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## PACIFICATION OPERATIONS IN VIETNAM

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**PACIFICATION OPERATIONS IN VIETNAM**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The American Involvement in Vietnam, while ultimately unsuccessful, presents an opportunity for the study of counterinsurgency warfare as well as the construction of a nation. Integral to this is the idea of Pacification, a means by which conditions are brought from a warzone to a fertile ground for nation building. It is believed that a study of successful pacification programs conducted in the Vietnam War would be useful models for application in current counterinsurgency wars, namely those of Iraq and Afghanistan, with potential for usage in future engagements. Discussed are the various pacification operations carried out in South Vietnam, their development, the politics surrounding their application, and ultimately, their effectiveness in winning the war for hearts and minds. Pacification, once it had been fully fleshed out, freed South Vietnam from communist subversion and forced the communists to broker a peace with the United States and to carry out mass military offensives against South Vietnam as they could no longer win by soft power and ideology. As such, the lessons learned in the Vietnam War should be used and considered in current engagements so as to prevent another protracted conflict with an insurgency.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AID – Agency for International Development

APC – Accelerated Pacification Campaign

ARVN – Army of the Republic of Vietnam

CAP – Combined Action Platoon

CORDS – Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support

DMZ – De-Militarized Zone

GVN – Government of South Vietnam

ICEX – Intelligence Coordination and Exploitation

MACV – Military Assistance Command, Vietnam

MAP – Military Assistance Program

NVA – North Vietnamese Army

OCO – Office of Civil Operations

PRU – Provincial Reconnaissance Unit

PSDF – People’s Self-Defense Force

RD – Revolutionary Development

RF/PF – Regional/Popular Forces

VC – Viet Cong

VCI – Viet Cong Infrastructure

## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

The Vietnam War was one of the most complex engagements that the United States of America has ever fought. In light of current events and the prevalence of recent counterinsurgency operations (such as Afghanistan and Iraq), it stands to reason that the study of a previous counterinsurgency operation would be beneficial. While the nature of the conflict was continually in flux, a clear case can be made for the effectiveness of Allied pacification operations, especially after policies were wholly adapted to Vietnam. Therefore, the use of pacification operations by American, South Vietnamese, and Allied forces during the Vietnam War was effective in neutralizing North Vietnamese and Viet Cong insurgency.

While pacification was not an instant success by any measure, the United States and South Vietnam effectively developed and put in to practice a comprehensive pacification plan which, by 1972, had effectively neutralized the Viet Cong insurgency. To borrow General Westmoreland's analogy about South Vietnam being a house with both termites eating away (the Viet Cong) and bully boys with clubs (the NVA) trying to tear it down, pacification was the process of fumigating the house, and after the tent was set up (effective pacification programs developed) and pesticides applied (executing pacification programs), the termites were destroyed.<sup>1</sup> As every population and culture is fundamentally different, this paper will review and analyze the development of the unique challenges associated with pacification in South Vietnam in the hope of providing the beginnings of a model for developing pacification programs. As the events in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated, fighting wars and military offensives simply cannot achieve policy goals or any peace at all; U.S. forces must not only

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<sup>1</sup>Dale Andrade and James Willbanks, "CORDS/Phoenix Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam for the Future." *Military Review*. (March-April 2006): 10, 14.

remove the military threat, but also clear an insurgency and ‚pacify’ the population such that the insurgency has neither popular support nor a reason to exist. While current engagements are not directly comparable to the Vietnam War, the U.S. had initially forgotten in both conflicts about the need for a unified effort, winning the loyalty of the people, and ensuring that the local government has to ultimately do it for itself, lest an American puppet be produced and fall once American forces leave.

There are several definitions to clarify as part of this paper. Pacification is not peacebuilding, though the two certainly share some overlap. Pacification is the intermediate step between a military offensive against the insurgents and nationbuilding. The key differences between pacification and peacebuilding are that pacification is effectively unilateral and the party conducting pacification generally is a state actor with considerable forces while peacebuilding is multilateral and is between groups of similar power. Pacification does not rule out the use of force, though its use is discouraged, and as this paper will suggest, there is far more efficacy in nonviolent means. Pacification is not concerned with conflict resolution, as the state actor generally does not recognize the legitimacy of the insurgency.<sup>2 3</sup>

The overwhelming majority of the existing scholarship on the Vietnam War tends not to focus on pacification operations, as the overall failure to accomplish American objectives distracts from the study of these types of operations. This paper seeks to highlight what did indeed work and of the successes that occurred. Even in works detailing pacification operations during the Vietnam War, there is a tendency to appeal to the sentiment and opinion of the time

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<sup>2</sup>United Nations Peacebuilding Commission: Questions and Answers." <http://www.un.org/peace/peacebuilding/qanda.shtml> (accessed 20 July 2011).

<sup>3</sup>Lewis Sorley. "The Quiet War: Revolutionary Development." *Military Review*. (November 1967): 13.

and ignore the tactical successes while focusing on the failure to achieve strategic goals. While the trend has yet to be firmly established, the more recent reviews of the Vietnam War tend to notice the successes of pacification operations. This paper will conclusively demonstrate this overall success.

After the Introduction and summary of the Vietnam War, Chapter Two will discuss the beginnings of direct American involvement, early pacification programs within South Vietnam, and general politics and tactics associated with pacification prior to American escalation. Chapter Three will discuss the deployment of U.S. troops and the development of more effective pacification programs with more on tactics and politics up until the Tet Offensive. Chapter Four will focus on the enhancement of pacification programs, detailing actions and the Allied victory in the counterinsurgency war, associated realities about the war, ending at the American departure. Chapter Five is to be devoted to the analysis of each major pacification program, supporting evidence for the virtually complete pacification of South Vietnam, and a general showcase of what did indeed work in Vietnam. Chapter Six will summarize the paper and end with policy recommendations for current and future engagements based on the American experience in Vietnam.

The beginnings of active American involvement in pacification operations are most prominent in the Strategic Hamlet program. Strategic Hamlets were a revamped and better funded version of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem's Agrovilles and Agro-Hamlets concept. The idea was to move several hundred families from their villages to more easily defended areas while providing security, show the benefits of urban life to the villagers, or in some cases to fortify already existing hamlets. With the American version of the program, more emphasis and resources were put towards building South Vietnamese infrastructure and

providing government services. Strategic Hamlets, at least in comparison with Agrovilles, were also more about improving quality of life rather than controlling villagers. The American influence sought to build South Vietnam as a nation, moving the objective of the prior pacification effort as an attempt to solidify Diem's rule.<sup>4 5</sup>

With the increased American involvement and the resulting influx of funds, the pacification effort in South Vietnam went further along the path of building an anti-communist bulwark. This was referred to as Revolutionary Development in American circles, though its translation in Vietnamese was no different than that of what Americans called Strategic Hamlets. Furthermore, the Vietnamese population generally observed no significant difference between Revolutionary Development and Strategic Hamlets. Revolutionary Development, beginning in 1964, finally took on the full emphasis that Strategic Hamlets previously had. Naturally, with a military coup removing Diem from power, the need for nation building efforts increased exponentially.<sup>6</sup>

Revolutionary Development was supposedly the second of three steps in establishing a „free and independent' Vietnam, the former being a military offensive and the latter being the process of nation building. Its basic goals were to clear out insurgents and guerrillas, destroy Viet Cong infrastructure, develop local militia for self-defense, organize local government, and provide social and economic aid. Created to satisfy American political pressure to „Vietnamize' the war as quickly as possible, dating back to 1962, Revolutionary Development sought to have as many Vietnamese doing things as possible; as the U.S. never wanted to be in Vietnam and

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<sup>4</sup>Richard Hunt, *Pacification: the American struggle for Vietnam's hearts and minds*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995). 20-22.

<sup>5</sup>"The Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition, Volume 2, Chapter 2", " *International Relations* :: Mount Holyoke College. <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon/pent1.html> (accessed 16 June 2011)

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.



wanted to exit as quickly as possible. Generally, the program was executed through American-trained Vietnamese cadre, who would go out into the villages and perform in the order mentioned above with varying degrees of effectiveness. Cadre ideally formed the nucleus for a developing Vietnamese civil service, organizing village councils and connecting them to the central government.<sup>7</sup>

Revolutionary Development (RD) Cadre teams, composed of fifty-nine South Vietnamese each, were inculcated with anticommunist ideology at the Van Kiep National Training Center, with the goal that the cadre would be revolutionaries and agents of social change. RD cadres were then assigned to hamlets and villages near their origin, with roughly seven per team. While the Regional/Popular Forces patrols were supposed to provide security, cadre often found themselves engaging the VC. Given that they spent only twelve weeks in training, the South Vietnamese populace had become dulled from continuous initiatives from Saigon, and those cadres weren't particularly well compensated or respected, they performed admirably. However, American support and the resulting decrease in corruption were necessary to really give the cadre any legitimacy in the eyes of the people. The resources and backing of the US led Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program were also needed to stave off high desertion rates and to get enough South Vietnamese into the program.<sup>8 9</sup>

With the new paradigm of Revolutionary Development, it follows that next we must discuss CORDS. CORDS was the brainchild of Robert Komer, who shared the argument about

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<sup>7</sup>Lewis Sorley. "The Quiet War: Revolutionary Development." *Military Review*. (November 1967): 13-19.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, p.19

<sup>9</sup>Richard Hunt, *Pacification: the American struggle for Vietnam's hearts and minds*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995). 36-39.

keeping the enemy out of villages and destroying Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army infrastructure, but with the understanding that for any of this to be effective, it was necessary to implement in on a massive scale; or, in other words, there's really no point in clearing out any one village if guerrillas are going to just move to the closest village nearby. Komer sought to handle these efforts under a unified command, resolving issues previously noted in Vietnam with multiple groups on the same side not knowing what allies were doing. Civilian groups were supposed to coordinate with the military through the U.S. Embassy, but due to battlefield realities and communication issues, such rarely occurred. The successes CORDS demonstrated are the crux of this paper as the guerrilla war had been completely won in South Vietnam by 1972.<sup>10</sup>

CORDS backed civilian operations with military resources, know-how, and organization, producing an unprecedented counter-insurgency effort. This military backing and unified command under the military are what separated CORDS from the last purely civilian pacification program, the OCO, or the Office of Civil Operations. OCO featured putting efforts together, but lacked the proper resources, thereby ensuring the failure of this pacification program. Furthermore, placing the pacification effort under military control definitively overrode internal conflicts among civilian staff and agencies concerning hierarchies and the tendencies of bureaucracies to expand their fiefdoms, not to mention the directives of higher-ups back in Washington.<sup>11</sup>

Aside from regular military forces and clandestine CIA operations, virtually all American programs outside of Saigon fell under the operational command of CORDS. CORDS evenly

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<sup>10</sup>Ross Coffey. "Revisiting CORDS: The Need for Unity of Effort to Secure Victory in Iraq" *Military Review*. (March-April 2006): 24-34.

