960s and early 1970s did village-based paramilitary and citizens’ militia forces begin to receive the attention and support they deserved. Although not wholly to blame, American military advisors were never able to resolve the problem of poor leadership within the South Vietnamese armed forces, whose ultimate source was a character flaw within the South Vietnamese elite. On the developmental side, U.S. civilian advisors battled for fifteen years over

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129 Ibid., 8.
130 Ibid., 13.
131 Ibid., 17.

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the type of aid best suited to the situation in South Vietnam. “Traditionalists” argued that economic assistance should be directed primarily toward infrastructure projects that could provide a foundation for nationbuilding once the war was over. “Counterinsurgents,” on the other hand, favored “high-impact programs that would bring immediate and visible benefits to the people and convince them that the government had something going for it.”\(^{132}\) Since neither side in this controversy gained the upper-hand, the result was a “vast proliferation” of American programs and personnel, often working at cross-purposes. Such abundant assistance overwhelmed the logistical capacity of the GVN and created an exaggerated Vietnamese dependency on the United States for “expensive luxuries,” such as land reform, refugee resettlement, and hospital and school construction, that were unaffordable under wartime conditions without continued large American subsidies.\(^{133}\)

As with the security and development aspects of pacification, IDA depicted U.S. efforts to manage the “Other War” in Vietnam as beginning poorly and belatedly improving. At the national level, pacification command and control remained confused, except for one brief period when White House special assistant Robert Komor took over responsibility for the civil components of the program in 1966 under President Lyndon Johnson’s direction. Reluctant “to permit the war in Vietnam to interfere with the normal process of government in the United States,” policymakers relied “on ad hoc committees, task forces, and ‘special groups’” and refused to establish “a single managerial staff” or to appoint “a Vietnam ‘czar.’”\(^{134}\) In South Vietnam, the managerial

\(^{132}\) Ibid., 19.
\(^{133}\) Ibid., 19-20.
\(^{134}\) Ibid., 21-2.
situation was much the same with MACV, CIA, AID and embassy officials vying with one another for influence. Under CORDS directors Robert Komer and William Colby, however, “the pacification effort in Saigon was finally consolidated into a centrally managed organization.” In the fashion of large business corporations, “horizontal integration” brought the military and civil sides of pacification together, while “vertical integration” established the CORDS chief’s authority from Saigon down to the rural district level. Although a unified US-GVN command structure was never implemented, the reorganization of American pacification assets substantially increased the clout of US advisors in their dealings with the South Vietnamese.¹³⁵

As the IDA report on US pacification efforts in Vietnam attests, the tales told by official (or quasi-official) commentators with regard to the protagonists in the “Other War” struggle were not mere apologies for America’s nationbuilding and counterinsurgency policies in South Vietnam. On the other hand, few government-supported academics, military officers, and civilian bureaucrats involved in the “Other War” warned their superiors or the American public of the dangers of continuing to act as South Vietnam’s political-military protector. Their view of the situation often conflicted with their interventionist ethos. They recognized the relative weakness of America’s ally by comparison with its Communist enemy, as well as their own lack of preparation for taking on the role of mentors to the Saigon regime, but they remained convinced that the United States could provide the necessary cover to ensure South Vietnam’s continued security and development. What America needed, above all, was a proper understanding

¹³⁵ Ibid.
of Communist revolutionary strategy, as well as a democratic revolutionary strategy of its
own that placed the “Other War” on the same level as the conventional military conflict.
To these ‘Other Warriors,’ the setbacks suffered by the Communists in South Vietnam
during pacification’s heyday between 1969 and 1971 reinforced their faith in the United
States’ potential to defend emerging nations beset by the twin traumas of modernization
and insurgency.
PART III: STRATEGIES AND METHODS
CHAPTER 6

VARIATIONS ON NATIONBUILDING

From the late 1950s until the mid-1970s, America’s “Other Warriors” held widely divergent assumptions about the best way to transform South Vietnam into a ‘viable’ political entity. Conservative populists championed a nationbuilding strategy that emphasized deep respect for traditional socio-political institutions, as well as local and regional autonomy for various ethnic, religious, and political groups, while the largest group of “Other War” social scientists, civilian bureaucrats, and military officers favored a liberal nationalist approach to political development. Bureaucratic authoritarians, for their part, were not so much opposed to economic measures that enabled individuals to enrich themselves in GVN-controlled areas, but they considered that South Vietnam was not yet ready for political democracy and sought to bind the country together administratively under the auspices of a benevolent dictatorship. On the other hand, the liberal approach required the Government of Vietnam (GVN) to initiate the development of a Western-style ‘mixed’ economy that would significantly improve the material and social conditions of most South Vietnamese. Furthermore, it meant integrating South Vietnam politically through ‘democratic’ appeals and representative national institutions.
Of course, the views of some ‘Other Warriors’ did not entirely conform to a particular nationbuilding approach. Still, the fact remains that the “Other War” community, as a whole, failed to provide its superiors in Washington and Saigon with a coherent strategy for constructing a non-Communist Vietnam.

**Conservative Populism**

To a large extent, this strategic orientation stemmed from an aversion to certain aspects of the modernization process, such as the widening gap between the city and countryside, the loss of communal responsibility and control, bureaucratic regulation and corruption, and ideological fanaticism. The old and, in many ways, exemplary Vietnam was perceived by the conservatives as being in a long-term state of decay, brought on by unfortunate colonial and GVN policies, as well as deliberate Communist subversion. Nevertheless, they said, it was basically salvageable, provided South Vietnam’s rulers understood that their destinies were linked with those of ‘natural’ leaders at the bottom of society, who chafed under the restrictions imposed upon them by greedy GVN officials and doctrinaire Viet Cong cadres. For some ‘Other Warriors,’ this meant instituting a ‘riceroots’ democracy, complete with local elections, ‘New England-style’ town meetings, and community-organized ‘self-help’ endeavors. For others, it meant accepting the relative benevolence of a feudalistic Vietnamese society, where landlords and other notables looked after villagers’ basic economic and security needs in return for a higher social status, more political power, and a greater share of communal wealth. Beyond the realm of the village, some conservative populists, in the mid-1960s, envisioned a
federalized South Vietnam composed of religious, ethnic, and political enclaves each with considerable regional autonomy and a representative slice of national authority.

At the heart of conservative populism was the idea of the village as the basis of Vietnamese politics and society and the foundation upon which all future political development efforts must be built.¹ For example, Michigan State University (MSU) political scientist Leonard Finkle stated in a 1961 report for the US Agency for International Development (USAID) that the village was “more than a political unit” in Vietnam. It was also “a social, economic, and, in many respects, a spiritual entity which commands the loyalty from its members.” Hence, local customs and institutions were not only representative of Vietnam’s past, they were the “key” to Vietnam’s future.² Such villagist sentiments were echoed by Finkle’s MSU colleague, anthropologist Gerald Hickey. In his 1964 book, Hickey observed that the vast majority of rural Vietnamese cared little for the rapidly changing politico-military landscape beyond the village gate.³ The basis of villagism, in his opinion, was “homogeneity in the attitudes and values” of most residents. Despite the presence of Catholic and Cao Dai believers in Hickey’s laboratory community of Khanh Hau in Long An province, a majority “share[d] a cosmological view deeply rooted in the Buddhist-Taoist-Confucian ideology of the

¹ The term “village” means something different in a Vietnamese context than it does in an American one. The Vietnamese village (which averaged around 5,000 people in the 1960s) is composed of smaller discrete units known as “hamlets.” In the Mekong Delta region of southern Vietnam, villages and their constituent hamlets tend to be dispersed along waterways, sometimes over a distance of many miles. By contrast, in the central lowlands region, villages and hamlets tend to be more compact.
Chinese Great Tradition, with Vietnamese alterations and additions."⁴ A second source of village solidarity was the family and clan, which not only provided daily “comfort” but also the promise of “immortality.”⁵

This was not to say that the institution of the village remained unscathed by misguided French and GVN rule, not to mention the social impact of the war. Indeed, Hickey traced certain basic problems in village administration at mid-century back over fifty years. Since 1904, the efforts of the French colonial government and subsequent Vietnamese national governments “to integrate villages into the larger political superstructure” had, on the one hand, given village residents “a greater voice” in their affairs, but, on the other hand, had steadily reduced the “prerogatives of the Village Council.”⁶ The central administration began to demand more from the villages in the form of taxes, conscript labor and military recruits, while simultaneously usurping welfare and cultural-religious functions that had traditionally been left to village leaders.⁷ To make matters worse, the Diem regime in the 1950s had limited the number of positions on village councils and lowered the prestige of their members by transforming them into bureaucratic appointees. Stripped of their direct connection to their fellow villagers and indifferently treated by their administrative superiors, village councilors

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⁴ Ibid., 276-7.
⁵ Ibid., 277.
⁶ Ibid., 178.
⁷ Traditionally, the village leadership in Vietnam was divided into two groups: the village council and the council of notabilities. Notables were selected by the village elite on the basis of age, wealth, and administrative experience. Village councilors were more-or-less democratically elected. Prior to colonial times, the council of notabilities was the real policymaking body in the village; the village council (which included the village chief) was more of an executive agency. Under the French, the official village pecking order was reversed. Although often retaining their influence as advisers to the village council, notables were officially relegated to a cultural role (e.g., taking care of the village’s ancestral temple or dính).
responded by working to improve their individual circumstances, rather than to satisfy
their communities’ needs. More scrupulous GVN administrators admitted that
grassroots corruption and inefficiency were major problems for the anti-Communist
cause, but they did not seem to appreciate that increased village autonomy and grassroots
political participation might bring both better local government and greater loyalty to the
Saigon regime.

Village-oriented social scientists urged the GVN to consider ways of increasing
the status and power of local “notabilities.” MSU’s Luther Allen praised the efforts of
Quang Nam provincial officials “to enlist the cooperation [of the local gentry] in the task
of combating Communism” by reestablishing their advisory councils. Gerald Hickey,
too, saw merit in bolstering the authority of the landlord class, whose ties to the village
were strong and whose wealth generally made it socially responsible “by virtue of the
noblesse oblige associated with higher status.” For his part, Edward Mitchell of the
RAND Corporation provided a Machiavellian justification for supporting the power of
large landowners in rural Vietnam. Contrary to the conventional wisdom within US
analytical and policymaking circles, Mitchell contended that statistical evidence seemed
to show that “large estates” and “inequality of land tenure” contributed to greater GVN
control. Not only did poor peasants tend to be more “docile” and less aspiring than

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8 For example, MSU political scientist Joseph Zasloff noted that “the corruptibility and inefficiency of
incumbent officials” in Vinh Long province in the early 1960s “made it virtually impossible to assure the
sympathy of the local population [and] competent replacements for them were scarce.” See *Rural
Resettlement in Vietnam: An Agrovile in Development* (Saigon: Michigan State University Viet Nam
9 Luther A. Allen and Pham Ngoc An, *A Vietnamese District Chief in Action* (Saigon: Michigan State
University Vietnam Advisory Group, August 1961), 35.
better-off peasants, the landlord-tenant relationship in “feudal areas” offered advantages to the government. In return for providing his tenants with land tenure and access to credit, the landlord could demand “service in the government forces, intelligence regarding rebel activities, and so forth.”

Although he did not say so explicitly, the policy implications of Mitchell’s analysis were clear to certain defenders of the GVN in the US: do nothing to disturb the basis of traditional rural society where it still existed.

According to Hudson Institute researcher Raymond Gastil, the Vietnamese “commune” was still largely the domain of a “respected group of old and usually ‘wealthy’ men.” Although the village chief and council might formally administer local affairs, the informally-organized council of notables more often than not made the significant decisions affecting the community. Although not altogether democratic, rule by the notabilities was “probably not oppressive in most cases.” True, wealthy villagers paid few taxes and collected rents from their tenants, but they were also “expected to contribute often fairly substantial sums to the upkeep or building of communal structures (schools, shrines, etc.) and to the financing of celebrations.” Moreover, “the communal hierarchy” attempted to modify national programs in a way that was acceptable to local

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11 Mitchell compared the situation in government-controlled areas of Vietnam in the 1960s to the Vendee region of post-revolutionary France in the 1790s, described by sociologist-historian Charles Tilly. In contrast to more revolutionary French locales, Tilly discovered that, in the Vendee, “fewer peasants owning their own land, a higher degree of absenteeism among landlords, greater ownership of land by the nobility, poorer accessibility, and greater religiosity.” According to Mitchell, if one took into account the absence of a nobility in Vietnam, the French and the Vietnamese cases appeared quite similar. See *Inequality and Insurgency: A Statistical Study of South Vietnam* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, June 1967), 3-4.
12 Ibid., 22.
13 According to Gastil’s definition, a “commune” is equivalent to a “village” in southern Vietnam and a “hamlet” in central Vietnam
peasant sensibilities. From Gastil’s point of view, the traditional restricted existence of the Vietnamese peasant was not so bad. Although the communal environment was not one that rewarded particularly dynamic individuals, its comparatively gentle “control apparatus” allowed peasants a limited opportunity for advancement, while preserving “the harmony of society through the maintenance of a community cult honoring the ancestors.” Communist propaganda notwithstanding, life in rural South Vietnam -- in the days before the resumption of the insurgency in the late 1950s -- had been “relatively pleasant” and “prosperous.”

Given a sufficient amount of personal security, Gastil believed, most contemporary South Vietnamese peasants would still rather be “left alone in their traditional rights, or with local or communal control...” This meant that the US and GVN should adopt a “conservative, decentralized” approach to pacification, which did not cut the peasant off from the national government,” but offered a gradual transition from local autonomy to national integration.

14 Unlike many district and provincial chiefs, Gastil asserted, village notables were generally less interested in killing local Viet Cong guerrillas than in stopping the “dissension” and “suspicion” that existed among their neighbors and in “reintegrating the community.” See Four Papers on the Vietnamese Insurgency (Hudson, NY: Hudson Institute, 8 August 1967), vol. 1, A Conservative, Decentralized Approach to Pacification in South Vietnam, 22-3.

15 Ibid., 24.

16 Ibid., 36.

17 As a start, Gastil wanted to restore “the old feeling of running their own affairs to peasant communities as soon as possible.” He also believed in transferring the authority over nationbuilding implementation to the district officials “who regardless of their ideology have been forced for years to work out small political and military advances in terms of concrete realities in their own areas of responsibility.” Finally, Gastil felt it worthwhile for development experts to “strive to create or recreate the community identification” of Vietnamese villagers currently separated into mutually distrustful hamlet clusters. “Where this cannot be done upon the basis of the old structures of the village Dinh and the council of notables,” he recommended trying more modern integrative techniques, such as elections and farmers’ organizations. In either case he suggested placing “greater emphasis on the village’s own legal and moral code, the village customary.” Ibid., 7-12.
Beginning in the mid-1960s, pacification bureaucrats often called for the
decentralization of resources and authority away from Saigon to the province, district,
and especially, village levels. For AID’s Rural Affairs chief George Tanham, this was
largely a matter of expediency. “[I]n an underdeveloped country,” he estimated in 1966,
“it is probably easier to grapple with local problems, which are simpler, than to try to do
everything at the top, where the problems are more complicated and complex.”18 While
not denying the need for a multi-layered allied pacification organization, regional
CORDS administrator Sterling Cottrell concluded that the purpose of “the whole
machinery” was “to get results at the district level, where you finally meet the 14,000,000
Vietnamese people on the ground, in hamlets, villages and district towns.”19 While
serving as a senior assistant to Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, Edward Lansdale wrote
that the goal of US-GVN pacification efforts] was “the creation and sustaining” of a
grassroots’ “attitude which is hostile to the VC.”20 He implored his fellow pacifiers to
recognize that nationbuilding must begin at the “very lowest level,” among “groups of
families and households” and among local elders and officials.21 AID provrep Jan
Vanderbie developed a strong conviction, from his experience in Quang Nam and Quang
Tri provinces during 1966-68, that the United States should shift its emphasis in
pacification away from intermediate and high-level projects and “toward the much more

File 578, Edward Lansdale Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford, CA, 2-3.
21 According to Lansdale, the survival of representative institutions at the provincial and national levels
was dependent upon the prior “linking of the rural population to its own visible local authorities.” Ibid., 4.
difficult task of encouraging local participation in self-government” village level economic development. Turning Lansdale’s maxim on its head, Vanderbie indicated that “a stable and fairly clear central or provincial government was a prerequisite for local self-government, but nothing more.”

By the end of the 1960s, decentralization of power to village officials and popular participation in local politics via elections had become central elements of the American pacification strategy as enunciated by top CORDS officials. According to CORDS official Stephen Young, ordinary Vietnamese citizens were not so much disenchanted with the GVN, they simply felt excluded from the governmental process. Consequently, the Saigon government’s unpopularity did not stem from “driving the people away” but from “failing to attract them and give them a role to play in shaping the nation’s destiny.” To rectify this historic mistake, CORDS director William Colby told Congress in 1970, South Vietnamese President Thieu was attempting -- with American backing -- to circumvent the “Frenchified ... conspiratorial ... upper class” in Saigon and establish a political base out in the countryside, which would form “a new foundation for the state and for the constitutional government.” Local elections were considered an essential ingredient in this grassroots political development strategy. Describing the electoral process in war-torn South Vietnam, John Paul Vann, then deputy for CORDS in

the southern Mekong Delta region, indicated that some elections were “quite good,” while others were “quite bad.” But the outcome was not as important as the event itself because even a bad election was “worthwhile,” because it constituted “a learning experience” for the people and usually assured that the elected official paid attention to the voters, if he wished to be returned to office.\textsuperscript{25}

In addition to elections, William Colby and Robert Kommer stressed the need for less formal mechanisms of participation in the local political process. The former considered the recruitment of a cross-section of village residents to serve on the boards of community self-help organizations to be a natural way of integrating members of various out-groups, including former supporters of the Viet Cong, without disrupting the national political situation. Such a “collaboration” of individuals across the wartime divide might lead to the establishment of a “coalition’ from the rice roots upward.” By supporting this goal, the GVN was expressing its willingness to establish a national government based upon a democratically-derived division of power, while “rejecting the artificial imposition of an undetermined proportion of power through a coalition at the top.”\textsuperscript{26} In a 1972 RAND Corporation publication, Robert Kommer praised another Thieu administration measure to establish a direct connection between Saigon and the world of the villages. This was the requirement that all newly elected village and hamlet chiefs in the country attend an official training course in the resort town of Vung Tau. By leaping over intermediate political and administrative obstacles and meeting face-to-face with his

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 93.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 4.
supporters in the countryside, Thieu was helping to develop “a sense of national identity among these village chiefs and hamlet chiefs,” to whom he was imparting the message that they were “part of something bigger than themselves.”

US Army strategists at the Pentagon partially endorsed a villagist approach to nationbuilding in their 1966 PROVN study. On the one hand, war combined with Communist propaganda and organizing activities had “created new, and intensified old, divisive social factors,” eroding the traditional, communally-oriented Vietnamese society. On the other hand, PROVN contributors held that family loyalty remained “the source point upon which to build a social system” in the Republic of Vietnam. Therefore, it was at the lowest administrative level -- the hamlet and the village -- that “all the elaborate plans made a higher levels must be translated into action.” And this required a policy of decentralization “in deed as well as in word.” Moving toward a village-based strategy would not be easy for the Saigon government, however, at a time when the Communists held the edge in grassroots competition. Of all the Vietnamese social structures, they pointed out, the village was “most susceptible to Viet Cong influence [and] least susceptible to GVN influence.” To gain the local initiative and successfully implement pacification and development programs, the GVN needed to rid itself of the corps of petty bureaucrats brought into the bureaucracy during the period of French

29 Ibid., 66-7.
30 Ibid., 78.
colonialism and the Diem era. For too long, the PROVN report complained, the US had expected the very same officials who had “created most of the peasants’ problems in the first place to return to the scene and correct them.” Before the holding of local elections, the government should recruit new political cadres, who understood “local political, economic and social structures and customs and could “work with, and through, the natural and official leaders” of the villages and hamlets.  

Beginning in the mid-1960s, some US social scientists began promoting a communitarian model of political development that involved negotiating mutually beneficial agreements between the Saigon regime and certain nationally-based socio-political groups. The Hudson Institute’s Raymond Gastil, for instance, went beyond mere villagism in his 1967 report on US-GVN pacification policy to urge the “strengthening of all those local and regional, political, ethnic and religious forces in Vietnam which have been responsible for a good many of the success stories of the past three years.” To Gastil, reformist policies and nationalist slogans promulgated in a distant capital were not enough to combat the forces of the Viet Cong; anti-Communist success also depended on tapping the sources of cohesion, conviction, and loyalty found among South Vietnam’s minority groups. Accommodation between Saigon and non-Communist minority groups was also important for the GVN from a practical political standpoint: the South

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31 PROVN, Vol. 2, 5-25 and 27.
32 Gastil, A Conservative, Decentralized Approach to Pacification, 12.
33 Ibid., 31.
Vietnamese “swing vote” would likely turn against the government “if a significant, nationally acceptable minority” were excluded from national power.  

MIT political scientist Ithiel de Sola Pool believed that the Vietnamese Communists could only be defeated “by a rival organization” that mobilizes the masses on behalf of some cause larger than themselves, whether it be Catholicism, Cao Daoism, Hoa Haoism, or some secular alternative. Likewise, RAND’s Gerald Hickey came to believe that defeating the Communists was not simply a matter of “rooting out the [enemy’s] infrastructure” and proclaiming the GVN’s dominion over a hostile or indifferent population. If the allies, however, chose to work through communal groups that were neither overtly pro-government nor pro-Communist, the people would have the option of “rallying “to their own leaders,” rather than to the government.” Hickey’s colleague at RAND, Allan Goodman, believed that Saigon had little choice but to negotiate political arrangements with non-Communist regional groups. “Practically speaking,” he wrote, “the incumbent government can deal with such communities by denying them any form of political participation or government. Or, it can seek to balance the danger of opposition with the possibility of gaining support by permitting rural communities a degree of self-government and representation on some national legislative body.” The problem with the first strategy was twofold. First, these groups

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34 Ibid., 36.  
36 Ibid., 18.  
were not likely to wither away through neglect, repression, or assimilation of their membership into the greater Vietnamese whole.\textsuperscript{38} Second, President Ngo Dinh Diem’s attempt in the mid-1950s to destroy the communal groups demonstrated that such a strategy’s end result would be to destroy the Saigon regime’s “only effective base” in rural Vietnam.\textsuperscript{39} Anticipating the criticism of “Other War” nationalists, Goodman claimed that taking the accommodationist approach was not akin to opening a “Pandora’s box” full of separatist tendencies. “Pluralism” would, more likely, increase South Vietnam’s chances for social cooperation and political-economic modernization.\textsuperscript{40} Hence the “wiser course” was for Saigon to “increase its accommodation to the communal groups.”\textsuperscript{41}

The two most celebrated instances of communalist accommodation mentioned as models by American social scientists such as Gerald Hickey and Allan Goodman involved the Hoa Hao religious sect and the \textit{Front Unifée pour la Lutte des Races Opprimées} (FULRO), a politico-military organization representing South Vietnam’s indigenous Montagnard population.\textsuperscript{42} The Hoa Hao attempt (in combination with the Cao Dai and the Binh Xuyen\textsuperscript{43}) to preserve the military and political autonomy acquired

\textsuperscript{38} “Two decades of war and the vagaries of politics,” Goodman indicated, “have stimulated the communal groups sense of identity and will to survive as distinct cultural and political groups;” and “this sense of identity” showed no signs of disintegrating in the future. Ibid., 31.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 33.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 4.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 33-4.

\textsuperscript{42} Hoa Haoism was a reformist Buddhist sect, whose base of strength was in the western Mekong Delta. FULRO was composed of elite members of several mountain tribes whose goal was cultural and political autonomy for the Central Highlands region.

\textsuperscript{43} Cao Daism was a syncretic politico-religious sect, whose doctrine combined elements of Buddhism, Confucianism, Catholicism, and indigenous Vietnamese beliefs. The Cao Dai “pope” resided in Tay Ninh province on the South Vietnamese-Cambodian border. The Binh Xuyen were Mafia-style gangsters, who operated out of the Chinese-dominated Saigonese district of Cholon.
under the French had been violently crushed by the Diem regime in 1956. Ten years later, stimulated by a common fear and hatred of the Viet Cong, the Hoa Hao in An Giang province and the government of Nguyen Cao Ky reached a private deal -- the precise details were never publicized -- which gave sect leaders freer reign in the areas they dominated in return for Hoa Hao cooperation with the GVN in crushing the local Communist organization. With respect to the Montagnards, resentment toward the government in Saigon was primarily a product of Diem-inspired attempts to Vietnamize the Central Highlands -- by resettling South Vietnamese peasants from the crowded lowlands on Montagnard communal properties, and by attempting to extinguish the cultures of the various mountain peoples. Brought together, in part, through the counterinsurgency efforts of the US Army Special Forces, Montagnard elites from various tribes employed their newly acquired military skills and political solidarity (in the form of FULRO) to stage two bloody revolts in the mid-1960s. Though rather quickly put down, these rebellions (and concomitant American pressure) convinced the GVN to offer the Montagnards a bill of rights containing a guarantee of respect for communal property, the right to be educated in their native languages, and the promise of a cabinet ministry charged with protecting minority interests.44

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44 “The question” posed by Gerald Hickey in 1967, was “whether the [South Vietnamese] government [could] accommodate other groups” aside from the Hoa Hao and the native highlanders. For him, the answer was “certainly,” so long as the groups were “sufficiently organized.” Religious groups like the Catholics and the Buddhists, regional political parties like the Dai Viets and the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dong (VNQDD), ethnic groups like the Chinese, Cham and Khmer, even labor unions and farmers organizations, fell within this category. Hickey estimated the number of all those Vietnamese belonging to one or the other of these socio-political ‘minorities’ at 13.5 million persons or nearly 80 percent of the total population of South Vietnam. See Hickey, Accommodation in South Vietnam, 18-22.
Given that sociopolitical accommodation was a good idea, how far should the GVN go to gain the cooperation of various regional groups? In Hickey’s opinion, quite a long way. A true rapprochement would, first of all, require that Saigon grant these groups “more prerogatives over territories and populations where they are in definite predominance” à la the agreement with the Hoa Hao in An Giang province. Second, communal groups had to be accorded “strong representation and voice in the central government,” preferably via “amalgamation of [their] elected representatives into a body such as a national assembly.” Lastly, the GVN had to reverse its divide-and-conquer strategy with respect to regional groups and, instead, help them to increase their sway over potential adherents.⁴⁵ According to Harvard University Professor Samuel Huntington, the GVN had already taken major strides in the area of political accommodation with non-governmental, non-communist groups by the summer of 1968, and these had paid off handsomely in terms of increased territorial control.⁴⁶ Since 1945, Allan Goodman affirmed, the relationship between the GVN and various regionally-based minorities had evolved along the following lines: “a consciousness of communal group identity is heightened by internal conflict; as the conflict proceeds, the groups become involved in confrontations with the government in which they tend to be

⁴⁵ Ibid., 22-3.
⁴⁶ Huntington expressed the belief that “the security of that one-third of the population which is under a relatively high degree of Government control is in large part the product of communal -ethnic or religious - organizations... Governmental authority is, in fact, most effectively exercised in those rural areas where the Government has come to terms with the local power structures and with ethnic and religious groups.” See “The Bases of Accommodation,” Foreign Affairs 46, no. 4 (July 1968): 646.
unsuccessful and subsequently withdraw their support from a particular government; finally, an accommodation is reached with usually a ‘new’ central government.”

For communalists, rapprochement with non-communist sociopolitical groups presented the possibility of a full national reconciliation involving a substantial number of Viet Cong supporters. If done properly, Hickey believed, the process of integrating the Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and other groups into the national government would not only demonstrate the GVN’s political good faith, but would result in a South Vietnamese government that was no longer dominated by the fiercely anti-Communist ARVN. Under such conditions, the Viet Cong might be willing to enter the political arena on the same terms as those offered to other groups with strong regional support. Samuel Huntington, for his part, seemed less willing than Hickey to provide the Viet Cong with a share of national political power. His proposal to recognize the fact of Communist control in certain “hard-core” Viet Cong areas was based solely on the pragmatic calculation that eliminating such control “would be an extensive, time-consuming and frustrating task.” “In a politically reintegrated South Viet Nam,” however, people would tend to move voluntarily from autarchic, Viet Cong-dominated regions into “more prosperous rural and urban localities.” Thus in order to achieve political reintegration and diminish the power of the Communist in the long-run, the allies had to take the

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47 Goodman, Government and the Countryside. 34.
48 Hickey considered that sociopolitical accommodation “will have the effect of altering the balance of power, resulting in a military-civilian coalition. It will, however, have to be a real, and not just a token, sharing of power in order to have the NLF view it as a new political arrangement amenable to working out a political settlement, particularly if it involves elections.” See Accommodation and Coalition in South Vietnam (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, January 1970), 60-1.
disagreeable initial step of recognizing and accepting Viet Cong rule in those places they currently dominated.49

Military strategists taking part in the US Army’s 1966 pacification reappraisal seemed interested in exploiting the strengths of various South Vietnamese socio-political groups on behalf of the GVN. The PROVN report indicated, for example, that the two largest religious denominations in Vietnam -- the Catholics and the Buddhists -- were growing more cohesive and, despite their past differences, shared two important aims: “winning the current war against communism and building a free and more prosperous” South Vietnamese society. Of the two major politico-religious sects, the Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai, the former was considered the more successful in resisting Communist encroachments upon its areas of influence; yet analysts were concerned that the Hoa Hao’s “strong local leadership and locally developed ideology [could] militate against their easy integration with other Vietnamese.” On the other hand, the less militant, more spiritually tolerant, and more geographically dispersed members of the Cao Dai sect might “offer less of a political threat to GVN.”50 As for the Montagnards, they remained “more feared than understood” by the Saigon regime, which resisted coming to terms with them. The recent successes of both the Viet Cong and the US Special Forces in organizing the Central Highlanders, however, seemed to support the idea of an alliance between the GVN and South Vietnam’s indigenous people.51 In the long run, Army strategists even advised “mak[ing] use of the VC and their kinsmen.” An attrition

51 Ibid., 1-44.
strategy with regard to this highly organized and motivated group of native-born
insurgents was not only impractical, but actually damaging to future nationbuilding
efforts; some sort of political agreement between the GVN and the Viet Cong would
ultimately be necessary in order to unite the country. 52

Liberal Nationalism

To “Other Warriors,” who espoused a liberal nationalist approach to South
Vietnamese nationbuilding, the prospect of the GVN’s ceding power to local and regional
socio-political groups was an outdated, ineffective, even cowardly response to the dual
challenge of modernization and Communist-inspired insurgency. Villagism and
communalism, in their view, no longer formed the intellectual basis of Vietnamese
society. Territorial expansion, French colonialism, Communist nationalism, and the
destructive effects of war had stripped the average South Vietnamese of his communal
identification and left him self-centered, materialistic, apolitical, and distrustful of all but
the members of his immediate family. This did not mean that he wished to fend for
himself without governmental assistance. Years of Communist and Western propaganda
had convinced him that a better life was available than one could obtain through the
traditional village social order and rice-based economy. In order to fulfill the peasantry’s
“rising expectations,” some liberals urged a long-term strategy of governmental support
for internal improvements (such as roads, canals, hospitals, and schools) that would knit
South Vietnam’s isolated rural communities together into a vibrant national market. But,
as the Communist insurgency gained in strength, most liberal nationalists began pressing

52 Ibid., 1-58.
for a Vietnamese version of the “New Deal” that offered rural residents immediate
rewards -- land ownership, medical care, and elementary education -- in return for turning
their backs on the Viet Cong.

According to MSU political economist James Hendry, the vaunted Vietnamese
tradition of communal solidarity was wearing thin by the 1960, especially in the populous
Mekong Delta region, where it had never been as strong as in other parts of Vietnam. In
his 1964 book, Hendry described “the small world of Khanh Hau” in Long An province
as being “a society in transition.” Less than a 150 years old, Khanh Hau had been settled
by “refugees, adventurers, soldiers, outcasts ... who as they moved southward into the
delta area had probably already begun to shed marginal or peripheral elements of the
culture of Central and Northern Vietnam they had left behind them.”53 Somewhat akin
to the mythical pioneers of the American West, these 18th and 19th century Vietnamese
immigrants were supposedly more individualistic and less mindful of the old ways than
their relations in the north. For example, southern villages were less likely to hold
riceland in common for use by land-poor farmers. In addition, ancestor worship was
taken less seriously in the south, where genealogies could often not be retraced more than
a few generations. Finally, the influence of Confucianism was stronger in the northern
Vietnam.

