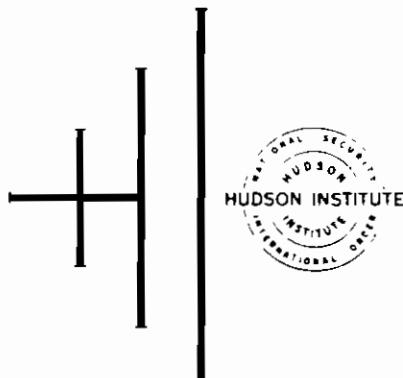


August 8, 1967

## FOUR PAPERS ON THE VIETNAMESE INSURGENCY

### I. A CONSERVATIVE, DECENTRALIZED APPROACH TO PACIFICATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

**Raymond D. Gastil**



**HUDSON INSTITUTE**

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## Four Papers on the Vietnamese Insurgency

### I: A CONSERVATIVE, DECENTRALIZED APPROACH TO PACIFICATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

By

Raymond D. Gastil

HI-878/2/I-RR

August 8, 1967

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Four Papers on the Vietnamese Insurgency

- I. A Conservative, Decentralized Approach to Pacification in South Vietnam, HI-878/2/I
- II. Counterinsurgency and South Vietnam: Some Alternatives, HI-878/2/II
- III. Principles for Settlement in South Vietnam, HI-878/2/III
- IV. Toward the Development of a More Acceptable Set of Limits for Counterinsurgency, HI-878/2/IV

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Some of those who have been kind enough to review and contribute to the document disagreed considerably with the author over the concepts contained in this report, but the criticisms were almost invariably constructive, and in general are reflected in the document, even where substantial disagreement still remains.

Four Papers on the Vietnamese InsurgencyGeneral Preface

In these papers I have attempted to consider a number of alternative means to raise the level of security in South Vietnam so that the tide of allegiance begins to flow strongly against the communists. In developing these papers I have been aware of the many important issues relative to security with which I have not dealt, or have only dealt with tangentially. These issues have been ignored because: 1) I thought I had little to say that others haven't said; 2) I felt that they were of second priority; 3) I thought that the United States, or at least an American analyst at a distance, could have little of real use to say on these topics.

I am convinced that the evolution of a more legitimate Saigon government is crucial, and, more importantly, the collapse of the Saigon consensus could ruin all other plans. This is something to worry about and try to avoid, but this subject does not appear to be one to which we can add much to analytically.

I believe that economic, social and educational development are of great importance in South Vietnam. Land reform is an important aspect of this, although increasing land and man productivity may be equally important. In many parts of South Vietnam, however, the issue is more one of finding steady, remunerative employment for a locally surplus population than it is a matter of dividing up land more equitably. I believe that the country can be made to grow now, and may really "take off" if peace is achieved. For example, a subsidized rice price for the farmer might go a long way toward reversing production trends in the Delta. But I do not believe that economic development is generally a very effective counter to insurgency once stated. Indeed, the readjustments attendant on the economic development of underdeveloped countries often prepare a fertile ground for communist or other radical ideology.

I believe that there does have to be change in the Vietnamese social and political structure to accomplish the demands of a changing economic situation. There needs to be institution building. Yet the question is one of timing. For example, a change toward greater centralization which might be desirable in 1990 might merely further disorganize society in 1970.

I am confident that there is administrative insufficiency in South Vietnam. There need to be better men, more trained men, and a more organized national structure. However, to say this does not solve the immediate problems. My reaction is to reduce or restrict the demands on the structure rather than to imagine its rapid improvement. However, at the apex of the command structure I believe that a joint Vietnamese-American war council may help to solve the most general problem of insufficient direction and coordination. It is necessary to have a generally accepted strategy, including priorities and standards of performance, even if we are to use a generally decentralized administration for the actual execution of plans.

The security suggestions given in these documents stem from a number of alternative assumptions and judgments of the current scene. The first paper (A Conservative, Decentralized Approach to Pacification in South Vietnam) is based on the observation that many Vietnamese and American advisers at the district and province level believe that if they were simply provided with more resources at this level--perhaps another regional force company in every district--then they could vastly improve and perhaps solve their pacification problem. Since in most areas our conventional offensive makes it extremely difficult for the VC/NVA to match these increases at the district level, I judge that this may well be correct. If so, then only a rather modest change in priorities may be necessary for the Vietnamese forces with almost no reallocation of U.S. forces. This approach stresses a primarily Vietnamese solution to the insurgency problem. To a large extent, a discussion of district emphasis and decentralization is a plea for a solution which fits GVN's administrative capability and which builds on the strengths available in the South Vietnamese society.