<sup>11</sup>Jeremy P. White. "Civil Affairs In Vietnam." January 30, 2009.

mixed civilian and military advisors at the province level, with district advisors being strictly military as required by dubious security situations. With unified American advice and direction, the South Vietnamese were no longer quite so confused about one agency stating one thing with another stating the exact opposite; from this CORDS was able to review every operating program and either make needed modifications or establish new programs and organizations where they were needed. As South Vietnamese legitimacy and expertise slowly increased, CORDS succeeded in the Vietnamization of the pacification effort, with the Central Pacification and Development Council being headed by the President of Vietnam himself.<sup>12</sup>

Concurrent with the introduction of CORDS, the Marine Corps' Combined Action Program also began. Common to the efforts at the time, the Marines and the Army couldn't agree on any one way to conduct pacification, producing a compromise effort reflecting all strategic ideas and accomplishing none. The Army wanted to use massive firepower and utterly destroy the Viet Cong (VC) while the Marines favored an approach more honed to guerrilla warfare - „clear and hold' - fighting at the village rather than starting huge battles. The original idea was to work with village leaders to secure established Marine bases; this developed into embedding Marine squads in with the local village militia. The initial „Joint Action Companies' put a squad of Marines in with a „Popular Forces' (PF) platoon, which would go about on patrols with relative frequency, focusing on security. After early successes in fending off the VC, the Combined Action Program received an official mandate from Gen. Walt.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Gordon M. Wells, „NO MORE VIETNAM: CORDS as a Model for Counterinsurgency Campaign Design" (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: United States Army Command and General Staff College, 1991), 28-32

<sup>13</sup>Michael E. Peterson, *The Combined Action Platoons* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1989) 1-29

The Combined Action Program's mission, officially, was to satisfy the following: destroy the VC infrastructure within the village or hamlet, protect public security and maintain law and order, protect the friendly infrastructure, protect bases and lines of communication within the villages and hamlets, organize peoples' intelligence networks, participate in civic action, and conduct propaganda against the VC. Uniquely enough, these actions were to be carried out by an all-volunteer group of Marines, who frequently chose to stay on with the CAPs and developed a rapport with the village militia. CAPs eventually became their own regiments within Marine battalions to ease logistics and administrative matters. The final variant of CAP became counterinsurgency guerrillas essentially, in that like the VC, they had no fixed location, only a general area of tactical responsibility. While a smaller program when compared against CORDS and others, the Marine CAP showed astounding effectiveness when they were taken seriously and provided needed resources.<sup>14</sup>

As an outgrowth of CORDS into its own entity, the Phoenix program, at first known as the Intelligence Coordination and Exploitation (ICEX) program, sought to bring together South Vietnamese and American intelligence efforts. ICEX was originally a CIA supported organization, but as the tasks grew, it needed the support of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, thus placing ICEX under CORDS. More notable for the purpose of this paper is ICEX/Phoenix's pacification activity; frequently condemned as an „assassination program', Phoenix sought more to infiltrate the upper levels of the communist political and military machine rather than engage in the tactical campaign against VC grunts. The neutralized VC were low level figures running day-to-day affairs rather than those of high rank.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid, 33-45

<sup>15</sup>William Rosenau and Austin Long, *The Phoenix Program and Contemporary Counterinsurgency* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp.) 1-2, 7-8, 14.

Some remarkable tools of the CIA and Phoenix in Vietnam, the Provincial Reconnaissance Units, were rebranded versions of Vietnamese Counter-Terror Teams, with the new goal of apprehending VC cadre and extracting intelligence from them rather than seeking to kill every bit of Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI) detected as was their previous mandate. To quote John Mullins, an American PRU adviser, “prisoner snatches were key. You can’t get information out of a dead man.” PRUs also generated their own intelligence, often of better quality than that provided by other Vietnamese or American agencies. These ninety man groups, each divided into eighteen man teams, were formed of elite South Vietnamese military personnel and set up with American advisers for operations. To reinforce their effectiveness, in 1970, the PRUs killed, captured, or convinced to defect roughly 380 VC cadre for every 1000 men in the PRUs - no other force came close to this quantity. <sup>16</sup>

Another key part of both the pacification efforts as well as the intelligence push was the *Chieu Hoi* program. Begun in 1963, the „Open Arms’ program offered amnesty and resettlement to VC and NVA personnel willing to defect. Chieu Hoi mostly won over low-level VC cadre and the occasional NVA rank and file, producing more in the way of intelligence concerning insurgent motivation, morale, and organization. Rallies put on by Hội Chánh Viên, or „those who have returned to the righteous side’ (to be henceforth referred to as Hoi Chanh) served to influence the South Vietnamese public to reject the VC cause. The Hoi Chanh shared the gritty details of life in the VC and doubt as to the ability of the communists to ‘liberate’ South Vietnam. So effective were Chieu Hoi rallies that the Viet Cong declared rallying a crime punishable by death. <sup>17 18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid, 10-14.

<sup>17</sup>Rosenau and Long, *The Phoenix Program*, 5

The previous paragraphs provided an introduction to the significant activities within the Allied pacification effort. In addition, this paper will discuss other programs within the bounds of American involvement, and will be discussed incidentally as the reader goes through the greater detail provided for in this paper. Under the Agency for International Development, there were „New Life Development’, ‘Chieu Hoi’ (aforementioned), refugee affairs, and public safety. The Military Assistance Command Vietnam maintained the Regional/Popular Forces programs as well as U.S. Forces Civic Action and Civil Affairs. The CIA managed the previously noted Revolutionary Development Cadre as well as the Montagnard Cadre. Revolutionary Development Reports, Evaluations, and Field Inspection fell under all agencies. The Joint Uniformed Services Personnel Advisory Committee was in charge of Field Psychological operations. While everything above eventually fell under CORDS, their development, changes, and contributions must be discussed as part of this paper. After a full review of the history of pacification operations in the Vietnam War, a solid case will be stated for its effectiveness; it is thought that pacification was effective primarily because of the change in NVA tactics, but there is a plethora of evidence to suggest such besides a sea change in enemy theory.<sup>19</sup>

### **A Quick and Dirty History of the Vietnam War**

The Vietnam Conflict, or at least the beginning of the United States’ place as the major western power in Vietnam, essentially began with the finalization of the 1954 Geneva Accords, the departure of the French, and Ngo Dinh Diem’s self declaration as the president of South Vietnam. The Geneva Agreement was incapable of producing a lasting peace, given that it was a French/North Vietnamese agreement and ignored the U.S. and South Vietnam, neither of which

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<sup>18</sup>J.A. Koch, *The Chieu Hoi Program in South Vietnam, 1963-1971*, Report Prepared for the Advanced Research Projects Agency (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp., 1973), v.

<sup>19</sup>Gordon Wells, *NO MORE VIETNAMS*, 29

were party to it. Diem was actually relatively popular at first in the South, especially compared with communism gone awry in the North. Masses of refugees came from North Vietnam as the new communist regime went through the excesses typical of idealistic and immature communist revolutions. In theory, the Vietnam War could have been prevented by an international enforcement of the Vietnamese DMZ and Geneva Agreement, similar to the partitioning of Germany and Korea, yet the International Commission for Supervision and Control, composed of Poland, India, and Canada and tasked with enforcing the settlement, was not able to successfully accomplish this task.

North Vietnam repeatedly tried to use the Geneva Agreement to liberalize the border and have fair and free democratic elections through all of Vietnam, only for Diem to repudiate their overtures. While still attempting peaceful reconciliation, the remnant Viet Minh gathered so that the North might attempt to struggle for reunification without inviting a U.S. invasion of Vietnam, mobilizing its social resources in the South from the day the peace was signed. North Vietnam began recovery from the excesses of communist fervor and for the first and second five-year-plans, began to industrialize and improve production so as to prepare for war. Mutual violations of the Geneva Agreement rendered it merely a truce under which the Viet Minh began to slowly spread communist propaganda, bringing about the need for pacification operations.<sup>20 21</sup>

To counter increasing Viet Cong influence, Diem attempted population controls, particularly the Agrovilles, Agro-Hamlets, and Strategic Hamlets. Fighting broke out in September 1959 with a VC surprise attack on two ARVN companies. (Note: the Viet Minh after

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<sup>20</sup>Merle L. Pribbenow, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam*. 1st ed. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002. 39, 71.