The transition to psychological modernity, in Hendry’s view, was accelerated in
the Mekong region by geography, the relatively greater impact of French colonialism, and
the social disruption caused by several decades of civil war. Southern villages tended to

conform to the lay of the land, which was flat and crisscrossed by canals and rivers. Unlike the clustered villages of central and northern Vietnam, Mekong villages often meandered for miles along the banks of various waterways. In southern Vietnam, Hendry indicated, “[t]he largest group within which there is anything approaching a genuine sense of community identification and interest is the hamlet,” and often cooperative efforts did not extend beyond the immediate neighborhood.  

Adding to the non-traditional, individualistic character of the Mekong peasant was the impact, beginning in the mid-19th century, of French colonial customs and practices. Unlike the people of Annam (central Vietnam) and Tonkin (northern Vietnam), those who lived in Cochin China (southern Vietnam) were directly administered by a French colonial governor and bore the full brunt of the new capitalist market economy. Southern Vietnam had been the place where French colonial efforts in Indochina had commenced and where the potential was greatest for economic exploitation, given the region’s fertility and relatively low population density. Whatever ties of a traditional, economic, or personal nature remained in southern Vietnamese villages by the mid-20th century were further frayed by the sharp edges of guerrilla and counterguerrilla warfare. “The net effect” of these distinctive regional characteristics was “to cast considerable doubt on the validity of the view that rural communities in South Viet Nam [were] essentially village-centered and strongly receptive to anything with a communal or cooperative orientation.”  

\[54\] Ibid., 253.  
\[55\] Ibid., 260.  
\[56\] Ibid., 261-2.
In a place where villagers could no longer trust one another, a person’s wants and
desires tended to focus on the self and the family. Furthermore, because of the danger of
attack from both sides in the civil war, most peasants eschewed politics and stuck to safer
economic and cultural pursuits. Most villagers tried to remain neutral regarding political
matters, and evinced an “equal degree” of distrust toward strangers and one another.
After fifteen years of internecine warfare, they felt safe only among those in their
immediate households.\footnote{Ibid., 7.} Despite the unhappiness associated with rural atomization,
some MSU researchers believed that the breakdown of the traditional village mentality
was a positive development in the long term. Jason Finkle argued that the old sense of
village solidarity vis a vis the outside world anchored “the village to the past,” and
worked against the changes that Vietnam needed, if it was ever “going to experience the
social, economic, and political development” that its people were demanding.\footnote{Finkle, Provincial Government in Viet Nam, 78.} For his
part, Hendry believed that reducing the population in the villages, diversifying the means
of rural production, and improving the technology of rice cultivation were all essential for
South Vietnam’s future economic health. Fortunately, the erosion of traditionalism and
communalism in the southern part of the country provided the impetus for such
“modernization.”\footnote{Hendry noted that, in Khanh Hau, “there is a substantial number of household heads who seem willing to
move, and another substantial number of villagers who have already moved,” most of them, to Saigon. In
addition, he wrote about the “desire” among Khanh Hau’s parents “to widen opportunities through
education” for their children whom they hoped might escape the farming life. Furthermore, Hendry was
impressed by villagers’ relative openness to the idea of technological change. See The Small World of
Khanh Hau, 31.} In Hendry’s opinion, American advisory personnel had become
“conditioned to expect resistance rather than acceptance in primitive and peasant
societies,” and failed to recognize the relative adaptability of South Vietnamese villagers.\textsuperscript{60}

Liberal nationalists among the MSU contingent disagreed on the role that governmental and foreign assistance should play in South Vietnam’s economic development. According to Jason Finkle, the South Vietnamese government could not afford to take a “laissez aller attitude” when it came to the economy.\textsuperscript{61} Writing in the early 1960s, Finkle advised the GVN and its American financial supporters that the key to South Vietnam’s long-term development lay in large-scale construction projects.\textsuperscript{62} Although somewhat concerned with the speed and coercion associated with the infrastructure campaign in Vinh Long, Finkle admired the industry and resourcefulness of the provincial chief, who proudly displayed to the visiting social scientist a map with multi-colored flags depicting the “schools, market places, and other structures which [had] been completed under his leadership.”\textsuperscript{63} By contrast, James Hendry expressed skepticism regarding American support for grandiose development projects. As a result of the focus on infrastructure, there was a dearth of “aid in forms that are immediately beneficial to people in the villages, and are recognizable as such.” Hendry called for a “variety of short range, high impact programs,” such as land redistribution and educational expansion. If the Vietnamese people were “only vaguely aware” of American foreign assistance and could not relate it to positive changes in their lives, he

\textsuperscript{60} Khanh Hau’s rice farmers, for example, were quite enthusiastic about innovations that readily demonstrated their production benefits, such as the use of chemical fertilizers. Ibid., 233.
\textsuperscript{61} Finkle, \textit{Provincial Government in Viet Nam}, 69.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 68-9.
contended, then the Communists were certain to take advantage of the resulting
development “vacuum.”

Drawing from his research in the village of Duc Lap in Hau Nghia province
during the early to mid-1960s, RAND’s R. Michael Pearce concluded that a
decentralized, gradualist, low-technology approach to economic development would best
serve the cause of rural pacification. “The problem of maintaining economic continuity
in the village while it is undergoing pacification,” he wrote, should “be met with a
program aimed not at changing the production of the village, but rather at improving the
methods used, to bring a greater return to the villager.” Pearce implied that US and GVN
officials should not immediately attempt to shift the Vietnamese countryside away from
its essentially monoculture rice economy. Instead, they ought to concentrate on meeting
the peasants’ more pressing requirements for food and a little extra cash. Such a short-
run strategy would avoid a “drastic alteration” in villagers’ customary lifestyle yet
provide them with tangible evidence of a better economic future.

Other components of a rural reform strategy in which the allied side was clearly
superior to the Viet Cong included health and education. Viet Cong medical treatment as
practiced in the vicinity of Duc Lap, according to Pearce, was “extremely crude and
generally ineffective,” whereas the government had “at its disposal relatively modern
medical techniques and resources for treating ailing villagers.” Nevertheless, pacification

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64 James Hendry, “American Aid in Vietnam: The View from a Village,” Pacific Affairs 33, no. 4
(December 1960): 391.
65 R. Michael Pearce, Evolution of a Vietnamese Village--Part III: Duc Lap Since November 1964 and
Some Comments on Village Pacification (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, Feb. 1967), xv and 73.
authorities had done little to exploit the GVN’s supposed healthcare advantage, and
Pearce suggested establishing paramedical training teams nationwide to teach nurses in
the villages “to care for the most common local diseases and ailments with simple
effective treatment.” 66 In the area of education, only the GVN could provide the
opportunity for rural South Vietnamese to attend high school or college. The Viet Cong
simply did not have the capability to offer villagers in the regions they dominated the
prospect of more than a elementary school education. But here too the government had
not adequately pressed its advantage. It was still almost impossible for the average rural
dweller to save enough to send his son or daughter to the secondary school in the district
capital, much less the university in Saigon. As one possible “solution,” the RAND
researcher recommended creating “a rural scholarship program” to enable village children
to attend secondary school and -- in the case of the most qualified among them -- to
provide funds for a university education. 67

Psychological warfare experts from the Human Sciences Research Corporation
believed that South Vietnamese peasants were motivated almost exclusively by the
promise of immediate and tangible improvements in their lives. From interviews
conducted in three villages, they concluded that “the lack of future orientation is
outstanding among rural delta Vietnamese and virtually nonexistent with respect to
political or community affairs.” Furthermore, Human Sciences researchers found that the
“achievement orientation” of the typical southern peasant “is particularly high in the field

66 Ibid., xv and 75-6.
67 Ibid., 76.
of economics and business, but not, however, in the political field.” Thus GVN officials would have more success emphasizing “how the individual can better realize his own aspirations” through support of the government, as opposed to telling him how his defense of the Saigon regime would contribute to the greater glory of the Vietnamese nation. In other words, “Nguyen” wanted land or some other means of acquiring wealth, and he wanted it “now.” Fortunately for the allied cause according to Human Sciences psychologists, the average rural Vietnamese, who once might have turned to the Viet Cong to fulfill his desire for rapid socioeconomic advancement, was becoming less and less likely to do so. Peasant youths had originally turned to the Communists “because of the possibilities for increased status in their villages and hamlets” and “for the excitement and prestige of having a gun.” But these social distinctions were in danger of being erased as the prospects for a Viet-Cong victory appeared less likely. Thus the time was ripe for the GVN to reenter the villages, from which it had been banished by the Viet Cong, and to attend to the peoples’ grievances and aspirations, using “a personal approach and ... establishing trust on a personal basis.”

Among liberal social scientists, no South Vietnamese development issue had so much hope invested in its resolution as the unequal distribution of riceland. In 1968, William Bredo of the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) asserted that land reform had become “a paramount issue in Vietnam,” particularly since the Communists had

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69 Ibid., 55.
70 Ibid., 54-5.
71 Ibid., 60-2.
exploited “gross inequities in past patterns of riceland ownership” in their “drive to political power.” But countering Viet Cong subversion was not the only benefit to be expected from a new GVN land reform initiative; it would also contribute to nationbuilding in a positive way by providing social justice and the “definite promise of economic prosperity and political development” to landless and land-poor farmers.  

Specifically, Bredo proposed a land reform program whose provisions fell somewhere between those of the Viet Cong’s expropriation plan and the GVN’s conservative Ordinance 57 legislation of the late 1950s. He suggested a reduction in the government riceland retention limit of 100 hectares to around 30 hectares, and called for a shift away from a land tenure system based on tenancy to one based primarily on land ownership. Bredo, nevertheless, cautioned South Vietnamese policymakers not to carry the concept of “egalitarianism to the extreme.” His objective was to use land reform as a tool for establishing a large class of Vietnamese yeoman farmers, who were not only economically productive but could “play a notable political role both locally and in the national arena.” As far as Bredo was concerned, there were two basic characteristics of a successful land reform program: fairness and justice to all parties, including landlords, and effective administration. Furthermore, the Thieu government’s Land-to-the-Tiller

73 This was still substantially larger than the five hectare limit prevalent in Communist-dominated areas. Ibid., 140.
74 “The reinstatement of the landlord, combined with the apparent ineffectiveness of rent controls,” Bredo wrote, “would seem to detract seriously from the psychological appeal of a return to GVN control. It would appear that anything less than full rights of ownership or at least the option to purchase the land would fall short of the desired effect of drawing the tenant to the side of the GVN.” Ibid., 144.
75 Ibid, 205.
76 Ibid., 208.
program, he contended in April 1970, had the potential of meeting these standards — so long as the GVN followed through “by implementing land distribution and providing farmers with the essential infrastructure needed for expanding productivity.”

As might be expected, the most passionate reformers among US officials in South Vietnam during the early to mid 1960s turned out to be AID provincial representatives and their superiors, such as Earl Young, John O’Donnell, George Tanham, William Nighswonger, and Jan Vanderbie. A provincial representative in the poverty-stricken central highlands province of Phu Bon, Young considered it the duty of US officials operating in rural areas persuade their GVN counterparts “to fight the Communist-led Viet Cong not only with guns but also with ... a responsive government truly interested in the welfare of its people.”

John O’Donnell, who operated in the Mekong Delta in the early 1960s, stressed the need for “immediate grass-roots [development] programs” to offset the Communists’ clever manipulation of local grievances to further their dream of national and international conquest. Similar, AID Rural Affairs chief in Vietnam, George Tanham, attempted to enlighten Americans back home regarding the “desperate need for a Vietnamese ‘New Deal’.” Like O’Donnell, Tanham recommended instituting

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“programs that would have a quick impact on the people”\textsuperscript{80} under the assumption “that improved material welfare [would] make the people more loyal to their government.”\textsuperscript{81}

In their memoirs, William Nighswonger and Jan Vanderbie described how the concept of “improved material welfare” for the South Vietnamese rural population figured within the GVN’s Strategic Hamlet program and its successor, the New Life Hamlet program. The larger purpose of the Strategic Hamlet program, according to Nighswonger, was “to build a new image of the government in the minds of the people, by increasing the services of the government ... at the village level.”\textsuperscript{82} As a result, in Quang Nam province, plans were laid for a vast, locally administered economic and social development effort, which, unfortunately, were never realized on account of “corruption difficulties” and the 1963 coup against President Diem.\textsuperscript{83} A couple years later, Jon Vanderbie echoed Nighswonger’s faith in a grassroots development plan for central Vietnam, sensing “from the very beginning” of his tenure as a prov rep that “fertilizer was more important than bombs” and “face-to-face confrontation” more effective than “the impersonal machinations of a distant bureaucracy.”\textsuperscript{84} Still, the New Life Hamlet program in Quang Nam and Quang Tri could do much more in economic terms for the residents of high-priority villages than it was currently. Specifically, Vanderbie suggested that development officials focus more on small material

\textsuperscript{80} These included “land reform (not necessarily redistribution but rent/interest reductions, secure tenure), efficient justice, effective grievance program, appealing defector program, rice price supports.” See Tanham, \textit{War Without Guns}, ix-x.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 111.
improvements -- like bicycles, manufactured clothing, and radios -- in the belief that the allies should “let the hamleteer actually ‘taste’ some of the elements of the New Life, and then make further availability of the things he wants contingent on the eradication of the VC.”

Echoing James Hendry’s earlier analysis of mid-20th century Vietnamese culture, the US Army’s 1966 PROVN report found most residents of South Vietnam -- contrary to the Western stereotype of “traditional” Asians -- to be highly individualistic, present-minded, and motivated primarily by the prospect of material gain. But this did not mean that the average Vietnamese was “apathetic or indifferent” to what was going on outside his village gate; nor did he simply wish “to be left alone” in bucolic isolation. “Under the impact of incessant GVN and communist propaganda,” he had “come to expect more” than the village environment could provide him. Today’s Vietnamese farmer wanted “his own land, improved crop production, education for his children, medical care, a nearby water supply, reasonable and fair taxes, more material comforts and decent, respectful treatment from GVN officials and military personnel.” Consequently, to win back the countryside for the government, the allies had “not only understand peasant aspirations” but to provide the Vietnamese farmer with “tangible manifestations of improved living standards” in return for his political support.

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85 Ibid., 171-2.
86 According to the Army pacification analysts, “No advocate of any kind of political doctrine or of forced or guided social change of any kind [could] afford to overlook the fact that the Vietnamese peasant or poet, petty politician or premier -- whatever may be his intellectual yearning--essentially [was] an undisciplined individual whose only real sense of loyalty or responsibility [was] to himself and his family, and -- less strongly -- to his village.” See PROVN, Vol. 2, 1-39.
87 Ibid., 3-47/8.
GVN nationbuilders ought not to waste their time engaging in a grassroots ideological contest with the Communists, for “rice and medicine” interested the average Vietnamese far more than slogans and ideologies. \(^{88}\)

While recognizing the need to exploit the ordinary Vietnamese’s craving for material things, PROVN analysts cautioned against either blanketing the country with charity or making radical adjustments in the distribution of wealth. First, socioeconomic benefits should be “limited to areas under GVN control so as to deny resources to the VC and to dramatically demonstrate the rewards accruing to association with the government.” \(^{89}\) Second, civilian aid programs should not outpace their security cover. \(^{90}\) Finally, satisfying the peasant’s material wishes ought not entail disrupting the entire system of land tenure in South Vietnam. Most South Vietnamese, PROVN analysts asserted, were not as exercised about unequal land distribution as they were about excessive rents, interest rates, and taxes. Thus they argued against far-reaching land reform at present, believing that such an effort “would only compound an already confused situation.” \(^{91}\)

Support for liberal socioeconomic policies in the Vietnam was more strongly expressed by US Marine Corps officers than by their US Army counterparts. For example, Major William Holmberg extolled the virtues of military-style social work in the June 1966 issue of the Marine Corps Gazette. Despite the small individual

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\(^{88}\) Ibid., 3-53.

\(^{89}\) PROVN, Vol. 1, 93.

\(^{90}\) PROVN warned that “[a]ttempts to win allegiance from the population or to induce from it a willingness to bear arms against VC harassment by the distribution of commodities or services without reasonable assurance of continued physical security [were] invitations to failure.” PROVN, Vol. 2, 4-14.

\(^{91}\) Ibid., 4-44.
adjustment required, he contended, the broadening of the Corp’s mission to include nationbuilding activities was a potentially revolutionary step. From its inception, America’s armed forces had expended most of their brain power and resources on the negative and occasional business of protecting the nation against foreign military threats. Now, for the first time in a concerted way, the US was making use of its highly skilled men-in-uniform to combat such ancient and perennial socioeconomic scourges as “ignorance, famine, disease and injustice.”

From the platoon leader in the village to the commander of the Fleet Marine Force Pacific, Marines demonstrated their appreciation for civic action throughout their period of involvement in Vietnam. In an address to the Marine Corps staff in May 1968, Lieutenant General Victor Krulak remarked on his troops’ special empathy for ordinary Vietnamese people and their ability to raise up the village dweller from the dire condition in what they found him. Major General J.M. (Jonas) Platt, in a 1970 paean to civic action, noted the importance of deliberately utilizing armed interventionary forces “in non-military ways to improve their standing with the population as well as to improve the social and economic development of the nation” being assisted. In South Vietnam, this primarily meant providing medical treatment, building new schools, and other services ranging from refugee resettlement to

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94 “Almost from the day they arrived” in Vietnam in 1965, Krulak asserted, his men had understood “that while the Vietnamese peasant was dirty, ignorant, ill-clothed and ill-fed, he was by no means stupid and by no means without pride, spirit or patriotism.” See “Address to Marine Corps Educational Center and to Headquarters, US Marine Corps,” 10 May 1968, Personal Papers Collection, Victor H. Krulak Papers, PC # 486, Box 2, Location 1A27, Speech File, July-September 1967, US Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington, DC, 9-10.
setting up pig farms. Still, Platt insisted that it was not the provision of “tangible help to the people in the form of projects” that mattered most as far as pacification was concerned, but the idea that the Marines had demonstrated their respect for the Vietnamese people’s right to be treated as human beings with some say in how they were governed.

Interest among US Army commanders in civic action during the heyday of American military involvement in the Vietnam varied from tepid to enthusiastic. In addition, their vision of what civic action entailed ranged from good soldierly conduct to the orchestration of region-wide nationbuilding projects. Reflecting on his service as 9th Infantry Division commander in the southern Mekong Delta, Major General George O’Connor focused his civic action remarks on the importance of teaching American soldiers how to behave overseas in a humane and culturally-sensitive manner.

According to him, civic action was not a complicated area of endeavor, requiring “special gimmicks,” but its influence was pervasive. “Every soldier,” O’Connor wrote in his end-of-tour report, “just by his appearance and attitude as he drives or walks through a village, takes part in this facet of the war” and “either adds to or detracts” from the overall objective of winning the support of the people. American military commanders, in particular, should be thoroughly briefed regarding their responsibilities for making

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96 Ibid., 24.
97 Ibid., 26.
98 Such “indoctrination [was] a never-ending task that included teaching his men “to respect religious shrines, to show special respect to old people, and to avoid actions considered rude or uncouth by the Vietnamese, such as bathing without screens.” U.S. Department of the Army, Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development, “Debriefing of Senior Officers: MG George O’Connor,” 14 March 1968, US Army War College Library, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 4.
“amends” to the local communities when their troops inadvertently killed or injured Vietnamese civilians or damaged the latter’s property.  

By contrast, O’Connor’s successor as 9th Division commander took a strictly utilitarian, by-the-book approach to civic action. According to Lieutenant General Julian Ewell, his unit’s most important development projects were those, like road construction, that had an obviously deleterious impact on enemy performance. Concerning other civic action projects, Ewell declared that he and his officers “used the [provincial] pacification program and the HES sheets as our bible and focused in on the specific areas and activities that were needed and did little else.” He claimed that occasionally his troops did “something of marginal utility for pure political effect,” such as fixing up an old temple in the division’s area of operations. But, in general, Ewell felt that civic improvements that relied on a “high [political or cultural] sensitivity” on the part of American and South Vietnamese soldiers were risky endeavors. From his experience as division commander, he found that neither American officials nor the westernized ARVN liaison officers assigned to his unit had been able to tell him what the Vietnamese peasant truly thought or desired. 

As commander of the 101st Airborne Division in Thua Thien province, then Major General Melvin Zais held a more expansive view of civic action than either Ewell or O’Connor. From July 1968 to May 1969, Zais claimed, a “significant transformation

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99 “The procedures for making solatium payments, instructing the people how to submit claims for damaged property, the need for personal visits to show concern —” O’Connor wrote in his end-of-tour report, “all these have double importance in the Delta where winning the support of the people is so important — because there are so many of them and the VC are mixed with them.” Ibid., 6.

took place in the Division civic action effort.” At the beginning of his tour, the presence of enemy armed forces in populated areas had limited both the scope and kind of divisional civic action projects that could be undertaken. After the 101st spread a security blanket over the coastal plains of Thua Thien, however, enemy combat operations had shifted to the sparsely populated mountains and valleys in the southwestern part of the province. Thenceforth, “a vigorous civic action effort” was initiated in the crowded eastern lowland region and civic action goals were broadened “from short-range emergency assistance to war victims” to provincial “reconstruction, resettlement, and development.” What is more, the Division began “playing a major role in welding the civic action program of many diverse elements into a coordinated, cohesive effort” involving CORDS and Vietnamese military and civilian agencies.\footnote{101 U.S. Department of the Army, Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development, “Debriefing of Senior Officers: MG Melvin Zais,” 7 June 1969, US Army War College Library, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 30.}

Although the military’s idea of civic action was mostly limited to short-term, “high visibility” construction and welfare projects, liberal social scientists and civilian bureaucrats cared as much about the ideological and political side of nationbuilding strategy as they did the economic and social side. Rootless South Vietnamese, they believed, had to bound to the Saigon government emotionally, not just materially: that is, they had to be offered a liberal form of nationalism that was at least as strong as the Communist variant. Here, the American role was critical. US advisors could not abandon their democratic principles at the water’s edge but instead had to become evangelists for such liberal concepts as constitutional government, separation of powers,
free and fair elections, individual liberties, and the construction of a civil society between the state and the individual. Still, these ‘revolutionary’ ideas need not be immediately put into practice, nor did implementation necessarily entail the wholesale removal of the GVN old guard. This was to be an orderly, managed revolution, in which the gap between the South Vietnamese government and people was successfully bridged -- without opening up a breach between Saigon and its American benefactor.

In his 1963 book, MSU Professor Robert Scigliano decried the Diem regime’s lack of a liberal nationalist ideology that could stand up to the revolutionary nationalist ideology of the Vietnamese Communists. The anti-Communist “negativism” of the South Vietnamese government, he wrote, “contributed to its failure to attack the Communist onus to the guerrilla movement.” Diem-era officials, “down to the lowest levels,” were generally pre-independence holdovers and pro-French collaborators without political vision. Rather than competing with the Communist Party on the issue of reunification, the GVN had peremptorily rejected its adversary’s proposals without offering any counter-proposals of its own. And on the issue of land reform, the GVN behaved more like the protector of the landlords’ interest than as an advocate for the majority of property-poor peasants. In short, the Diem regime had “rendered its own nationalist credentials suspect.”

Instead of attempting to “curtail the liberties” of university students, Buddhist monks and other non-Communist political activists, the

GVN should seize the ideological initiative itself and “place its struggle [against the Communists] under the banner of freedom.”

By the mid-1960s, participants in the Southeast Asia Development Advisory Group (SEADAG) discussions on Vietnam had begun to argue that the success of national integration and rural pacification efforts depended upon “political -- and not just administrative -- stimulation and organization.” In 1967, Brandeis University political scientist and visiting director of AID’s Far East Training Center, I. Milton Sacks, voiced his concern that South Vietnam lacked a legitimate means for selecting leaders of the stature and authority necessary to end factional infighting and stabilize the national political system. The disruptive effects of war and revolutionary upheaval had “contributed to a condition wherein no real definition of the strengths and/or weaknesses of the contending political actors [could] be made.” Elections were needed not only to legitimize the Saigon government, but “to test the real popularity of the contestants for political power in the absence of their ability to impose their will by other means.”

Thus Sacks felt heartened by the efforts of the 1966 Constitutional Assembly and hoped that an elected government would soon be in place in South Vietnam that “might create the conditions for stability.”

Writing from a rural pacification perspective, SEADAG’s John Donnell lamented the “lack of linkage between national political activity and organization” and the non-

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103 Ibid., 186.
106 Ibid., 520.
governmental groups being set up at the grass roots level by the Revolutionary Development (RD) program.\textsuperscript{107} Part of the solution lay in the indoctrination of RD cadres, working throughout the country, in a unified democratic nationalist ideology that expressed the allied goal of a “genuine, albeit controlled, social revolution.”\textsuperscript{108} Beyond this, the government had to “produce its own connective tissue” linking the political aspects of the pacification program with the national political structure in Saigon. South Vietnam’s government could not afford to “remain just a somewhat disjointed version of the loose traditional federation of villages at the base of a newer national political arena superimposed at the top and only tenuous political threads between them.”\textsuperscript{109} As the title of his 1970 article in \textit{Asian Survey} indicated, it would be “a long haul from villagism to nationalism” for the South Vietnamese, but their country’s future depended upon their making the attempt.

Of the US government-affiliated social scientists working on Vietnamese political development, Allan Goodman was among the most sanguine regarding the use of political institutions as the primary means for integrating the country’s various sociopolitical forces within the national power structure. In the Third World, he wrote, fostering “political communication” meant building “political institutions to accommodate the interests” of new political participants.\textsuperscript{110} Unfortunately, successive military-dominated regimes in Saigon had expended most of their energy attempting “to

\textsuperscript{107} Donnell, “Pacification Reassessed,” 576.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 570.
consolidate rather than expand their narrow base of control.”¹¹¹ Thus what South Vietnam required most was not simply a political alternative to the Viet Cong, but an “arena independent of the military and its politics.” For Goodman, the newly-created national legislature, with its direct links to the people and its representation of most non-Communist socio-political groups, was the ideal political focal point. By involving themselves in constituents’ problems and faithfully representing their interests, legislative deputies could help to forge a bond between the GVN and the majority of rural Vietnamese based on mutual loyalty and concern for one another’s well-being. Goodman was hopeful, too, that the growing responsiveness of the national deputies might, in time, find its reflection in the behavior of provincial bureaucrats.¹¹² Finally, the National Assembly could ultimately serve as the place where non-Communists and Communists carried on their struggle by political means. Admittedly, non-Communist politicians were not yet strong enough for this bout; still, Goodman viewed the current stage in the evolution of the legislature “as one of preparation” for eventually taking on the Viet Cong, in an electoral sense.¹¹³

According to Canadian political scientist and SEADAG participant Jerry Mark Silverman, South Vietnamese legislative deputies might also function as a cultural “transition or bridge between the relatively western-urbanized national elite and the traditional majority Vietnamese population.” True, deputies tended to be better educated and established, socially and professionally, than ordinary folk, but Silverman claimed to

¹¹¹ Ibid., 93.
¹¹² Ibid., 686-7.
¹¹³ Goodman, Politics in War, 252.
see “some mutual identification” between GVN representatives and their constituents. Those belonging to the provincial political elite tended to be “intercultural commuters,” moving easily between rural and urban settings, and their somewhat urbane and westernized manners did not necessarily disqualify them as spokesmen for the peasant masses, since Vietnamese peasants expected their leaders to be more sophisticated than themselves. Still, to help surmount the problem of “cultural heterogeneity” that was impeding Vietnamese national integration, legislative deputies and the rest of the “western-oriented urban elite” needed to become more “aware and empathetic” to the concerns of rural residents. In this way, they could serve as the voice of the silent majority in the capital.114

Even more than their social scientist colleagues, “Other Warrior” bureaucrats expressed their liberal political development hopes in evangelical terms. In his memoirs, Edward Lansdale declared that his basic intent, as counterinsurgency advisor in the Philippines and Vietnam in the 1950s and ‘60s, had been to preach the virtues of American-style revolutionary democracy. “I took my American beliefs with me into these Asian struggles,” he wrote, “as Tom Paine would have done.”115 When conversing with Ngo Dinh Diem in the presidential palace, Lansdale stated that, whenever possible, he tried to “teach” the South Vietnamese leader “a little about my country and countrymen.” He also explicitly compared Diem to the first president of the United

States and suggested that the South Vietnamese pattern himself after George Washington. In order to play to this exalted role, Lansdale advised the South Vietnamese president to resist the temptation of stuffing ballot boxes at the time of the next national election, warning that “cheating would be building the future on a false foundation.” The American advisor also recommended that Diem establish “a whole new set of rules, embodied in a constitution” that would clearly differentiate his liberal nationalist regime from Bao Dai’s French-dominated dictatorship. In addition, Lansdale tried to convince the South Vietnamese leader of the importance of allowing “a loyal political opposition.” President Diem, in his view, ought to follow George Washington’s lead and decline to give his blessing to any one political party. According to Lansdale, the fact that President Diem, as well as his own superiors back in Washington, failed to heed his words of advice on the subject of political parties deeply pained him.