Yet this minimum approach may be insufficient. The security problem of most pro-GVN areas in the country is severe, for the war is everywhere and there is no front in terms of which success can be measured. A review of alternative counterinsurgency systems and of the present war in Vietnam suggest that we need to separate the people from the insurgents more positively than the districts can do in isolation. (Counterinsurgency and South Vietnam: Some Alternatives) But if we are to set up an effective frontal system, I believe we must make a major reallocation of all friendly forces in Vietnam. This appears to require deep fronts of patrolling, both area saturation and what I call a thickened perimeter. On the basis of this set of assumptions I have tried to look at the forces which might be required and the degree to which present deployments might have to be altered.

In addition to these questions I have tried in the remaining papers to ask what we want by way of final settlement, what we might expect to end up with if things go moderately well. (Principles for Settlement in South Vietnam) I have also tried to inquire into the possibility of improving the morality of our position in Vietnam--maintaining stringent limits which are sometimes costly to us, but also accomplishing our objectives with less cost to everyone involved. (Toward the Development of a More Acceptable Set of Limits for Counterinsurgency) In particular, I am thinking of the legacy of this war. What are we going to think of ourselves after it? What lessons might it have for our next one?

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## A CONSERVATIVE, DECENTRALIZED APPROACH TO PACIFICATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

### I. Introduction

By now it has become a cliché to speak of two wars in South Vietnam, with America and its allies fighting one successfully against NVA and the main force VC units, and the South Vietnamese and their allies fighting one less successfully against the detailed political-military control of the Viet Cong. For the purposes of this discussion let us refine this distinction and then relate the two wars. Large unit actions with regimental sized forces intended to isolate and eventually capture main arteries and provincial capitals, or to destroy large ARVN or allied units are now largely supported from North Vietnam. Destroying the capability to mount such actions is primarily the function of the conventional war forces of the United States and its allies. All other Viet Cong and NVA capability must be directly opposed by the pacification effort.

However, let us not forget the interconnections between the two efforts. Only control of the peasants makes it possible for large VC/NVA units to be moved and kept in action. Peasants provide guidance, intelligence, food and bearers. On the other hand, the larger units also serve the guerrilla cause on the local level. First, they make it necessary for government and allied forces to bunch together in any area near where the large units operate. This means that many peripheral areas have to be abandoned to the communists because it is too dangerous to try to maintain small units in these areas. The large VC or NVA units also serve to protect VC supply bases, rest centers and communications for those VC with primary responsibility for the "small war." Probably equally important is the morale boost the large units give to the guerrillas. As long as these forces operate, the guerrilla is part of a powerful machine which seems to control a great deal of the country, albeit often uninhabited country. Guerrilla morale is probably supported more by the dramatic successes of the large units than by thousands of isolated guerrilla actions.

The foregoing discussion suggests that while it is legitimate to speak of two wars, each is important to the other, so that it would be extremely difficult for the opponent to win on one plane without considerable success on the other. Because of our highly complex ability to fight anywhere, we could, however, apparently win the big war without success in the small one. But our capability does not make it possible to win the small while losing the large. On the other hand, the communists could only win the big war without success in the guerrilla war, if they followed the Korean model and came down Highway One. Now they cannot do this. But a dangerous possibility is that they could revert to a purely guerrilla war and endure indefinitely, with considerable control over perhaps 50% of the rural populace. To make this option unprofitable, South Vietnam and its allies will probably have to improve their abilities in the detailed, anti-guerrilla effort.

There are sure to be costs to a VC movement attempting to rely primarily on its rural infrastructure and confining itself to small unit actions. But if the communists make this transformation, especially if they can use NVA in the small unit role, it is easy to imagine the allied response as being inadequate enough to permit an indefinite duration of high level violence in South Vietnam.

It is in an attempt to prevent this latter scenario from being realized that the following discussion has been developed.

## II. An Estimate of the Present Situation in Peasant Control

The present pacification situation in South Vietnam may be said to be a stalemate with glimmerings of success. But this hardly means that nothing is happening. It is clear that there are gains in certain areas, but for the sake of conservatism I feel it is likely that these successes are being matched by less publicized losses in other areas.\* There are a number of reasons to take such a conservative position. There is an air of hopelessness about several provinces which may reflect subjective but accurate judgments that things are actually worse than before. One encounters stories of heroic hamlets which have gone under within the past twelve months, and districts with declining security.\*\* On the other hand the pluses seem more tangible. First, the old local power groups have become more willing to side with the government and to assert their authority in their present and past areas of strength. These include Hao Hao, Cao Dai, Cambodians, VNQDD and Dai Viet, and many of the montagnards. A second plus is the abandonment of VC territory by peasants. For whatever reason, this movement complicates the VC problem of providing communications, food and recruits. The effect may be particularly strong in montagnard areas where whole provinces have been practically abandoned by the people. There are some possibly successful examples of pacification after the heavy sweeps of allied forces--particularly in the central coast areas and in the Marine areas near Da Nang. Finally, there are exceptional district, village and hamlet organizers who have been able to make an effective amalgam out of the variety of tools available in Vietnam for the defeat of the Viet Cong. Their success if measured either in terms of holding the line against heavy pressure, stopping what was regarded as inevitable decline, or in making slow steady progress in pacification. In their areas Americans can now go more places safely, hamlet or village chiefs no longer have to retire to district towns at night, the people more freely offer intelligence. Often however, the