<sup>21</sup>"The Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition, Volume 2, Chapter 2", *International Relations* :: Mount Holyoke College. <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon/pent1.html> (accessed 16 June 2011)

the French departure and the Viet Cong are essentially the same organization, this paper roughly defines the conversion of Viet Minh to Viet Cong as taking place with the creation of the National Liberation Front in December 1960.) The NVA was still strengthening up north as the VC cadre wreaked havoc across South Vietnam. The unpopularity of Diem's population relocation and control programs, futile attempts at pacification, distanced his government from the people, while his dogged determination to keep power and exercise sovereignty built a wall between South Vietnamese governance and American aid. The coup and resultant power struggle left the VC free to roam about South Vietnam and presented the lowest point in the war.<sup>22</sup>

The fall of Laos to communism frightened American forces into stepping up the war effort against the communists and North Vietnamese. Combined with Johnson's overwhelming electoral victory and the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the Americans now had political approval and a mandate to escalate the war in Vietnam. This began with bombings over North Vietnam, lasting for three years in an attempt to force North Vietnam to quit support of the National Liberation Front. As the ARVN failed in defending U.S. air bases in Vietnam, the Marines were brought in on guard duty. The overwhelming of the ARVN and the losing trend led the Americans to effectively take responsibility for defeating the VC. South Vietnam only existed as an American puppet at this point, with political stability eventually being found under Nguyen Cao Ky and Nguyen Van Thieu. With the uptick in deployment to 200,000 Marines by the end of 1965, the war had truly become Americanized, beginning Westmoreland's war of attrition.<sup>23</sup>

The Tet Offensive in January 1968 exposed the fallacies of the U.S. military reporting of the war effort, demonstrating that the VC and NVA were wholly capable of striking anywhere in

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<sup>22</sup>Stanley Karnow. *Vietnam: A History*. 2nd ed. New York: Penguin Books, 1997. 229, 236-237

<sup>23</sup>Robert S. McNamara. *Argument Without End In Search Of Answers To The Vietnam Tragedy* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2000) 349-351



South Vietnam. While they were readily beaten back and suffered heavy casualties, the war effort lost face at home and its continuance became politically untenable. This began the Vietnamization of the war and steady pull out of American forces. The credibility gap produced by skewed reporting and the results of the Tet Offensive destroyed Johnson's political career. The political effects effectively forced the Americans to enter peace talks with North Vietnam, causing the bombings to halt. Tet was at least a tactical victory for the Americans, that combined with an increased pacification effort, was the beginning of the end for the VC in South Vietnam.<sup>24</sup>

With GEN Abrams now commanding the War and Nixon in the Oval Office, withdrawals slowly began. The idea was to build up the ARVN such that it could fight the war adequately, now realistically possible because of the severe communist losses from Tet. For the first time in the Vietnam War, the Allies had the advantage; changes in tactics and the renewed pacification effort caught the VC off guard. Unfortunately, ARVN incompetence quickly squandered what opportunity existed. Vietnamization of the war continued and the remaining U.S. forces moved to more secure locations. The war expanded into Cambodia and Laos in an attempt to stave off incoming NVA and VC forces, yet the operation, designed to cut the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos, demonstrated the complete failure of Vietnamization and of the ARVN buildup.<sup>25</sup>

Australia and New Zealand withdrew from Vietnam, and the U.S. troop count further dwindled in the early 70s. Disillusionment spread across the ranks as peace protests spread back home. The Easter Offensive effectively demonstrated that South Vietnam was incapable of standing on its own, with American airpower necessary to halt the offensive. The last remaining

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<sup>24</sup>Stanley Karnow. *Vietnam: A History*. 2nd ed. New York: Penguin Books, 1997. 536-581

<sup>25</sup>Ibid, 594-626.

American ground troops were withdrawn in August 1972. That which is not stated in conventional histories is the success of pacification operations; the North Vietnamese Politburo never sought the expansion of the war, but as it could no longer take over South Vietnam from within, it was forced into mass military offensives. American airpower sufficiently halted their offensives; Hanoi could not win without making peace with the U.S. In October 1972, Kissinger and Le Duc Tho came to an agreement, in the process angering Thieu. One debilitating bombing campaign later, and parties returned to diplomacy, producing the Paris Peace Accords, officially ending U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.<sup>26</sup>

As American forces withdrew, the inevitable downfall of the Thieu government began. The North reneged on the terms of the peace agreement, and with the Case-Church Amendment hamstringing any executive American ability to intervene on South Vietnam's behalf, South Vietnam was on its own. The peace did last until 1974, when the VC struck as South Vietnam was still reeling from oil price shocks. North Vietnamese offensives held off for a few months in fear of U.S. retaliation, but after a testing of the waters involving the sacking of Phuoc Binh and U.S. refusal to help the South, the Politburo found a golden opportunity to strike. So began Operation 275, the capture of the northern half of South Vietnam, the complete rout of the ARVN in a bloody repeat of the South Vietnamese offensive against the Ho Chi Minh Trail in 1971 and the fall of Hue against the ARVN's best efforts. The Politburo then ordered the Ho Chi Minh campaign, destroying the ARVN everywhere but the Mekong Delta. With Saigon surrounded, the American helicopter evacuation began, chaos reigned, and on April 30th 1975,

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid, 638-644, 662-668.

the flag of the National Liberation Front was raised above Independence Palace, ending the war.<sup>27</sup>

## CHAPTER 2 - AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Harkening back to the days of the Vietminh insurrection against the French, the U.S. government had been watching Vietnam for fear of communist takeover, lest the implications of the domino theory wreak havoc on the economies of such illustrious western allies in the region as Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand. It didn't help that Ngo Dinh Diem handled his regime much like the „strongmen' of the Middle East and Latin America, adding fuel to the fires burning in the hearts of those Vietnamese who have already taken up arms against one oppressive government. His government, which effectively did not extend past individual districts, left gaping holes for the Viet Cong to come in and court destitute villagers in the countryside. As a result, the Vietnamese found the resultant exploitation under Diem little different than the French. Shortly after taking office, President Kennedy approved a Counter-Insurgency Plan, bolstering the ARVN and supporting a counter-guerrilla auxiliary referred to as the Civil Guard, with the caveat that Diem conduct common sense reforms. Numerous negotiations were made to no positive effect despite an American frenzy about the crisis in nearby Laos.<sup>28 29</sup>

While Diem left the Viet Cong to run unchecked amongst the villages of the South Vietnamese countryside, grasping on to power as only a fledgling autocrat can, the U.S. was generally making every diplomatic overture and support effort possible short of ignoring South

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid, 674-684.

<sup>28</sup>Richard Hunt, *Pacification: the American struggle for Vietnam's hearts and minds*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995). 12-15.

<sup>29</sup>"The Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition, Volume 2, Chapter 2", " *International Relations* :: Mount Holyoke College. <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon/pent1.html> (accessed 16 June 2011)

Vietnam's sovereignty. Kennedy sent over the Taylor-Rostow mission, which found the plight of Diem's regime more haphazard than expected. Unfortunately, no American had quite figured out yet that throwing money on the ARVN wasn't doing any good. A shocking example of this concept occurred in September 1961 in which the Viet Cong publicly beheaded a province chief only fifty-five miles from Saigon. Frustrated with Diem, some favored promoting an anti-Diem military coup as soon as convenient; The U.S. offer of troops now came with the understanding that there would be shared command rather than merely advisors.<sup>30</sup>

Diem's attempts at pacification, the Agrovilles, which became Agro-Hamlets, and ultimately then Strategic Hamlets, were satisfactory for their first few months of implementation, but as time passed, villagers, uprooted from their ancestral lands, became restless and rather inclined to return to their original areas. Strategic Hamlets were a compromise program between Diem, U.S. politicians, and U.S. military leaders, allowing the U.S. to come in on the counterinsurgency effort while satisfying Diem's desire for control and to consolidate his administration's standing. Drawing on the British experience in Malaya with relocating populations to more secure and easily defended areas, it was suggested that a similar strategy be used in South Vietnam. Diem et al began Strategic Hamlets in March 1962, producing 2500 by August 1962; Strategic Hamlets were purported by the government of South Vietnam to be its central pacification and counterinsurgency effort. At the very least, Strategic Hamlets were a mainly Vietnamese effort, and the Diem regime had the good sense to go about the program massively about the whole country rather than following the French 'oil spot' strategy, which merely moves the guerrillas, only for them to return when convenient.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

Strategic Hamlets were doomed to fail from their inception as peasants and villagers simply had no inclination to move and would rather remain where they always have. As might be imagined, peasants resented the South Vietnamese government for such, actively resisting in some cases. Population resettlement in any form was reminiscent of the French colonial empire. While hamlets succeeded in securing the population, there was nothing in the way of political development. Serendipitously enough, Diem tied the Strategic Hamlet program tightly in with his regime. With his death so too died the program, bringing relief to numerous peasants rather than felling the nation. The reigning generals after the coup were not quite so foolish to impose loyalty from above as Diem attempted.<sup>32</sup>

The last few months of the Diem regime produced the beginning of the Chieu Hoi program. While it had a minuscule budget and no existence as a separate program, with humble beginnings under an ARVN captain within the Ministry of Psychological Warfare, the program achieved 11,000 VC or NVA defections in its first year. Chronic to the early years of the Vietnam War, the Government of South Vietnam (GVN) never provided much in the way of training or wages for cadre, not to mention a of coordination hampering operations. Early on, it was the most cost-effective program, averaging \$14 per defection; it was actually more expensive to hunt down and kill enemy soldiers. Diem also started the South Vietnamese National Police on the task of capturing members of the VC leadership. The special branch was tasked with gathering intelligence, the combat police with stopping terrorists, and the regular beat cops with operating checkpoints. Both the CIA and AID provided advisors and training for the police forces, with the ARVN guarding areas as it was able.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Richard Hunt, *Pacification: the American struggle for Vietnam's hearts and minds*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995). 23-24.

In the aftermath of the military coup and a change in VC tactics, the strategic hamlet program wholly fell apart; by July 1964, only 30 of 219 strategic hamlets built in Long An province still remained under GVN control. National guidance of the pacification effort was laid to the wayside in the resulting turmoil. The VC moved right on in, controlling fifty percent or more of the land in twenty-two of forty-four provinces, reaching ninety percent in Binh Duong, Kien Tuong, Kien Hoa, and Dinh Tuong, overall thirty percent of South Vietnamese territory and more than fifteen percent of its people were under the VC as of March 1964.<sup>34</sup>

The South Vietnamese generals were in a bit of a bind and produced, with the assistance of the American embassy and MACV, a revised pacification plan called Chien Thang, or “Will to Victory”, drawing upon the oil spot theory of the French colonial counterinsurgency effort. Bolstered by U.S. Army support under the Military Assistance Program (MAP), the idea was to expand slowly from secure areas to contested and insecure areas while fully discussing public works, improvements, and relocations with the locals, rather than imposing them as was done with Strategic Hamlets. The plan began around Saigon and the Mekong Delta with ARVN units performing clear and hold operations and providing population security. While certainly an improvement over previous attempts at pacification, Chien Thang died three months after its inception in February 1964.<sup>35</sup>

The next new strategy, replacing Chien Thang, was Hop Tac, or ‘Victory’. Recycling the oil spot concept again, Hop Tac was mainly backed by MACV rather than civilian agencies. New to previous pacification efforts was the responsibility of American military advisers to report in to headquarters as to the security of each province. Established was a Hop Tac council, ideally to coordinate South Vietnamese civilian agencies and military units, producing a

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid, 25.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid, 25-26.

balanced civil-military effort as a joint American and South Vietnamese working committee. Westmoreland's brainchild wasn't taken seriously by the South Vietnamese though, and the newly minted Hop Tac council found itself powerless and effectively an advisory board. Both Hop Tac and Chien Thang failed due to ARVN impotence and incompetence, a lack of coordination, and a general fear amongst the officers of being deposed as their former leader was but months ago.<sup>36</sup>

### **Policies, Tactics, and the Battle of Bureaucracies**

The period prior to and around escalation featured a great deal of debate concerning tactics on both sides of the Pacific and the seventeenth parallel. Should the focus be on pushing back the NVA or on eliminating guerrillas and enemy cadre? „Search and destroy’ or ‘clear and hold’? Security first or development first? Oil spot theory, population control, or some other counterinsurgency tactic entirely? At this point, the only things the Americans were particularly certain about was the need to keep South Vietnam as a nation standing and free of communism. It was also generally agreed, at least among the strategic-level policy makers in the U.S., that if anything was to be accomplished, coordination among all allied forces, agencies, programs and the like was critical. Furthermore, competing bureaucracies and political agendas needed to be placated, as combination strategies without a clear directive have already been demonstrated as failures.