At the time of his departure from Vietnam in 1956, Lansdale remained faithful to his liberal nationalist creed, “convinced more than ever that the most pragmatic course for Americans serving in Asia was to heed the idealism of our country’s political tenets and make them the basis for our acts.” This bureaucratic rebel of sorts felt dismayed by his colleagues’ “trust in material things” to win the war in Vietnam. “We couldn’t afford just

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116 Ibid., 329.
117 Ibid., 333.
118 Ibid., 332.
119 Ibid., 344.
120 For the ‘father of his country’ to take sides would “leave the body politic in South Vietnam deeply divided, in a covert and deadly game of nationalists struggling against nationalists, at the very time that thoughtful patriots needed to come out into the open to write a constitution and found a new political system to rival the Communist system in the North.” Ibid., 341-2.
to be against the Communists,” Lansdale argued. “We had to be for something ourselves.”\textsuperscript{121} To Lansdale, this meant constructing a national government, in Abraham Lincoln’s words, “of the people, by the people, for the people.”\textsuperscript{122} If this had happened in South Vietnam during the Diem era, he implied, the Communists’ strategy of people’s war would have made no significant headway. After all, there really was no comparison between the Vietnamese version of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology -- which depicted man “as little more than a zero, a cipher to the state” -- and American-style liberal nationalism, which represented “man as an individual endowed by his Creator ‘with certain unalienable Rights.’”\textsuperscript{123}

USAID officials Rufus Phillips, John B. O’Donnell, and William Nighswonger, among others, carried the liberal nationalist banner for the United States in South Vietnam during the post-Diem period of the early 1960s. Like Lansdale before them, these men lamented the short-term, resource-dependent view of the war held by many of their American colleagues and superiors, as well as the uninspiring leadership provided by South Vietnamese administrators and soldiers. In a July 1964 memo to the US Operations Mission (USOM)/Vietnam director, Rufus Phillips noted that “the mind of the Vietnamese peasant, and that of the civil servant and military officer,” had change if “any real progress” were to occur.\textsuperscript{124} Subsequently, John O’Donnell argued, in an article on the Strategic Hamlet program in the Mekong Delta, that physical accomplishments

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 369.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 372.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 375-6.
could be “virtually meaningless,” even “counter-productive.” The fundamental goal of pacification involved “the attainment of the intangible -- the creation of a state of mind, the commitment of men to a cause.”¹²⁵ To provoke this change of consciousness, O’Donnell recommended “the preparation and continual proclamation of a statement of the aims and ideals of the government,” something akin to the US Declaration of Independence or the Constitution, that could provide a rallying point for all citizens and “for whose preservation they would willingly risk their lives.”¹²⁶

William Nighswonger, in his 1966 book on pacification in Quang Nam, attempted to challenge his compatriots at home into re-examining “the gap between a love of their own democratic institutions at home and concern for the growth and survival of such institutions abroad.”¹²⁷ In the opinion of this former AID provincial representative, America had no choice but to promote its brand of democratic revolution in Vietnam, even though this strategy risked provoking additional social turmoil and political instability in that country. He did not, however, mean to imply that the US was, or should be, in the business of instigating immediate, radical change in South Vietnam. Nighswonger hoped that “orderly revolution as the counterinsurgent cause” might prove inspiring enough to convince South Vietnamese peasants and elites alike of the virtues of fighting the Communists and building an independent nation. Without such a cause, he doubted whether “any pacification effort based on popular support could succeed.”¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Ibid., 738.
¹²⁷ Nighswonger, Rural Pacification in Vietnam, 256.
¹²⁸ Ibid., 151.
By the early 1970s, pacification bureaucrats such as Edward Lansdale, William Colby, and Stephen Young were claiming that the mechanisms for ensuring the success of an “orderly revolution” in South Vietnam were nearly in place. Commenting on the upcoming 1971 national elections in that country, a recently retired Lansdale predicted that the Vietnam war could be “rapidly concluded” if the South Vietnamese people were to elect leaders willing to bring about “a prompt end to the fighting and the replacement of military rule by civilian government,” thereby permitting the US an honorable withdrawal from Southeast Asia.\textsuperscript{129} A somewhat more circumspect, William Colby, acknowledged in 1971 that the success of the allied pacification program depended, in part, upon the perceived legitimacy of the upcoming South Vietnamese elections.\textsuperscript{130} For his part, local government advisor, Stephen Young, noted that CORDS had recently added an innovative entry to the Vietnamese nationbuilding menu that “was strictly Tocqueville.” The Americans had concluded that for an electoral system “to be meaningful, organized groups had to exist between the individual and the formal structure of elections and administrators.” Although Vietnam had always included “an abundance of private, nonpolitical groupings,” its civil society lacked coherence and permanence. Thus Young and his colleagues formulated a program that rewarded associational involvement without instituting bureaucratic regulations on group activities a la Diem and Nhu.\textsuperscript{131}

\textsuperscript{131} Young, “Power Towards the People,” 92-3.
Army strategists, working on the PROVN project, also supported the idea of managed democratization for South Vietnam. On the one hand, they rejected the diehard anti-Communist position that rocking the GVN’s leaky political boat would only aid the enemy in swamping it.\footnote{PROVN, Vol. 1, 86.} On the other hand, the PROVN report refused to endorse the view of some critics of US policy in Vietnam that the dire political situation there required the jettisoning of the current GVN leadership in favor of a cast of characters more appealing to the West. Staking out the “reasonable middle ground,” Army pacification analysts held that “an immediate, wholesale reorganization” of the South Vietnamese political system was “neither feasible nor desirable,” yet “gradual, progressive change” that resulted in a more efficient government was “both feasible and desirable.”\footnote{PROVN, Vol. 2, 3-17.} Specifically, the PROVN report gave a qualified endorsement to the establishment of a national legislature, the holding of national elections, and the extension of political liberties. Still, Army analysts believed that political institutionalization should occur only in well-defined stages.\footnote{“Initially,” according to their scheme, the National Assembly “would be a consultative body without legal power and serve as a vehicle for communication between the people and the national government... A mid-range objective should be to make it a legislative body and, hopefully in the long range, it would develop into a legislative branch coequal with the executive branch.” PROVN, Vol. 1, 79.} Before reaching the summit of political development, Saigon’s fractionalized party system would have to be simplified, more or less along American two-party lines.\footnote{The US and South Vietnamese governments, the PROVN report advised, “should subtly discourage the formation of political groupings around parochial interests. More appropriate and constructive political identifications should be considered around broader platforms.” PROVN, Vol. 2, 3-34.} Political liberties were acceptable in South Vietnam, as a popular safety valve, provided they were not abused.\footnote{Ibid., 3-35.}
PROVN strategists, however, recommended that the GVN not be rushed into holding national elections, predicting that a premature contest would result either in a sweeping Communist victory or a “mobocracy.”

**Bureaucratic Authoritarianism**

As PROVN’s ambivalence regarding South Vietnamese national elections suggests, the line between liberal nationalism and bureaucratic authoritarianism within the “Other War” community was rather fine. Particularly in the early years of America’s involvement in Vietnam, certain US social scientists and bureaucratic advisors pinned their hopes for increased GVN effectiveness and popularity on raising the caliber of civil service administrators at the provincial level and below. Establishing constitutions, holding elections, and convening legislatures were not their highest nationbuilding priorities. Vietnamese government, they argued, had always been authoritarian, and it was questionable whether the South Vietnamese people really understood, or cared for, Western-style political democracy. Consequently, for many “Other Warriors,” “viable government” became the immediate political development goal. Ideally, this meant selecting capable, honest, and unpretentious men for the job of province, district, and village chief and training them to listen and respond to the grievances and aspirations of those under their control. In the near-term, however, some pacification analysts settled for the production of a sufficient numbers of bodies -- able or not -- to fill the void in civil service ranks in parts of the Vietnamese countryside. At the pinnacle of government, viability required, at a minimum, the establishment of a benevolent dictatorship that

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focused on the needs of the people in the provinces -- rather than those of selfish urban elites -- and that administratively extended its authority into every corner of the realm.

Michigan State University (MSU) social scientists spent much of their sojourn in Vietnam during the 1950s and early ‘60s seeking ways to improve the functioning of the GVN’s administrative bureaucracy. According to Luther Allen, it was at the level of the district (the equivalent of a US county) that the South Vietnamese government confronted a make-or-break opportunity in terms of its relationship with the majority of the people. The district chief was the government for many rural dwellers, who normally did not venture more than a few miles from their home villages. He “more than any other Vietnamese administrator” was in “direct contact” with the masses, and could act as a symbol of the central government’s effectiveness and goodwill.\(^{138}\) If only the right man could be found for the job -- and provided with sufficient resources and technical advice - - the hearts and minds of the peasants could be won. “The ambiguous legal basis” of his authority permitted the district chief considerable leeway in the realm of policy implementation, making “possible diverse adaptations to diverse regions and traditions plus potential experimentation in the direction of reform.”\(^{139}\) MSU’s Jason Finkle, for his part, was impressed by the paternalistic potential of the provincial governor.

Nevertheless, he recognized that the latter’s power could have deleterious, as well as beneficial, consequences in terms of public support for the GVN. “To a large degree,” the province chief structured his administration “to suit himself.” He could implement

\(^{138}\) Allen, *A Vietnamese District Chief in Action*, v.
\(^{139}\) Ibid., 65.
governmental policies according to his own lights, or he could treat provincial residents like “constituents” and enforce Saigon’s directives in a way that was acceptable to the people.\textsuperscript{140}

Like the members of MSU’s Viet Nam Advisory Group, AID provincial representative John B. O’Donnell contended that his experience in Kien Hoa province in 1962-64 had demonstrated the importance of administrative acumen in achieving favorable pacification results. To him, bureaucratic ability could not be measured solely in terms of territorial control. “The degree of progress in any given area,” he wrote shortly after his return to the US, “depended to a great extent on the ability, honesty, and sincerity” of local administrators. This was not something that could be faked by “going through the motions of wearing a constant vacuous smile;” one had to “develop ... a deep appreciation of the [people’s] needs and aspirations.” Only when government leaders understood this could they begin to lead South Vietnamese “in a struggle for the attainment of those ideals” that had motivated America’s “revolutionary leaders a little less than two hundred ago.”\textsuperscript{141}

O’Donnell’s superior at AID in 1964, Ogden Williams, shared the provincial representative’s administrative orientation.\textsuperscript{142} In the view of this Saigon-based bureaucrat, the success or failure of US assistance programs in Vietnam hinged on “the quality, competence and motivation of Vietnamese” officialdom. From his experience, “a

\textsuperscript{140} “There is room for genius in the office of the province chief,” Finkle stated, “and there is room for the incompetent.” Provincial Government in Viet Nam, iii.
\textsuperscript{141} O’Donnell, “The Strategic Hamlet Program in Kien Hoa Province,” 732-4.
\textsuperscript{142} Ogden Williams, “End of Tour Comments,” March 1969, Edward Lansdale Papers, Box 29, File 655, Vietnamese Conflict, 1961-75, United States Involvement, Hoover Institution, Stanford, CA, 1.
good province chief” meant “a good province” in the same way that “a good Minister” meant “a good Ministry.” Consequently, the United States’ highest priority in Vietnam should neither have been “the introduction of greater resources, nor the quadrupling of the US personnel complement, nor the taking over of operations under complete American control, but rather the directing of [American] attention to the basic question of Vietnamese personnel.” If the US had spent the fifteen years prior to March 1969 building an effective and dedicated civil service, much of the corruption that had so “tarnished the image of the Vietnamese Government” might have been eliminated. As it was, the US military could continue to maintain “an efficient military screen” for the next twenty years and still not achieve real victory -- absent the establishment of a professional bureaucracy.  

In a more abstract manner, RAND’s James Farmer argued in 1963 that -- aside from creating a climate of security -- the only essential requirement for a “counterinsurgent ‘win’” was the establishment of a “viable government.” Such a government was not necessarily democratic or politically inclusive; rather, it was one capable of producing progressive political and economic results. In other words, administrative effectiveness was more important than mass political participation. Modestly, Farmer declined to prescribe a particular form of government for vulnerable Third World countries, “be it a dictatorship or democracy.” He acknowledged that most Americans tended to regard dictatorships “with suspicion.” Nonetheless, recent experience had demonstrated that not all countries, with which the U.S. was allied in the

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143 Ibid., 4-5.
struggle against Communist aggression, possessed the intellectual and cultural prerequisites of democratic nationhood.\textsuperscript{144}

Farmer’s colleague at RAND, R. Michael Pearce, found that the Vietnamese peasants he studied in Hau Nghia Province were not looking simply for cold, efficient government, but “a government with \textit{nhan dao} [humanity].” According to popular belief, a successful ruler always kept in mind “the people’s needs and desires.” He attempted to be “fair and just” and to understand the basis of his authority. If these qualities bore some resemblance to democratic attributes, Pearce did not say so. Indeed, the RAND researcher specifically renounced any intention of preaching the gospel of democracy to the Vietnamese.\textsuperscript{145} Somewhat whimsically, he suggested that one of the leaders in the coup against Nguyen Khanh’s regime might have captured the spirit of \textit{nhan dao} by calling for a government based on “humanitarian socialism.” Although not altogether happy with the socialist half of the term, Pearce insisted that what Vietnam needed was a government “borne out of Vietnamese considerations.” Presumably, this meant some sort of benevolent dictatorship: a modernized Confucian state, where the new mandarin-bureaucrats truly cared for, as well as listened to, the people in the villages.\textsuperscript{146}

RAND researcher, Guy Pauker, also downplayed the necessity of a democratic transformation of the South Vietnamese political system. Increasing the extent of personal freedom, addressing specific citizen complaints, and putting an end to official

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 64-5.
callousness and corruption were more important political goals than establishing a Western-style constitutional order. And a benevolent dictatorship was more apt to implement fundamental reforms than a government preoccupied with the demands of narrow interest groups. In time of war, the GVN could “afford to pursue authoritarian policies” in its dealings with the rootless and selfish urban elite. Such a tack might, in fact, be necessary in order to forestall unscrupulous power-mongers from blocking government reforms designed to benefit the rural masses.\textsuperscript{147} Furthermore, constitutionalism and democratic representation had little popular support “in a society that had never experienced “representative government.” Indeed, if such a concept meant anything in a Vietnamese context, it meant a regime that was responsive to the needs of ordinary people, as opposed to one that acted “on behalf of the interests of an oligarchy.”\textsuperscript{148} Thus, the Thieu regime possessed a better than even chance of acquiring a mass following “provided that his administration “could shed its arrogant, elitist image.”\textsuperscript{149} Pauker advised against trying to beat the Communists at their own ideological game by selling a democratic alternative to Vietnamese-style Marxism. He preferred appealing to the economic self-interest of the average Vietnamese citizen since it was simply not true that people were more willing to give their lives for “abstract ideas than for concrete benefits.”\textsuperscript{150} As long as the United States kept up its policy of dispensing

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\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 39.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 43.
\textsuperscript{150} “The history of the American nation,” Pauker wrote, “is replete with acts of heroism by farmers, ranchers, miners, and traders who accepted great personal risks for private gain.” For their own slice of pie, many Vietnamese could be expected to act similarly. Ibid., 68.
\end{flushright}
vast amounts of material largesse, South Vietnam’s people would continue to gravitate toward America’s ally, the Government of Vietnam.\textsuperscript{151}

For many administratively-oriented social scientists, the key to gaining the support of the rural masses in Vietnam was the “establishment of firm political authority at the center” with representatives in the villages who could serve as the “visible alternative to the Viet Cong.”\textsuperscript{152} According to R. Michael Pearce, the second step in the local pacification process -- directly after the creation of “a reasonable degree of security”-- ought to be the instruction of village officials in their administrative responsibilities.\textsuperscript{153} As a researcher in Hau Nghia, he deplored the South Vietnamese bureaucratic practice of constantly “shuffling ... village officials” as well as appointing them to positions for which they had “neither prior training, special aptitude, nor any real interest.”\textsuperscript{154} Charles Joiner, the director of Temple University’s Public Administration Program, not surprisingly concluded that successful nationbuilding depended upon whether the national government could become an “administering regime.” In a 1967 SEADAG conference paper, he pointed out that the South Vietnamese regions most heavily dominated by the Communists were those that had not been “effectively governed

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{153} Pearce, Evolution of a Vietnamese Village--Part III, xiv.
\textsuperscript{154} A training program conducted within the village, Pearce believed, could both “improv[e] the efficiency of the village administration and rais[e] the status of the village chief and his officials in the eyes of the villagers.” Another benefit “would be to extend national-government presence down to the villages...” Furthermore, empowered grassroots administrators could open up “a feedback channel” of communication from the village to the district and the province” to replace the “one-way channel” that currently existed “from province to district and thence to the villages.” Ibid., 69-72.
since World War II.”\textsuperscript{155} While French colonial administrators had “created an aura of contractualism and bureaucratism,” they had “failed to provide a universal presence of government and administration.” Not only had this failure doomed France’s chances to remain in Vietnam as colonial master, it had left its South Vietnamese successor with an administrative “vacuum” that continued to stymie efforts to defeat the Communist insurgency and develop a unified nation.\textsuperscript{156}

South Vietnam was not alone in having to cope with “the absence of significant intermediate structures” between the rulers and the ruled. According to Joiner, in most “underdeveloped nations,” the majority of the population constituted “an amorphous mass,” politically speaking, that could “only be reached by direct governmental actions.”\textsuperscript{157} This was the source of the widespread perception of the GVN as arbitrary, out-of-touch, and partial in its decisionmaking. The ultimate solution to this problem, Joiner believed, was probably a Western-style “representative regime elected by popular mandate.”\textsuperscript{158} But the Saigon regime could not wait for the democratic process in Vietnam to evolve to the point where the top and bottom halves of Vietnamese society would naturally knit together. It had to administratively catalyze the process through the chartering of “new intermediate structures” that could serve as “genuine focal points for determining the

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 544-5.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 563.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 547-8.
views of particular publics.” Nevertheless, the current South Vietnamese administration had to avoid the trap into which President Diem had fallen with regard to his pro-
government party: that is, using the government party as a mechanism “for enforcing uniformity in governmental programs.” Such “facade structures” that did not allow for sincere, two-way communication had no chance of competing with the National Liberation Front.¹⁵⁹

According to Jerry Mark Silverman’s analysis of national elections during the early 1970s, extending administrative control throughout the countryside not only improved governmental effectiveness but also had important electoral consequences for the Saigon regime. A staff member at the South Vietnamese Institute of Public Administration, Silverman argued that winning elections in South Vietnam, as well as other “developing” countries, was primarily a matter of maintaining a permanent presence in the countryside. Although not especially popular, the Thieu regime had managed since the summer of 1972 to implant police chiefs in most of the country’s villages,¹⁶⁰ and one of the duties of this rural constabulary was to turn out voters for President Thieu on election day. Silverman claimed that Thieu’s large margin of victory in the countryside was not simply a “function of ... coercion;” ignorance and apathy played at least a large a role. At any rate, the President’s overwhelming victory in rural districts more than off-set his poor showing in South Vietnam’s big cities, and his non-
Communist opponents lacked the organizational means to mobilize much support outside

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 563-4.
urban areas.\textsuperscript{161} Thus, in South Vietnam, the democratic process \textit{was} largely a facade overlaid upon an authoritarian political system; and whether the current national regime remained in power was more a function of bureaucratic reach than genuine popular acclaim.

Like Silverman, Vietnam Special Studies Group evaluators Bruno Kosheleff and Stan Jorgensen had few illusions regarding the paternalistic potential of the South Vietnamese bureaucracy. In their March 1970 report on conditions in Quang Nam province, they seemed willing to settle, at least initially, for the establishment of a widespread governmental presence in rural areas. “No matter how ineffectual an RD cadre or a PF soldier might be,” they noted somewhat ambiguously, “the very fact that he is both living in the village and working for the GVN has some importance.”\textsuperscript{162} Such a comment indicates just how far the nationbuilding zeal of some “Other Warriors” had declined by the 1970s. As Kosheleff and Jorgensen perceived the situation in the countryside, neither the conservative-populist Vietnam of quasi-independent villages and ethno-religious enclaves nor the liberal-nationalist Vietnam of capitalist prosperity and mass political participation was a realistic possibility any time soon. What was achievable was an allied policy of forcefully occupying the populated regions of South Vietnam in the hope that residents would eventually acquiesce to GVN overlordship and forsake the Communists. In other words, ‘true’ nationbuilding would have to await the

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 416.
\textsuperscript{162} Vietnam Special Studies Group, “The Situation in the Countryside: Quang Nam Province,” 16 March 1970, pp. 4-5, The National Archives, Record Group R6472, MACCORDS (101986) (235633), Suitland, MD. 50.
end of the war. While the majority of ‘Other Warriors’ continued to espouse a combination of measures for building a nation in the midst of war, they could not develop a coherent plan for bringing this about. Instead, they proposed bits and pieces of various strategic approaches. Therefore, South Vietnamese nationbuilding and -- as the next chapter will demonstrate -- counterinsurgency evolved into an assemblage of narrowly conceived, stitched-together programs whose only overarching goal was “progress on all fronts.”
CHAPTER 7

SECURING THE POPULATION

“Other Warriors” confronted counterinsurgency in much the same contradictory manner as they did nationbuilding. Most social scientists, civilian bureaucrats, and military officers associated with the Vietnam pacification campaign either believed that security and development went hand-in-hand or that securing the population against Communist influence must precede the establishment of a stable, prosperous, and democratic Republic of Vietnam. They did not dispute MACV’s contention that the allies needed to vie with the enemy militarily, as well as politically and socio-economically. But they often took issue with the allied high command on the relative priority accorded the “Other War” in the villages of South Vietnam versus the “Big Unit War” in the jungles and mountains and the strategic air campaign over North Vietnam and along the Ho Chi Minh trail.

They were of two minds regarding how best to protect the people in order to win them over to the non-Communist side. “Other Warriors” tended to support a long-term, defensive approach to the war in South Vietnam, designed to deny the enemy access to the more densely populated areas of the country. They did not seem altogether
comfortable with this strategy, though. While rejecting conventional, American-style attrition warfare, they tacitly accepted the Clausewitzian principle of the superiority of the offensive. Thus, “Other Warriors” believed, the allied forces must continue to seek out and destroy the insurgents whether guerrillas, intelligence agents, or Communist Party cadres, but they should avoid harming the people they were sent to secure. In reaching this conclusion, they tried hard to repress any doubts they might have had that such a complex operational mission exceeded the intellectual and moral capabilities of the allies.

The Sine Qua Non

To many, if not most, US military officers in Vietnam, it was “axiomatic” that the popular support that the GVN needed to defeat the Viet Cong would never be “forthcoming until the security of person and property” could be assured, which meant that population security had to come first on the list of pacification priorities.¹ Edwin Chamberlain, an advisor to the South Vietnamese military in 1964-65, argued that no “amount of civic and related actions” could neutralize the continuing “threat of VC terrorism” in the minds of villagers.² The majority of long-suffering, war-weary Vietnamese were “realists” and “working pessimists,” Army PROVN analysts claimed, whose “primary concern [was] with individual survival.”³ And absent a “secured

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² Ibid., 39.
physical environment,” US-GVN hopes for binding rural villagers to the government in Saigon were “meaningless.”

Although somewhat more partial to non-combat military activities than their Army counterparts, Marine spokesmen jealously guarded their service’s warrior image and forcefully rejected the notion that Marines might someday be transformed into glorified social workers. In a 1966 article outlining the principles of civic action, Major William Holmberg concluded with the admonition that the Marine Corps ought to “remain a professional fighting force ... fully capable of wielding the cutting edge of counterinsurgency.” It was this “cutting edge” that would carve up the Viet Cong and “provide the greatest ... gift” to the South Vietnamese people: namely, “security from fear, destruction and death.” By extolling the benefits of civic action, Holmberg did not mean to imply that the Marine Corps should neglect its combat duties. Besides the negative impact that this would have on the Vietnamese security situation, he worried about the long-term effect that “excessive attention to humanitarian programs” might have on Marine recruitment. On the one hand, such a shift in mission focus might cause an influx of enlistees who would be better off serving in the Peace Corps. On the other hand, failing “to push civic action to a proper balance” might provoke young American males with martial qualities to join the Army Special Forces or some other elite military organization.

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4 Ibid., 69.
In the opinion of several top Army field commanders in Vietnam, pacification advocates sometimes failed to give the security factor the priority and weight it deserved in their calculations for winning Vietnamese “hearts and minds.” In October 1968, Lieutenant General Fred Weyand scoffed at the notion “that pacification of itself can secure an area by gaining popular support for GVN and concomitant rejection of VC programs.” In his experience, every time pacification projects had been located “on the fringe areas of security, the results [had] been costly, if not disastrous.”

For his part, 9th Infantry Division commander, Lieutenant General Julian Ewell, argued that “the military/security situation controlled pacification progress” in most parts of South Vietnam. Unfortunately, outside observers often overlooked this fact, particularly during periods when the enemy was lying low in order to rebuild his strength. Although there might come a point when political and economic factors overtook and determined the military-security factor, Ewell allowed, this point was “probably very high on the security scale.”

Despite Ewell’s distrust of pacification “zealots,” there was actually little disagreement between US military officers, civilian officials, and government-sponsored social scientists regarding the importance of security -- either to the Vietnamese peasantry, or as a pre-condition for the attainment of other pacification goals. From his experience as an AID field representative, William Nighswonger concluded that the

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“drive for preservation of self and family takes precedence over all other concerns, and
determines, to a great extent, the nature of the peasant’s response to both sides of the
conflict.” In general, the peasant gave his support to whichever side posed the greatest
threat to his survival. Consequently, both Nighswonger and his fellow AID provincial
representatives believed that security and local military superiority were essential for
pacification. In the absence of a secure environment, all their efforts at improving the
economy and increasing political participation could proceed only “in a very limited and
sporadic manner.” Furthermore, political, economic, social programs could not defeat
the Viet Cong; the Communist infrastructure had to be “smashed” before South Vietnam
could move forward as a nation. The failure to heed this fundamental point, in Robert
Komer’s opinion, was what had bedeviled pacification prior to its re-emphasis in 1966.

This belief was echoed by government-sponsored social scientists. In their 1972
summation of the pacification experience for the Department of Defense, Chester Cooper
and his social science team at the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) flatly stated that
“Security is a Prerequisite for Development.” While acknowledging that “certain
nonmilitary undertakings” were also necessary for pacification, IDA contended that
development programs could make no headway without first establishing “the conditions
for a sustained government presence.”

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1966), 8 and 31.
important consequence of security was the “confidence” it bred in the rural population. When villagers realized that allied troops were serious about remaining for the long haul, they became “more willing to participate in government-sponsored programs and to contribute to their own defense and welfare.”12 True enough, agreed Raymond Gastil of the Hudson Institute, but the American obsession with security could be carried too far. The establishment of political and economic development programs in South Vietnam need not depend on the kind of physical security expected by American suburbanites of the 1960s. In his estimation, Vietnamese were willing to gamble a bit in the hope of acquiring a modicum of comfort and happiness for themselves and their children as long as they did not have to risk their lives in pursuit of “a lost cause.” As a realistic security benchmark, the Hudson Institute researcher suggested using the level of success achieved by most US Marine Corps Combined Action teams after a period of about six months. In such cases, the end result was not perfect security, but a situation in which it was “relatively more dangerous to be pro-VC than anti-VC.”13

But if security was the *sine qua non* of pacification and development, what was the role of the American military in providing security to the people of South Vietnam? Most US Army and Marine Corps officers paid obeisance to the principle that “in a counterinsurgency war ... combat and pacification campaigns must be conducted simultaneously for the final victory to be lasting.” According to Colonel Norman R.K.

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Stanford, chief of the Marine Corps’ Civic Action Branch, it would be useless “to destroy the main insurgent forces and their North Vietnamese allies while leaving the Viet Cong political infrastructure and guerrilla cadres untouched behind the lines.”

On the other hand, the allies could not afford to ignore the Communist regular forces while they focused on pacification. US military strategists disagreed, though, over how much emphasis should be accorded to area (or territorial) security versus conventional offensive operations, as well as over whether Vietnamese or American forces should be primarily responsible for each mission.

In 1966, “Other Warriors” in the US Army and Marine Corps began to make the case for more allied emphasis on -- and American military responsibility for -- clearing the densely populated lowland areas of South Vietnam of insurgent elements and continuously holding them for the GVN. The Army’s PROVN study announced that “the key” to security could be found “in the conduct of effective area saturation tactics” that denied the Viet Cong the opportunity to move freely in and out of populated areas. Providing security at the village and hamlet levels in South Vietnam, PROVN analysts admitted, entailed fighting of “the most difficult and dirty [kind] imaginable.”

Nevertheless, it was “mandatory” that American officials recognize the importance of the war in the villages and apply comparable resources to winning this conflict as they were currently employing to defeat the Communist main forces.


For his part, Lieutenant General Victor Krulak of the Marine Corps virtually became an evangelist for the “Other War” in Vietnam. In the mid-to-late 1960s, he toured the United States giving passionate speeches on the topic to business groups, service organizations, and student gatherings, as well as audiences composed of national security professionals. At the Naval War College in April 1966, Krulak hammered home the point that “[t]he conflict between the North Vietnamese and the hard core VC on the one hand and the US on the other could move to another planet today and we still would not have won the war.” Communist subversive and guerrilla activities would still continue.\(^{16}\) Before a presumably “safe” group of senior Marine Corps officers in early 1967 -- including Commandant Wallace Greene -- Krulak spoke frankly about the difficulties the III MAF was having in persuading the US Army in Vietnam to more actively engage in the war amongst the people. The Marines, he noted, had known for some time that “digging the guerrillas out of the populous and fertile lowlands [was] more important than going into the mountains after the big North Vietnamese units.” Communist regular forces simply could not operate in South Vietnam without the

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\(^{16}\) Krulak went on to outline the importance of holding on to the Mekong Delta and the coastal littoral of South Vietnam. “In short,” Krulak stated, “80% of the wealth and 75% of the people are found in 20% of the country. This is why the Viet Cong do not regard hills or cities as prime objectives. Their objectives are the people. The Communists want the wealth and resources, and these are found where the people are. Consequently, the decisive battlefields in Vietnam are in the hearts of the people in the heavily populated areas.” See “Lecture and Address to Naval War College,” April 26, 1966, Personal Papers Collection, Victor H. Krulak Papers, PC # 486, Box 1, Location 1A27, Speech File 1966, US Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington, DC, 9-10.
backing of the local Viet Cong infrastructure that provided them “the food and the intelligence and the taxes and the other support that they need[ed].”

In general, US Army officers favored a direct security approach that emphasized tracking down and annihilating organized enemy forces operating in the more inaccessible reaches of the country. By 1969-1970, however, Army receptivity toward an area security strategy, focusing on the populated lowland districts of South Vietnam, appeared to increase as a consequence of the Communist Tet offensive of 1968. Army staff officers, as well as advisors to South Vietnamese military units charged with pacification missions, seemed most willing to accept a fundamental change of strategic direction. In the summer of 1969, Lieutenant Colonel Richard McMahon, a military intelligence officer with Vietnam service, proposed what he termed an “indirect counterinsurgency strategy” for allied forces in Indochina designed to dislocate insurgent forces instead of destroying them. In his view, the only way that the government could ensure the people’s security would be to “hold that part of the land where most of the people live.” As long as the Communists could enter and leave Vietnamese villages as they pleased, counterinsurgency was bound to fail, “regardless of how many search-and-destroy operations go off into the jungles.”

Still, in the case of some Army field commanders, support for the village war was rather half-hearted. In April 1969, Lieutenant General Julian Ewell accused some

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unnamed US units of doing “a tremendous job with pacification support” while their “military operations” languished. As for himself, he favored putting “maximum military pressure on the enemy” in the expectation that that would take care of pacification as much as anything else. Major General Harris Hollis, commander of the 25th Infantry Division in 1969-70, agreed that American forces were most effectively employed against regular Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army units. The US military’s main contribution to pacification was mostly an indirect one, he believed. By focusing on the enemy’s main forces, it increased the probability that the GVN would be able to manage “the residue of that threat” that remained following the departure of American combat units. On the other hand, Hollis acknowledged that the enemy’s posture had changed significantly since the American intervention-in-force in 1965. The Communists were less willing to fight in large formations, and this made an alteration in American strategy necessary. With few main force units left to fight, his unit had been forced to close down a number of its fire and patrol bases and go after Viet Cong local forces, guerrillas and political cadres. The idea was to deprive North Vietnamese Army infiltrators of their “welcoming party” and “logistical carpet” once they decided to leave their sanctuaries in Cambodia and cross over into South Vietnam to establish new bases of operation.21

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20 Ideally, according to Hollis, the Americans should leave to the GVN’s territorial forces “those close-in pacification and security matters that [could] safely be left primarily to them.” While this was going on, US tactical forces would be operating “farther away from the population centers,” attempting to “grind down the enemy and wear him out.” U.S. Department of the Army, Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development, “Debriefing of Senior Officers: MG Harris W. Hollis,” 20 May 1970, US Army War College Library, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 6.
21 Ibid., 3.
Although favoring an increased emphasis on territorial security, civilian bureaucratic strategists generally advocated a balanced, sequential approach to combating the problem of insurgency in Vietnam. In mid-1960s memo, Edward Lansdale conceded that large-scale military operations would continue to overshadow all other activities of the Saigon government until such time as the Communist main force units had been substantially reduced in size.\textsuperscript{22} Nonetheless, the strategy in Vietnam had to be primarily political. Although conventional military forces provided a necessary “shield for political development,” they could not substitute for territorial forces in the key areas of local security and anti-infrastructure operations. Consequently, around 1968, the time became ripe for a “refocussing of military strategy” away from the concerns of the “Big Unit War” and toward the “Other War” objective of wresting the people from Communist political and psychological domination.\textsuperscript{23}

Most government-sponsored social scientists preferred a US strategy for South Vietnam that focused on the internal threat to that country’s security. An exception was RAND’s G.C. Reinhardt, who rejected both the prevailing attrition-based strategy as well as the pacification approach. In his view, peace in South Vietnam would not arrive until the external threat had been dealt with.\textsuperscript{24} This required a shift away from territorial security missions and small-scale offensive operations in the direction of operations


\textsuperscript{24} G.C. Reinhardt, Guerrilla-Combat, Strategy and Deterrence in Southeast Asia (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, Jan. 1964), 20-1.
against Communist units in their sanctuaries in Cambodia, Laos, and North Vietnam. Using a homely analogy, Reinhardt reminded Americans that their ancestors had not terminated “the deadly menace of Indian raids by merely defending their log cabins” but by beating the “raiders” in battle and then pursuing them and destroying their base camps.  

More typical of the attitudes of social scientists were those expressed by RAND’s R. Michael Pearce and the Hudson Institute’s Raymond Gastil. Neither entirely denied the usefulness of external security measures and large-scale offensive operations. Both, however, considered them insufficient to win the war and less important and more wasteful than other security remedies. From his experience in Hau Nghia province, Pearce concluded rural security was mostly a by-product of “the villagers’ willingness and ability to defend themselves from infiltration and attack by local Viet Cong agents and guerrillas.”  

For his part, Gastil believed that the “concept of clear and hold operations ... might well be sufficient to pacify South Vietnam.” Moreover, this operational strategy could be performed at a fraction of the cost of the dominant attrition-oriented strategy that emphasized search and destroy operations. “Simply killing the VC or NVA” was not the most “efficient” means of ending the war. Instead, Gastil urged allied commanders to separate the Communists from the people by isolating them, harassing them, starving them for supplies, and capturing them.