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\*For some other considerations in this regard see R. D. Gastil, Counter-insurgency and South Vietnam: Some Alternatives, HI-878/II-RR, August 8, 1967, Appendix B.

\*\*A recent example of a district in I corps moving in the VC direction was given in The New York Times, March 13, 1967. Kien Hoa province was certainly not improving about the same time (N.Y.T., March 28). On April 3, the Times reported only 6 villages out of 115 in this province were safe enough for elections.

leader of a "good district" has a great many members of an anti-communist minority in his area. Interrelated to his success--if not a cause of it--is the fact that he is often handling relatively large amounts of American aid and has been assigned relatively more RD teams, or other benefits.

Why is there success some places and not others? At least half of the reasons which occur to this observer are fortuitous, as far as present plans are concerned. These include local power blocs opposed to the VC and often include a history of foolish VC counteractions. Another factor is the competence and interest in success of the men on the spot--almost any plan might work if well administered. Finally, there is a tendency for American aid, advice and concern to flow toward the successful Vietnamese, toward those we can work with, toward those who radiate hope.

In terms of the concept of protracted conflict the communist apparently made a mistake in 1964-66. They tried to raise from amongst the peasants under their control and from NVA a force large enough to take over significant parts of the urban economy, inflict heavy losses on allied forces and thus force a peace on communist terms. Like the Japanese effort in World War II, they failed, and for the analogous reason of over-dependence on spiritual superiority. How much of the current "trend" against the VC that some students find is due to these conventional defeats, is hard to estimate. But I suspect a good deal. The requirements of conventional war wreaked the communist's embryonic educational system, lost them the advantages of their land reform (through over-taxation), and brought tragedy home to every VC family (through the loss in war of relatives). Many Viet Cong subjects simply left. If the communists continue to strive for rapid conventional victory, their outlook is not promising.\* While American overconfidence may lead to a couple of serious U.S. defeats in the highlands, over-all 1967 should be better than 1966 for our conventional war. (U.S. morale might always crumble at home.) But if the communists should admit their mistakes, and revert back to emphasis on small unit action and peasant control, then they might be able to stem and even reverse what many regard as the present trend against them. There are some signs that they have decided to go back to this level.

Although there are plausible theories that the communists cannot hold together if they reduce the level of violence, it would be foolish for the planner to count on this. A rapid VC collapse is, at any rate, more likely if they keep reaching for conventional victory than if they abandon this attempt.

The political situation in the urban arena of South Vietnam is better than we have any right to expect will continue. Ky has imposed many months of stability, pulled off an amazing election, and allowed the constituent assembly to get pretty much the constitution it desired. The constituent

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\*On trends in the war see R. D. Gastil, Counterinsurgency and South Vietnam: Some Alternatives, HI-878/I-RR, August 8, 1967, Appendix B.

assembly seemed to act with reasonable responsibility. Harmony has been restored with dissident groups or they have been broken up. A first round of elections of village and hamlet officials has been completed. While the elections of September and October were not perfectly handled, the results were positive. In choosing his cabinet, Thien was careful to placate Ky and his supporters. I am frankly uneasy with so much sweetness and light, and expect to have trouble in the next year. If the resulting storms can be outlasted, both in terms of reasonable stability and reasonable legitimacy, then the outlook of pacification with or without a new program is greatly improved. If there is failure here, then the U.S. and its allies may have to take over essentially all phases of pacification, with tremendous new expenditures. If there is an optimistic assumption creeping into the discussion below, it is that there will be a fair degree of success on the urban political scene.

### III. General Principles for Attaining, Maintaining, or Going Beyond Stalemate in Pacification

Depending on how we judge the present situation in South Vietnam, the first task of the planner must be to keep things going as well or better than they are now on the hundreds and thousands of little pacification fronts throughout South Vietnam. He must be careful to take advantage of all of the pluses today, and plan to keep them pluses, before he can feel justified in transferring effort to new plans and proposals. And new plans and proposals must utilize what is already available to the greatest extent possible.