During the rare times that individual power holders in the political shambles of South Vietnam thought of anything other than securing their own positions, some thoughts emerged. The generals realized that forced relocations would only alienate themselves from the peasantry and left Strategic Hamlets by the wayside, choosing instead to fortify, defend, and develop the

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid, 26-27.

areas where the peasants already were or returned to. While population controls were shown to be effective in Malaya, Malaysians were also more than willing to move, while Vietnamese were not so inclined. Generals also accepted that power really only existed at the village level and undertook operations coordinated with the village leaders. While these all of these thoughts were positive, with escalation and a relatively stable regime brought about under General Thieu's military directorate, the war became fully Americanized, and the place of the Vietnamese was to maintain a guise that they were not indeed „American puppets’.

The Vietnam War very well could have ended in 1964 or 1965 with a massive NVA invasion, but on the northern side of the 17th parallel, there was a decision made to further develop and strengthen the NVA. The Politburo was very much aware that „the American imperialists’ weren't going to leave anytime soon and chose to strengthen North Vietnam so that they might have a base of operations and industry rather than scurrying about with aging Japanese and French arms as they did when they called themselves Viet Minh. While decidedly peaceful for the time being, nonetheless, the VC controlled much of South Vietnam and rapidly augmented their forces during the lull. NVA/VC forces continued with alternating between quick maneuvering, attacking bases directly, and guerrilla warfare, which certainly pummeled a disorganized ARVN. VC infiltration was at its zenith and would never again reach such highs while Americans were engaged in Vietnam.<sup>37</sup>

The American response to these tactics would truly begin the pacification effort, ultimately annihilating the communist insurgency and guerrillas. The trick lied in figuring out how exactly to do it. Westmoreland's Hop Tac council idea provided a start to the idea of coordination, but its failure and general dismissal by the agencies led to its failure. Any

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<sup>37</sup>Merle L. Pribbenow, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam*. 1st ed. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002.) 91-94, 103-104.



successful pacification attempt would need strong backing rather than being treated as a side front to the war. Resolving squabbles between American civilian agencies, American military branches, American intelligence, and all their South Vietnamese counterparts was critical, but this required either compromise on strategy or one high potentate to run the whole operation. Even if Strategic Hamlets were not fundamentally flawed for use in Vietnam, they never could have succeeded with several parties seeking their vested interest over the compromise goal.

Within the military, the debate over attrition vs. pacification and „search and destroy’ vs. „clear and hold’ still raged, with the Marine Corps and Army disagreeing on strategy. The Marine Corps drew on its experience with the Banana Wars of 1915-1935, particularly in Nicaragua. They favored positional warfare and small units, while the Army favored conventional large unit engagements, massive firepower and attrition. More fundamentally, the Marines went with „clear and hold’ while the Army followed „search and destroy’; the Army left local forces and police to do basic population control and checkpoints as their pacification effort. The Army’s perspective on counterinsurgency warfare viewed no difference between the partisan and the insurgent, believing the VC to be an extension of North Vietnam, easily defeated when lines of communication and support could be severed. Westmoreland, the commander of Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, found the idea of positional warfare abhorrent, but at least left the Marines to their own devices tactically.<sup>38</sup>

A cursory review of the First Indochina War showed that the French attempted a similar strategy of „search and destroy’, continually hoping for one large battle in which superior French firepower would decisively decimate the Viet Minh. When „search and destroy’ failed, the French then chose to hunker down and force conventional battles that way, which worked until

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<sup>38</sup>Michael E. Peterson, *The Combined Action Platoons* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1989) 15-22

the Viet Minh wisened up and brought out massive firepower against French fortifications. At any rate, „search and destroy’, while potentially effective against partisans, definitively failed against insurgents following Viet Minh/VC tactics, with the waste of soldiers forcing the counterinsurgency forces into a defensive position in the long run. Westmoreland’s attrition strategy with the use of „search and destroy’ pulled considerable resources away from other programs, limiting their effectiveness, yet perform they did. Nonetheless, because of conflicts in American thought, the following pacification effort in all of its various strains presented a remarkable tactical experiment in which multiple schools of thought on counterinsurgency were put to the test. The next chapter of this paper discusses the Americanization of the war, the plethora of pacification programs put out and developed, and the early results of each.

### **CHAPTER 3 - ESCALATION TO THE TET OFFENSIVE**

With the escalation of the war effort, so too began the escalation of pacification. “Winning the hearts and minds of the people” ceased to be a cliché and became an integral part of the war. As South Vietnam was still in shambles politically, escalation also meant that the incoming Americans filled a power vacuum, and soon South Vietnam was no longer the main force in the pacification effort. Pacification was secondary to the massive battles taking place across the central highlands and along the coast as pacification does not and cannot occur in the middle of a battle. This time period represents a time period in which tactics were tested, programs truly developed, and the groundwork for Allied victory in the „other’ war was laid.

The resurgence of pacification was marked by a series of Presidential conferences on islands in the Pacific with South Vietnamese political leaders. Pacification’s importance continued to rise with each; the first in February 1966 in Honolulu, the second in Manila that October, and again in Guam in March 1967. Each conference also brought about a reorganization

within the U.S. mission, seeking to improve Pacification management. These conferences are what developed pacification from the remnants of the Hop Tac program into something of importance, then to the OCO, and finally producing CORDS. CORDS is what truly began to win the pacification war and represents the ultimate product of the development of pacification programs. (Mount Holyoke College: International Relations)

Back on the battlefield, American forces were scrambling to halt the steady encroachment of the Viet Cong. It was as though nothing had been done in the way of pacification when U.S. troops entered the theatre; ARVN classifications of areas as being „secure’ were systematically false. Saigon, when held accountable to its declarations as to the security of an area, refused to take responsibility for an underfunded and impotent ARVN. This encouraged a NVA/VC military buildup, as though they intended to finish off South Vietnam in a general offensive; all the more possible because they controlled a majority of South Vietnam’s territory and could impress locals into joining them. Policy changes associated with South Vietnamese weakness, particularly National Security Action Memorandum 288, dedicated the American effort to maintaining a noncommunist government in South Vietnam regardless of regime or the strength of its central government.<sup>39</sup>

U.S. Army Engineers, medics, civil affairs teams, and civilians came in to try and improve the lives of the South Vietnamese with the goal of enhancing the appearance of the government as troops would secure areas and relocate populations that could not be secured. AID and the South Vietnamese government worked to assist and care for these refugees. As Americans came in providing security and a better way of life, they certainly improved local opinion of the Allies, but as the effort was not fundamentally South Vietnamese, there were

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<sup>39</sup>Richard Hunt, *Pacification: the American struggle for Vietnam's hearts and minds*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995). 28-29.

limits as to what could be done to improve the legitimacy of the central government. To try and put a Vietnamese face on these efforts, General Thang brought together the existing cadre organizations together, forming the Revolutionary Development Cadre. The most formidable task among Revolutionary Development cadre was to overcome that lack of credibility. As the RD cadre were trained and sent out by the central government, they sometimes didn't understand the need to work with the locals, going out and building infrastructure as ordered and ignoring villager concerns.<sup>40</sup>

In an attempt to prevent an overrun and begin pacification, there were a number of large military operations. Every operation in this period was a blur between the various kinds of operations: search and destroy, clear and hold, and pacification support. As the reader might imagine, a great part of this is semantics - there were some who still confused 'Pacification' and 'Revolutionary Development' as being the same thing when a subset relationship fit reality. Some argued that any effort which took out communists implicitly aided 'the other war'. Sometimes it did, but body counts aren't the criteria here - it's a matter of whether the communists still exerted any influence on an area or if the position of the government was improved in the countryside.<sup>41</sup>

County Fair operations took place in villages, bringing in civil affairs specialists to make improvements with cordon-and-search operations to provide security. In essence, these operations included clearing out a village of Viet Cong infrastructure, gathering intelligence, putting on a show and attempting to gain the loyalty of the populace. Villagers generally welcomed the county fairs as peace from Viet Cong harassment improved life. RD cadre came in and implemented village governance and a link to Saigon, taking a census, running elections, and

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid, 36-37, 45-47.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid, 47.

doing small construction projects. County Fairs worked wonderfully until the Americans left, when the ARVN would revert to more corrupt activities, not unlike the VC. The communists would also harass the area as they didn't fear massive American retaliation in their absence. While effective in the short-term, County Fairs required disproportionate manpower and resources to keep a village safe, rendering them infeasible save for a small number of villages at any given time - „clear and hold' doesn't work when one stops holding!<sup>42</sup>

The U.S. Army's 25th Infantry division attempted another variant of operation in Hau Nghia as well as in Long An. The initial search and destroy operations conducted disrupted the VC, kept them moving, and dealt heavy damage. As a result, the VC moved into an urban environment, making tanks, artillery, and aircraft effectively useless, forcing rifle vs. rifle fights. The VC would continuously move about, even into pacified areas, and lay low when faced with the sporadic battalion or brigade sized sweeps conducted to eliminate them. Yet, if the Army ever stayed in an area long enough to truly remove the VC from the location, they would risk rendering the ARVN permanently dependent on their presence. As it was, the ARVN was often under strength and units would do little more than protect their own bases for fear of VC capture.