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26 Pearce, Duc Lap Since November 1964, 67-8.
27 Gastil, Counterinsurgency and South Vietnam, 18.
28 Ibid., 21.
Fortifying the People

Essentially, a defensive “clear and hold” strategy demanded that the people --
government supporters and “neutral” rural dwellers -- congregate in defensible locations
so that a combination of US and South Vietnamese regular, paramilitary, and civilian
self-defense forces could provide them continuous and permanent “protection.” It also
demanded that allied authorities restrict the activities of the rural population in order to
deny Communist military units and political cadres access to supplies, intelligence
information, and recruits, and that the allies mount an intensive psychological warfare
campaign to win over civilian “fence sitters,” bolster the morale and improve the
discipline of their own troops, and undermine the confidence of enemy soldiers in the
revolutionary cause. Beyond these basic principles, “Other Warriors” disagreed over just
how the people should be fortified. For example, was forcible relocation acceptable, or
should the allies rely on the indirect effects of war to channel scattered rural residents into
government-controlled areas? What part should US soldiers play in protecting villagers
and training territorial defense forces? Could nonprofessional civilians be expected to
defend their villages/hamlets against Communist incursions? How far should the allies
go in their attempts to curtail the internal flow of resources to the enemy? And finally,
how did one go about altering people’s perceptions of the war and the war makers in a
manner favorable to the non-Communist side?

Beginning in the late 1950s, the South Vietnamese government, with US backing
and advice, created agroville centers -- later replaced by strategic and “New Life” hamlets
-- for the purpose of concentrating the rural Vietnamese population within reach of
government reinforcements. Bringing villagers closer together, it was hoped, would stymie Communist attempts to extract taxes, gather information on the government, foment terror, and coerce locals into providing laborers or fighters for the revolutionary cause. As General Krulak noted in April 1966, the Viet Cong were not particularly dependent on supplies laboriously transported down the infamous Ho Chi Minh trail from North Vietnam. Beyond what they salvaged from the allies and bought on the open market, Communist guerrillas and political operatives relied for most of their sustenance on the local population. According to RAND’s James Farmer, the regrouping of rural inhabitants in fortified locations also served a psychological purpose: it altered the image of the enemy in the minds of villagers from friendly neighbor to hostile outsider. After the advent of the strategic hamlet program, he contended, the Communists were forced “to attack a defended hamlet,” and this constituted “a direct attack on the people themselves.”

From his experience in Vinh Long province in 1959-61, however, MSU political scientist Joseph Zasloff discovered that it was the Viet Cong, not the South Vietnamese government, who held the propaganda advantage with respect to regroupment. In his opinion, the unpopularity of agrovilles and strategic hamlets did not necessarily invalidate the underlying concept, but the whole project had to be rethought, taking socioeconomic, as well as security, factors into consideration. “The fortress-like quality” of the agrovilles, the improved roads, and the concentration of the population, he allowed,

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29 Krulak, Lecture and Address to Naval War College, 20.  
offered the promise of “greater physical security.” Nevertheless, “tactical strength” had to be “balanced against the demoralizing effect of a community disturbed by labor demands, moving, constructing new homes, and plotting a new work pattern.” Until the South Vietnamese government learned to deal more sensitively with the social disruption associated with regroupment, the Viet Cong would continue to win rural recruits and support by harping on the popular perception that the program was unfair and unnecessary.  

Following the 1963 coup d’etat that toppled President Diem, US Army Major William Smith -- formerly with the Strategic Hamlets Division of the US Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) -- acknowledged that tactical adjustments were necessary to enhance regroupment’s political acceptability and military soundness. In particular, he recommended that forcible removal of Vietnamese villagers “should be the exception rather than the rule” and should only be done if the authorities could truly provide “better security to the families involved.” Furthermore, the GVN should not use the need for greater population security as an excuse for exerting greater political control over the peasantry. Smith also decried such Diem era practices as locating strategic hamlets in the midst of Viet Cong territory, simply to show the anti-Communist flag, and constructing new hamlets at a rate that far exceeded the GVN’s ability either to support or protect them from Viet Cong interference. Like many American advisers, Smith

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subscribed to Sir Robert Thompson’s dictum that government influence must gradually expand like an “oilspot” from a secure core.\(^\text{32}\)

Cognizant of the ineffectiveness of early attempts at concentrating the rural population, American social scientists in the mid-1960s sought a more “natural” alternative to government-imposed agrovilles and strategic hamlets. In a May 1967 article, Asia Society President Kenneth T. Young broached the idea of shifting the focus of allied pacification operations from rural regroupment to urbanization. According to Young, the mass migration from the villages to Saigon and other cities and towns that had commenced in the early 1960s as a result of wartime disruption and the attractions of city life, suggested that the allies “should make a virtue out of a necessity” and “deliberately increase [the size of] urbanized markets and ... town groupings.” Without spelling out how this should be accomplished, Young touted the strategic benefits of a demographic realignment in South Vietnam in which half the population of the country lived in urban areas along the coast.\(^\text{33}\) Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington, for his part, contended that urbanization might very well be “the answer to ‘wars of national liberation.’” Rather than trying to achieve a military victory over Communists insurgents in the Third World, Americans should forcibly “bring the country in question out of the phase in which a rural revolutionary movement can hope to generate sufficient strength to come to power.”\(^\text{34}\) Hudson Institute researcher Raymond Gastil was more tactically

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\(^{32}\) Ibid., 22-23.


explicit in his comments regarding peasant migration. “Collecting refugees,” he wrote, “could become an objective of our sweeps in some areas.” Not only would such a military policy liberate a large group of people from Communist control, it would undoubtedly depress the morale of those left behind without family, friends, and economic opportunity.  

Two studies produced for the Department of Defense by The Human Sciences Corporation in the summer of 1967 provided some support for the view that encouraging rural migration to densely populated, government-controlled areas might yield positive results from both a political and security standpoint. Pointing to the historical movement of Vietnamese people down the Southeast Asian coastline, the first study headed by A. Terry Rambo registered “considerable doubt upon the existence of any significant peasant resistance to migration.” More to the point, based on his team’s observations of the refugee situation in Phu Yen province, Rambo concluded that the Viet Cong were suffering to a greater extent than the South Vietnamese government from the migratory process. A “vicious circle” was apparently developing in those parts of Phu Yen controlled by the enemy: as the population base shrunk, need for recruits and taxes went up, which, in turn, caused additional villagers to flee from their too-demanding...

37 Rambo noted that present-day Vietnam had “developed as a nation only because of the relentless ‘March to the South’ by colonists” from the Red River Valley. What is more, census figures indicated that residents of the Mekong Delta region had been voluntarily emigrating to nearby urban areas for decades. Rambo, *The Refugee Situation in Phu-Yen Province*, 28-29.
Communist overlords. What is more, Viet Cong political success largely depended upon “intensive agitation-propaganda” among the masses, and the popular movement away from Communist zones greatly reduced rural residents’ exposure to such indoctrination measures. Finally, the refugee movement could perform the vital physical security function of consolidating a large number of rural settlements without “the politically counterproductive need to forcibly regroup the population” as was done during the Diem era.

But how should the allies convince Vietnamese peasants that they would be better off severing their ties with the Viet Cong guerrillas? They could simply let the conventional war take its natural” course by allowing aerial and artillery bombardments, “free fire zones,” and infantry “sweep” operations to drive the peasantry into government-controlled refugee camps. Alternatively, they could permit the Communists to perform the job of alienating the rural population themselves through their increasingly harsh exactions. Victor Krulak, for instance, believed that the Communists had lost the affections of the average peasant by the mid-1960s. They had taken “his rice,” “his money,” “his sons” and his labor, and had offered him in return “only [vague] promises of a better world.” Consequently, he would probably “be eternally grateful” to the allies for freeing him and his family from the grip of “guerrilla terror.”

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38 Ibid., 112,
39 Unfortunately, according to the Human Sciences team, this did not mean that GVN officials had seized the occasion to mount a psychological operations campaign – either to win the active support of the refugees, or to sway national and international public opinion by broadcasting the dimensions of the influx into “free world” territory. Ibid., 114-15.
40 Ibid., 116-17.
41 Ibid., 17-18.
stood in the way of active cooperation between American soldiers and Vietnamese villagers. But once the allies brought them peace, medical assistance, and educational opportunity, they would “begin to tell us where the Communists are, who they are and warn us of the dangers that are everywhere.”

Accordingly, US Army and Marine Corps officers developed territorial security tactics in the mid-to-late 1960s designed to bring real peace to rural hamlets under the GVN’s nominal control. In the November-December 1968 issue of Infantry magazine, Major William H. Willoughby -- a counterinsurgency specialist at Fort Benning -- described a four-ring defensive security concept to deny the enemy access to populated areas. Others, such as then-Major General Fred C. Weyand, favored a sector security approach, involving a mixture of American and South Vietnamese military and paramilitary forces. In his version of sector security defense, Army Colonel Jerry Dunn -- Deputy Province Senior Advisor in Quang Tin during the late 1960s and early ‘70s -- paired Vietnamese combat arms battalions with US battalions and alternately

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42 Ibid., 24.
43 Following an initial offensive to clear an area of VC Main Force or NVA forces, four concentric zones were established, involving all available military and paramilitary units in the vicinity. According to Willoughby, Revolutionary Development cadre were responsible for “minimal security” within the inner ring comprising the village’s hamlets, and the South Vietnamese Regional or Popular Forces patrolled the area immediately outside the village. In order to prevent the return of Communist local and main force units, an ARVN battalion assumed responsibility for the third ring of security. American and other so-called Free World Forces were left to provide the outer ring of security. They were charged with conducting offensive operations beyond the populated zone designed to head off the infiltration of enemy regulars into the lowlands. See “Revolutionary Development,” Infantry 58 (Nov.-Dec. 1968): 8-9.
44 According to Weyand’s 1966 long-term security plan for Hau Nghia province, a village targeted for pacification was first “divided into sections that generally followed the pattern of distribution of the [constituent] hamlets.” Each day of the operation a designated US 25th Division battalion was responsible for clearing one of these sections of Viet Cong guerrillas, as well as providing security for a so-called “Go” team, consisting of South Vietnamese National Police and psychological warfare, intelligence, and medical troops. The “Go” team’s job was to establish law and order and win the trust and loyalty of the hamlet residents. See “Winning the People in Hau Nghia Province,” Army 17 (Jan. 1967): 54.
“intermixed” them along the outer defensive perimeter. This was done not only to improve over-all territorial effectiveness,” but “to assist Vietnamese units in assuming full responsibility for territorial security” when the American troops were no longer there. Like other area security tacticians, Dunn held that forming an initial military barrier around the selected village and “denying all entry or exit to the pacification area” gave the Vietnamese police and other authorities a head-start in identifying and eliminating the local Viet Cong infrastructure, and in implementing high “payoff” medical, educational, and agricultural programs.\textsuperscript{45}

CORDS officials John Paul Vann and Robert Komer stressed that denying the enemy access to the population was a time-consuming, as well as manpower- and resource-intensive, proposition. It was only after Tet 1968, Vann confided to Congress in June 1970, that the allies officially acknowledged the importance of providing security to the Vietnamese villagers “24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 31 days a month.” The post-Tet Accelerated Pacification Campaign (APC) and its successors vastly increased the number of paramilitary forces stationed throughout the Vietnamese countryside. Consequently, governmental authority was no longer subject to sudden politico-military “reversal,” as Communist forces “walked” into settlements abandoned by allies. In the future, the enemy was “going to have to eat those hamlets up platoon by platoon.”\textsuperscript{46}

Despite its usefulness, building a nationwide territorial defense force was no easy matter. As ex-CORDS chief Komer explained the problem in 1972, there were over ten thousand

hamlets in South Vietnam, any one of which could be attacked on any one particular
night. “Therefore, you have to have a unit in each one of those hamlets every night ready
to fend off an attack.” If the South Vietnamese administration were efficient, then this
operation could perhaps be managed from a central location. But the GVN was slow and
weak, making effective rural security contingent upon the installation of local defense
forces and information services throughout the country.\textsuperscript{47} To the extent that the allies
accomplished this goal, however, they made life more and more difficult for the enemy
and less and less burdensome for themselves.\textsuperscript{48}

According to Victor Krulak’s security scenario, South Vietnamese villagers
should be prepared to defend themselves as soon as US Marine forces had demonstrated
that “freedom” from the Viet Cong was possible. But rather than simply doling out
obsolete rifles and leaving a newly-organized militia to its own devices, Americans must
remain behind to “inspire it and guide it.” In the Marines’ case, this meant indefinitely
assigning a squad of US troops to each platoon of Popular Forces militiamen. The
rationale for this Combined Action Platoon (CAP) concept was as simple as “monkey
see, monkey do.” By aping the behavior of well-trained Americans, Vietnamese local
forces acquired the necessary “skill, pride and confidence” to fend off the Viet Cong.

What is more, their fellow villagers gained the kind of security that came from being

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\textsuperscript{48} By successfully recruiting Vietnamese to join the self-defense forces, they reduced the number of potential enemy recruits, which limited Communist military options. Furthermore, if the GVN could persuade villagers to defend themselves by training them properly and guaranteeing them the services of a mobile rapid reaction force in times of trouble, then Saigon could afford to devote fewer of its limited resources to defense and more to popularity-enhancing social and economic programs. Ibid., 47 and 49.
protected by people who lived among them and were personally committed to their area.\textsuperscript{49}

The Marine Corps, Krulak asserted, had been the first American organization in Vietnam to realize the importance of the South Vietnamese Popular Forces (PF), whom the general called “the least trained, the least supported, the least respected, and the least compensated of all” the ARVN forces.\textsuperscript{50} Unlike most South Vietnamese soldiers, the Marines had discovered that the members of the Popular Forces “had a real interest in the war because they were defending their home, their hearth, their wife and their children.” Furthermore, Marine Corps tacticians discovered that the addition of American volunteers to a Popular Forces platoon created a potent village security force, far stronger than its individual parts. On the one hand, the Marines learned a bit of the language, customs and guerrilla habits of the Popular Forces, whereas the latter became more proficient in individual soldier skills and small-unit tactics. “All in all,” Krulak told a group of Marine Corps staff officers in May 1968, “the two separate unremarkable elements united to make an explosive mixture which, in the end, is going far toward winning the war.”\textsuperscript{51}

According to CAP historian Francis West, many allied generals underestimated the capabilities of combined defense forces. When they questioned whether the CAP

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 24-5.

\textsuperscript{50} Following the Marine example, the US Army created Mobile Advisory Teams (MATs) in the late 1960s for the purpose of improving the Vietnamese Regional and Popular Forces in areas under its control. The 1968 pacification plan called for 353 5-man MATs to be deployed to the village level, living with RF and PF units, assisting in their training and accompanying them on operations.

teams could withstand a large-scale enemy onslaught, it only displayed their ignorance of
the true “nature of the war” in Vietnam. The US Marines, whom West observed in
Quang Ngai province, understood that even though the Communists could mount a
battalion-size operation against their combined unit on occasion, they lacked the reserves
to continuously maintain the attack. Furthermore, it eventually dawned on these young
Americans that “the Viet Cong could triumph” only if their threats “cowed the small unit
into leaving.” Yet, the CAP Marines were determined never to depart under “Viet Cong
pressure,” partly as a matter of “personal pride,” and partly out of a “feeling of obligation
to the villagers.”

Lieutenant General Melvin Zais was not among those Army generals who
denigrated the territorial forces. In fact, under his tolerant auspices, the XXIV Corps --
which included the 101st Airborne Division, the Americal Division, a brigade of the 5th
Mechanized Infantry Division, and the 1st Marine Division -- fostered a number of
alternative methods for improving the performance of South Vietnamese Regional and
Popular Forces. For example, the 101st employed both “dedicated” battalions and
Mobile Training Teams (MTT). In the first case, an American battalion was committed
to a selected provincial district on a long-term basis and conducted combined operations
with Regional and Popular Forces against Communist forces in the area. In those
districts in which American forces did not regularly operate, each 101st brigade organized
three mobile training teams. For their part, the 1st Marine and Americal Divisions

53 These eight-man teams, much like Marine CAP squads, “provide[d] training specifically shaped to
correct the weaknesses” of the particular RF company or PF platoon, as well as assisted South Vietnamese
jointly established the Combined Unit Pacification Program (CUPP) in southern and central I Corps. As corps commander, Zais also had operational responsibility for Marine-sponsored Combined Action Platoons stationed in his area. On the one hand, the Army general lauded the CAP squads’ success in “greatly improving the capability” of their Popular Force counterparts, which he attributed to “the careful selection, screening and training of Marines” assigned to the Combined Action program. On the other hand, he expressed some reservation about the “relative cost of the CAP Program in terms of manpower” -- that is, one Marine to every two Popular Forces -- which weighed against the program’s expansion.

To a greater extent than their military counterparts, bureaucratic “Other Warriors” were enamored with the idea of substituting civilian self-defense forces for paid professionals. As early as the mid-1956, Edward Lansdale suggested to President Diem that the GVN combat the mounting threat of Communist terrorism in the countryside by arming South Vietnamese villagers. Although some saw military utility in giving the

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54 According to Zais, the basic concept of CUPP was very similar to the CAP concept: “divide an infantry company into platoon or squad size elements and combine each of these units with a PF platoon to work in a targeted hamlet.” In fact, training for CUPP personnel underwent on-the-job training with a CAP team for a ten-day period prior to taking up their village security duties. Ibid., 15-16.
55 Ibid. Like General Zais, Hudson Institute researcher Raymond Gastil doubted whether the Marine system could be extended throughout South Vietnam. Believing in the principle of economy of force and searching for a way to reduce Saigon’s dependence on American troops, Gastil recommended an operational approach somewhere between saturating the country with American forces and employing them in a blocking role outside populated areas. Until the South Vietnamese could handle the area security mission themselves, combined US and GVN units a la the Marine model would man “a perimete: of villages around a more secured area” occupied by territorial and self-defense forces. See Counterinsurgency and South Vietnam, 6
56 Diem reportedly considered this a fine idea, “adding that by arming the electorate, perhaps Vietnam could be sure to have a real democracy, since no leader could become a dictator in the face of a public bearing weapons.” See In The Midst of Wars: An American’s Mission to Southeast Asia (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 354.
people weapons, it was the political aspect of the idea that appealed most to US bureaucratic strategists. Thus the formation by the Thieu regime of the People’s Self-Defense Force (PSDF) in December 1968 boosted the confidence of US pacification officials in the GVN’s political strength. “The theory,” according to CORDS official Stephen Young, “was that if a man accepted a weapon to defend himself, family or community” against the Communists, “he was making a tentative commitment to the nationalist cause on the basis of which a more permanent relationship could grow.”\textsuperscript{57} To Robert Komer, the political results were more obvious and basic. “Having a little blue patch of the self-defense force on one’s sleeve,” he believed, instilled pride in a demoralized peasant, while providing him an old M-1 carbine demonstrated a bond of trust between the peasant and his government.\textsuperscript{58}

Beyond concentrating and physically shielding the peasantry and providing them with the means and skills for self-defense, the allied objective of denying the Communists access to the people meant instituting strict resource controls on food, medicine, and education, among other things. The Army’s 1966 PROVN study complained about the allies’ “fragmented, uncoordinated” attempts to gain control of rice supplies in Vietnam and “starve out the enemy.”\textsuperscript{59} Despite the anti-humanitarian implications, the report also called for a tightening of the allied policy regarding medical assistance to Vietnamese, including civilians, living outside government-controlled

\textsuperscript{58} Komer, Bureaucracy Does Its Thing, 46.
\textsuperscript{59} PROVN, vol. 2, 4-39.
areas. In addition, Army analysts favored halting the spread of educational resources to areas of Communist strength in order to clearly demonstrate the difference between life under freedom and life under Communism.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the US and South Vietnamese militaries combined forces to deprive the Communists of basic sustenance in the relatively poor northern third of South Vietnam. XXIV Corps Commander Melvin Zais, for example, touted his region’s “High Price of Rice” campaign. Launched in October 1969, it was designed to exacerbate existing shortages of rice by restricting what the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army could buy from the local population. In order to keep local civilians aware “of their role in denying the enemy food,” Zais made use of radio, TV, aerial broadcast, and newspapers, as well as psychological operations teams with distributed over 15 million propaganda leaflets. In an article entitled “More Precious Than Bullets,” Major Terry Rowe described the “Golden Fleece” rice-denial operations in which he participated as an I Corps advisor during the 1970 harvest season. According to him, their object was threefold: to destroy the enemy’s crops, to capture or destroy his rice caches, and to deny him access to crops in friendly areas. As for their effect, these resource control operations supposedly surpassed combat operations in their devastating impact on the Communist military, particularly in Central Vietnam.

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60 Ibid., 4-63/4.
61 Ibid., 4-68.
Beyond restricting the enemy’s access to the population and its resources, “Other
Warriors” focused their attention on popular attitudes and what could be done to shape
them in a way favorable to the allied cause.64 From the mid-1960s, US pacification
experts began expressing their concern over the limited scope of the GVN’s
psychological warfare program, particularly as compared to the Viet Cong’s. The Army’s
PROVN report, for example, charged that the South Vietnamese government was
ignoring the political education of their soldiers and students. A soldier only gained the
“will to fight,” it maintained, once he understood the “why to fight.”65 Furthermore, by
keeping politics out of the classroom, South Vietnamese authorities were missing out on
an opportunity to have “an immediate impact on the commitment of SVN youth.”
Although Army analysts acknowledged that “‘sledgehammer’ propaganda” was
detrimental to the “credibility of education as a rational institution,” there was no
alternative to increasing the political content within the academic curriculum. To leave
the educational system “in its current apolitical limbo” was to abandon South Vietnamese
youth “to the VC communicator.”66

Colonel William Johnston and Bernie Yoh argued that governments threatened by
insurgencies must tailor and personalize their political indoctrination programs to meet

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64 In an 1971 address to graduates of the Army’s psychological operations course, Air Force Colonel
Robert Gleason noted that in the case of a revolutionary war, victory was in the eyes of the beholder.
Therefore, the contestants had to do their utmost to win the public relations battle as well as the battle of
arms. “Today’s conflicts, Gleason asserted, “are not fought to ... black-and-white resolutions. Indeed in
today’s wars a military operation may be judged a success or failure not by its tactical accomplishments but
by the effectiveness of the psywarfare and military/political actions that accompany it. Put more bluntly,
many victories are victories because one side convinces the other, or neutrals, that this is so.” See
65 PROVN, vol. 2, 5-60.
66 Ibid., 4-66/7.
the needs and expectations of various segments of their population. Broadbased appeals, Johnston implied, did not work in multicultural societies, such as Vietnam’s; rather, “a face-to-face PSYOP” program had to be developed for “each particular language group, tribe, clan, or area of the country” and implemented by that country’s military, paramilitary, and police forces. Like the Communists he had made a career of studying, Bernie Yoh -- a former Office of Strategic Services operative and Diem confidante -- counseled splitting the psychological warfare campaign into three parts, each aimed at a different social class: that is, civilians, friendly soldiers, and enemy soldiers. In his view, the “themes to be advanced toward the civilian population should center around the positive achievements of government,” rather than conventional military victories over the Viet Cong that might arouse ambivalent feelings. Furthermore, psychological operations officers should eschew unrealistic promises of radical governmental reform and an end to official corruption. Instead, he should emphasize such tangible local benefits as “increased security, more schools and better medical facilities.” As for the friendly armed forces, Yoh recommended a policy of “continuous indoctrination” focusing on the “proper conduct of the soldier” toward civilians. Finally, with regard to the Viet Cong, Yoh favored a paternalistic strategy such as fathers might apply to wayward sons: a mixture of love and discipline.

67 Not only did “these forces represent the best organized and most cohesive institutions in many developing countries,” but Johnston considered that “better results will be achieved if the peasants know that an iron fist is underneath the velvet glove of friendly persuasion.” See “Neglected Deterrent: Psychological Operations in ‘Liberation Wars.’” Military Review 48 (May 1968): 89-90.
68 On the one hand, the individual Viet Cong recruit “must be made to feel that as an individual, the government does not consider him a criminal.” On the other hand, he must understand that, sooner or later, his “association with the insurgent organization will result in his certain death, and that the only means of survival is to leave the organization.” Ibid., 5-8.
Social scientists working for the Defense Department’s Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) analyzed enemy actions for the purpose of crafting techniques to sway public opinion away from the Viet Cong and toward the Saigon government. In the summer of 1965, the RAND Corporation team of Leon Goure and C.A.H. Thomson came up with a series of recommendations designed to sully the benevolent image of the Viet Cong cadre, to destroy the “illusion” of Communist battlefield prowess, to shift the blame for the war’s beginning and continuation to the enemy, and to combat the typical Vietnamese view of the United States as an imperialistic interloper. In a more idealistic vein, Goure and Thomson called for “a statement, comprehensible and plausible to reasonably unsophisticated people,” about what the United States was doing in Vietnam. Although too modest to formulate such a statement themselves, the two RAND researchers warned that as long as the Communists could point to the American imperialism as the “real enemy,” they did not have to face up to their responsibility for initiating a civil war in Vietnam.

To win over Vietnamese public opinion to the anti-Communist side, M. Dean Havron and his colleagues at Human Sciences Research Corporation proposed a psychological warfare methodology reminiscent of the one employed by American business. As psychological warfare advisers to the US Defense Department, they called

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69 Specific RAND proposals included exposing the methods being used to “draft, entrap, blackmail, and seduce young men into the Viet Cong forces”; publicizing accounts of the dangers of life in the Front, prominent Viet Cong defeats, as well as the difficulties involved in “fighting against forces with vastly superior weapons”; and promoting the growing belief that, in areas controlled by the Communists, “anything not necessary for [the villager’s] bare subsistence will be taxed away...” Leon Goure and C.A.H Thomson, Some Impressions of Viet Cong Vulnerabilities: An Interim Report (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, Aug. 1965), 71-7.

70 Ibid., 80-1.
for the development of programs, themes, and messages to fit the “ingrained value orientations” of specific audiences and the selection of the most appropriate media for their expression. Specifically, they recommended analyzing all governmental programs “to determine what values are relevant to them, which of these should be emphasized, and which may present problems.” But should a program should face elimination in the event it appeared to contravene existing Vietnamese values? Havron responded that, “in order to ‘swim upstream’ successfully,” psyops professionals would either have to promote a new belief system or find a way of persuading the Vietnamese that the allied “objective is, in fact, consistent with, or instrumental to, existing values.”

From their analysis of Vietnamese culture, the Human Sciences team discovered that the average resident of Vietnam possessed “a high present situational orientation,” particularly with regard to politics. In other words, most Vietnamese had no particularly deep loyalties to either wartime protagonist, but would “bend with the wind” toward the side which appeared the stronger. Consequently, if the allies could persuade people that they were winning the war, then the “mandate of heaven” would slip from the Communists’ grasp and the masses would “shift their allegiance [to the GVN] without compunctions of conscience.” This was particularly true of the youth, whose “value orientations” were supposedly “more variable” than their elders and who cared even less for politics. Contrary to the American stereotype of the Oriental, young Vietnamese

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72 Ibid., 42.
73 Ibid., 53.
74 Ibid., 56.
wanted, most of all, to be left alone to devote their time to improving their personal socioeconomic circumstances.\textsuperscript{75}

One important aspect of psychological warfare campaign was the bringing of “law and order” to South Vietnam. In part, this entailed altering the firepower intensive, take-the-objective-at-all-cost mentality often associated with the American style of war. “Burning the village in order to save it” was obviously not acceptable when the objective was not a piece of ground but the people living on that ground.\textsuperscript{76} To many US specialists in territorial security, however, law and order were more typically imposed by allied military forces for the purpose of reinstating South Vietnamese government control, even at the cost of contravening Western standards of human rights and liberties. Writing near the end of the Tet Offensive of 1968, Army Colonel Gus Peters, a former deputy senior advisor in III Corps, noted that “pacification and security” were not well enough established in Vietnam for the government to do without “military controls and discipline over the population,” and an indefinite period of armed authoritarian rule over the countryside seemed warranted “until such time as the enemy [was] fully defeated militarily.”\textsuperscript{77} For his part, RAND social scientist Guy Pauker argued in 1971 that the Thieu regime could get away with pursuing authoritarian policies against “members of the articulate and vociferous urban elites,” who, at any rate, lacked support among the masses.\textsuperscript{78} 

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 63-4.
\textsuperscript{76} See PROVN, vol. 2, 5-19; and Krulak, Address to the Naval War College, 24.
On the other hand, American academics and military men also expressed their preference for a strict and regularized code of conduct for South Vietnam’s rural residents. In 1961, MSU researcher Luther Allen wrote approvingly of the attempt one Quang Nam district chief to institute “a new chapter of village common law” within his domain. This new regime included forcing all but a few rural residents to join the village guard; establishing a reward system for anti-Communist information, especially that leading to the capture of Viet Cong agents; and ordering all village residents to cooperate in the construction of fortified village enclosures. Establishing law and order in the village was ideally a job for the National Police, according to most pacification experts, but this institution was nearly universally regarded as corrupt and ineffective. Consequently, the responsibility for regulating village affairs generally fell into the hands of the military or the paramilitary. There were some notable exceptions, however.

Marine Captain Francis West described one police chief in Quang Ngai province, circa 1966, who was determined to change the “old ways” of the village, which allowed the Viet Cong to use civilians as spies and coolies. Chief Thanh desired to upset this arrangement by exploiting the superior firepower of the US Marines and by threatening the a villager with death in the event that he undertook “the simplest act to help the Viet Cong, such as carrying a sack of rice or waving a lantern.”

Remove the Threat

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79 Beyond this, “families with brothers, sisters, or children who had left the village after 1956 in order to join the Communists were to have their houses moved to special areas of concentration in order to facilitate control of them,” and “persons speaking in favor of the Communists... were to have their village lands expropriated for periods ranging from 3 to 6 years.” See Luther A. Allen and Pham Ngoc An, A Vietnamese District Chief in Action (Saigon: Michigan State Viet Nam Advisory Group, 1961), 44.
80 West, The Village, 62.
Although a territorial security strategy was not without its coercive aspects, many “Other Warriors” seemed uncomfortable with the idea of American forces’ remaining essentially on the defensive. Victory in war meant going on the offensive, finding and attacking the opposing forces, and applying maximum destructive power to the enemy’s “center of gravity.” True, “Other War” advocates tended to berate the military high command for its undiscriminating use of firepower and its preference for large-scale, conventional battles. But this did not mean that they advised sitting backing and waiting for the enemy to attack. Instead, they recommended besting the Viet Cong at their own guerrilla game through the selective employment of small numbers of fast-moving, well-equipped elite forces -- primed with the latest intelligence information -- for the purpose of eliminating enemy military targets while avoiding “collateral” damage. What is more, civilian “Other Warriors,” especially, favored going after Communist Party leaders in South Vietnam -- the nodal points of the insurgency -- either by inducing them to defect or, failing that, prying them from their hiding places among the population.