In Long An, the VC were even so bold as to fly their banner over villages near the district headquarters. Thus they attracted the U.S. Army's first engagement in an urban area - to soothe civilian protests, artillery strikes were coordinated with village chiefs and several RD cadre teams were brought in. Naturally, the VC almost doubled their presence there and kept strictly to indirect engagements, making it clear to the populace that American military force couldn't win on its own. In another offensive, the U.S. Army surrounded an island in Long An, showing up with massive firepower and seeking a bloodless clearing out of VC. Chieu Hoi was conducted in

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid, 47-48.

place on that island, but the overwhelming majority of VC cadre had left, only to return when the Americans left, leaving the island near Long Huu to be defended by two ARVN companies, one RF company, and a PF platoon. Naturally, corruption set in quickly, the South Vietnamese military forces alienated the population, the VC regained influence on the island, and the pacification of Long Huu was wholly bungled, even if successful in the short term.<sup>43 44</sup>

Near Saigon, the U.S. Army and ARVN launched a combined effort to clear out more VC, who had been burning schools and overrunning outposts. Operation FAIRFAX/Rang Dong began in December 1966, targeting an area where Strategic Hamlets and Hop Tac have already failed to pacify an area but kilometers from the capital. Each ARVN battalion was linked with a U.S. Army unit, jointly acting with the goal of clearing out Gia Dinh of VC in two months. While the militaries were linked, there was poor coordination with the civilians, particularly the Provincial Reconnaissance Units, whose counterinsurgency efforts were thoroughly disturbed by the military offensive. Five separate South Vietnamese intelligence nets were in operation, not to mention the numerous American intelligence agencies in place, none of which were sharing information. The local police were inefficiently deployed, with faulty data on their blacklists. Six months later, the communists stalemated the Americans in Gia Dinh, dealing heavy casualties all the while and carrying out their usual operations in town. What's more, the Americans couldn't leave, lest the VC mount an offensive against Saigon.<sup>45</sup>

These operations showed the need for coordination in pacification efforts now. With FAIRFAX going on in Gia Dinh, Operation CEDAR FALLS struck the Iron Triangle, a

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid, 54.

<sup>44</sup>"The Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition, Volume 2, Chapter 7", *International Relations :: Mount Holyoke College*. <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon/pent1.html> (accessed 16 June 2011)

<sup>45</sup>Richard Hunt, *Pacification: the American struggle for Vietnam's hearts and minds*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995). 55-56.

communist stronghold for over twenty years. The operation called for surrounding the Iron Triangle, clearing it of civilians, stripping away natural concealment/defoliating the area, and destroying communist installations and tunnel complexes. Artillery and air strikes were opened to use for the whole of the tactical area of operations. Of course, somebody had to move the civilians out without declaring to all the impending action. Yet, it was common knowledge that there were intelligence leaks in Vietnam, so the South Vietnamese paramilitary forces, the ARVN 5th division, the American civilian province representatives, and the province chief weren't told about CEDAR FALLS until after the operation was started. As might be expected, it took days to move the civilians and their livestock out, soured relations between civilian agencies and the military, put numbers of refugees in awful conditions, and possibly created recruits for the enemy. Aside from the adverse publicity, the VC moved back in two weeks after the operation, as neither the ARVN nor the U.S. Army could keep forces there to prevent their return.<sup>46</sup>

One positive military development was the creation and deployment of the Combined Action Platoons by the U.S. Marine Corps. In late 1965, the Marines initially began a trial, with Joint Action Platoons, placing a USMC squad in with a Popular Forces platoon. They started with daylight patrols and improving security measures, putting villagers and officials at enough ease to sleep in their own homes. There was the added psychological boost of making the VC think there were more forces deployed than there actually were; upped patrols made life in the VC for cadre harder as they could no longer return to their families without defecting. The concept of Combined Action Platoons soon spread across the country, producing 57 CAPs by

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid, 56-59.

1967. Their presence even resulted in Giap sending main force units in to South Vietnam just to disrupt the pacification effort.<sup>47</sup>

Now solidified from the experiment phase with Lt. Ek, the first commander of a CAP, the CAPs became a formal component of Marine strategy in the conduct of the war. At Binh Nghia, complete pacification was achieved as early as the fall of 1967; the village was completely ignored by the Tet Offensive. By waging war in the hamlets rather than on the hamlets, the CAPs demonstrated astounding effectiveness. Granted, not all platoons had been as successful as the one sent to Binh Nghia; not all soldiers in the CAPs were willing volunteers, and one inappropriate action from one Marine could destroy months worth of progress. Given that these Marines were given poor logistical and administrative support, they performed admirably, despite having to switch from fighting the main war to the war for hearts and minds. The administrative problem was eventually resolved, with Marines in CAPs placed under the operational control of Combined Action Companies or Groups and eventually a separate program entirely with its own Table of Organization and Equipment.<sup>48</sup>

The increased focus on pacification throughout the military led to the addition of a civil affairs function to the command structure of battalions - the „S-5’, to go along with „S-1’ through „S-4’ (Command, Intelligence, Operations, and Supply). Slowly, the focus moved from „search and destroy’ to ‘hearts and minds’. While the traditional emphasis on kinetic operations inhibited this transition, it was occurring. The CAPs gained more support higher up, with a complete move of the program under the 3rd Marine Amphibious Force. The CAP school began to develop, familiarizing Marines with the intricacies of dealing with the PFs as well as reviewing military

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<sup>47</sup>Michael E. Peterson, *The Combined Action Platoons* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1989) 23-31

<sup>48</sup>Ibid, 31-44.



skills, Vietnamese culture, and Vietnamese language when able to attend an extended program. Unfortunately, the good work of the CAPs was largely ignored as the war intensified along the DMZ, and as focus moved, the warnings of a massive buildup in VC forces in the countryside were largely ignored.<sup>49</sup>

On the civilian side of the pacification effort, there was the same problem of effective programs being undermined by either lack of resources or lack of coordination. AID handled the police, the refugees, and Chieu Hoi. The CIA acted as primary adviser to the RD cadre. MACV supported the RF and PF. Nobody acted as a coordinator for all of these programs so that an efficient strategy might be employed. Supposedly, all of these fell under the American ambassador to South Vietnam, yet he had to deal with an autonomous military commander as well as semi-autonomous heads of the civilian agencies. All roads led back to Washington at a time when they needed to lead to Saigon with the occasional telephone call to Washington. It's not as though attempts weren't made to consolidate the American effort - just that bureaucracies took offense when the heads in Washington found out. The idea of a single executive, a pacification „czar', began to circulate through Washington as early as February 1965, but with political focus on the mass deployment of U.S. troops to Vietnam, there wasn't quite enough political will to push it through over the heads of bureaucracies.<sup>50 51</sup>

Between the Honolulu and Manila conferences, Robert Komer, reporting directly to President Johnson, went about politicking for pacification and preparing a reorganization of the civilian effort. He produced three options for change: putting the entire civilian and military

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid, 45-50.

<sup>50</sup>Richard Hunt, *Pacification: the American struggle for Vietnam's hearts and minds*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995). 65-66.

<sup>51</sup>"The Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition, Volume 2, Chapter 7", "*International Relations* :: Mount Holyoke College. <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon/pent1.html> (accessed 16 June 2011)

effort under the Ambassador to South Vietnam, centralize the civilian effort and strengthen MACV while leaving military and civilian efforts split, and to put everything under Westmoreland. With Presidential backing, the Office of Civil Operations was formed, pushing over the heads of the civilian bureaucrats and forcing the military to take the now united civilian agencies more seriously. Naturally, entrenched powers resisted and the OCO was never really allotted sufficient time or resources to accomplish much, yet it set an important precedent in the pacification effort and prepared the stage for CORDS.<sup>52</sup>

While limited in effect and duration, the OCO brought together the refugee program, psychological operations, new life development (the ultimate incarnation of revolutionary development, with particular concentrations for youths and the Montagnards), RD cadre, Chieu Hoi, and public safety/police under one organization. Responsibility officially shifted from parent agencies to the OCO, yet frequently, the parent agencies still had the power of the purse as well as the duty of logistics. Unfortunately, as the period of escalation demonstrated, security from the VC had to come before any real pacification could occur; even if the civilian agencies were united, the military as the prime mover was inevitable for the simple reason that South Vietnam was insecure in many locales. Hence, presidential support, and even Komer came behind the idea of integrating the civilian and military pacification operations.<sup>53</sup>

The departure of Henry Cabot Lodge from the ambassadorship to South Vietnam in 1967 resulted in a bout of politicking to reach Johnson's goal of putting pacification under the military. The reorganization produced Bunker as ambassador, Locke as deputy ambassador, and Komer as 'pacification czar' under Westmoreland. Abrams was placed as Westmoreland's

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Richard Hunt, *Pacification: the American struggle for Vietnam's hearts and minds*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995). 82-85.

deputy, with the reasoning that the ARVN needed to be cleaned out and remodeled more than South Vietnam needed American troops, with the fear hanging overhead that South Vietnam would become ever more dependent on the American military. This and further politicking eventually led to transition, melding civilian agencies under the OCO together with the military, producing CORDS, or Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support. „Blowtorch Bob’ (Komer) had skillfully managed to navigate Washington bureaucracy, placate civilian concerns, and finally bring the pacification effort under one command.<sup>54</sup>

From May 1967 on, CORDS became the main pacification authority on the American side. Now the only administrative issue remaining was that of actually getting the South Vietnamese to do what they needed to do. „Project Takeoff’ was taken up to review all programs, formalize ‚action principles’, and hopefully elicit a stronger South Vietnamese commitment. The South Vietnamese side of the pacification effort was plagued by poor management and planning, underfunding, and poor coordination in much the same way the American side was. Granted, the vagaries of elections rendered gathering the political will for such in 1967 difficult at best, but because of the unification of CORDS, the needed message could be distributed to the lower officials, potentially getting something done in spite of the politics in Saigon. Project Takeoff massively improved the planning and coordination of the 1968 pacification effort vis-a-vis the 1967 one, which really only focused on Revolutionary Development in individual locales. Under American pressure, the South Vietnamese finally put together a centralized council to manage Revolutionary Development.<sup>55</sup>

Chieu Hoi benefited massively from the introduction of CORDS and the greater pacification push. The program actually received close to all of the funding it was supposed to in

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid, 86-89.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid, 100-101.

1967, rather than 31% the previous year. Capacity for intake of defectors doubled in 1967, and CORDS brought in more American advisers. The true challenge lied in reforming the ARVN, whose ineffectiveness and lack of support for pacification allowed the VC to infiltrate provinces adjacent to Saigon. The goals of Takeoff in this case were to increase the ARVN support of RD cadre teams, in both numbers and in terms of actually moving off base and protecting the teams rather than being stationed in the locale. Early on, there was also an attempt to stem the attrition of the RD cadre, and though the program was expanded, attrition wasn't significantly impacted. CORDS's aegis brought more support to RD, but South Vietnamese lack of motive and focus proved limiting. The introduction of CORDS also allowed for the militarization of refugee programs, finally bringing needed resources and coordination in case civilians needed to be evacuated.<sup>56</sup>

With the introduction of CORDS, the intelligence apparatus could not be ignored, receiving a similar boost. Infrastructure Coordination and Exploitation, or ICEX, was developed during Project Takeoff with CIA input. Similar to the intelligence agencies in Washington, ICEX tasked the South Vietnamese police forces with eliminating the VCI and gaining intelligence on the communist underground, complete with special units and a national police agency. While the formation of separate intelligence agencies would seem counter to the purpose of CORDS, whose major feature was unification, the existing military intelligence service, J-2, was already burdened and likely incapable of anything more than an advisory capacity regarding the VCI. In a similar vein, CORDS also established an accurate and uniform field reporting system, now requiring the name, position, rank, function, and party of every VC cadre captured, killed, or defected, in this manner preventing corruption and body snatching. It should be noted for future

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid, 102-103.

pacification efforts that accountability and political pressure are prerequisites for getting the existing or newly formed political structure to do anything; it took several months of pressure and the reincarnation of ICEX into a new program called Phoenix before the new anti-infrastructure program took hold.<sup>57 58</sup>

With the development of CORDS and Phoenix as well as the new emphasis on pacification, Allied forces were put in a strong position to take advantage of the massive military defeat the VC and NVA suffered in the Tet Offensive. While Tet achieved a coup in world opinion in favor of the communists, it came at an incredible price and spelled the end of any success the communists had in the counterinsurgency war. Tet alienated the VC cause from the South Vietnamese commoner, and the resounding Allied counteroffensive helped to seize the popular mandate, convincing many that South Vietnam might actually win. Furthermore, as the VC licked their wounds, the ARVN and RF/PF were able to establish footholds and provide security for once, allowing pacification to truly begin. Chapter Four will treat the actions and final incarnations of pacification programs, concurrent with the Vietnamization of the war.

#### **CHAPTER FOUR - TET TO AMERICAN DEPARTURE**

The Tet Offensive was the definitive turning point in the Vietnam War on all fronts. The massive VC and NVA attack and the Allied losses incurred sent a shock through a previously supportive American public. The political career of President Johnson was over, and Westmoreland was on his way out. Political pressure to Vietnamize the war in the early sixties was minimal compared to that which was beginning to come up - not to mention the impending peace protests and demands for withdrawal. The military was doing well to prevent a general

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid, 114-116.

<sup>58</sup>William Rosenau and Austin Long, *The Phoenix Program and Contemporary Counterinsurgency* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp.) 7.

uprising through all of South Vietnam and by March 1968 things had begun to calm down.

Contrary to popular belief on the other side of the Pacific, pacification was not dead though, and in fact, had an unprecedented opportunity. The VC were hurting badly after Tet, and Saigon only needed to assert itself in force to recover control over its territory. Tet also thrashed the idea of conducting the Vietnam War as a „big-unit’ war, thus favoring pacification.<sup>59</sup>

Project Recovery, the effort to aid the victims of the Tet Offensive, started up within days of the first attacks as the enemy couldn’t take the cities. In a rare instance, South Vietnam mobilized quickly for once. Komer and Vice President Ky worked together to coordinate the effort, making American advisers actively part of South Vietnamese organizations. Funds were shifted towards rebuilding, restoration, and rearmament, with a bonus five million dollars from MACV to supplement funds. Each refugee family received ten bags of cement, ten sheets of tin roofing, five thousand piasters, and six months of rice. Things were going well with Project Recovery when the competent Vietnamese leaders in the group, Ky and Thang, needed to leave for political reasons, leaving things to founder on the South Vietnamese end due to lack of top-level mandate. The „mini-Tet’ that followed in May was mostly ineffective and further demonstrated South Vietnam’s ability to recover and redevelop.<sup>60</sup>

South Vietnam fully recovered from Tet in less than a year, even with subsequent waves of attacks, with strong support and the success of Project Recovery. Up to 66.8% of the South Vietnamese populace were living under secure conditions by September 1968. The People’s Self-Defense Force (PSDF) was established for local men to serve in militia to protect their villages. The idea had been long advocated by CORDS without success. The Phoenix Program

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<sup>59</sup>Richard Hunt, *Pacification: the American struggle for Vietnam's hearts and minds*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995). 140-143.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid, 145-148.

began to seriously take hold as well with government promulgation. The VC human infrastructure were finally being actively targeted by South Vietnam, focusing on those most important to the communists rather than brutalizing the grunts. South Vietnamese pacification forces had grown after Tet, with 385,000 in the RF/PF, 50,000 RD Cadre, and 80,000 police, and pacification funds almost doubled compared against 1966. RF/PF also received M-16s, freeing up their old weapons for use by the PSDF. Relative optimism, as demonstrated by these updates, flowed through South Vietnam, encouraging Thieu to maybe consider taking advantage of the lull in the VC. For once, a commanders' conference was held to take the initiative in the war - with William Colby (Komer was named ambassador to Turkey, Colby replaced him as head of CORDS) proposing a plan to expand government control of moderately populated areas, with enough relative control to claim at least ninety percent of the South Vietnamese populace.<sup>61</sup>

With sufficient political pressure to push Thieu into most anything desired, the Americans were able to start on the Accelerated Pacification Campaign developed. Beginning 1 November, the PSDF were now responsible for local security in the secure hamlets while the RF/PF moved into contested and enemy-controlled hamlets, with the ARVN out running search and destroy tactics. This first majority American planned South Vietnamese operation was run with far superior organization and the uniform statistical measure of a hamlet's security as established by CORDS. Military offensives were launched throughout South Vietnam in every Corps area of operations. Operation Vinh Loc was notable for securing Hue, a cultural capital of Vietnam, as well as successfully clearing and holding an area, albeit with assistance from the

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid, 154-155.

local terrain. With any luck, the APC would be sufficient to convince the American public that the war was indeed winnable and that pacification was succeeding.<sup>62</sup>

By the end of January 1969, over one thousand contested hamlets had been secured, with less than fifteen percent of those targeted by the APC still under dubious control. Almost half of the improvement had taken place in the Mekong Delta, a particularly populous region of South Vietnam. 1.7 million more Vietnamese were living in secure areas at the end of 1968, compared against the previous gain of 1.3 million for 1967. The 1968 data was purely from improvements and initiatives in pacification, unlike the 1967 data which was artificially high due to population movements and questionable accounting. 76.3% of South Vietnamese were living in secure areas, with only 12.3% under VC control. Saigon only needed to establish political roots in the newly pacified hamlets in order to consolidate its gains, installing local elections in over five hundred hamlets and appointing officials in over seven hundred.<sup>63</sup>

As the communists received a sound defeat on the battlefield, they began to fight back the only way they could - politically. The Viet Cong resorted to the assassination of village officials and terrorism while scaling down military operations. They also ramped up the establishment of „liberation committees’, attempting to create some sort of political legitimacy and claim a modicum of control over areas so that they might claim them in peace talks, never mind that CORDS’ Hamlet Evaluation System conclusively demonstrated that the VC were only on the fringes of the country now. The APC, conducted in the aftermath of Tet, decisively rolled back VC encroachment on South Vietnam and forced the VC to political tactics and lying low. The

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid, 157-159, 174-175, 193.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid, 197, 200.



only failing of the campaign was that its actions made no difference to the talking heads on the other side of the Pacific.<sup>64</sup>

The APC began a period in which South Vietnam would have continuous gains in security while the VC continued to wither away, lasting until American withdrawal. While Thieu's government wasn't perfect, even downright ineffective at times, the APC wasn't a success because of the brilliant pacification programs devised by Americans - it was a success because the South Vietnamese actually took the fate of their nation into their own hands. Coordination of programs and ministries into a single campaign helped, but the larger hurdle of South Vietnamese commitment was passed. There was an aura of hope in Saigon and the Allies were winning the war for hearts and minds. With Nixon entering the Oval Office at the end of the APC, pacification and the place of the South Vietnamese government would take on greater emphasis.<sup>65</sup>

The „three selfs', self defense, self-government, and self-development would come to dominate the conduct of pacification as Colby took over CORDS and Abrams MACV. The idea was that the most effective way, arguably the only way, to solidify gains in South Vietnam was to connect the South Vietnamese with the central government. As the military threat could now be handled by South Vietnam on its own, the country now shifted into the blurry phase between pacification and nation-building. Granted, this begged the question about whether the South Vietnamese could adequately govern themselves - performance of local officials was considered 'good' in only one province as of September 1968. Still, appearances suggested Thieu and his crew were moving forward, albeit at a pace far too slow for American tastes, but considerably better than the situation where fear of coups predominated politics.

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid, 200-205.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid, 202-208.