In June 1955, US Army Major Lamar McFadden Prosser drew the lesson from the Viet Minh’s victory over the French in the First Indochina War that aggressiveness and mobility would be the key to the anti-Communist side’s emerging victorious in a future iteration of the Vietnam conflict. According to Prosser, the French had lost to the Viet Minh “because they committed their strength in small, ineffective combat groups and because they relied upon modern materiel and modern means of movement in terrain
where they could not be exploited.”81 From this, he concluded that the only way to fight
the Communists effectively in the future would be to adopt “their own type of warfare,”
which involved tracking the enemy down in the jungles and villages and ambushing them
at night. Prosser advised against a defensive strategy of “fortified positions,” which left
“all initiative and freedom of maneuver to the enemy.”82 A successful anti-Communist
strategy would necessarily be an offensive “seek-and-search operation, fought mainly off
the roads and rolling gradually northward in combination with airborne and motorized
operations...”83

At a time when American combat troops were heavily involved in Vietnam,
Victor Krulak and Francis West reiterated the view that the best way to defeat the Viet
Cong guerrilla was “by seeking to outdo him at his own game” through relentless
offensive action. The Marines’ concept of operations was much more localized than
Major Prosser’s, however, reflecting their concern with linking military measures to
population security. Tactically, Krulak favored conducting around-the-clock “saturation
patrols” of various sizes and establishing “sniper posts” in order to engage the guerrillas
whenever they moved.84 Following a bloody attack by a combined force of Viet Cong
and North Vietnamese Army troops, Francis West’s squad of CAP Marines bemoaned
their “lack of tactical aggressiveness” and insisted upon carrying “the fight to the enemy.”
From that point on, instead of trying to defend the central complex of hamlets, they

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81 Lamar McFadden Prosser, “The Bloody Lessons of Indochina,” Army Combat Forces Journal (June
82 Ibid., 29.
83 Ibid., 29-30.
84 Krulak, “Address to Naval War College,” 21.
launched patrols into Communist-infested hamlets and laid ambushes on the river which bounded their village. In the words of the new Marine squad leader: “The VC had to learn fear.” Only then would they leave the village alone.85

In answer to skeptics who questioned the allies’ ability to operate effectively within the enemy’s domain, General Krulak stressed the former’s technological and numerical advantages “in the guerrilla game.” For instance, his US Marines had effective means of communications, “Starlight” devices that helped them to see in the dark, “superb” air and artillery support, and helicopter transport that allowed them to move “at 100 miles an hour.” Communist troops, on the other hand, were stuck in the Dark Ages of military technology. Their weaponry was mostly of inferior quality; and their transportation, communications, and surveillance systems were largely dependent on fallible human beings. “The Viet Cong is never safe from being surrounded,” Krulak claimed. He never knew when the Marines and their South Vietnamese allies would swoop down out of the sky without warning and obliterate him. And when the allies killed a Viet Cong soldier, this was of no small matter to the Communist insurgency, for the individual Viet Cong guerrilla, the essence of the revolution in the South, could not easily be replaced. His formation took years of indoctrination, training and politico-military experience. Admittedly, the supply of North Vietnamese manpower was virtually inexhaustible, but the Communist policy of substituting fresh recruits from the

85 West, The Village, 51.
North for indigenous Viet Cong fighters would eventually prove counterproductive to the revolutionary cause.⁸⁶

Like their Marine counterparts, Army advocates of pacification often stressed the offensive aspects of the “Other War.” In the midst of describing a model clear-and-hold operation, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Mack indicated that hamlet fortifications, such as barbed wire entanglements, were to be viewed as an “interim security measure” until such time as allied security forces were prepared to directly confront the guerrillas. Furthermore, boundaries designating areas of responsibility were not to be considered as defensive perimeters, but rather control markers within which “offensive patrolling” would take place by small-units ordered to remain in “continuous contact with the Viet Cong.” As the holding operation reached maturity, Mack envisioned that the allied unit’s zone of responsibility would “become saturated with patrols,” and the insurgents would lose their capability either to coalesce into a large force or to plan strikes against a “constantly moving target.”⁸⁷

In a 1969 article, Richard McMahon denied that clear-and-hold strategy failed to provide the means for defeating the enemy. Once allied pacifiers had “established positive security and control” over one area, they were not supposed to stop there; they were to move forward, “slowly but inexorably” gathering in the remaining population. Not only would this gradual expansion of the circle of allied territorial control prove “extremely annoying to the insurgent,” it was in keeping with the American military

⁸⁶ Ibid., 21-2.
tradition of maintaining the tactical and strategic offensive. An “indirect approach” to winning the war did not mean that allied forces had to “sit and wait for the enemy to attack.” True, “large-scale search-and-destroy operations” would no longer be favored. Yet, US and GVN units would lay ambushes and send out patrols beyond the defensive belt, “constantly seeking” out enemy formations, supply depots and operational bases, and “every effort would be made to interdict the insurgent’s supply lines” with aircraft, artillery, and “small airborne strike teams.”

For the purpose of rounding-up the Viet Cong local forces, Major General Harris Hollis favored “a cavalry reconnaissance style of fighting” over more conventional infantry tactics. The 25th Infantry Division commander encouraged his lightly equipped forces to develop a capability for moving rapidly from place to place, relying on near-term intelligence on the enemy’s location and exerting constant pressure while avoiding “set-piece” battles.” The inspiration for this “jitterbugging” technique, involving repetitive airmobile insertions, came from General Ewell, who had used it successfully in the eastern Mekong Delta. Hollis claimed that his own troops “danced all over the division area ... with deftness and speed” without sacrificing their ability to call for reinforcements. Typically, “if no contact occurred after 30 minutes” following an initial airmobile landing, they were in the air again moving toward the next likely Viet Cong location.

With respect to South Vietnamese Regional and Popular Forces, Colonel C.E. Jordan -- chief of territorial security for CORDS -- stressed the importance of “aggressive” interdiction operations, especially at night. Although Popular Forces were generally considered as incapable of conducting offensive operations on their own, Jordan nonetheless believed that a strategy of active defense was most appropriate for this units. During the day, patrols would conduct “reconnaissance to discover signs of enemy entry into the hamlet area,” and after nightfall, the PF platoon would divide into ambush teams with the goal of “interdict[ing] enemy routes around the periphery of the hamlets.” Jordan acknowledged that his approach would not satisfy advocates of continual “‘aggressive’ patrolling.” But he likened a PF ambush team at night to a “successful deer hunter ... who chooses a good blind and awaits his prey.”

Some government-sponsored sympathized with the military’s desire for an offensive orientation to the “Other War.” Still, they tended to emphasize the difficulties of taking the offensive in an environment such as Vietnam’s, which demanded good intelligence, a well-developed plan, specially trained and equipped troops, and the know-how to exploit enemy tactical and operational vulnerabilities. One offensive-minded analyst at the RAND Corporation, James Farmer, commented in a 1963 article on the problem of identifying guerrillas, which he equated to “trying to tell who is a Republican and who is a Democrat” solely based upon appearance. He also chided American

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90 Ibid., 9-11.
military advisors in Vietnam for sometimes attaching “more importance” to aggressive patrolling than to “intelligence work and preparation for successful operations.”

The Hudson Institute’s Raymond Gastil lamented the US Army’s predilection for combating guerrilla forces through sheer manpower and firepower, and proposed an alternative strategy of “defeating insurgencies with small numbers of troops with low firepower.” In his estimation, the use of “elite Special Forces-type units,” operating in the role of counter-guerrillas, offered both political and military advantages. It enabled the US “to help local governments without exciting... intensive [domestic] opposition.” In addition, an “elite force approach” was more efficient in terms of resources than the prevailing attrition strategy, and its reduced firepower requirements and superior targeting capability would likely result in fewer “mistakes, with both their real and property losses.”

Having conducted a comprehensive study of the “Viet Cong system” in Dinh Tuong province, RAND’s David Elliott and W.A. Stuart recommended a strategy of exploiting specific weak points in the Communist politico-military edifice. “Despite its strengths and its successes,” they found the provincial Viet Cong organization to be “bureaucratic and cumbersome.” Its over-reliance on “intensive communications” left its command network “sensitive to interventions.” On the political side, the Communist emphasis on control meant that mid-level cadres played an essential role in keeping grassroots activities in line with higher-level objectives and directives. If these

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91 Farmer, Counterinsurgency: Viet-Nam, 20-1.
92 Gastil, Counterinsurgency and South Vietnam, 6-7.
facilitator-communicators could be eliminated, the system would break down until hard-to-find replacements were procured.\(^93\) On the military side, a “delicate balance” existed among Viet Cong guerrilla, local, and main force units. Guerrilla forces depended on local and main force units to protect them from government regulars. Communist main forces, for their part, relied on local and guerrilla forces to provide them with a “structure of fortified resting places, stored supplies, and logistic support, not to mention intelligence and security.” From these observations the RAND social scientists concluded that an allied operational strategy focusing on the “infrastructure” of fortified resting places would disrupt the Viet Cong’s carefully layered arrangement of forces.\(^94\)

“Other Warriors” of all stripes recognized that attacking the military appendage of the Communist Vietnamese insurgency would not destroy the beast; the allies would have to strike at its political nerve center. Recalling the “emergency” in British Malaya, the US Army’s PROVN report indicated that insurgents there had endured and adjusted to “almost all losses,” except the “death of key individuals,” who collected the money, arms, supplies, recruits, and intelligence upon which the guerrillas maintained themselves. In the case of South Vietnam, it recommended the establishment in every province of the country a police program “specifically designed to neutralize the communist subversive cell structure.”\(^95\)


\(^94\) Ibid., 103-4.

\(^95\) PROVN, vol. 1, 73-4.
Both the US Army and the Marine Corps produced specialists on the tactical aspects of anti-infrastructure operations. According to Army Lieutenant Colonel Richard McMahon’s territorial security plan, as the allied pacification steamroller advanced, intelligence staffs were responsible for providing commanders with the names of insurgents, insurgent family members, and Viet Cong sympathizers, so that they could be quickly “isolated” from the civilian population.\textsuperscript{96} Captain T.M. Pratt III described the strict methods employed by the Marines to quash the enemy’s political and intelligence-gathering apparatus in Quang Nam province. These included whisking Viet Cong suspects and their families out of their villages at virtually a moment’s notice, developing comprehensive censuses of the local population that “underwent constant revision,” and “closely monitor[ing]” the people, produce, and goods that traveled to and from the marketplace.\textsuperscript{97} From his early experience in Hau Nghia Province, Army Phoenix advisor Stuart Herrington concluded that “sweep” operations were generally ineffective in uprooting the deeply entrenched Communist apparatus. However proficient the allies became at tracking down illegal cadre in their bunkers, “this was simply not the way to defeat an organization that consisted overwhelmingly of legal cadre.” A partial answer to this dilemma, in Herrington’s view, lay in the assiduous cultivation of Viet Cong defectors, who could give up their former comrades to the allied side.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{96} McMahon, “Indirect Approach,” 61.
\textsuperscript{98} Stuart Herrington, Silence Was A Weapon: The Vietnam War In The Villages (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982), 111.
If anything, civilian representatives of US agencies in Vietnam expressed more enthusiasm for the anti-VC infrastructure campaign than their military counterparts. According to CORDS chief Robert Komter, the political character of the “Other War” made it “essential not only to protect and rebuild the GVN’s local administration but to neutralize that of the enemy.” In testimony before Congress in June 1970, regional CORDS administrator John Paul Vann described the origins of the two main American-supported programs designed to deal directly with the threat posed by grassroots Communist organizers: Chieu Hoi and Phoenix. In the first case, the idea was to neutralize the enemy infrastructure -- by capturing insurgents or inducing them “to rally” -- rather than by employing military action or special assassination squads to kill them. The motive was entirely practical, since a Viet Cong agent’s “capture or defection imperil[ed] the entire [local] enemy organization.” The allies could exploit him not just for the intelligence he could provide but for his propaganda value as well.

Vann explained the genesis of the Phoenix program in terms of both efficiency and strategy. “Distressed at the redundancy, at the overlapping responsibilities, and the very great gaps of coverage on the part of the various intelligence agencies,” he had pushed in 1967 for the formation in III Corps of District Intelligence and Operations Coordination Centers (DIOCC’s), which placed all of the allied agencies responsible for intelligence under one roof. Because Vann and like-minded US advisors had been concerned about an overemphasis on tactical military intelligence, the new district intelligence centers

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directed their attention toward the “enemy’s government or secret government apparatus which was actually controlling and calling the shots for the enemy’s tactical units.”\textsuperscript{101}

Although not begun on a nationwide basis until mid-1968, the Phoenix program was considered by most government-sponsored social scientists as a sign that the allies were beginning to recognize the political nature of the war as well as the crucial role of each side’s organizational apparatus in maintaining the military momentum. “Unlike military strategy,” claimed RAND’s R. Michael Pearce, “where the insurgents may retreat temporarily in order to advance later, the Viet Cong cannot reverse the direction of its political activities in the rural villages, since that would be tantamount to an open admission of defeat and would destroy the foundation upon which the whole revolutionary war in South Vietnam is built.”\textsuperscript{102} Unfortunately, the reality of Phoenix -- as Jeffrey Race experienced it in Long An province -- did not exactly accord with the theory. Not only were the majority of “neutralized” Communist cadres low level operators, but their discovery was most often the accidental result of routine military operations rather than discriminating intelligence work. Nevertheless, had the program been implemented earlier and more faithfully, Race argued in 1972, Phoenix “would have made it possible to break the endless cycle by which revolutionary main-force units were ground down time after time only to be rebuilt through efforts of the Party apparatus working among the population.”\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 119.
\textsuperscript{102} R. Michael Pearce, \textit{The Insurgent Environment} (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, May 1969), 106.
\textsuperscript{103} Jeffrey Race, \textit{War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province} (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1972), 237.
Thus, even Jeffrey Race, one of the most insightful and skeptical of all US “Other Warriors,” failed to realize the paradox in a counterinsurgency strategy that called for protecting some Vietnamese people and eliminating other Vietnamese people. While Phoenix may have been tactically ineffective, it was strategically dubious. It represented one aspect of Americans’ long held desire to “have their cake and eat it too,” to both embrace and destroy the foreign peoples they confronted on the imperial frontier. In fact, the overall allied strategy of “neutralizing” the South Vietnamese Communist Party leadership -- if not the Phoenix program per se -- appears to have been more “effective” than Race thought. Relatively few Viet Cong cadres emerged in 1975 to take their place in the ruling class of a unified Vietnam.\textsuperscript{104} Nevertheless, the fratricidal village war, in which both sides admittedly engaged, precluded the kind of grassroots nationbuilding that many “Other Warriors” claimed was their ultimate objective.

\textsuperscript{104} Of course, the Communist high command bore a large responsibility for these losses by ordering the bloody offensives of 1968 and 1972.
CHAPTER 8

MANAGING THE "OTHER WAR"

Among US pacification and development experts, basic philosophical differences were compounded by disagreements over how the "Other War" in Vietnam should be managed. The most significant managerial issue concerned the nationbuilding and counterinsurgency responsibilities of the United States. In short, how much of the burden of constructing a viable and secure Republic of Vietnam should fall on America, as South Vietnam's primary ally and the leader of the "free world"? And how much should be reserved for the South Vietnamese regime and people to deal with as best they could? Beyond this, "Other Warriors" argued over the proper methodology for measuring allied progress in pacification and development. Was this best determined by the occasional, subjective assessments of experienced US field reporters? Or was a regular, standardized, and statistically-based reporting system more likely to provide a reliable, composite picture of "Other War" trends? Finally, military officers, bureaucrats, and academics were of two minds concerning the best mechanism for organizing allied nationbuilding and counterinsurgency programs. The fact that the "hearts and minds" campaign was highly localized argued for a decentralized
organizational approach that permitted US and GVN administrators in the provinces a
great deal of autonomy and flexibility. Yet the proliferation of bureaucratic agencies
involved in the “Other War” -- with sometimes overlapping responsibilities, but different
operating procedures and chains of command -- suggested that a centralized organization
was needed to bring order and focus to the melange of allied pacification and
development activities.

America’s Responsibility

On the one hand, most “Other War” advocates believed that America had a moral
obligation -- not only to the Vietnamese people, but to its own republican ideals -- to stick
by the GVN as long as it continued the fight for an independent, non-Communist nation.
On the other hand, most paid obeisance to the idea that the “Other War’s” outcome was
ultimately up to the people of South Vietnam. Americans were in Southeast Asia
primarily to provide advice and support to indigenous nationbuilding and
counterinsurgency. The Republic of Vietnam was a sovereign country, and the US was
not, and did not wish to be, a colonial power. More practically, many noted that the
proud and xenophobic Vietnamese would hardly risk their lives for a nation built by
foreigners in the image of some faraway land.

Complicating the “Other Warrior” perspective was the fact that a majority of
pacification experts, until quite late in the war, considered the GVN military-political-
administrative structure to be rotten to the core. Thus many set aside their qualms about
intervention in another nation’s internal affairs as well as their unease with Americans’
compulsion to “take charge” of situations that did not conform to their sense of what was
right. Some “Other Warriors” went so far as to demand that Washington compel the Saigon government either to stick to the reformist path or to leave the pacification arena to the Americans. Others argued for a more indirect approach. The GVN, they proposed, should retain the appearance of control over the “Other War,” while US experts unobtrusively pulled the strings at all levels. This behind-the-scenes manipulation was justified, they believed, as long as the United States stuck to its “noble” objective of serving the Vietnamese people rather than following some nefarious imperialistic design.

According to the US Army’s PROVN report, the American people should be under no illusions regarding the nature of their role in South Vietnam. Like adoptive parents saddled with a troubled child, they had to realize that deep-seated problems could not be resolved overnight. Indeed, in the case of Vietnam, the final results of corrective actions undertaken in the present might not be apparent for a generation or more, even given “the best program of action that minds, funds and technology might devise.” Nevertheless, the “expenditure of national effort” for such a purpose was “mandatory,” not just for reasons of national security, but because it would nourish the American spirit. “Developing South Vietnam,” wrote Army analysts, “affords the opportunity to do something about developing ourselves.” The United States must promote security, prosperity, and democracy abroad in order to maintain these values at home.¹

The US government had to alter its paternalistic methods, however, if the Republic of Vietnam were to be transformed into the kind of nation about which

Americans could be proud. It had to refrain from coddling South Vietnamese authorities and begin applying consistent, across-the-board pressure on the GVN to undertake the reform measures that were necessary for competing with, and eventually defeating, the Communists. Providing good advice was no longer enough; Americans had to take complete responsibility for their fledgling’s behavior. US officials working in Vietnam ought not function “without authority and at counterpart sufferance.” They must direct, not suggest. They must represent the interests and objectives of the US government, rather than those of the government in Saigon.

Army analysts expressed their frustration with the consequences of American “political restraint” in the 1950s and early ‘60s, which had supposedly “foreclosed responsible involvement in GVN political development.” In the past, American advisors had had both hands tied behind their backs, unable either to goad reluctant Vietnamese officials into action or to veto measures they considered unsound. What was required, in order to increase US influence, was a new interventionist apparatus “geared to influence any Vietnamese leader -- at any political level and within any organizational structure -- to contribute to the achievement of responsive government.”

Composed of American representatives from the ambassador in Saigon to the district advisor in the countryside,

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2 According to the PROVN report: “Discriminate US involvement in GVN affairs -- ranging from skillful diplomatic pressures, through the application of politico-economic leverage, to US unilateral execution of critical programs -- is essential.” Since Saigon had shown itself “either unwilling or unable to accomplish successfully many requisite tasks ... , the US must exercise its influence to evoke GVN performance.” Ibid., 6.
4 PROVN, vol. 1, 75-6.
this “civil-military scaffolding” would exist “alongside the weak GVN structure.” Such a framework should “be capable of helping when possible, pushing when necessary and going it alone when circumstances dictate.” It should also permit US advisors either to “introduce resources into selected points of the GVN structure to press or reinforce official actions” that they favored or, alternatively, to hold back American aid in the event that positive measures failed to achieve the desired result.\(^7\)

To those who worried that an authoritative role for US officials smacked of neo-colonialism, PROVN authors responded that “real world” circumstances and capabilities dictated that the United States take the lead. America was already “too heavily involved” in Vietnam to reject the possibility that “direct influence in GVN affairs” might turn a dismal situation around. Besides, if Americans were defeated in Vietnam, they would suffer the global consequences, no matter the pains to which US officials had gone in their respect for “Vietnamese sovereignty.”\(^8\) Two points had to be kept in mind when considering the possibility of a more forceful American role in Vietnamese affairs. First, the current “self-limiting role” of US advisors had not improved the GVN’s politico-military effectiveness. And second, the intent of US policy in South Vietnam was not to take over the country, but “to orient an imperfect system toward the legitimate aspirations of its people.”\(^9\)

Good intentions and an aggressive attitude were not enough to guarantee positive results. Americans had to be prepared to “perform as social innovators” and model

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\(^7\) PROVN, vol. 2, 2-19.  
\(^8\) Ibid., 4-23.  
\(^9\) Ibid., 2-21/2 and 2-40.
nationbuilders. Degraded by modernizing pressures and Communist subversion, South Vietnamese society needed to be rebuilt from the village level on up. Because members of the GVN elite refused to recognize this reality, Americans had to intervene on behalf of the South Vietnamese majority, employing their government’s political and material leverage to produce needed social reform.\textsuperscript{10} True, Americans were “not well prepared to assist [South Vietnam] through a social revolution” that they did not wholly understand. Yet PROVN authors expressed confidence that the elements of a successful modern society could be identified and transferred from one national group to another.\textsuperscript{11} All that was necessary to begin this process was a “cohesive, farsighted and forcefully directed” US support structure.\textsuperscript{12}

When it came to the management of specific “Other War” programs, U.S. Army commanders expressed divergent opinions as to the proper role for American advisors and their South Vietnamese protégés. Lieutenant General Fred Weyand, the II Field Force commander, lamented the fact that the United States had not forced the GVN to take strong measures to overhaul the local administration of pacification programs. American officials needed the authority to hire and fire “key civilian and military officials in the GVN bureaucracy,” in order to root out endemic corruption and enhance “the low-caliber of [military] leadership.” In future interventions of the Vietnam-type, Weyand advised, the United States ought first to negotiate an agreement with the host

\textsuperscript{10} PROVN, vol. 1, 54-5.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 55.
government, allowing Americans to take the lead on matters of policy “vital to the success of our total effort.”

Lieutenant General Melvin Zais, by contrast, “insisted” upon determining from local Vietnamese leaders “what they wanted” and only given them “help where and when it was needed.” Furthermore, he rejected the idea of force-feeding American security and development notions to the South Vietnamese. Instead, he tried to bring out the best in the GVN through a policy of sympathetic understanding. Essentially, Zais believed that “the secret” to promoting US pacification goals was establishing the right kind of “human relationships and attitudes.” Americans had to show their respect for the South Vietnamese as individuals, both in public and private, and communicate to them “our sincere desire to secure his surroundings” and improve “his welfare and future.”

With Vietnamization in full swing, Lieutenant General Michael Davison, head of the Third Regional Assistance Command, described his position as part consultant, part liaison, and part supply officer. Rather than dictating the course of operations in his

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13 Given the “ultra-sensitive issue of sovereignty,” Weyand emphasized the importance of securing such an agreement as early as possible, when the “US bargaining position” was strongest its “assistance ... most urgently needed.” U.S. Department of the Army, Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development, “Debriefing of Senior Officers: LTG Fred C. Weyand,” 4 October 1968, US Army War College Library, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 10-11.


15 While discussing aid for I Corps territorial forces, for example, Zais and his XXIV Corps staff struggled to “understood the differences in their origins, culture, and background and ... did not try to shape them in our image. We only tried to help them perform, stressing those virtues which they possessed, rather than searching for differences which many other have interpreted as weaknesses -- erroneously so.” US Army, “Debriefing of Senior Officers: LTG Zais,” 32.

16 Ibid., 34.
sector, he attempted to render support for whatever plans his GVN colleagues devised. At most, he served as a “sounding board” for the “operational ideas” of the South Vietnamese corps commander. Occasionally, Davison raised “particular points for consideration,” but the final decision was left to his Vietnamese counterpart. As Davison saw it, his most important advisory role was to “make certain that US operations” complemented what the ARVN was doing as well as to provide the South Vietnamese with the resources they needed to achieve allied security goals.  

Several rungs down the American advisory ladder, Army Lieutenant Stuart Herrington expressed more ambivalence regarding the Vietnamization process. As a new Phoenix advisor in Hau Nghia, he had felt “disturbed” by his superior’s contention that Americans should take over the job of eliminating the Vietcong political organization since “the Vietnamese were not up to the task.” Yet, less than three weeks into his initial assignment, Herrington had become hopelessly frustrated with his Vietnamese counterparts. Leaving the job of Phoenix liaison to his sergeant, he created a new position for himself working with Chieu Hoi defectors that required little interaction with GVN officials. “As an American military man, schooled in the direct, aggressive approach to problem-solving,” he was determined to crack apart the Communist infrastructure “with or without the help of the Vietnamese.” In retrospect, however, Herrington regretted his decision to go it alone, returning to his original faith in

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19 Ibid., 48.
Vietnamization. Much of such “success” as Phoenix had achieved could be attributed “to the American propensity to take charge rather than to any great skill on the part of our advisory personnel to patiently teach our counterparts,” but this was “a second-best solution” to the problem of counterinsurgency.\(^\text{20}\)

US Marines in Vietnam also struggled over the competing goals of political sovereignty and military-administrative effectiveness. In the March 1966, Colonel Norman R.K. Stanford compared the interventionist role of the Marines at mid-century with that of their forebears in Central America and the Caribbean several decades before, who also strove “fearlessly ... to put a restive and untidy world in order.” But, for better or worse, the international situation was different now from days when the US “could just send a gunboat” and resolve a crisis in some banana republic. In Vietnam, the American military was politically hamstrung. It could neither establish a colonial-style occupation authority to complement and assist American-led security forces as it had in Cuba and Haiti in the early 1900s; nor could it depend on the small and inefficient corps of native civilian officials to do the job.\(^\text{21}\)

As commander of the Fleet Marine Force Pacific, Lieutenant General Victor Krulak exhibited the same wobbly interventionism found in many Corps officers with Vietnam responsibilities. On the one hand, he experienced great frustration with the slow pace of the GVN’s nationbuilding effort and believed his Marines could do a better job. “I really do not look to see the ARVN come around to doing what they ought to do” in

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 198.
the area of pacification, he wrote to Defense Secretary Robert McNamara in January
1967, “without greater compulsion than is now being exerted on them.” On the other
hand, he conceded that the insurgency was primarily a Vietnamese problem and that the
US could only push its ally so far in the direction of reform before toppling the weak
Saigon regime. South Vietnam was “not a satellite,” Krulak told an audience at the US
Army War College a month after his letter to McNamara; it was “a sovereign country.”
Furthermore, it was up to the Vietnamese to win the war -- albeit with American help.
The MACV commander could not simply order the GVN to abide by American plans,
tactics, and operational methods. Consequently, the success of this delicate alliance
relationship depended on Americans’ “ability to influence and guide, to earn respect and
confidence; in short, and paradoxically, to lead without authority.”

Although Krulak seemed to take a middle position on the
sovereignty/effectiveness issue, other Marines came down closer to one pole or the other.
In his description of pacification in I Corps, Lieutenant Colonel David Clement noted that
it was “explicit” command policy “to support the authority and the reputation of [South
Vietnamese] public officials.” In some cases, this meant acquiescing in GVN decisions
that, from an American perspective, appeared counter-productive to the war effort. By
contrast, Lieutenant Colonel William Corson called for strong resistance to any South

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24 Commenting on the dismissal of two village mayors friendly to US Marines, Clement chose to look on the bright side: “The first twinges of regret for the downfall of two spunky friends soon gives way to the realization that political leaders must inevitably change, and that the follow-on leaders are likely to be even more capable and dedicated than their predecessors.” Ibid., 24.
Vietnamese official who stood in the way of American pacification goals. GVN bureaucrats must be given two choices: either accept US ideas for combating the insurgency or risk being by-passed by American soldier-statesmen determined to help the Vietnamese masses rebuild their society from the ground up. In the final analysis, the construction of a South Vietnamese nation could “not depend upon the Vietnamese military or political hierarchy for its successful implementation.” As Combined Action Platoon commander, Corson had chosen “to go it alone, relying on the Marines under my command and dealing directly with the end object of pacification -- the peasant.” This posture of unilateralism, he argued, was appropriate for other aspects of American policy in Vietnam, too. Americans ought to directly control the distribution of aid in the countryside. They should take command of ARVN battalions, and they should place South Vietnamese Regional and Popular Forces under the aegis of a massive, US-sponsored CAP program.

The Combined Action Program served as a focal point for the expression of complex beliefs regarding the US military’s role in South Vietnamese counterinsurgency and nationbuilding operations. He acknowledged to Secretary McNamara in 1967 that “more [US] fighting men” were needed to counter an upsurge in Communist terrorism, but these soldiers should be employed primarily for the purposes of “leadership and example.” Most of those protecting the people “in the hamlets, day and night” must be

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26 Ibid., 160.
27 Ibid., 272.
Vietnamese ... not Americans." According to Krulak, a greatly expanded Combined Action Program provided Americans the opportunity take charge of the war effort without incurring the political liability of appearing to direct the entire show. The Marines in Vietnam had developed a “leadership-by-indirection formula in the ‘Combined Action Company’ arrangement ... with the Vietnamese technically in charge, but the Marines, by example and influence alone, causing the right things to happen.” As Colonel Corson described it, however, the power relationship in CAP villages was more definite. “Outside of combat the Marine sergeant and the PF platoon leader share[ed] responsibility” for their combined unit, but in combat “the Marine sergeant assume[d] complete command of the CAP and its subordinate elements.” Thus while US commanders were under orders not to command Vietnamese troops in battle, the combined action formula allowed Marines to control the style and tempo of security operations.

In comparison with the CAP program, most Marine Corps writings on civic action were less concerned with efficiency and getting things done the American way. Major General J.M. (Jonas) Platt, III MAF’s chief of staff, emphasized the indigenous component of military development projects as well as the need to rid American soldiers of their arrogant, anti-Vietnamese attitudes. Civic action, he wrote in 1970, was “not a

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28 US troops would continue to be there to show the Vietnamese how to do the job; they could also help to motivate them and, in some cases, even engage in combat with them. “But the major manpower contribution to the guerrilla war and Revolutionary Development should be theirs.” Victor H. Krulak, “Letter to Robert S. McNamara,” 4 January 1967, Personal Papers Collection, Victor H. Krulak Papers, PC # 486, Box 2, Location 1A27, Correspondence 1967-68, US Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington, DC, 5.
give-away program.” A firm believer in the idea of self-help, Platt was convinced that when “villagers themselves build the school, it becomes their school -- not ours -- and the enemy may think pretty hard before they destroy it.” Leaving the essential planning and implementation of civic action projects to the Vietnamese did not come easily to Americans, however. Being “naturally action-oriented,” some US military men believed they could more efficiently carry out the work of pacification themselves.31 But such “communication of contempt” for the native people “not only undermine[d] civic action,” it resulted in the unnecessary loss of “American lives” since the Vietnamese people would have little incentive to endanger themselves in order to assist US troops. Consequently, Platt argued in favor of an expanding the Marine Corps’ Personal Response Program so that every US soldier acquired “a general understanding” of the Vietnamese way of life and thought twice before violating their host country’s customs.32 Some USAID representatives believed that pacification was basically a GVN responsibility, while others emphasized the myriad impediments to Vietnamese development that only a combination of American assistance and pressure could supposedly surmount. For example, two veterans of the Strategic Hamlet program, Rufus Phillips and John O’Donnell, evaluated the American to the early pacification

31 General Krulak expressed this belief, contending that Americans were “more aggressive, more resourceful, more compassionate and less venal” than South Vietnamese officials and, thus, better suited to the civic action mission. See “Address at the University of California, San Diego,” 30 April 1970, Personal Papers Collection, Victor H. Krulak Papers, PC # 486, Box 1, Location 1A27, Speech File 1970, US Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington, DC, 33.
32 The Marine Corps Personal Response Program was an in-country course designed to instill within often parochial young Americans -- many of whom were acquiring an active dislike for the Vietnamese -- a basic understanding of the customs, habits, characteristics, and peculiarities of the Vietnamese people. See J.M. Platt, “Military Civic Action,” Marine Corps Gazette 54 (September 1970): 25-6.
effort quite differently. In a 1964 memorial, Phillips declared that pacification was not a job for “foreign Americans.” The Vietnamese were a deeply xenophobic people, “particularly in home front politics.” More importantly, a foreign-built nation would have little meaning to the local population. “Americans,” he contended, “could lead the Vietnamese to build a beautiful non-Communist Vietnam, but they would never think that it was theirs, nor voluntarily risk their lives, fortune and sacred honor to defend it.”

From his experience as a provincial representative in Kien Hoa, John O’Donnell retained a more positive impression of the US impact on rural pacification. “The presence of Americans at the lower levels,” he wrote in 1967, gave local leaders the courage to vie against a centuries-old tradition of governmental centralization and experiment with reforms suited to their particular situation.

William Nighswonger and his AID superior, George Tanham, also held different views on the proper extent of American involvement in South Vietnam’s internal affairs. Although he conceded that the “substitution of the American government apparatus [for the Vietnamese] would miss the whole logic of the pacification enterprise,” Nighswonger did not find the American role in pacification and development matters at all overbearing.