The 1969 Tet Offensive, a lesser version of the previous year's offensive, demonstrated that South Vietnam could at least defend itself, or at least that the VC wasn't inclined to military offensives - the communists suffered heavy losses and made no military gains again, not making another major military effort until 1972. This allowed Nixon to begin troop withdrawals and pull Americans away from the front lines. 25,000 American combat forces were pulled out with a declaration in the middle of 1969, and plans were set in motion to pull out 265,500 American men by spring 1970. As of March 1970, Nixon announced another withdrawal, this time of 150,000 troops. Nixon was caught between politics at home, the lack of a suitable military option, and North Vietnamese intransigence. Still in the same political logjam, he withdrew troops again in 1971, leaving 175,000 Americans in Vietnam, of which only 75,000 were combat forces. South Vietnam was holding strong during the entire drawdown, though rumors of a massive buildup among the VC were about.<sup>66</sup>

By March 1972, there were only 95,000 American forces remaining in South Vietnam, of which only 6,000 were combat troops - Vietnamization was nearly complete. The North Vietnamese decided to strike right as the Americans were almost gone and at the beginning of the presidential campaign for maximum effect, bringing about the Easter Offensive. With hands tied, the Americans resorted to their only option - yet another massive bombing campaign, gaining political support in the process. Diplomacy with the USSR and China also helped bring pressure on the North Vietnamese to settle a peace with the Americans. With the bombing by Operation LINEBACKER, the Easter Offensive produced a stalemate between the Allies and

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<sup>66</sup>George Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1996). 248-249, 254, 264-265.

North Vietnam, hastening the peace process as South Vietnam still stood as strong as it ever had.<sup>67</sup>

After an overly long and drawn out period of negotiations, stick waving, and political showmanship, a peace deal was brokered over Thieu's head on January 14th, 1973, producing the end of American involvement in Vietnam. Thieu was effectively forced to accept the deal or lose American support, with a reminder of that which happened to Diem almost a decade ago. POWs were returned to the U.S. and „peace with honor' was achieved. While it was commonly accepted that matters would eventually be resolved by force, the peace bought South Vietnam some time to get its act together and placated the American public. The Case-Church Amendment effectively forced the breakup of Nixon's promise to Thieu of American enforcement of the treaty, setting up the stage for the VC resumption of offensive operations and the communist victory in Vietnam in 1975. After an inordinately long struggle, peace was finally achieved, even if a domino had fallen.<sup>68</sup>

## **CHAPTER 5 - ANALYSIS AND EFFECTIVENESS**

The argument of this paper is that pacification was effective and an integral part of the Vietnam War. It is believed that the success of pacification, combined with overwhelming American airpower, forced the North Vietnamese to agree to the Paris Peace Accords. The paper will now detail the major pacification operations in terms of their efficacy - plainly, what worked, what didn't, and the peculiarities to Vietnam concerning their applications. There will then be a final discussion as to the case for pacification's role in bringing about the sought peace, demonstrating that peace within acceptable American outcomes depended on pacification's function.

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid, 271-276.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid, 281-282.

Starting out with the earliest of the effective pacification programs, Chieu Hoi stands out among them for its role in pacification. Chieu Hoi was the cheapest means of neutralizing VC at a mere \$14 per defection, bribing and reeducating those who recognized the potential for a better life away from the communists. Chieu Hoi produced a stunning defection of over 194,000 VC during its run from 1963 to 1971. The ralliers among the Hoi Chanh (those who had defected) were able to effectively dispel VC propaganda in South Vietnam, letting the truth of communist abuses and the hard lives under the communists out into the open. There was the added bonus later on of the participation of the Hoi Chanh in the Phoenix program, aiding in the extraction of intelligence from captured VC. While the per capita cost of Chieu Hoi eventually rose to \$350 with added American support, quality improved and the Hoi Chanh were more successfully integrated into South Vietnam. Unfortunately, the program was perennially plagued by South Vietnamese distrust of the defectors, fearing that they might return to the VC as well as that they were competing for jobs as much as any other citizen, inherently earning disfavor. Some of the Hoi Chanh had committed serious abuses while part of the VC. There was also the matter of chronic underfunding and an incomplete processing of defectors through the resettlement centers. Ultimately, during the whole of the war, Chieu Hoi was the only avenue allowing reconciliation of the VC with South Vietnam, inducing a significant chunk of the VC to return to righteousness, and should be looked to in the future to the extent that partisan insurgents exist in an area.<sup>69</sup>

The next development in pacification produced the County Fairs. County Fairs were amazing, albeit resource intensive, one stop pacification centers that would go into villages, clear out the VC, provide security, bring in public works developments, offer the services of medical

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<sup>69</sup>J.A. Koch, *The Chieu Hoi Program in South Vietnam, 1963-1971*, Report Prepared for the Advanced Research Projects Agency (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp., 1973), i-ix.

and civil affairs specialists, jump-start local governance, and hopefully bring the population behind the South Vietnamese government. As was already mentioned, they required massive amounts of manpower and finance, limiting their application in South Vietnam to relatively few villages at any one time. Like all clear and hold strategies, the extended holding was a prerequisite to its success. Unfortunately, the ARVN and RF/PFs were undeveloped during their time of operation and lack of effective application resulted in failure as the VC were considerably free to move back in once the Americans left. County Fairs represented the premier pacification operation during the era prior to CORDS, which brought about the coordination and resources necessary for pacification to occur and truly root out the VC. County Fairs, coupled with massive deployment, an extended commitment, proper finance, and a slow withdrawal, present a possible option for a counterinsurgency war, though the resources required and potential disenchantment with such would bring their usage into doubt.<sup>70</sup>

Prominent as well among the pacification operations was the introduction of the Marine Combined Action Platoons (CAPs). The general idea was to embed American Marines in with the RF/PFs, bolstering their effectiveness and reaching out to the local villages. The medics among the CAPs were especially appreciated by the villagers, and the Marine CAP deployments brought a link to the vast American military and aid machine. CAPs were instrumental in developing the RF/PFs to the point that they could actually do something other than retreating from the VC and provide illusory security. CAPs also took up civic activities in the absence of RD cadre and helped to build a sense of community in the village while improving living conditions. The real accomplishment of the CAPs was in dissuading VC assault on the villages - frequent patrols would confuse them into thinking there were more forces stationed in the

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<sup>70</sup>Richard Hunt, *Pacification*, 47-48.

villages than there actually were, making any attack on a village with a CAP requiring at least a full battalion. CAPs weren't perfect, and one bad apple in any CAP often spoiled the show in that village, yet they certainly provided needed security, and when conditions allowed, were capable of pacifying a village on their own.<sup>71</sup>

CORDS represented the ultimate development of pacification operations during the whole of the Vietnam War and any future counterinsurgency war would do well to follow its example of military and civilian coordination. CORDS coordinated the various developed programs, bulldozed over bureaucracies, and brought a flood of resources right where it was needed the most. The support and planning provided by CORDS is most prominent in the overwhelming success of the Accelerated Pacification Campaign. If the funding for military deployment and pacification been maintained at the levels seen during the APC long enough to allow for proper nation building to occur, perhaps South Vietnam would still be a free country. By synchronizing intelligence, boosting development, and arming the militia and RF/PFs adequately, CORDS built South Vietnam with American support to a point where it could almost stand on its own, successfully neutralizing the overwhelming majority of the VC and rendering the counterinsurgency war nigh moot.<sup>72</sup>

Most infamous of the lot, the Phoenix program, in like fashion with CORDS, coordinated amongst the various intelligence agencies on the allied front in Vietnam as well as actively neutralizing the Viet Cong infrastructure throughout South Vietnam. Its effects took place concurrently with those of CORDS and it is maintained that a similar program would be just as integral in any counterinsurgency effort. The Provincial Reconnaissance Units, devised by the

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<sup>71</sup>Michael E. Peterson, *The CAPs*, 31-50, 68-71.

<sup>72</sup>Gordon M. Wells, "NO MORE VIETNAM: CORDS as a Model for Counterinsurgency Campaign Design" (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: United States Army Command and General Staff College, 1991), 28-32

Phoenix program, served as the action element of the program, and among the development of civilian security forces in South Vietnam, stood out for their particular skill in rooting out the VC. This was so true that the enemy, unable to react kinetically, began to deride Phoenix as an assassination program, bringing negative press upon it such that the political cost of Phoenix began to balance out its success in clearing out Viet Cong infrastructure. The PRUs, acting mostly of their own accord, neutralized 380 VC cadre per 1000 men in the PRUs in 1970, with a total of 80,000 neutralizations from 1968 to 1972 and an expense of four million dollars during that same time frame.<sup>73</sup> Targeted killings to destroy an insurgency are an inherent part of any counterinsurgency policy, and while the Phoenix program and PRUs certainly worked wonders in that regard, the secret aura about them breeds distrust and political ill-will. Usage of a similar program in the future would require a significant public relations effort equal or superior to that employed in the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

The most compelling overall evidence for the success of pacification is the change of VC/NVA tactics after the Accelerated Pacification Campaign. The VC, no longer able to challenge the government of South Vietnam, resorted to terrorism in some villages and to minimal campaigns in others, changing its role from that of a nationalist insurgency to that of a fringe terrorist and political group sponsored by a foreign power. At best, it could only mount small attacks on villages guarded by the RF/PFs. The combination of military patrols and active civilian targeting of the Viet Cong infrastructure made it impossible for the VC to gain influence in the overwhelming majority of South Vietnam. As a result, the VC resumed the political fight with the creation of liberation committees - the communists wouldn't have done such if they

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<sup>73</sup>William Rosenau and Austin Long, *The Phoenix Program and Contemporary Counterinsurgency* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp.) 10-14.

thought that they could take over South Vietnam by force, as political attempts had been made and failed for decades prior.<sup>74</sup>

While it cannot be said that, as of American departure from Vietnam, South Vietnam was capable of defending itself fully, it can be said that with Vietnamization nearly complete and the results of the Easter Offensive, South Vietnam was only really dependent on American financial support as well as American bombers. South Vietnam recovered from the Easter Offensive (overwhelmingly a NVA attack with limited VC support) in nine months, demonstrating that the communists had no population base in South Vietnam. Hanoi implicitly acknowledged that it had lost the war for hearts and minds by attacking with NVA regulars rather than VC guerillas as in the „68 Tet Offensive, invading a foreign country rather than engaging in a civil war, as would be the case had pacification not succeeded. As its only remaining option, Hanoi sought a peace deal to try and get the U.S. out of the country - communist victory was impossible as long as American bombing campaigns continued and financial support for pacification and nation building provided. Pacification - the war for hearts and minds - was a definitive victory for the allies.