On the contrary, US civilian and military officials had not sufficiently employed their

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powers to effect necessary reforms.\textsuperscript{36} At this time in history, nationbuilding in the Third World required “an intimate American involvement.” Thus, when considering the righteousness of their country’s activities in places like Vietnam, US citizens should rely on their sense of America’s basic values and obligations and not fallback on “the easy legalisms of ‘self-determination’ and ‘non-intervention.’”\textsuperscript{37} While justifying and even celebrating America’s role in the “war without guns,” Tanham stressed that US province representatives were intended to be “advisers and teachers, not doers.”\textsuperscript{38} Like Rufus Phillips, Tanham chided Americans in Vietnam who strove “to take over and do the job themselves” instead of taking “a back seat” and allowing local officials to drive.\textsuperscript{39} He did not mean to imply, however, that US officials should refrain from imparting values and institutions to the Vietnamese. Indeed, if the US mission to Vietnam were to have “any meaning,” Americans had to share their “political heritage with the Vietnamese,” even while allowing them “the freedom to develop their own political and economic systems and social institutions.”\textsuperscript{40}

Jan Vanderbie -- a member of the final class of independent AID field officers -- believed strongly in the US provincial representative’s role as a catalyst for grassroots social change. At the same time, he harbored doubts about the ability of US advisory

\textsuperscript{36} With regard to pacification, he wrote, “the many personal and parochial interests that have threatened to divert the announced ambition of every South Vietnamese regime since Diem” made success nearly impossible. Thus, only “more American pressure, at hundreds of pressure points,” on the GVN administrative structure could “move the [Saigon government] towards its announced goals.” Ibid., 230.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 256.


\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 132.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 135. See “Some Insurgency Lessons from Southeast Asia,” Orbis 16, no. 3 (Fall 1972): 657.
personnel to engage the Vietnamese in American-style nationbuilding. Vanderbie’s memoir of his experiences in Quang Nam and Quang Tri is, above all, a paean to the “provreps,” whose deeds in Vietnam had demonstrated that “twentieth century citizens of a highly industrialized society [could] still respond to the needs of a rural society on a different continent.”

According to this idealistic former AID employee, his assignment in Vietnam was to “out-revolutionize the Viet Cong,” “to prove that the American revolutionary spirit was still alive and relevant.” Although official Vietnamese obstructionism and US disorganization did not make the going easy, Vanderbie persevered and triumphed in small ways by “finding ways of working outside the system.” In his end of tour report, however, Vanderbie feared that the “provreps” efforts would ultimately be for naught -- unless Washington found a way to purge the rotten ranks of GVN officialdom.

On the other hand, he seemed unsure whether an American-directed bureaucratic housecleaning could truly invigorate the anti-Communist cause.

The father of US pacification efforts in Vietnam, Edward Lansdale, imparted a similarly mixed message of realistic humility and interventionist zeal. While serving as

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42 Ibid., 16.
43 Ironically, this thoroughly modern American found himself “gradually drawn into the ancient Vietnamese game of conspiracy” in order to achieve US objectives and to help out the “Vietnamese little man who expected so little and who got even less.” Ibid., 18.
44 Ibid., 167.
45 Vanderbie’s memoir, for instance, contains a conversation he held in Saigon with a North Vietnamese refugee friend just prior to Vanderbie’s departure from Vietnam in 1968. Responding to the US prov rep’s plaintive inquiry as to why the Americans were losing the war, the Vietnamese man responded that Americans were constitutionally unable to cooperate with their allies in building a new society. “When two parties meet ... there can only be intercourse when there is give and take. Your culture only wants to give, generously indeed, but only give just the same.” Ibid., 137.
a Ambassador Lodge’s “executive agent” on pacification, he advised his fellow Americans to rein themselves in so as to avoid hijacking the nationbuilding project. “While doing what is essential in terms of initiating, supporting and monitoring,” Lansdale advised US officials “to avoid the appearance assuming the leadership” role.46 Not only was it difficult for “outsiders to induce changes in a political system,” but there were “severe constraints” in the form of anti-interventionist groups in the US that had to be taken into consideration. Forsaking the dream of remaking Vietnam in the American image, Lansdale listed “several things we simply cannot do.”47 As the Vietnamization policy was getting underway, Lansdale called for more American understanding of the GVN’s delicate political situation if the US were to retain any influence over Saigon’s actions.48

And yet in the early 1970s, the interventionist inside Lansdale seemed to return to the fore. He clearly emphasized, for example, how the holding of “open” presidential elections in South Vietnam in 1971 depended “on American initiative.” Furthermore, he suggested that the US government could no longer countenance “a military government in South Vietnam ... determined to continue an already interminable conflict while

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47 These included reforming the Vietnamese bureaucracy, creating a “democratically oriented” Vietnamese leadership, keeping the army out of politics, and fostering an electoral process that would “satisfy the desires of the people.” See “A Political Strategy for Vietnam,” December 1968, Vietnamese Conflict 1961-1975, United States Involvement, Box 28, File 694, Edward Lansdale Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford, CA, 16.
undertaking ever-expanding military thrusts.”49 Finally, in his 1972 memoir, he justified American interference in the politics of its Third World allies, as long as it was intended to benefit the people. “The mere fact that we are giving aid,” Lansdale contended, “already means that we are influencing the internal affairs of a country. So we need to use that influence consistently toward guiding the country to attain its true strength.”50 If this period of tutelage took longer than expected, Americans should remember how long it took for the Founding Fathers to put the US on a sound “political foundation” following the Revolutionary War. “People’s wars,” Lansdale asserted, were not for those “with short attention spans.”51

CORDS officials Robert Kommer, William Colby, and Stephen Young claimed that they and their predecessors in the pacification advising business had purposely followed a policy that allowed the GVN to be the primary architect of Vietnamese nationbuilding. For his part, Kommer frankly acknowledged that surrendering control over US security and development resources to a less-than-competent South Vietnamese bureaucracy had had significant negative repercussions; still, there had been “no other choice.”52 In his

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51 Ibid., 374.
52 Robert W. Kommer, “Clear, Hold and Rebuild,” Army (May 1970): 23. As American participation in the Vietnam War was drawing to a close, Kommer seemed to reject his earlier view of America’s interventionist role. He concluded in an August 1972 RAND report that “successful execution [of a pacification-oriented strategy in Vietnam] would probably have required far greater U.S. success in turning around the GVN than was ever achieved.” This, in turn, would have called for “a greater use of leverage” in reorganizing the South Vietnamese administration than “conventional-minded” American officials could permit themselves to employ. See Robert W. Kommer, Bureaucracy Does Its Thing: Institutional Constraints on U.S.-GVN Performance in Vietnam (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, August 1972), 149-50.
testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Colby elaborated on this point. The Communists, he declared, “try to portray the [South Vietnamese] Government as nothing more than a puppet of the United States. So, it becomes very important to the entire [Vietnam War] effort for the Government to stand on its own and to make its own decisions, and for us, correspondingly, to take an advisory position, but not a command position,” which admittedly, could sometimes be “tricky.”

According to Stephen Young, Americans provided the ideological and methodological inspiration for nationbuilding, whereas the GVN was responsible for putting the political revolution into effect. His own enthusiastic description of the allied pacification program, he acknowledged to SEADAG conferees in 1971, might lead some to suspect that “it had been sanctified by the holy writ of the American way.” But this was not the case. Although they “did draw on basic American lessons of local democracy and decentralization, recent political reforms had been “demanded by leading nationalist elements within the Vietnamese government.” Indeed, the American role in pacification was not as problematic as had once been. In the post-Tet era, the GVN was prepared to go along with American recommendations for political reform. Aside from the shock of the Communist assault itself, Young attributed current South Vietnamese

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tractability to intelligent, consistent, and long-range US policies with respect to Saigon that had created a legacy of trust in American leadership.\footnote{These included providing military support when the regime's support was “at its nadir,” insisting on the establishment of a constitutional form of government, and adding “power to the entire system of politics” so South Vietnam’s military rulers no longer equated a democratic opening with a decline in their political standing. Ibid., 95.}

On the one hand, government-sponsored social scientists generally advised their clients not to yield to the temptation either to take over the direction of the war or to usurp the nationbuilding mantle from the GVN. An opponent of the use of regular American military forces in the Vietnam conflict, RAND’s James Farmer argued in 1964 argued for the war to remain in GVN hands, since the Vietnamese people would likely sit out the conflict if they thought that the United States were “willing to accept the entire responsibility for the operation.”\footnote{James Farmer, \textit{Counterinsurgency: Principles and Practices in Viet-Nam} (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, Dec. 1964), 23.} On a deeper level, MIT’s Ithiel de Sola Pool cautioned his fellow Americans against heavy-handed meddling in Vietnamese affairs, believing them to be out of their element in a primitive, Third World environment.\footnote{“We find ourselves,” he told an academic audience at MIT in 1966, “forced to solve problems that arise in a kind of life [i.e., rural and peasant-oriented] that we as individuals have never experienced -- problems that arise in a state of development at the opposite end from ours on the scale of societies.” Ithiel de Sola Pool, “Village Violence and Pacification in Vietnam,” Edmund J. James Lecture on Government, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 29 February 1968, NLP/GEN/File 1, Indochina Archives, University of California, Berkeley, 3.}

On the other hand, like many of their military and civilian bureaucratic colleagues, social scientists did see a role for US forcefulness with respect to the Saigon government -- if their socio-political experiments were to turn out properly. Lucian Pye, an associate of Sola Pool’s at MIT, called for more US involvement in what he considered as a seminal Vietnamese nationbuilding endeavor, the Chieu Hoi defector...
program. Without additional Viet Cong cadres coming over to the anti-Communist side, Pye believed that the chances for South Vietnam’s political development were limited. Unfortunately, GVN officials did not seem to appreciate the political potential of these articulate, dynamic individuals, treating them as traitors rather than wayward brothers. Supposedly, the only available antidote for such shortsightedness was “a substantial investment of American personnel in its administration” of the Chieu Hoi program, which would “likely ... compel the GVN to face up to some of the long-range issues involved in” reintegrating various disaffected elements into South Vietnamese society.  

In addition, Pye called for the appointment of an American responsible for Chieu Hoi oversight -- with the “full backing” of the US ambassador in Saigon and a direct line to the South Vietnamese prime minister’s office.  

Despite their endorsement of US involvement in pacification, social scientists at the Institute for Defense Analysis (IDA) were less sanguine than Pye about America’s ability to reinvent Third World political systems. In their 1972 compilation of Vietnam pacification “lessons learned,” an IDA team headed by Chester Cooper advised future US pacifiers to harbor “no illusions” about their local government allies. Neither commitments nor assistance (material or otherwise) could “change the nature of the client regime or the society of the host country.” Therefore, decisions to intervene in a particular developing country, Cooper implied, should be based on an assessment of US national interests, and Americans should not expect substantial political reforms in return.

58 Lucian W. Pye, Observations on the Chieu Hoi Program (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, Jan. 1969), x.
59 Ibid., 30.
On the other hand, IDA also counseled American policymakers to “avoid the ‘tyranny of the weak.’” To do so, Cooper recommended being “able to operate within and even to use the ally’s own political and social system to assure that he keeps his side of the bargain”: to enlarge the regime’s popular appeal, and to shoulder its share of the costs of counterinsurgency warfare. But Americans should avoid becoming mired in Third World politics. “If our ally does not perform satisfactorily in our view and we have exhausted our means of influence or pressure,” IDA counseled, “we should have a credible capability to reduce or withhold further support and, if possible, disengage.”

Pacification Measurement

If US “Other Warriors” could never settle upon a definite role for themselves in the Vietnamese nationbuilding and counterinsurgency process, still less could they agree upon how to measure allied progress with regard to pacification and development. The fundamental issue here concerned the relative merits of qualitative versus quantitative (or subjective versus objective) reporting. From the beginning of US involvement in the “Other War,” bureaucratic higher-ups in Saigon and Washington besieged their military and civilian field representatives with demands for up-to-date situational information that demonstrated allied achievements in the countryside. What is more, as the pacification advisory and support structure was consolidated under MACV’s aegis, “Other War” managers, like CORDS director Robert Komer, began requesting their data in a standardized and numerical form that made them both computer digestible and

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graphically presentable. The most notable example of this reporting trend was the
Hamlet Evaluation System (HES), established in 1967.

Under this system, US district advisors assessed every hamlet in South Vietnam,
that was not entirely controlled by the Viet Cong, according to eighteen security
and development indicators. These scores were then combined to provide an overall hamlet
rating of from “A” (secure) to “E” (insecure). Many old-time “Other Warriors”
grumbled about this movement toward objectification, claiming that the views of
experienced field reporters could not be meaningfully reduced to a series of letter grades.
In response, pacification managers and systems analysts contended that busy
policymakers required some means of viewing the “Other War” in its entirety and at a
glance. They could not be expected to sift through the reports of 250-plus advisors, each
evaluating his small piece of the conflict according to his own lights. More importantly,
they needed some mechanism for ensuring that local Vietnamese officials were not
slacking off in their pacification efforts.

Aside from the qualitative versus quantitative split, “Other War” specialists
disagreed over a number of other issues relating to pacification measurement. For
instance, some questioned the reliability of the reporting data that was being fed into
MACV and Pentagon computers. Did US advisors have the time and training to
adequately evaluate every hamlet in their domain on a monthly basis? Did they rely
over-much on Vietnamese colleagues with a vested interest in continued pacification
progress? Others wondered whether HES had been properly constructed. Had
developers chosen the correct indicators to represent variations in hamlet-level
pacification and development? Were the indicators accorded their proper weight within overall hamlet scores? Were advisors given enough -- or too much -- latitude in evaluating indicator change? Finally, some “Other Warriors” worried that the whole advisory and support structure was being threatened by an ocean of computerized reports. Field workers could no longer devote themselves to their advisory responsibilities, and analysts and managers could not digest much of the data that was being produced.

In December 1964, RAND’s James Farmer defined the two basic elements of a “counterinsurgent ‘win’” in Vietnam. The first was a peaceful environment for the civilian population and for the state ensured primarily “by civil police and other civilian organizations” (as opposed to the regular army). The second element was the existence of a “viable government”: that is, one “capable of producing results.” Although Farmer seemed to know what victory in a counterinsurgency war looked like in the abstract, he was less certain about how to measure anti-Communist success. He himself admitted that his “Other War” indicators were, in some cases, either inconclusive or inconsistent with his stated counterinsurgent objectives. For example, the RAND analyst suggested that the “amount of area controlled” by the warring parties might be viewed as an indicator of civil security and governmental viability. On the other hand, he acknowledged that in Vietnam there were large chunks of territory “controlled in an absolute sense, by neither the Viet-Cong nor the government.”

Furthermore, although he claimed to be assessing governmental viability strictly in terms of efficiency, Farmer sought to ascertain the “morale” of Vietnamese civilians by measuring alterations in their standard of living.

61 Ibid., 5.
their propensity to provide information to government officials, and their willingness to
desert from one side or the other.\(^2\) Finally, despite his insistence that security in
counterinsurgency situations ought to be a police responsibility, Farmer measured
security by estimating the strengths and weaknesses of each side’s military.\(^3\)

Before the advent of standardized systems of pacification measurement, USAID
provincial representatives developed individual methods of evaluating the security and
development climate in rural South Vietnam. For example, in the memoir of his time as
a provincial representative in the early 1960s, William Nighswonger describes the
characteristics he identified with a pacified hamlet. These included the willingness of
local GVN cadre to sleep in their assigned hamlet, the number of men willing to bear
arms or serve as hamlet and village officials, the amount of intelligence data volunteered
by the people, and the trend in Chieu Hoi returnees. “Perhaps the best indicator,” he
found, “was the demonstrated willingness of hamlet people to defend themselves in a
Viet-Cong attack.”\(^4\) Nighswonger was critical of the allied penchant for conducting
superficial, one-dimensional analyses of security conditions in populated regions, which
failed to “include a variety of information, particularly from observation and interrogation
of the peasants.” In his opinion, the maps -- designating zones of government and Viet
Cong control -- sent to MACV and ARVN headquarters in Saigon failed to reflect the

\(^{2}\) Ibid., 5-7.
\(^{3}\) Ibid., 8.
\(^{4}\) By contrast, Nighswonger discounted reports of Communist military activity (or lack thereof) when
assessing a community’s security status. A high level of activity might be an indication of peasant
resistance to Viet Cong domination, and a low incident rate might mean that the guerrillas had successfully
intimidated local officials from disclosing the full extent of their activities. See Rural Pacification in
Vietnam, 216-17.
complexity of a situation in which the two sides were competing on several different levels with varying rates of achievement and degrees of uncertainty.\footnote{Ibid., 217-18.}

In his 1966 book, AID Rural Affairs director George Tanham lamented the bureaucracy’s insatiable desire for up-to-the-minute, numerical estimates of the pacification situation. The evolution of certain “Other War” programs, in his view, could not be usefully evaluated on “a weekly or monthly basis.” Furthermore, statistics did not always “reveal the true nature of [developmental] progress” or regression.\footnote{Tanham, \textit{War Without Guns}, 130-1.} This over-emphasis on measurability led to a “concentration on material things” that the US was giving to the Vietnamese people on behalf of the GVN. For his part, Tanham preferred to look “beyond the statistics on the uses of equipment, the number of trainees, and the tons of fertilizer spread” and “to evaluate the impact of [pacification] programs” on the Vietnamese people.\footnote{George K. Tanham, “Some Insurgency Lessons from Southeast Asia,” \textit{Orbis} 16, no. 3 (Fall 1972): 658.}

Some US military officials were also skeptical of bureaucratic attempts to quantify the results of the US-South Vietnamese pacification program. Colonel John H. Cushman, a US Army advisor assigned to the 21st ARVN Division in the early 1960s, maintained that pacification was a “mysterious [largely psychological] process.” He likened the allies’ program to win over the peasantry to a young man’s attempt to win “the heart of his lady.” “[A]s in courtship indicators of success or failure” were not precisely calculable “during the campaign,” and responsible officials “could not be sure
for months, probably years, that the job of pacification was completed.” According to Army PROVN analysts, qualitative assessments -- obtained by keen observers with firsthand knowledge of the situation -- were much superior to anonymous statistical reports in determining the “thrust of nonmilitary activity in SVN.” They advised bureaucrats in Saigon and Washington to place more faith in what their own representatives, as well as village residents themselves, were telling them about the situation in the countryside. A knowledgeable observer of the “Other War” was able to intuitively evaluate the condition of a village in much the same way that a military expert was “able to judge the effectiveness of a battalion simply by spending time with it.” Neither, however, was likely to be able to articulate exactly how their “many unquantifiable impressions” had come together to form an experienced judgment. Thus US officials should abandon their search for “demonstrable and measurable [pacification] results,” and start paying more attention to the “subjective assessments of experienced people on the ground.”

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68 Still, Cushman noted, the 21st Division had, through practical experience, arrived at a couple of specific and easily recognizable -- albeit broad gauge -- measures for determining whether an area was sufficiently pacified. First, the village chief and other officials must be able to move about the area generally unescorted, and second, Viet Cong cadres must not be able to openly collect taxes in the area. See “Pacification: Concepts Developed in the Field By the RVN 21st Infantry Division,” Army 16 (March 1966): 27.
69 Ibid., 2-44.
70 Ibid., 2-44.
71 In particular, the willingness of ordinary Vietnamese to “volunteer” information to the government was “by far the most valuable indicator of RC progress.” PROVN, vol. 1, 71.
72 PROVN, vol. 2, 2-42.
In his 1968 book, Marine Lieutenant Colonel William Corson was even more
disparaging of Washington-hatched schemes for measuring the effectiveness of Vietnam
War programs. Some measurement criteria, he contended, were selected simply because
they were quantifiable and not because they bore a clear relationship to US objectives.\(^73\)
On the other hand, important “Other War” indicators -- such as “the tenacity and
resoluteness of the Communists” -- were unmeasurable in a numerical sense. The White
House and the Pentagon might generate graphical depictions of allied progress, in terms
of enemy killed or villages pacified, but these might have very little effect on the enemy’s
“willingness to fight on” despite their losses.\(^74\) In spite of the sophistication of the
computer-assisted Hamlet Evaluation System (HES), Corson questioned the accuracy of
its data, based as it was on the cursory observations of hundreds of overworked,
undertrained officials in the field.\(^75\)

Defending quantification’s role in pacification measurement, Army Colonels C.E.
Jordan and Maurice Rush argued that numerical goals tied to specific dates were useful
tools for goading recalcitrant Vietnamese bureaucrats into taking the actions desired by
their American allies. Yet Jordan, the Coordinator of Territorial Security for CORDS,
allowed that quantitative measurements sometimes had deleterious consequences and
were no “substitute for continued and effective command supervision.”\(^76\) For his part,

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\(^73\) “The fact that so many wells have been dug, so many bars of soap have been passed out, or that so many
school rooms have been built,” Corson wrote, “may or may not have any relevance” to the US goal of
persuading the South Vietnamese population to actively support their government in its struggle against the
\(^74\) Ibid., 29.
\(^75\) Ibid., 233.
\(^76\) For example, he noted that each South Vietnamese territorial unit was “required to execute a prescribed
number of operations weekly,” a sub-set of which had to be run at night. As a result, many thousands of
MACV official Roush simultaneously acknowledged the need for an objective means for evaluating pacification and raised significant objections to the mechanism then in place. To him, the goals of the US-South Vietnamese pacification program and allied war aims were practically one and the same. Therefore, understanding how the anti-Communist side was doing in this area was absolutely critical. Unfortunately, in its current configuration, HES had serious deficiencies when it came to providing an accurate representation of popular leanings with respect to the GVN and the Viet Cong. The system primarily measured pacification inputs rather than results. In addition, it provided mostly historical information rather than current intelligence, weighed all pacification factors equally, and depended on the value judgments of often inexperienced advisors who, in turn, relied overmuch on their South Vietnamese counterparts. Finally, it ignored conditions within Communist-controlled hamlets, and did not allow for the incorporation of data obtained by means other than monthly questionnaires.

Despite its numerous flaws, Roush considered the Hamlet Evaluation System worth salvaging. Before this could be accomplished, however, people who understood the situation in rural South Vietnam had to inform the developers of this complex...

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weekly operations occurred without much increase “in contacts, enemy killed, or weapons captured.” Jordan and his colleagues at CORDS surmised that many GVN units were engaging in “meaningless ‘walks in the sun’” or setting up night ambushes “for an hour or two just to achieve the weekly quota.” U.S. Department of the Army, Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development, “Debriefing of Senior Officers: COL C.E. Jordan, Jr.,” 4 February 1969, US Army War College Library, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 23.

77 “In Vietnam,” Roush wrote, “the FEBA [Forward Edge of the Battle Area] must measure the allegiances or will of the people, and the enemy strength we must destroy is the control he exercises over these people. Similarly, our high ground rests among the people and the moving dynamics of their willingness to be measured and counted on the side of the government through act and resolve.” Maurice D. Roush, “The Hamlet Evaluation System,” Military Review 49 (Sept. 1969): 10.

78 Ibid., 12.
measurement device what were the significant indicators of population control. But they
must not be too dogmatic about this because indicators took on “varying significance
under different circumstances.” Roush was also concerned about reliability of much of
the HES data, given that they were generally obtained through interviews conducted
under poor conditions. “Years of buffeting,” he noted, had “taught the Vietnamese
peasant to answer official questions with answers” designed to “please the questioner.”
Still, an objective evaluation of the situation in the countryside was not impossible; one
simply could not rely on the publicly-stated opinions of individual villagers.
Alternatively, he suggested that “overt” actions that “risk[ed] VC reprisal and
demonstrate[d] faith” in the government were “the soundest indicator[s] of popular
attitude and loyalty.”

Although US advisors had always depended on their South Vietnamese
counterparts for a great deal of their intelligence, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Lockridge
contended that the “veracity” of HES plummeted when the operation was turned over
entirely to the GVN in 1972. Sympathetic to the low-ranking Vietnamese who gathered
the HES data, this former pacification advisor blamed inaccurate hamlet evaluations on
intervention from superiors, ignorance of the rationale behind HES, and insufficient
resources for the conduct of regular, detailed examinations of the rural environs. “One
need see the wrath of the Province Chief and District Chief only once when the ratings

79 Ibid., 14.
80 Such tangible, quantifiable indicators of peasant attitudes included the number of refugees who
voluntarily move to government-controlled areas, tax collection receipts, savings in GVN institutions, the
proportion of arable land under cultivation, the number of able-bodied males in residence, the rate of
enemy defections, the number of villagers running for elective office, and the proportion of harvests
marketed through official channels. Ibid., 15.
declined from a previous month,” Lockridge wrote in his end-of-tour report, “to understand the indirect pressure brought to bear on the VN HES officers.” Because no one in the Long An provincial administration seemed to “grasp the concept of computerized reports,” few took the HES reports-writing job seriously, gathering their information from “the District log” and neglecting to “confirm or deny activity in the villages.” But “in fairness to the HES officers,” they had no dedicated transportation to get to the villages, or any funds to defray the cost of public transportation. Finally, Lockridge claimed that the withdrawal of US district advisors and reductions in the American contingent at the province level made close oversight of the Hamlet Evaluation System impossible.\textsuperscript{81}

The initial reception by systems analysts in Washington to CORDS’ “scientific” method of pacification measurement was largely positive. Although HES was described in 1967 as suffering from adolescent “data turbulence,” Defense Department number-crunchers were satisfied that at last they had some relatively “objective,” comprehensive, and consistent data on the “Other War” into which to sink their teeth.\textsuperscript{82} Compared to HES, the previous allied population security reporting system inaugurated in 1964 had been more narrowly focused and subject to bias and dramatic fluctuations.\textsuperscript{83}


\textsuperscript{83} For example, the old system had placed most of its emphasis on military security -- and, to a lesser extent, administrative control -- whereas overall HES scores more clearly reflected social and economic development in the countryside. Ibid., 42.
digested the first crop of HES statistics, however, OSD analysts began raising strenuous objections to CORDS’ measurement methodology. The first annual evaluation of HES declared that “accounting changes to the HES system” -- hamlet additions and deletions, revised population estimates due to migration, and new census information -- were responsible for much of apparent “progress” in South Vietnamese pacification during 1967.\textsuperscript{84} Furthermore, the “substantial turnover” in individual hamlet ratings was not reflected in overall pacification scores.\textsuperscript{85} Finally, analysts questioned the reliability of the basic HES data since only a few of the eighteen pacification indicators could be judged “on the basis of direct observation of a clear-cut condition” and American evaluators were forced to rely on Vietnamese officials “for at least half their raw data.”\textsuperscript{86} But such “obstacles” and obfuscations by no means negated the value of HES findings, especially if one delved beneath the generalized hamlet scores and analyzed specific security and development trends.\textsuperscript{87}

For Washington-based systems analysts, the immediate consequences of the 1968 Tet Offensive caused a drastic loss of confidence in HES. Blaming the pacification measurement system for failing to predict the allies’ initial massive loss of control over the population, they doubted whether signs of renewed optimism in current HES data should be taken at face value.\textsuperscript{88} In a quasi-public debate with CORDS director Robert Komer, OSD analysts defended their practice of deconstructing overall HES ratings.

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 66.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 61.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 77.
Since there was as yet no means of directly measuring public opinion Vietnamese public
opinion, they had to “watch for the ‘minor’ changes” that might result in major attitudinal
shifts. 89 What is more, CORDS’ ABCDE hamlet classification system was too general,
il-defined, and “subject to wide interpretations.” Consequently, a HES rating might
either overstate or understate the actual level of hamlet security. 90 Later incarnations of
Hamlet Evaluation System, which appeared in 1970 and 1971, went part of the way in
correcting disadvantages in the original identified by systems analysts. In an attempt to
overcome reporting biases among US district advisors with varying levels of training and
experience, CORDS came out with a new questionnaire in 1970 that asked for “facts, not
subjective judgments” and ensured that expert-derived rating criteria would be applied
“uniformly throughout the country.” 91 For its part, the 1971 version of HES was praised
for giving “more weight to enemy terrorism and VC infrastructure” and “very little
weight” to socio-economic factors, 92 as well as for doing away with the ABCDE
pacification rating system, whose imprecision Washington systems analysts had decried
for some time. 93

89 “One isolated terrorist assassination of a hamlet chief,” it was claimed, “can set back months of patient
RD [Rural Development] work by activating the people’s fears and doubts.” Ibid., 78.
90 “A ‘C’ rating,” OSD analysts noted in July 1969, “is supposed to mean that VC village guerrillas
operate at less than platoon size, yet 24% of hamlets rated C were in villages where advisors reported there
were one or more platoons able to operate. On the other hand, a ‘D’ or ‘E’ rating is supposed to mean that
VC guerrillas have military control of the village, yet 12% of hamlets rated D-E were in villages with only
a squad or less of VC guerrillas capable of operating.” Ibid., 141.
91 Ibid., 151.
92 Belying their earlier concern with long-term measures of nationbuilding, SEAD analysts claimed that
HES/71 reports provided a more conservative, “realistic” depiction of rural South Vietnam, where
alterations in the security situation mattered more than the state of development projects.
93 Ibid., 230 and 238.
As a complement to the somewhat bloodless Hamlet Evaluation System, systems analysts recommended the Pacification Attitude Analysis System (PAAS). Established in 1970, this compilation of polling data seemed to provide a “reasonably accurate picture of rural [South Vietnamese] thinking.”94 Yet conducting opinion polls in a wartorn country among scared, distrustful, and ill-educated people was no easy task, and PAAS had its own limitations. Since honest responses to the questions of strangers were difficult to obtain in Vietnam, the use of semi-structured interviews -- in which villager opinions were “elicited during the course of conversation” -- was “probably the only feasible means of encouraging an open and frank response.” This collection method, however, gave the Vietnamese interviewer ample opportunity to shape survey results according to his own lights. OSD analysts were also uncomfortable with the use of “quota rather than probability sampling techniques” because the sample from which interviews were drawn was “not a fully accurate representation of the South Vietnamese rural population.”95 Finally, in an attempt to maintain survey continuity, the size of the PAAS population sample was deliberately kept small, generally about thirty individuals per province. Given South Vietnam’s cultural, social, and political diversity, this number was considered insufficient to represent the full range of popular thinking.96

By the early 1970s, even CORDS officials were admitting that their statistically-based pacification measurement system could not stand by itself as an indicator of

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94 Ibid., 169.
95 For example, the views of residents from 'neutral' villages, without a strong GVN or VC presence, were over-represented in PAAS reports.
96 Ibid., 182.
progress in the “Other War.” In May 1970, Colonel Erwin Brigham, the former head of CORDS’ Research and Analysis Division, published an apologia for Hamlet Evaluation System. “Although [HES] provide[d] the most convenient single index of pacification at the hamlet-village level,” he wrote, one could not comprehend the “Other War” in its entirety without carefully analyzing the results of the individual programs that contributed to pacification.97 Furthermore, one had to keep in mind that HES relied on the “subjective evaluation of district advisors about problems that are difficult to quantify.” And because of the rapid turnover in their ranks, inadequate language instruction, insufficient numbers, and numerous other duties, these advisors did not always describe the situation in their hamlets accurately in their monthly assessments. Finally, Brigham lamented the equal weighting of pacification factors in the first incarnation of HES, which, he believed, undervalued the security portion of the report.98 Nevertheless, Brigham’s bottom-line was that HES filled a vital niche in America’s pacification program and, despite its initial flaws, was actually getting better at measuring shifts in South Vietnamese security and development conditions.99 He argued that if HES did not currently exist, it would have to be invented. The fact was “that people in and out of Government want[ed] to have an overview of the situation in

97 Within this category, Brigham included programs for territorial forces improvement, the neutralization of local Communist infrastructure, Revolutionary Development cadre support, refugee care, and defector promotion. Erwin R. Brigham, “Pacification Measurement,” Military Review (May 1970): 50-1.
98 Ibid., 52.
99 According to Brigham, the 1970 version of HES, with its expanded and rewritten questionnaire, was both “more objective” and provided “more information” than its 1967 predecessor, while requiring fewer monthly responses from harried district advisors. In addition, even the earlier version of HES had proved its worth as a predictor of “enemy objectives and intentions”: prior to the 1968 Tet offensive, security scores had dropped sharply throughout South Vietnam.
Vietnam,” and the reports of individual observers on particular rural communities, regardless of their level of insight, were no substitute for a concise, standardized, and up-to-date review of the entire country.  