## **CHAPTER 6 - SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

As has been stated before, pacification is the intermediate step between military offensives and nation building in the plan to establish a free and independent South Vietnam. Pacification also generally refers to the war for hearts and minds, serving as a precursor of sorts to the role of modern Civil Affairs units in contemporary engagements. In a tertiary manner, it is also a strategy for conducting a counterinsurgency, though the political and economic aspects of pacification may not necessarily apply in such cases. Vietnam was a distinctive conflict in that

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<sup>74</sup>Richard Hunt, *Pacification: the American struggle for Vietnam's hearts and minds*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995). 140-208.



the VC weren't strictly insurgents nor were they partisans - their history as nationalist insurgents as Viet Minh contrasted with their communist ideology and support from North Vietnam, the USSR, and China. Pacification thus belongs to a different era where the main threat had a monolithic identity rather than distributed ill will across the nations. As it stands, pacification was quite the success, and serves as a useful model for application elsewhere, particularly that of CORDS.<sup>75</sup>

One of the main points of this paper was to discuss the development of pacification programs and the unique circumstances the United States was placed in regarding the Vietnam War. No two wars are alike, and with something as complex as counterinsurgency, every instance will require its own solution, though one can extract a number of good practices applicable everywhere from this case.

The concept of CORDS and of coordinating resources and forces should have universal application, but Chieu Hoi has little place and may even stoke hostilities when dealing with a religiously centered insurgency that has popular support. Similarly, County Fairs, while useful when a country is teeming with insurgents and could be arguably in the midst of a civil war, should yield to Phoenix style operations when dealing with a smaller insurgency that has been mostly stamped out. As was observed with Strategic Hamlets as run by Diem, cultural issues must be respected, with failure to do so often being counterproductive. There's also the entire question of whether to attempt a pacification campaign in an area where diplomacy and peacebuilding would be considerably more appropriate.

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<sup>75</sup>Gordon M. Wells, "NO MORE VIETNAM: CORDS as a Model for Counterinsurgency Campaign Design" (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: United States Army Command and General Staff College, 1991), 39.

Those arguing against the effectiveness of pacification will suggest that pacification had only a minor role in South Vietnam and that the progress after Tet was wholly due to the losses that the VC sustained. Such a viewpoint requires either a deceptive argument, misunderstanding what pacification is, or supposes that Vietnamese society spontaneously composed itself after the lull of the VC attack. External support was necessary, at a minimum to rebuild after the Tet Offensive, let alone prevent further VC encroachment in the hinterlands - the RF/PFs and ARVN were still underdeveloped at that point. There is also another argument against the effectiveness of pacification; some think that the wily VC were merely lying in wait for the American departure. While there may be some truth to such, that argument is flawed because it doesn't explain why the Easter Offensive was a vast NVA invasion rather than a VC revolt. Furthermore, such would imply that VC aggression would have risen during Vietnamization, while in fact, South Vietnam further consolidated its control over its territory - 98% of hamlets and villages had elected governments between 1970 and 1972.<sup>76</sup> The VC simply had no population base in South Vietnam, with nearly completed pacification passing the baton to the nation building phase for South Vietnam.

Ultimately, South Vietnam fell to the communists after a long and protracted struggle. As of Vietnamization and American departure, the war for hearts and minds was definitively won, the military war was at a standstill with neither side capable of achieving their main objective, and the political battle was decisively won by the communists. The end of American support spelled the end of South Vietnam in the face of overwhelming North Vietnamese assault on most all fronts while the effects from the Arab oil embargo kept their air force on the ground. Fortunately, that lesson had been learned, and while there have certainly been peace protests and

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<sup>76</sup>Richard Hunt. *Pacification*. 265.

pressure to withdraw from the different wars the U.S. is currently engaged in, at no point have these reached anywhere near the magnitude of those during the Vietnam War. World opinion has also been managed more effectively in recent conflicts.

### **Lessons Learned**

The general lesson from Vietnam is that of the need for coordination and proper funding in counterinsurgencies. It is imperative that an organization similar to CORDS be established as soon as possible whenever an engagement is undertaken, otherwise political will, resources, and manpower will be wasted without achieving much of anything. As of 2006 and to the best of the author's knowledge, there is no similar program in Iraq or Afghanistan. While the Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan have borrowed CORDS concepts, they lack the scale and top-level directive. Getting stuff done is more important than bureaucratic politicking - that's why we needed CORDS. Institution of a CORDS type program would also help placate Iraqi and American demands for withdrawal of military forces, not to mention building goodwill - Iraqi infrastructure has yet to return to its levels prior to the Persian Gulf war, let alone the American invasion. There's also the matter of pacifying rural areas and developing a democracy, which CORDS excelled at in Vietnam.<sup>77</sup>

Something that has been forgotten between the Vietnam War and the War on Terror is the need to gain the loyalty of the population. This has never been more poignant an issue as it is now in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where the ethnic Pashtuns have developed a deep kinship and willingness to battle, long under imperial attack since time immemorial. The deathbed of empires simply cannot be brought under control, with the stick and carrot policies only serving to heighten animosity. While the use of Provincial Reconstruction Teams, drawing from

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<sup>77</sup>Ross Coffey. "Revisiting CORDS: The Need for Unity of Effort to Secure Victory in Iraq" *Military Review*. (March-April 2006): 32-33.

past experience in the use of Combined Action Platoons, County Fairs, and CORDS, is admirable, it is simply not sufficient in one of the world's least developed countries at current deployment levels. Chieu Hoi and deradicalization style programs, concurrent with economic and political development, deserve a far greater emphasis - content people who don't have to resort to farming poppies do not join insurgencies. The Taliban, having been rooted in Afghanistan for decades, requires an active anti-infrastructure program to dig it out, with clear-and-hold tactics rather than search-and-destroy. As it stands, the Taliban has been using the same strategy against ISAF as it used against the Soviets - bleeding the „empire' dry with attrition tactics until it ultimately has to leave. Unfortunately, given that the Afghan government, criticized in some circles as an American puppet regime, has listened to the Afghan people and sought American departure, the only realistic remaining course of action is to ramp up civilian aid efforts and demonstrate an absence of imperial ambition through such activities if any influence is to be maintained in the country.

Similar to the actions of the Viet Cong in the era of the Vietnam War after the coup and before Tet, the Taliban actively pressures villages into supporting them and can do so with relative impunity. The Afghan government has not provided services in parts of the country, with geography further challenging matters. If we assume that the Taliban isn't active in places under Afghan government control - defined loosely as areas in which civil services are provided, then the problem becomes one of denying the Taliban any popular support, which under the previous assumption, means that the villagers must be protected. Fortunately, village stability operations are already underway, with combined teams built around Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alphas - mirroring the application of CAPs in Vietnam to the villages, but now using personnel with far superior training for the task at hand. The importance of „staying the

course' and maintaining village stability operations is paramount - Afghan villagers tend to align with the dominant presence, much like villagers in Vietnam did. Political concerns will require making it clear that coalition forces are there not to act as imperial agents but rather to improve life for Afghans - continuous public relations disasters have thoroughly hampered such, while unintentional, poor intelligence has a way of producing poor results.<sup>78</sup>

Related to the concepts of pacification and counterinsurgency, though ultimately more useful in resolving conflict and achieving American objectives, is the practice of peacebuilding. Actions by certain groups have managed to fractionate a once stable Iraqi nation into ethnic and religious groups, leading to sectarian violence between Sunnis, Shias, and Kurds. Given the moral and geopolitical implications of supporting any one side, the focus must be on producing a stable peace between groups. There's also the balkanization option, but this option could inflame Turkish sentiments regarding their Kurdish minority, and would grant Tehran far more regional power than it currently possesses. As Americans begin to pull out militarily from Iraq, it would be useful to nudge the government to use oil profits for economic development equally distributed across the country, improving stability while demonstrating that it doesn't need international help. Provincial Reconstruction Teams and developmental aid remain the best American options while the Iraqi government further consolidates and demonstrates its capacity to govern. Peacebuilding should only be resorted to if sectarian conflict overwhelms the Iraqi government.

The most poignant of lessons we learned in Vietnam that haven't been put to use in present conflicts is that of intelligence. Intelligence failures served as the *casus belli* for the invasion of Iraq and they continue to plague operations in the current conflicts, resulting in

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<sup>78</sup>Brian Petit, "The Fight for the Village: Southern Afghanistan, 2010." *Military Review*. (May-June 2011): 25-27, 31-32.

civilian deaths and generating bad press, with the potential to make terrorists of a once peaceful people. An intelligence network and policing program similar to Phoenix would be ideal for Afghanistan so as to root out the Taliban and finally eliminate them, while also reducing the rampant drug trade in Afghanistan which is undermining government authority. As terrorists are not a significant influence in Iraq, and matters are divided over sectarian lines, the Iraqi challenge is to sell the government to the people - fighting the war for hearts and minds through good works, propaganda, reconciliation, and deradicalization programs is the task at hand there.<sup>79</sup>

In final review, there are several points to be emphasized. The requirement for unity of effort must be reiterated yet again, as it has been ignored overall. Anti-infrastructure programs need to be established as a first step, using local forces and making its presence widely known. There is also the need to build a clear legal framework for dealing with insurgents - the presence of innocents and non-combatants in Guantanamo Bay, not to mention the non-combatant VC rounded up by PRUs, is immoral - persons captured ought not spend time in legal limbo. „Gitmo’ has brought a torrent of negative publicity, undermining the ideals of freedom and democracy brought forth by American intervention. Ultimately, it must not be forgotten that these battles are for the hearts and minds of the people and the responsibility for maintaining a free country falls on those same people; American engagement can only start and guide the process.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Nathan Minami et al., “Beyond Reconciliation: Developing Faith, Hope, Trust, and Unity in Iraq.” *Military Review*. (March-April 2011): 52-54, 57-59.

<sup>80</sup>Dale Andrade and James Willbanks, "CORDS/Phoenix Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam for the Future." *Military Review*. (March-April 2006): 21-22.

This paper has shown that the use of pacification operations by American, South Vietnamese, and Allied forces during the Vietnam War was effective in neutralizing North Vietnamese and Viet Cong insurgency. By applying the concepts developed and applied in this conflict to current and future operations (to include joint, combined and multi-national peacekeeping/peacebuilding operations) it is hoped that these future operations will be more effective in accomplishing their objectives and thus saving troops and treasure.

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