The same month that Brigham’s article appeared, CORDS’ former chief, Robert Kommer, conceded that the “quantitative indices of pacification” that HES and other computerized systems highlighted so clearly -- improved village security, neutralization of VC cadre, improved rural economic conditions, local elections, and refugee migration -- might, in the end, “prove inadequate and transitory.” Still, this did not make allied success in the “Other War” any less real. Furthermore, Kommer contended, critics of America’s Vietnam policy were misrepresenting the function of HES and related measurement devices. These were not meant to be employed as external “indexes of pacification] progress” but as internal “operational tools.” In his July 1971 congressional testimony, William Colby elaborated on this point. “CORDS developed a rather complex system of goals and reports,” he explained, “in an effort to stimulate local leadership to action and provide a management measurement of their accomplishments.” Both Colby and his subordinate, John Paul Vann, admitted that the pressure on those in the field to meet their designated objectives had led some to fudge on their reports. And

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100 Ibid., 52-3.
102 As Kommer’s successor, William Colby, told the US Congress in 1971, one did not need computer printouts to recognize positive changes in the rural situation; one had only to stroll through South Vietnam’s towns and villages, as he and other pacification officials frequently did, observing “the traffic on the roads,” “the bustling marketplaces,” and the unmistakable “atmosphere of security.” Congress, House, Government Operations Committee, U.S. Assistance Programs in Vietnam, 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 19 September 1971, 181.
103 Kommer, 27.
Vann had at times even questioned “the wisdom of having quotas.” But they were effective in prodding pacification officials into achieving more than they previously had, and the GVN insisted on retaining the goals system as the only means of motivating lackadaisical bureaucrats.\textsuperscript{104}

Within the US bureaucracy, Komer and Colby skirmished with Washington-based analysts and officials who sought to replace their Hamlet Evaluation System with a more conservative measurement device. In the wake of the 1968 Tet offensive, for example, Komer deplored attempts on the part of Defense Department systems analysts to substitute their simpler method for determining rural security for the HES categories of A, B, C, D and E. Arbitrarily shunting C-rated hamlets into the “contested” or “insecure” category made the situation in the countryside appear unduly bleak. Furthermore, his analytical personnel in Saigon had “designed very stringent criteria for the HES (especially on the security side) to deflate previous overoptimistic reporting.” If anything, HES security indicators were “oversensitive to minor changes.”\textsuperscript{105} In an August 1970 memo, Colby complained about the way the interdepartmental Vietnam Special Studies Group (VSSG) had selectively used HES data in its cease-fire study. Although HES was not a precise measuring device, the VSSG’s “control indicator” -- which accounted only for conditions related directly to security -- was of less value than the HES original because it presented a narrower, comparatively static version of the

\textsuperscript{105} As an example, Komer pointed to the fact that “one harassment of a hamlet one day is a month (even a few shots as long as they are reported) drags that security factor down to E.” Thayer, \textit{A Systems Analysis View of the Vietnam War}, 76.
pacification reality. The VSSG measure vetoed “GVN control on the basis of any one of five indicators,” resulting in a “set of fairly heavily loaded dice against the GVN.” Even worse, the VSSG indicator “omitted much of the dynamics” of the rapidly improving situation in South Vietnam by artificially flattening the pacification curve.\footnote{William E. Colby, “Memo for Ambassador Bunker on VSSG Cease-fire Study,” August 10, 1970, VSSG File, US Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC, 1-2.} \footnote{Cooper, \textit{The American Experience with Pacification in Vietnam}, xvii.}

In their 1972 pacification retrospective, the social scientists at the Institute for Defense Analysis (IDA) lauded the purpose behind the Hamlet Evaluation System, but characterized the output of quantitative measurement tools, such as HES, as both insufficient and overwhelming for those hoping to determine the impact of pacification programs on the rural situation. In future missions of the Vietnam-type, IDA recommended that a standardized system of reporting be developed early on “to provide program managers with the kind of information they require[d] to judge progress and deficiencies, to juggle priorities, and to allocate resources.”\footnote{Cooper, \textit{The American Experience with Pacification in Vietnam}, xvii.} Although the computerized reporting system that went into effect in Vietnam in January 1967 had been a marked improvement over the previous Tower of Babel, the original HES suffered from “the fact that comparability of results was difficult [because] evaluations were ... based on the essentially subjective judgments of more than 250 district advisors.” Later versions of HES largely solved the subjectivity problem by “eliminating the district adviser’s own overall assessment of the state of security in his district” and restricting his reporting task to “responding to an elaborate series of objective questions.” But, in IDA’s opinion, the cure was possibly worse than the disease; the new system’s “excessive reliance on
objectivity and its massive series of reports may have over-compensated for the earlier subjective, spotty reporting.\textsuperscript{108}

**Pacification Organization**

Like the measurement systems it spawned, the US pacification advisory and support organization underwent constant criticism from “Other Warriors” of various ideological stripes. In the early 1960s, centralizers decried the near absence of coordination -- in terms of resources and personnel, as well as policy and execution -- between the branches of the US military and civilian agencies involved in pacification and development: that is, the Department of State, USAID, USIA, and CIA. The formation of Civil Operations and Revolutionary (later Rural) Development Support (CORDS) organization, in the spring of 1967, went part of the way toward placating centralizers. It brought together many, though certainly not all, of America’s nationbuilding and counterinsurgency assets in South Vietnam -- both civil and military -- under the control of a civilian official, who reported to the MACV commander. It failed, however, to satisfy the desire of unification purists calling for a fully integrated US-GVN command structure. On the other hand, decentralizers in established agencies, whose turf CORDS had partially usurped, strongly objected to the militarization (or civilianization) of their functions, as well as the reduction of autonomy and experience at the local level that had supposedly followed the creation of this new bureaucratic entity.

The first generation of American pacification managers stressed the importance of transferring authority for decisions directly affecting rural South Vietnamese from out-of-

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 26.
touch Saigon administrators to a group of younger, more dynamic, and civic-minded local officials, whom US advisers would groom for the job of nationbuilding. John O’Donnell, an AID provincial representative in Kien Hoa in the early 1960s, believed that “[t]he decentralization of responsibility and authority was one of the fundamental tenets of the Strategic Hamlet Program and a key element in its early success.” Although the range of administrative freedom of action depended on the “confidence and aggressiveness” of the individual province or district chief, the program’s first priority was to place implementation responsibility “at the lowest practicable level.”

There were “forty-five provinces in South Vietnam,” and “forty-five different wars.” Hence each province was charged with developing a strategic hamlet plan that suited its “individual character,” and tactics that proved successful on a local level were to be included in the national plan. Although “there were many ways to bring about the commitment of rural people,” according to O’Donnell, “a people’s war [could not] be fought from the capital of a country alone.”

By the mid-1960s -- and particularly after Tet 1968 -- decentralization was replaced, as the chief allied organizational concept, by unification. In retrospect, Robert Kommer, the primary advocate of CORDS in the Johnson White House and its first director, called the “marriage of U.S. civilian and military personnel ... one of the managerial keys to such success as we had in pacification.” First, CORDS had

110 Ibid., 719-20.
111 Ibid., 741.
provided an organizational focus for US and South Vietnamese backers of a less conventional, more people-oriented strategy in Vietnam. Early supporters of the “Other War,” Komer believed, had largely failed because pacification -- with its intertwined security and development aspects -- had not been “part of the institutional repertoire” of the major governmental agencies in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{113} Second, in combination with the Tet offensive, CORDS had goaded South Vietnamese officials into streamlining and centralizing their own pacification machinery. With backing from South Vietnamese President Thieu, province chiefs -- long considered key players in the pacification process -- were removed from ARVN control and placed within a territorial command system administered from Saigon through four corps/regional entities. In addition, the South Vietnamese revived their Central Pacification Council, with President Thieu eventually assuming the chairmanship and providing the Council with a full-time staff.\textsuperscript{114} What is more, after each GVN reorganization, CORDS had utilized the opportunity to insert its own advisory and support personnel into the new pacification hierarchy and to foist upon its allies a “pacification management process,” involving “combined centralized joint GVN-US planning with decentralized execution in the field.”\textsuperscript{115}

But not all American officials were pleased with the changes effected by CORDS. AID provincial representative Jan Vanderbie believed that the 1967 reorganization of US pacification advisory assets had militarized an idealistic experiment in democratic

\textsuperscript{113} Komer, \textit{Bureaucracy Does Its Thing}, 145.
\textsuperscript{114} Komer, “Clear, Hold and Rebuild,” 23.
\textsuperscript{115} Specifically, this process involved the formulation of “a comprehensive annual pacification plan,” “detailed province plans,” and “concrete time-phased performance goals.” Ibid., 26.
nationbuilding. And it had done so without greatly improving the coordination, or the efficiency, of allied development and security programs. In Vanderbie’s estimation, AID’s rather autonomous network of grassroots organizers and technical specialists was the allies’ only real counter to the Viet Cong cadre system, whose primary focus was the local political economy. Unfortunately, the influence of “free spirits,” like himself, had declined proportionately with the increase in the size of the American expeditionary force. By 1965-66, they were already serving as appendages to an American mission structure that was more and more dominated by the Army. But the formal demise of “the USAID prov rep” had not occurred until July 1967, when he was replaced by “a bureaucrat — a military bureaucrat, in most instances.”116 The establishment of CORDS, then, did not usher in a period of enhanced authority and support for true “Other Warriors.” Rather, it provided additional jobs in the provinces for “military advisors and some fresh new State Department protégés,” while “experienced and capable” field operators languished in Saigon “shuffling papers.”117

Despite his nostalgia for the days of the independent prov rep, Vanderbie did not oppose the idea of centralizing the management of allied operations in Vietnam. But he also did not consider MACV’s absorption of most US pacification assets to be an improvement over the previous organizational situation. First of all, CORDS had failed to eliminate the problem of bureaucratic overlap. For example, although South Vietnam’s Ministry of Revolutionary Development (or Rural Construction) was “advised

117 Ibid., 127-8.
and supported by CORDS,” the older functionally-oriented ministries, which provided for South Vietnam’s day-to-day development needs, continued to receive assistance from USAID. “Alas,” Vanderbie lamented, “the various [US] advisors did not follow the same blueprint or speak the same language.”118 CORDS’ second major failing was its inability to persuade the GVN to cleanse its ranks of corrupt and incompetent officials, who remained a substantial “impediment” to pacification despite repeated American attempts to get rid of them.119

In a 1968 memorandum entitled “Organizing for Political Warfare,” Edward Lansdale emphasized the importance of conceptual and organizational unity in the struggle against the Communists in Vietnam.120 His proposed new counterinsurgent organization, however, bore little resemblance to CORDS, with its limited pacification mission and its formal bureaucratic hierarchy. In line with his freewheeling attitude and past experience in dealing with presidents, Lansdale had in mind “a flexible and relatively non-structured apparatus” located in the White House, with direct links to the field.121 As director of this special staff, Lansdale recommended someone not unlike himself: that is, someone who could get “something out of the bureaucratic ‘beast’” without becoming “a bureaucratic creature” himself. As for the staff, it had to have “the authority and

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118 Ibid., 106.
119 As an example of US ineffectiveness during the CORDS era, Vanderbie recounted a story concerning some twenty Vietnamese administrators, whose names had been forwarded to Saigon by one of the CORDS regional directors in the fall of 1967. Several months following the list’s transmittal, Vanderbie “discretely inquired as to the action which had resulted from this request.” “The best information I could obtain,” he recalled, “was that one of the 20 officials was removed, one was promoted, and the rest were still going strong.” Ibid., 114-24.
121 Ibid., 9.
capability to ensure implementation of the President’s decisions,” which required that some staffers rotate frequently between Washington and Saigon and others serve as “Special Assistants to key Vietnamese decision makers, civilian and military.”¹²² “The intent” of his reorganization proposal, according to Lansdale, was to inject a few old Oriental hands into the critical nexus between the US and South Vietnam. These men would be free from the pressures of bureaucratic politics and unobtrusive enough not to stigmatize and overburden their country in its mission of defeating the Communist-inspired insurgency. In this way, South Vietnamese officials could be held accountable for their wartime performance, and their “American surrogates” could assume a lesser share of the day-to-day burden of counterinsurgency and nationbuilding.¹²³

In the view of some military men, unification in the form of CORDS did not go far enough -- either philosophically or organizationally -- to alter the character of the allied war effort. Among the most vehement of these uniformed critics was Lieutenant Colonel William Corson. On the one hand, the former CAP official conceded that Robert Kommer and his CORDS staff had succeeded in introducing managerial techniques and goals into the pacification process. On the other hand, he found the allied “Other War” effort still lacking in ideological coherence. Increased production -- not product quality -- had become the primary measure of pacification progress. “Kommer made it plain to the CORDS people that they were going to do better and were going to operate as a team,” Corson asserted in his 1968 pacification expose, “but then he neglected to make clear

¹²² Ibid., 10-11.
¹²³ Ibid., 11-12.
exactly what they were to do. As a result, CORDS continued to operate inefficient programs in an efficient manner.”124

Yet, according to Corson, the post-1967 American organization in Vietnam was flawed even by the narrow standard of bureaucratic efficiency. Despite the formal unification of US pacification advisory and support assets under MACV, there was no combined US-GVN command structure for combat and pacification operations. What is more, CORDS represented a thoroughly modern marriage in which the various partners were allowed a great deal of independence and association with their former spouses back in Washington.125 In his this view, Corson was supported by Lieutenant General Fred Weyand, who described America’s civil-military apparatus in Vietnam as “a patch-work of previously independent and semi-independent agencies,” which functioned according to “some very unorthodox lines of command and information.”126 As a consequence of the Americans’ failure to communicate and coordinate, South Vietnamese officials were able to manipulate the US support system and to thwart US efforts to pressure them into undertaking needed reforms.127

In contrast to Corson and Weyand, Colonel Gus Peters argued that even the limited civil-military integration inaugurated by CORDS had been too much. In his final report as III Corps deputy senior advisor in 1968, Peters regretted military commanders’ loss of control over GVN territorial security forces and their US advisors to provincial

124 Corson, The Betrayal, 213.
127 Corson, “Pacification Program,” 91.
administrators and local CORDS officials. To this Army officer, American officers (such as RF and PF advisors) ought to be commanded by their superiors in the normal chain of command.\textsuperscript{128} What is more, Vietnamese commanders should exercise authority over all ARVN units in their tactical area, regardless of whether they were assigned to combat or pacification duty. Combining civil and military functions at district and province levels created a “span of control” problem, which required that the two areas of responsibility be separated once again by the appointment of “a professional administrator” to act as the “civil head of government” and “a professional military leader” to serve as head of the security forces. Thus the military chain of command would be reframed “from Corps through DTA [Divisional Tactical Area] to sector [province] to subsector [district].”\textsuperscript{129}

From at least the mid-1960s, government-sponsored social scientists began preaching the cause of doctrinal and organizational unification in Vietnam. For some idealists, unification implied a combined politico-military organization at the policymaking level that established the direction of the entire allied war effort. The Hudson Institute’s Raymond Gastil argued in 1967 that “a joint Vietnamese-American war council [might] help to solve the most general problem of insufficient direction and coordination.” Although he accepted the principle of decentralized execution, Gastil held that “a generally accepted strategy, including priorities and standards,” was absolutely essential for allied victory.\textsuperscript{130} For their part, social scientists at the Institute for Defense


\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 5-6.

\textsuperscript{130} Raymond D. Gastil, Four Papers on the Vietnamese Insurgency (Hudson, NY: Hudson Institute, 8 August 1967), vol. 1, A Conservative, Decentralized Approach to Pacification in South Vietnam, i.
Analyses called for the integration of national pacification resources and concepts beyond that achieved by CORDS. A future “Other War” similar to Vietnam’s would require “central management, both in Washington and in the field and on both the US and host-country sides, at a level high enough to wield adequate bureaucratic ‘clout.’” 1IDA analysts also urged US strategists to thoroughly ponder the lessons of Vietnam and other Third World insurgencies with the goal of constructing a “pragmatic doctrine of pacification” -- superior to the ad hoc pacification strategy in Vietnam -- that skillfully interwove its security and development strands.\textsuperscript{131}

But was IDA asking too much? In the waning days of the Vietnam War, was it reasonable to assume that the diffuse community of former ‘Other Warriors’ could finally settle upon a coherent pacification and development doctrine, as well as a single bureaucratic organization to ensure its proper execution? Had America’s nationbuilders and counterinsurgents reached a consensus on the rudiments of ‘building a nation in the midst of war’? And, assuming that they had achieved some degree of insight regarding Asian-style political warfare, could veterans of the “Other War” in Vietnam convince their colleagues in the military, bureaucracy, and academia -- not to mention politicians and ordinary citizens -- that the United States should maintain a permanent capability for long-term politico-military intervention in the internal affairs of Third World states?

\textsuperscript{131} Cooper, \textit{The American Experience with Pacification in Vietnam}, xvii-xviii.
CONCLUSION

This dissertation has attempted to analyze the intellectual basis of the “Other War” in Vietnam by exploring the writings of a loosely affiliated group of mostly American soldiers, civilian bureaucrats, intelligence operators, and government-sponsored social scientists, who shared a common objective of keeping the emerging nations of the Third World securely in the Western fold and a common conviction that Western governments were on the wrong strategic track vis a vis their Communist enemies. These men were motivated by a complex mixture of altruism and self-interest, abstract national goals and concrete personal objectives, but essentially they believed that America’s security and “special” way of life could only be preserved through the establishment of open, secure, prosperous, and democratic states worldwide. This process, they declared, would not happen automatically, or at least not soon enough to overcome the competition. It required that the United States, as the epitome of Western culture and power, urgently pursue a dual policy of nationbuilding and counterinsurgency in countries threatened by so-called “movements of national liberation.”

Especially in the early stages of America’s involvement in Vietnam, “Other Warriors” -- like Edward Lansdale, George Tanham, Joseph Zasloff, Gerald Hickey, Douglas Pike, and John Paul Vann -- did not shy away from notifying their superiors in
Saigon and Washington -- and, in some cases, the American public -- about the flaws in the South Vietnamese political-military leadership, the organizational and strategic advantages of the Communist Vietnamese, and the shortcomings of the United States as a counter-revolutionary mentor. But most continued to hold in their breasts and to express in their writings an interventionist ethos, which demanded that America “stay the course” in Vietnam and gave them hope that Western values, technology, institutions, and “revolutionary” spirit would eventually prevail there. Ironically, just as the rest of America was turning against the war after Tet 1968, “Other Warriors” began to release their hitherto restrained optimism in response to certain modifications in allied and Communist doctrine and performance. Their exaggerated perception that the allies were finally fighting and winning a “people’s war” -- whereas the Communist war effort had become conventional and imperialistic -- supported their dream of South Vietnamese independence and democratic development until the verge of Communist victory in 1975.

From the late 1950s until approximately 1967, “Other Warriors” were highly critical of the South Vietnamese government efforts and of nationbuilding and counterinsurgency in Saigon and in the countryside. During the period of authoritarian nationbuilding (1954-1963), South Vietnamese President Diem was presented either as a genuine nationalist leader brought down by selfish minions or as the chief representative of an urban, Catholic minority with few nationalist credentials. “Other War” commentators also criticized South Vietnam’s public administration, lamented the GVN’s decision to continue the French policy of restricting the autonomy of village elders and elected officials. They accused the Saigon government of failing to foster a
South Vietnamese political identity through the creation of national political parties and a sophisticated propaganda apparatus. Finally, although many endorsed the overall concept of concentrating rural residents, “Other Warriors” had little that was nice to say about the GVN’s agroville and strategic hamlet population relocation schemes.

Following the death of President Diem, the sour mood prevalent among “Other Warriors” with regard to the South Vietnamese government grew even worse. They blamed the regimes of the interregnum period (1963-1965) for retaining many of the ineffectual rural policies of the previous regime and for continuing to erode the GVN’s political base by purging Buddhists in the north, discriminating against the montagnards in the Central Highlands, and generally ignoring the aspirations of the majority peasant population. “Other War” observers noted that the outbreak of factional infighting had actually reduced the government’s presence in the countryside. Despite some policy changes (e.g., on forced relocation), the New Life Hamlet program was largely seen as a reincarnation of Diem’s Strategic Hamlet program. As for the South Vietnamese Army, it continued to receive poor marks in the areas of soldier skills, morale, and recruitment.

Analyses of the GVN condition by “Other War” specialists during the period of the allied reemphasis on pacification (1966-68) generally began on a pessimistic note and ended on a hopeful one. “Other Warriors” continued to berate the South Vietnamese political elite for its conservative, uninspiring, and divisive style of leadership, but they pointed to certain positive political developments: the “democratic” constitution of 1966, the autonomy agreements reached between the GVN and major regional minorities, the holding of national and local elections in 1967, and the growing nationalistic spirit within
the middle class. The socio-economic picture, too, looked brighter than it had in the early 1960s: better pay and better jobs -- even if largely financed by the United States -- could not help but redound to the benefit of the Saigon regime. By 1967, many “Other Warriors” were expressing their satisfaction with the ARVN’s renewed dedication to pacification, and well as the remarkable improvement in the quality of the paramilitary.

For “Other War” advocates, the years 1968 and 1969 were the ones when the US-South Vietnamese “Other War” strategy finally began to bear fruit. They attributed this, in large part, to the South Vietnamese leaders’ astonishment over the Communist Tet offensive, followed by the belated realization that they -- and not the Americans -- were ultimately responsible for their own political survival. The GVN’s Accelerated Pacification Campaign (APC), begun in the fall of 1968, supposedly returned the situation in the countryside to its pre-Tet condition. According to “Other Warriors, the GVN went on the pacification offensive in 1969 by granting real political power to the village councils. By the end of the decade, peasant prosperity was on the rise, and more and more rural fence-sitters were expressing confidence in their legitimate government and shunning the Viet Cong.

At first sight, the Communists’ 1972 Easter Offensive appeared quite devastating for pacification. Very quickly, however, US commentators altered their despairing tone. They began praising the fighting abilities of the South Vietnamese troops, noting the improvement in public attitudes toward their government in the wake of the invasion, and even crediting President Thieu for his steadfastness at the diplomatic negotiating table and his choice of new provincial administrators. Analysts continued to hedge their
assessments of the GVN’s nationbuilding chances: the NLF/PLAF organization still existed (in a diminished form), and success of the whole pacification and development game depended on preventing the North Vietnamese Army from continually disrupting the nationbuilding process. Nevertheless, “Other Warriors” retained their faith in the GVN’s ability to reconstitute its rural authority after each interlude of massive violence.

Part of the reason for their optimistic assessment of the GVN’s chances for survival stemmed from the alleged failure of the Communist revolution in South Vietnam. Prior to the Tet offensive, “Other Warriors” expressed grudging admiration for the Viet Cong. They acknowledged the depth of the Communists’ roots in the South Vietnamese countryside, the hardiness of the Viet Cong’s political-military organization, and the flexibility of Ho Chi Minh’s “people’s warfare” strategy. Still, “Other War” advocates always held that the Communist contagion was not necessarily deadly, since the Viet Cong were not without exploitable faults of their own. For the average Vietnamese peasant, living within a Communist society turned out to be less glorious than the Viet Cong had initially pictured it, and the militarization of the war in the mid-1960s had done grievous damage to the Communists’ popular standing. The privations of life under communism included forced labor, high taxes, and isolation from the rest of the country, not to mention increased exposure to allied sweeps and air-artillery attacks. As a result, the Viet Cong were supposedly on the verge of “losing the mandate of heaven,” as evidenced by the outpouring of rural dwellers from Communist-controlled areas. What is more, allied troops had begun to strip Viet Cong guerrillas and political
operators of their conventional military protection, leaving them exposed to the long-term lethality of pacification.

Given the prevailing belief that the Communists had adopted a lower profile strategy in the face of American military might, the extent and ferocity of the Tet offensive caught many “Other Warriors” by surprise. Once recovered from their shock, however, they tended to express some satisfaction regarding the post-Tet situation in South Vietnam, which stemmed from their conviction that the Viet Cong had overreached militarily and depleted much of its political capital as well. The Communist Easter Offensive in 1972 renewed the cycle of analytical pessimism and qualified optimism. Through brute military force, it seemed, the Communists had undone several years of pacification expansion and Viet Cong “neutralization.” But upon further reflection, the South Vietnamese armed forces had held up better than expected under the combined Viet Cong-North Vietnamese Army onslaught, and the ruthlessness of the Communists had apparently made them more unpopular than ever with the average peasant. If the prospects for a genuine political settlement between the Viet Cong and the Saigon government were still dim, the “Other War” campaign was nevertheless back on track by the time of the cease-fire in early 1973. Indeed, it was practically over, given that the Vietnam conflict had largely degenerated into a conventional military slugfest. True, the Viet Cong organization continued to exist throughout much of the countryside, but with their depleted and increasingly “foreign” leadership, South Vietnamese Communists had presumably lost their knack for communicating with the people. The only question was whether the United States would continue to fend off the North Vietnamese hordes long
enough for the GVN to complete the process of recovery from two decades of
Communist subversion and its own maladministration.

To proponents of the “Other War” in Vietnam, the US government took an
excruciatingly long time to assume its role as the GVN’s nationbuilding and
counterinsurgency mentor. Top US officials had little knowledge of Asia as a region,
were indifferent toward the singular aspects of South Vietnam’s predicament, ran
roughshod over GVN priorities and sensibilities, distanced themselves institutionally
from their Vietnamese counterparts, and inadvertently inflated the expectations of the
South Vietnamese people with regard to governmental performance. Strategically,
Americans were inferior to the Communists in their appreciation for political warfare.
What is more, they employed an unduly restrictive definition of pacification, gave mostly
rhetorical support to the concept of democracy in South Vietnam, and declined to
compete seriously with the Viet Cong in the ideological domain. Finally, bureaucratic
mistrust and a diffusion of advisory and support authority made it next-to-impossible for
the US to pressure the Saigon government into instituting needed political-military
reforms. Consequently, until the late 1960s, GVN officials stuck to their corrupt and
ineffective ways.

Few military men, however, seemed to doubt America’s ability to assist the South
Vietnamese in winning the “Other War.” Marines, especially, heralded their service’s
long experience in counterinsurgency warfare, appreciation of the need for popular
support, determination to carry out the population security mission, and populist
identification with Vietnamese villagers. On the downside, uniformed “Other Warriors”
complained about the absence of an integrated plan of action and a single commander or institution in charge of all wartime operations. Marine officers castigated the Army-dominated high command for its attrition-based strategy, its lip service treatment of the Combined Action program, and its waste of precious Corps resources on strictly conventional military missions. In addition, officers from both the Army and the Marine Corps expressed disdain for their government’s supposed policy of non-intervention in South Vietnamese internal affairs and its tolerance of GVN ineptitude and corruption.

By 1969, “Other Warriors” were sensing that their government had begun to take seriously its job as political, military, and ideological mentor to the South Vietnamese regime. Most agreed that the US-inspired “new model” pacification program was a significant improvement over its ramshackle and ill-supported predecessor. In particular, officials at CORDS lauded their organization for bringing a greater degree of strategic flexibility to the “Other War” campaign, creating a bureaucratic interest in pacification’s success, expanding and integrating hitherto localized pacification projects, making the military more aware of the political dimension of the “Other War,” and providing a single pacification and development chain of command from Saigon down to the district level. Military field commanders touted their units’ counterinsurgency achievements in driving the majority of Viet Cong from their village refuges and targeting those who remained with anti-infrastructure campaigns. Some civilian and military observers of the pacification effort did recognize a few flaws in the “new model” program. For example, the GVN did not seem to share their American counterparts’ fixation with uprooting Communist political operatives, and the US Army continued to treat nationbuilding as a
secondary mission, at best. Finally, even the most gung-ho “Other Warrior” had to admit that the relentless drawdown of US forces in South Vietnam cast doubt on the future of allied pacification projects.

Supporters of the “Other War” were not mere apologists for America’s nationbuilding and counterinsurgency policies in South Vietnam. On the one hand, they raised doubts about US-GVN policies, strategies, tactics, organizational structures, and measures of success and advised policy makers to address the multidimensional nature of the Vietnam conflict. On the other hand, their perspective on the situation in the countryside and in Saigon conflicted with their interventionist orientation. They recognized the relative weakness of America’s ally compared to the Communist enemy, as well as their compatriots’ lack of preparation for their nationbuilding role, but “Other Warriors” nevertheless remained convinced that the United States could provide the necessary cover to ensure South Vietnam’s continued security and development. The formation of CORDS in 1967, the GVN’s apparent commitment to democratic nationbuilding after Tet 1968, and the setbacks suffered by the Communists in South Vietnam between 1969 and 1971 only reinforced their faith in America’s “Other War” potential. “Other Warriors” refused to acknowledge that the GVN’s ability to change was structurally limited; that the Communists’ ability to resurrect and transform themselves was historically proven; and that America’s ability to comprehend, much less orchestrate, the process of building a nation in the midst of war was uncertain at best.

“Other Warriors” did, to a certain extent, understand the nationalist and revolutionary character of the Vietnam conflict as well as the need for better pacification
management. But their collective response to Vietnamese Communist “people’s warfare” never developed into a coherent alternative to the dominant model of attrition warfare. Reflecting their own ideological preferences, nationbuilders promoted conservative, liberal, and bureaucratic political development schemes. Counterinsurgents shifted between defensive and offensive strategic approaches. And managers were divided into advisers and controllers; quantifiers and subjectivists; centralizers and de-centralizers. Thus, the root problem with counterinsurgency and nationbuilding in Vietnam was with the concepts themselves.

From the late 1950s until the mid-1970s, “Other Warriors” held widely divergent assumptions about the best way to transform South Vietnam into a “viable” political entity. Conservative populists championed a nationbuilding strategy that emphasized deep respect for traditional institutions, as well as local and regional political autonomy. The old and, in many ways, exemplary Vietnam was perceived by conservatives as being in a long-term state of decline, brought on by unfortunate colonial and GVN policies as well as deliberate Communist subversion. Nevertheless, it was basically salvageable, provided South Vietnam’s rulers understood that their destinies were linked with those of “natural” leaders at the bottom of society. For some “Other Warriors,” this meant instituting a “riceroots” democracy, complete with local elections, New England-style town meetings, and community-organized “self-help” endeavors. For others, it meant accepting the relative benevolence of a feudalistic Vietnamese society, where landlords and other notables looked after villagers’ basic economic and security needs in return for a higher social status, more political power, and a greater share of communal wealth.
Beyond the realm of the village, some conservatives, in the mid-1960s, envisioned a federalized South Vietnam composed of religious, ethnic, and political enclaves with considerable regional autonomy and a representative slice of national authority.

To liberal nationalists, the prospect of the GVN’s ceding power to local and regional socio-political groups was an outdated, ineffective, even cowardly response to the dual challenge of modernization and Communist-inspired insurgency. Years of Communist and Western propaganda had convinced the average Vietnamese peasant that a better life was available than one could obtain through the traditional village social order and rice-based economy. In order to fulfill the peasantry’s “rising expectations,” some liberals urged a long-term strategy of governmental support for internal improvements that would knit South Vietnam’s isolated rural communities together into a vibrant national market. But, as the Communist insurgency gained in strength, most began pressing for a Vietnamese version of the “New Deal” that offered rural residents immediate rewards in return for turning their backs on the Viet Cong. Many also believed that the rootless South Vietnamese needed to be bound to their government politically and emotionally, not just materially. This meant that US advisors had to become evangelists for such liberal nationalist concepts as constitutional government, separation of powers, free and fair elections, individual liberties, and the construction of a civil society between the state and the individual.

By contrast, bureaucratic authoritarians within the “Other War” community questioned whether the South Vietnamese people really understood, or cared for, Western-style political democracy. In Vietnam’s case, long-term governmental viability
would most likely result from the selection of capable and honest provincial, district, and village chiefs, who were trained to respond to the grievances and aspirations of those under their control. In the near-term, however, a growing number of “Other Warriors” were willing to settle for more bodies to fill the void in the ranks of the civil service and, at the national level, for the establishment of a relatively benevolent dictatorship, whose authority extended into every corner of the realm. Although they hoped that rural residents would embrace the GVN and forswear the Communists, bureaucratically-oriented officials were willing to postpone “true” nationbuilding until the end of the war.

“Other Warriors” confronted counterinsurgency in much the same contradictory manner as they did nationbuilding. Most either believed that security and development went hand-in-hand or that securing the population against Communist influence must precede the establishment of a stable, prosperous, and democratic Republic of Vietnam. They did not dispute MACV’s contention that the allies needed to vie with the enemy militarily, as well as politically and socio-economically. But they often took issue with the allied high command on the relative priority accorded the “Other War” as opposed to the “Big Unit War” in the jungles and mountains and the strategic air campaign over North Vietnam and along the Ho Chi Minh trail.

Despite their emphasis on war in the villages, “Other Warriors” were of two minds regarding how best to protect the people in order to win them over to the non-Communist side. On the one hand, they tended to support a long-term, defensive approach to the war in South Vietnam, designed to deny the enemy access to the more densely populated areas of the country. Essentially, this “clear and hold” strategy
demanded that the “people” -- government supporters and “neutral” rural dwellers --
congregate in defensible locations so that a combination of US and South Vietnamese
regular, paramilitary, and civilian self-defense forces could provide them continuous and
permanent “protection.” It also required that allied authorities restrict the activities of the
rural population in order to deny Communist military units and political cadres access to
supplies, intelligence information, and recruits. Finally, “Other Warriors” recommended
that the allies mount an intensive psychological warfare campaign to win over civilian
“fence sitters,” bolster the morale and improve the discipline of their own troops, and
undermine the confidence of enemy soldiers in the revolutionary cause.

On the other hand, “Other Warriors” did not seem altogether comfortable with a
defensive strategy. While rejecting conventional, American-style attrition warfare, they
tacitly accepted the Clausewitzian notion that victory in war meant going on the
offensive, finding and attacking the opposing forces, and applying maximum destructive
power to the enemy’s “center of gravity.” Many disdained the ARVN’s propensity for
sitting and waiting for the enemy to attack and suggested trying to beat the Viet Cong at
their own guerrilla game by employing small numbers of fast-moving, elite forces. In
addition, civilian “Other Warriors,” especially, favored going after local Communist
leaders either by inducing them to defect or, failing that, by prying them from their hiding
places among the population.

Among US pacification and development experts, basic philosophical differences
were compounded by disagreements over how the “Other War” in Vietnam should be
managed. The most significant managerial issue concerned the nationbuilding and
counterinsurgency responsibilities of the United States. While “Other War” advocates believed that America had a moral obligation to stick by the GVN as long as it continued the fight for its independence, they also paid obeisance to the idea that the conflict’s outcome was ultimately up to the people of South Vietnam. Americans were in Southeast Asia primarily to provide advice and support to indigenous nationbuilding and counterinsurgency. Yet, until quite late in the war, a majority of pacification experts considered the GVN military-political-administrative structure to be rotten to the core. Thus, some “Other Warriors” set aside their qualms about intervention in another nation’s internal affairs as well as their unease with Americans’ compulsion to “take charge” of situations that did not conform to their sense of what was right.

If US “Other Warriors” could never settle upon a definite role for themselves in the nationbuilding process, still less could they agree upon how to measure allied progress with regard to pacification and development. The fundamental issue here concerned the relative merits of qualitative versus quantitative (or subjective versus objective) reporting. On the one hand, bureaucratic higher-ups in Saigon and Washington besieged their field representatives with demands for up-to-date situational information that was both computer-digestible and graphically presentable. On the other hand, many old-time “Other Warriors” grumbled about this movement toward objectification -- exemplified by the Hamlet Evaluation System -- claiming that the views of professional observers could not be meaningfully reduced to a series of letter grades. Some also questioned the reliability of the reporting data that was being fed into MACV and Pentagon computers, while others wondered whether HES’ software properly reflected
the conditions necessary for pacification. Finally, some “Other Warriors” worried that
the whole advisory and support structure was being threatened by an ocean of
computerized reports.

Like the measurement systems it spawned, the US pacification advisory and
support organization underwent constant criticism from “Other Warriors” of various
ideological stripes. In the early 1960s, centralizers decried the near absence of
coordination between the branches of the US military and civilian agencies involved in
pacification and development. The formation of CORDS, in the spring of 1967, went
part of the way toward placating them by bringing together many, though certainly not
all, of America’s nationbuilding and counterinsurgency assets in South Vietnam under
the control of the MACV commander. It failed, however, to satisfy unification purists,
who were calling for a fully integrated allied command structure. Furthermore,
decentralizers in established agencies, whose turf CORDS had partially usurped, strongly
objected to the militarization (or civilianization) of their functions, as well as the
reduction of autonomy and experience at the local level that had supposedly followed the
creation of this new bureaucratic entity.

Perhaps the Vietnamese environment was too harsh, or perhaps Americans were
unsuited for the job of nationbuilding and counterinsurgency, or perhaps no “magic”
formula of coercive and constructive elements ever existed that could permanently
repress a well-established revolutionary foe. Still, over the course of some twenty years,
America’s “Other Warriors” never really came to terms with the heterogeneous
assumptions that underlay their ad hoc attempt to build a nation in the midst of war. This

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is not to say, however, that their programs and analyses are not without utility in laying out key issues for those currently navigating the murky waters between nationbuilding and warfighting. For example, is a stable political system best constructed from the bottom up or the top down? Is constitutional democracy a by-product of an effective government and a peaceful, harmonious society, or is it a pre-condition for these other good things? Can a foreign army take sides in a domestic conflict without prolonging the war, increasing its destructiveness, or widening its scope? How should the international community organize and coordinate the various military and civilian governmental -- as well as non-governmental -- assets required to provide order and repair shattered communities? How should progress in “Other War”-type operations be measured? At what point should outside powers decide cut their losses, and when should they accept some short-term abuse in the expectation of long-term success?
EPILOGUE:

INTERVENTIONIST DOCTRINE SINCE VIETNAM

Since the early 1970s, shifts in US interventionist doctrine -- particularly with respect to the Third World -- have been conditioned by the experience of the Vietnam War. Administrations from Richard Nixon’s to Bill Clinton’s have, more or less, dreaded the possibility of being sucked into a Vietnam-like “quagmire” that would rob their foreign policies of international legitimacy and leave them without the economic resources and political support necessary to maintain America’s leading position in the world. Consequently, they have all, at one time or another, recognized certain limitations in the United States’ ability to control events within the boundaries of another country. And, until recently at least, they have proved reluctant to resume the challenge of building nations in the midst of war.

Even before the end of the war in Southeast Asia, however, the US foreign policy establishment began searching for a way to shake off the debilitating effects of the “Vietnam syndrome” that had supposedly caught hold of the public’s imagination as a result of the 1968 Communist Tet offensive. From its perspective, an excessive preoccupation with Third World setbacks, such as in Vietnam, constrained national
security professionals from carrying out America’s fundamental international objectives to further the development of a liberal world order, to reduce the power and influence of hostile belief systems, and to protect vital strategic interests around the globe. If need be, the United States should try to limit the cost of specific overseas involvements, but it should still retain overall command of the forces pushing for freedom and democracy abroad. Despite this high-level agreement, post-Vietnam administrations have not developed a consistent answer to the question of how to hold on to the reins of world power without paying a bloody and expensive price.

Faced with the necessity of political-military retrenchment, as well as the temporary collapse of public support for Third World interventionism, the Nixon administration responded with a dual policy of regionalism and détente.1 According to the President and his national security advisor (later, secretary of state) Henry Kissinger, the *sine qua non* for effective US action in the developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America was the establishment of stable and effective anti-Communist governments in these areas. Vietnam had shown that America’s vast power, wealth, and know-how could not substitute for a lack of local will and organizing ability. Consequently, the US would “no longer conceive all the plans, design all the programs, execute all the decisions, and undertake all the defense of free world nations.”2 It would

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adopt, instead, a cautious and less militarized security policy reminiscent of President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s.

On the one hand, America would continue to abide by all of its major international commitments. This was not to be a strategy of retreat. On the other hand, the US would henceforth depend on regional surrogates, like Iran, Israel, and South Africa, to keep the peace in peripheral areas. It would generously service requests for military assistance from such friends, but would intervene in Third World conflicts only when this would make a decisive difference and, in most cases, only with air and seapower. Accompanying this new military policy was a diplomatic approach that took advantage of divisions within the Communist camp and the supposed reversion of Russia and China to their traditional Great Power roles. If Nixon and Kissinger could establish a relationship of détente with these longtime provocateurs of conflict and subversion, then they might be convinced to reduce their support for “national liberation” movements in the Third World. This, in turn, would enable the US to remain globally involved at a sustainable price.

Even before the Watergate scandal destroyed his presidency, President Nixon’s dual strategy was under attack by realists, regionalists, and moralists of the left and the right. Realists complained that the administration’s strategy was not what it purported to be: that is, a balance-of-power approach more in keeping with a multipolar world than the prevailing policy of trying to contain Communism everywhere. The administration continued to affirm the validity of America’s far-flung interests and to market their
foreign policies by appealing to “universalised fears.”

Furthermore, the Nixon-Kissinger strategy did not distinguish between types and levels of Third World threats, making the decision to intervene no less difficult than it had previously been, especially in cases of internal subversion. Regionalists, for their part, assailed the administration for understimating the importance of local actors in determining events in peripheral areas. As the Vietnam end-game had demonstrated, the “road to Hanoi” did not go “through Moscow and Peking.”

Indigenous Communists did not always bend to the will of their Soviet and Chinese patrons. What is more, US clients did not always share the same degree of interest in Communist containment and regional stability as did Washington; nor did they necessarily calculate national security requirements in the same way.

Moralists faulted the Nixon administration for its misunderstanding of the Soviet Union as well as its blindness to the consequences of its regional surrogate strategy to both Third World peoples and domestic civil liberties. Those on the right argued that the Soviet Union was not a great power like any other. It was not interested in being co-opted into a “legitimate order” a la the Congress of Vienna. Moscow’s rulers continued to dedicate themselves to the demise of capitalism and the triumph of Communism throughout the world. Although they realized, at this point in history, the great risks of taking on the United States in an all-out war -- and so were amenable to the idea of arms control talks in order to buy time for further military preparations -- these hard-line Communists were not about to give up their cost-effective strategy of nibbling at the

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3 Girling, America and the Third World, 190.
4 Litwak, Détente and the Nixon Doctrine, 92.
edges of the “free world” by supporting revolutionary movements. By contrast, those on
the left contended that the Nixon administration’s policy of delegating security
responsibilities to regional surrogates was increasing political repression overseas.
Washington seemed not to care whether popular protests against its Third World clients
were justified. As long as allied regimes maintained a strong anti-Communist stance,
they were permitted to use American aid to manipulate and mistreat their citizens. What
is more, US dealings with unsavory governments inevitably corrupted American officials,
and this corruption seeped into the domestic political arena in the form of spying, break-
ins, illegal political contributions, and assorted “dirty tricks.” Both forms of repression
violated America’s democratic values and undermined public support for the
administration’s policies.

President Jimmy Carter’s international human rights campaign -- the major
foreign theme of his administration’s first two years -- was, in large part, a response to
conservative and liberal criticisms about the “amorality” of the Nixon-Kissinger
strategy.\(^5\) If the United States and its fellow democracies were to regain their standing in
the Third World, in the view of Carter and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, they had to
champion the values in which they believed. By publicly avoiding the topic of human
rights, previous administrations had placed the US on the same level as governments that
disparaged the very idea of individual liberty. Since “the passion for human freedom

\(^5\) Girling, *America and the Third World*. For a description of the Carter Doctrine from a generally realist
point of view, see “Moral Policeman to the World,” *U.S. News and World Report* 82, no. 10 (March 14,
113-118.
[was] on the rise,” it was vital that America take the lead in shaping a more humane and peaceful world.⁶ Aside from enhancing the nation’s image overseas, Carter intended the human rights campaign to reinvigorate American values at home. In the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate, the American people were seeking a way to renew their faith in the liberal democratic creed. By providing them with an explicitly moral foreign policy - - which, in theory, addressed the failings of friends and foes alike -- the administration hoped it could placate both conservative critics of détente with the Soviet Union and liberal opponents of US ties with right-wing dictatorships.

Unfortunately for President Carter, he ended up pleasing neither ideologues nor realists. The latter group accused the acknowledged Christian evangelist of trying to transform the United States into the world’s moral policeman. Not only did most members of the international community, whose governments tended toward authoritarianism, reject this policy, but it was bound to be selectively applied and might even prove dangerous. On the one hand, countries, such as Egypt and South Korea, where the US had important strategic interests, would be granted exemptions from the human rights standards, while strategically insignificant or hostile countries, like Cuba, would receive the full dose of American indignation, to little practical effect. On the other hand, in places like Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, strident US criticism of the internal workings of the Communist system might either provoke a rebellion (which Washington could not support) or furnish hard-line officials with the excuse that they needed to crackdown on dissidents or to scotch arms control talks.

Left-leaning moralists initially found Carter’s emphasis on human rights and the Third World a refreshing change from the usual Cold War focus on national security and the Soviet Union. But the President’s gradual evolution from moralist to militarist during the last two years of his administration -- in the wake of Cuba’s interventions in Angola and Ethiopia, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the Islamic revolution in Iran -- left many liberal Democrats cold. Ironically, the efforts of the Carter administration to build a rapid deployment force and overseas base structure to protect US strategic interests in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa won it few plaudits from conservatives either. The latter considered Carter’s realization of Russia’s potential for evil belated and half-hearted, and they resented his earlier “mistreatment” of anti-Communist stalwarts in the Third World, such as Chile and Argentina.

Obviously, the champion of moralistic conservatives (known as neo-conservatives in the 1980s) was Ronald Reagan. Unlike his predecessor, President Reagan came into office with a clear, albeit reductionist, view of the global situation. From the time of the disgraceful American retreat from Vietnam in the early 1970s, the forces of light had allegedly been losing out to the forces of darkness. And nowhere was this more evident than in the Third World, where Marxist-Leninist movements in Central America, Africa, and elsewhere were taking control of weak national institutions, overthrowing pro-American governments, replacing them with pro-Soviet regimes, and gradually tilting “the global balance of power away from Washington and toward Moscow.”

accelerating the Carter administration’s military build-up, President Reagan responded to
the renewed Soviet challenge in his second inaugural address by offering assistance to
“freedom fighters” intent upon toppling Moscow-backed governments throughout the
Third World. Employing the rhetoric of the early Eisenhower administration, supporters
of the Reagan Doctrine sought not merely to “contain” Communism where it already
existed but to “rollback” Soviet power, thereby dealing a crushing blow to the Soviet
Brezhnev Doctrine.8

Essentially, President Reagan and his neo-conservative allies sought to turn
Leninist dogma on its head. “Democratic freedom fighters” would now begin to erode
the Soviets’ position along the periphery of their empire in much the same way as
Moscow and Peking-supported “national liberation movements” had been attacking
Western outposts in the Third World since the late 1940s. Not only was this a cost-
effective policy, they argued, it was also the moral thing to do. The Soviet Union had
made relatively easy geopolitical gains in the 1970s, and its resources were stretched thin.
A strategy of sending anti-Marxist insurgents money, arms, and possibly advisers (but not
combat troops) would slowly allow the West to recover lost ground and to even go on the
offensive, without becoming bogged down in a Vietnam-like “quagmire” or involved in a
shooting war with the Russians. True, US-backed guerrillas might not be able to take

8 The Brezhnev Doctrine asserted the permanence of Communist-dominated national political systems as
justification for the Warsaw Pact’s invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. For an objective analysis of the
views of Reagan Doctrine supporters and opponents, see Raymond W. Copson, “Contra Aid and the
transcript of a lively roundtable debate on the Reagan Doctrine, see “The Reagan Doctrine: should it stay
or should it go?” Reason 19, no. 2 (June 1987): 22-30. For a critique of the moralist aspect of the Reagan
Doctrine from a liberal perspective, see Robert H. Johnson, “Misguided Morality: Ethics And The Reagan
Doctrine,” Political Science Quarterly 103, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 509-529.
power in the near-term, but they could inhibit the Soviet Union and its proxies from
undertaking new Third World adventures as well as from consolidating recent conquests
in Latin America, Africa, and Southwest Asia. Somewhat contradictorily, support for
anti-Communist “freedom fighters” was also justified on the grounds that it might be
used as a lever in negotiating arms control agreements and regional peace settlements
with Moscow. Most importantly, Reagan Doctrine advocates considered assistance to the
Nicaraguan Contras, the Afghan mujahadeen, and Jonas Savimbi’s Angolan rebels to be a
moral imperative. Although not altogether democratic from an American perspective,
these groups were fighting “totalitarian” governments imposed on them by a foreign
power that continued to determine the course of events inside their countries.
Furthermore, without US intervention, history indicated that these “noble” anti-
Communist struggles would be in vain.

Reagan Doctrine opponents argued, however, that American aid to Third World
guerrilla movements was neither moral, cost-effective, nor even useful. Above all, it
derived from a fallacious, Manichean world view that failed to differentiate between
conflicts in various parts of the world. From this perspective, the majority of unrest in
developing countries was not a manifestation of US-Soviet competition but a reaction to
socioeconomic inequality and ethno-religious rivalry. In a Third World environment, it
was difficult for outsiders to determine which protagonist was legitimately entitled to
rule. What is more, the movements, which the US was currently backing, were not apt to
adopt democratic forms of government in the unlikely event that they came to power.
And the so-called Marxist-Leninist governments, which the US was opposing, were not
likely to remain under the Soviets’ sway for long. Nationalist impulses and popular hopes for socio-economic betterment would eventually drive even the most radical regimes either toward the West or toward genuine non-alignment. This, of course, was assuming that the United States refrained from stirring the pot of counter-revolution. If it continued trying to implement the Reagan Doctrine, the US risked consolidating Soviet influence over nominally Marxist regimes unable to defend themselves against American-backed insurgent groups.

From a realist standpoint, neo-conservatives lacked a sense of proportion. With a few possible exceptions, the US had few interests in the Third World worth the cost of supporting anti-Communist rebellions. Bankrolling “freedom-fighters” was not the cheap proposition that its advocates made it out to be. Who could say that the Soviets would not decide to counter US aid to guerrilla groups with increased assistance of their own? Might Marxist governments not strike out at targets in neighboring countries they believed to be harboring their enemies at US behest? What would happen if America’s insurgent allies did succeed in their goal of toppling their Communist-backed opponents? There was no guarantee that a new regime would not itself become unstable and require US help to keep it afloat. And what would happen if freedom-fighters found themselves on the verge of defeat? If the impact of Marxist-Leninism on the peoples the Third World were really such a threat, would not the United States have to intervene militarily to save its beleaguered allies? Finally, what made neo-conservatives so certain that minor American victories in the Third World would result in a substantial erosion of Soviet power? In the eyes of most realists, the Soviet Union was going to be “around for a very
long time,” “for better or worse,” and there was no inexpensive way to bring about its demise. Indeed, the Reagan Doctrine would end up irritating the Russians more than it hurt them, thus spoiling chances of cooperation in areas deemed vital to America’s national security, such as nuclear arms control.

Liberals, by contrast, found the Reagan Doctrine morally reprehensible. Employing the tool of revolutionary warfare to promote democracy and undermine the Soviet Union contravened American values. For one thing, in order to undermine the government and sow fear among the population, guerrillas could not afford to distinguish in their operations between soldiers and civilians -- a distinction the US government upheld in theory, if not always in practice. For another, fomenting civil war went against America’s oft-stated preference for international peace and order, without which democratic politics and free market dealings could not flourish. To the neo-conservative argument that the Reagan administration did not cause domestic conflict, but simply tried to assist those willing to fight for their freedom, liberals countered that US actions in support of insurgents added to the intensity, duration, and scope of civil unrest. Furthermore, after years of death and destruction, America was likely to leave its insurgent allies to fend for themselves -- given the nation’s historical inability to sustain an intervention in the Third World. Above all, liberal critics condemned the Reagan Doctrine for its “moral hubris” in presuming that the United States had the unilateral right

\[9\] Reason, 23.
to choose which Third World regimes were legitimate and which regimes deserved to have violence used against them.\textsuperscript{16}

Within the Reagan administration, however, there existed an alternative interventionist doctrine that liberal moralists initially found more to their taste. Although known as the Weinberger Doctrine (after President Reagan’s first Secretary of Defense, Casper Weinberger), this six-point manifesto, governing the future employment of American combat forces, was really a distillation of the beliefs of top US military leaders.\textsuperscript{11} These mainly Army officers had served as mid-level commanders during the Vietnam War and were determined to avoid a repetition of the ignominy suffered by the armed forces as a result of the nation’s defeat in that conflict. On the one hand, Secretary Weinberger and the defense establishment allowed that the US had a continuing obligation to shoulder the burdens of global leadership, which meant maintaining an extensive overseas presence and spending large sums on weapons’ modernization and well-trained military personnel. On the other hand, they were extremely chary about using the products of the fabled Reagan defense build-up -- except as instruments of deterrence with respect to the Soviet Union and its allies. Before they would sanction the sending of young American men, and possibly women, into combat, military

\textsuperscript{10} Johnson, “Misguided Morality”: 528.
commanders demanded that their civilian superiors abide by strict Clausewitzian standards of wartime conduct.

In particular, the high command called for the commander-in-chief and his foreign policy advisors to avoid the “mistakes” of their predecessors during the Vietnam War, and which were, to a certain extent, repeated during America’s brief foray into Lebanon in 1983. For example, they recommended that the president only commit forces to combat overseas when “vital national interests” were at stake. By this, they hoped to forestall another massive US involvement in some faraway country about which most Americans cared little. The military wanted some assurance, if it were to go to war, that it had the full backing of the American people and their elected representatives in the Congress. Vietnam veterans in the armed forces looked back with considerable bitterness at President Lyndon Johnson’s failed strategy of trying to soften the impact of the war in the US.\textsuperscript{12} What is more, older military officers resented the opprobrium that students and liberal intellectuals had heaped upon them for fighting a war whose policy and direction they did not control. Pentagon officials also requested that top policy makers provide them with achievable military goals. In Vietnam, many of them believed, the armed forces had been required to do too much. Instead of concentrating on repelling North Vietnamese aggression, they had become involved in South Vietnamese nationbuilding, something for which they were equipped neither by temperament nor by training. Above all, military leaders demanded the right to win. Most of them had had

\textsuperscript{12} This strategy included refusing to ask Congress for a declaration of war against North Vietnam, shielding most middle- and upper-class whites from the draft, and neglecting to call up the nation’s reserve forces for combat duty.
enough of “limited war” strategies, escalatory ladders, and civilian micromanagement. Once the President made the decision for war, they expected him to hand over to them the authority for its prosecution. From that point, they would employ traditional military principles to bring the war to a swift, decisive, and victorious conclusion. No more stopping the war at mid-point in order to conduct diplomatic negotiations. No more vetting of strategic bombing target lists. And no more gradual introduction of combat forces onto the field of battle.

“Limited” warriors and conservative interventionists -- inside and outside the government -- immediately derided the Weinberger Doctrine for its alleged unrealism and immorality. The Reagan administration’s chief anti-terrorist spokesman, Secretary of State George Shultz, allowed that the Defense Department manifesto might have some utility when the issue was whether the US should become involved in “a major, conventional war.” But the Weinberger Doctrine offered little help when the question was what to do about the threat of terrorism and other unconventional forms of violence. Diplomatic negotiations were not the answer, for “diplomacy not backed up by strength will always be ineffectual at best, dangerous at worst.” According to Secretary Shultz, there had to be a middle way of dealing with certain categories of violent threats “between doing nothing and launching an all-out conventional war.” Furthermore, Weinberger’s test of overwhelming popular support prior to sending troops into combat set a nearly impossible standard of presidential achievement. On the one hand, a large segment of the American public would always have qualms about any overseas intervention, no matter how vitally necessary, and these qualms could only be overcome
through success on the battlefield. On the other hand, US national security and American honor required that the president sometimes make initially unpopular decisions, even if lives were lost as a result. Should the president’s choice prove mistaken or too costly, then the country’s democratic system provided the means for instituting a change of policy. To decide for or against intervention on the basis of opinion polls, however, was cynical and cowardly.  

At first, many liberals voiced support for the Weinberger Doctrine. When compared to its White House counterpart, the military’s interventionist policy seemed surprisingly unwarlike and democratic. But it soon became clear that liberal and military sentiments with regard to Third World intervention were not altogether in sync. In part, this stemmed from the lessons each group extracted from the Vietnam debacle. As indicated above, senior US military officers wished to steer clear of combat situations that offered neither the possibility of a decisive victory nor a quick and honorable way-out. This did not mean that they opposed armed strikes against radical governments abroad, as long as the administration could meet its rather stringent combat criteria, which helps account for the popularity within the armed forces of the invasion of Grenada in 1983 and the bombing raid against Libya in 1986.

For liberals, the most important lesson of the Vietnam War involved the dangers of an excessive preoccupation with Communism. Although few rose to the defense of Muanmer Qaddafi or the Cuban-backed Marxist leader of Grenada, they raised questions

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about the anti-leftist rationale behind the attacks, the military’s tendency toward over-kill, and the long-term impact of such coercive measures on American relations with Latin America and the Arab world. Furthermore, as the Reagan administration segued into the Bush administration and the Cold War yielded to the “New World Order,” liberal internationalists began to find more in common with their former neo-conservative adversaries than with the military high command. While the latter continued to be wary of Third World entanglements, a new coalition of moralists called for America to lead a crusade against domestic repression and civil war and in favor of self-determination, political democracy, free-market capitalism, and individual human rights.

In the early 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rollback of Iraqi forces from Kuwait were liberating events for many conservatives and liberals. For ambivalent Cold Warriors, the demise of the “evil empire” released them from their obligation to support authoritarian regimes for the “greater good” of fighting international Communism. What is more, the end of the US-Soviet rivalry supposedly made civil wars in peripheral areas more amenable to solution. For their part, veterans of the anti-Vietnam War movement were reluctant to back President George Bush’s decision to go to war against Iraq, another poor Third World country, merely for the sake of cheap oil. But the prospect of the United States at the head of a UN-blessed coalition, out to repel Iraqi aggression and, from there, to seek a comprehensive Middle Eastern peace settlement based on equal security and democratic reform, served to reinforce their faith in the coming “New World Order.” This euphoria was somewhat dissipated in the early days of the Clinton administration by the inglorious end to the “humanitarian” mission in
Somalia, the temporary retreat of a Marine Corps expeditionary force in Haiti, and the seeming inability of the NATO allies to agree on peace enforcement measures in Bosnia.

Yet, in the eyes of “new interventionists,” these unfortunate events did not negate the potential benefits of a neo-Wilsonian collective security system.\textsuperscript{14} In order to buttress this shaky edifice, however, several things needed doing. First, the president of the United States, the leader of the sole remaining superpower, had to convince both his own people and other nations of the necessity for outside intervention in conflicts between and within members of the international community. More and more nations were choosing to give democracy and the free market a try, but the stability of many countries was extremely precarious and in need of outside reinforcement, lest civil conflicts impede global efforts to stem the flow of arms, drugs, and refugees across international borders.

Second, representatives of the United States and like-minded countries had to agree on a new set of universal legal principles governing both the conduct of domestic regimes toward their own citizens as well as the responsibility of the international community in enforcing this global code.\textsuperscript{15} Finally, the world’s great powers had to devise a practical


\textsuperscript{15} Despotic governments, which systematically abused their populations, should no longer be permitted to escape exposure and punishment by hiding behind an obsolete framework of international law that opposed external involvement in a country’s internal affairs. The concept of sovereignty had to be redefined so that it referred not to states but to individuals.
and moral strategy for upholding the new legal system. Such a strategy would make use of such methods as preemptive diplomacy and multilateral cooperation and would employ coercive forms of intervention -- economic embargoes, blockades, and military action -- only as a last resort.\textsuperscript{16}

But wrapping a policy of “peacetime engagement” or “humanitarian interventionism” in the flag of the United Nations did not make it any more acceptable to foreign policy realists. In fact, they considered the attempt by liberal and conservative moralists to energize support for their idealized “New World Order” to be even more foolhardy than President Carter’s human rights campaign or President Reagan’s backing of anti-Communist “freedom fighters.” The Carter administration, at least, had mostly limited its attack on human rights violators to rhetorical condemnation and, in some cases, economic sanctions. And the Reagan administration’s foreign policy strategy was connected, however tenuously, to the very real security threat posed by the Soviet Union. Yet “new interventionists,” with influence in the Bush and Clinton administrations, risked involving the United States in expensive, prolonged, and bloody civil wars \textit{a la} Vietnam, whose relation to the national interest was extremely remote. Furthermore, even humanitarian ventures that posed limited dangers to American citizens were an unaffordable indulgence in an era of budgetary constraints. “While Mother Teresa is an admirable person and social work a noble profession,” observed Johns Hopkins

\textsuperscript{16} Halperin and Scheffer, \textit{Self-Determination}, 9.
University Professor Michael Mandelbaum, “conducting foreign policy by her example is an expensive proposition.”¹⁷

From a realist standpoint, the “New World Order” was largely a “chimera.”¹⁸ True, the final days of General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev’s tenure in the Kremlin had provided a brief window of opportunity for the settling of civil wars in the Third World (for instance, in El Salvador), where the rival parties depended equally much on superpower assistance. Once the Soviet Union had ceased to exist, however, the ability of outsiders to influence their former proxies diminished considerably, and interventionist-minded policy makers needed to recognize that they might soon be facing many of the same difficulties that had bedeviled their predecessors in Vietnam. Almost no matter what the difference in material power between internal combatants and outside peacemakers, the former possessed offsetting temporal and moral advantages. The longer that a war dragged on and its costs mounted, the more certain that the will of the intervening parties would waver. As the mainstay of any international police force, the United States would always have a large number of competing foreign commitments and could never feel as strongly as the indigenous parties about the outcome of a particular conflict. Time also worked to the advantage of the civil warriors by allowing them to play upon inevitable differences of within the international coalition. As the Vietnam War demonstrated, local combatants had only not to lose in order to win.

Establishing international standards of governance made little sense for other reasons as well. For example, it was certain that such a policy could never be consistently applied. Resources were limited, and some domestic conflicts were of greater significance to the United States and its allies than others. In addition, there was the possibility that humanitarian assistance to one or another party in a civil war might actually prolong the conflict, increase the suffering, and extend the geographic scope of the fighting. What is more, neither the US government nor the UN had yet developed a coherent “peacetime engagement” doctrine. They knew how to keep the peace in cases where the contestants had decided to stop fighting. And they knew how to seek out and destroy an aggressor. But enforcing the peace in the midst of a civil war was something that neither had learned to do very well.

While realist critiques of the “new interventionism” commanded the pages of international relations journals, popular resistance to US global activism was reflected in the sometimes xenophobic tirades of neo-isolationist presidential candidates Patrick Buchanan and Ross Perot. To a lesser extent, it could also be inferred in the public’s narrow preference in the 1992 presidential contest for former Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton -- whose interest in foreign policy paled in comparison to his fondness for domestic economic and social issues -- over George Bush, the “foreign policy president,” who had presided over the end of the Cold War and America’s victory in the Persian Gulf War. More than President Bush, Buchanan, Perot, and Clinton seemed to understand the American public’s longing to divest itself of overseas responsibilities in order to attend to
long neglected problems at home.\textsuperscript{19} For their part, Buchanan and Perot went further than Clinton -- and most Americans -- were willing to go in advocating a return to an idealized pre-World War II “Fortress America,” where immigration was severely restricted, English went unchallenged as the national language, US companies and jobs remained in the country, and American soldiers were in no danger of being sent off to war at the behest of the United Nations.

By the mid 1990s, a less ambitious version of the Third World interventionist agenda espoused by “Other Warriors” of the 1950s and ’60s appeared to be gathering support among the civilian foreign policy elite, while the majority of the uniformed military and interested public remained quite skeptical of foreign adventures in peripheral areas. Both sides claimed that America continued to be the “indispensable nation” in international affairs, but they differed on the questions of when, where, and how US forces should enter into civil disputes. Thus President Clinton and his foreign policy team steered cautiously from crisis to crisis, carefully testing the waters of military and public opinion, before committing themselves to “Other War”-type ventures in Bosnia and Haiti in 1994-95 and backing away from one in Rwanda in 1996. Furthermore, without the emergence of another “evil empire” to focus America’s passions, it seemed unlikely that a future president of the Vietnam generation would go beyond such tentative interventionism except in cases where “victory” was virtually assured.

\textsuperscript{19} A fall 1995 \textit{Time} magazine/CNN poll indicated, for example, that 73% of American adults believed that “the country should further reduce its involvement in world politics” and concentrate more on domestic issues. J.F.O McAllister, “Uncertain Beacon,” \textit{Time} 146, no. 22 (November 27, 1995): 42.
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