It is more or less agreed that the additional effort in South Vietnam should go toward improving our performance in the "small war." There has always been a good case for concentrating on this war rather than the larger one, a case admirably made by Sir Robert Thompson, Roger Hilsman and others.\* But today there is the additional reason that VC concentration on the small war is their only military hope for success as long as the U.S. troops remain. If this argument is correct, then the planner must realize that he will have additional resources allocated to the small war in the immediate future which he should plan to distribute among several alternative programs. However, some of these new allocations have already been made, and whatever new suggestions he makes must be adjusted to those shifts toward a greater pacification effort that are already underway.

What I am suggesting may be summarized by listing the following five principles:

1. Policy stability
2. Decentralized control of pacification and strictly limited de facto federalism

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\*Sir Robert Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency (New York: Praeger, 1966); Roger Hilsman, "China's 'War of National Liberation' and America's Counterstrategy," paper delivered at Chicago, February, 1967.

3. Continuity of Saigon's political evolution toward greater legitimacy
4. Return to normalcy, reduction in terror and threat
5. Limited experimentation with centralized pacification programs by U.S./GVN in priority and VC areas

This discussion will be primarily concerned with supporting the second principle, yet it seems worthwhile to make a few remarks on the importance of policy stability in 1967-68. Over the last several years there has been a good deal of experimentation with pacification programs in South Vietnam. Experience has been built up, and people have been educated in the nature of the problem. Out of this process there evolved in 1966 what I judge to be the outlines of an American-Vietnamese consensus on what should be done. According to this consensus there should be:

1. Limited federalism, allowing a considerable measure of local control to staunchly non-communist peoples
2. Heavy rings of blocking forces maintained in consistent support of pacification efforts in many areas
3. No secure base areas allowed the VC/NVA
4. Emphasis by all forces on small unit activity, deep patrolling, night patrols, ambushes
5. A shift in U.S. attention, if not major units, from the jungles and mountains to the rice growing areas
6. Emphasis on quality rather than quantity in pacification
7. Emphasis on intelligence and police-like activities

This mixture of ideas has long been advocated by U.S. and British counter-insurgency advisers. But I believe that only now do we have the civilian personnel and forces, and the degree of consensus, which might make possible the successful implementation of these ideas. In its essential outlines I think we should stick to this program for another year or two. Without at least this much patience there will be no test, no real information as to whether this mixture is enough. Particularly, if in our impatience we take it away from the Vietnamese, we are liable to make an irremediable mistake.

#### IV. Decentralized, District Level Control of Pacification

The first task is to decide on administrative-military relationships and responsibilities in terms of available capabilities. Let me suggest a few fairly well attested generalizations. 1) The South Vietnamese bureaucracy is vastly overburdened, especially in rural areas, and in terms

of qualified, reliable cadres. 2) The South Vietnamese administrator, whether civilian or military, is most effective in an ad hoc face-to-face situation rather than through a chain of command, or in the execution of plans out of Saigon. 3) ARVN is better adapted for large unit operations than for small unit, away from the people rather than with the people. 4) Popular forces and militia are often poorly officered, and often too much under the effective control of local interests to be used very flexibly.

One of the most important decisions to make is to decide on the degree of centralized control of pacification that Saigon or Washington should strive for, or expect. Today, there is a good deal of de facto decentralization because of insecurity and the distances involved, the many services, and the natural aggressiveness of many Americans in isolated positions.

There would, of course, be advantages to a more organized, centralized effort. Such an effort would allow for more uniform training and indoctrination of those involved in pacification. Uniformity of program would have the considerable advantage of making more standard, and therefore measurable, the indicators of success or failure. In particular, a centralized program should offer less chance for the apparent success which rumor says is really due to local accommodations with the VC. If pacification succeeds in a centralized form, the resulting nation might well be considerably stronger than with decentralized methods.

However, I believe that the balance of advantage is liable to lie with the decentralized approach.\* Sir Robert Thompson endorses heartily the English general in the Malayan campaign who saw his job as keeping the supplies moving. There are a number of reasons why this should be the role of higher echelons in counter-insurgency. Perhaps the most important of these is that by granting control to the man on the spot, generalized plans may be most easily adapted to local circumstances, so that their purpose rather than their form is achieved. As might be expected, local circumstances do make a great deal of difference in Vietnam. For example, in one area de facto control may really be in the hands of Hoa Hao elders, with American and Vietnamese officials acting as advisers and mediators; in another the Saigon representative rules firmly and aggressively. In one area it is productive to build schools in unpacified hamlets; in another it is only useful to improve education in market towns. In one place RD cadres will be used primarily as a military force--in another they may go unarmed. Trying to carry out general plans without detailed adaptation to these variations can be disastrous.

There are other more specific advantages to decentralized control. The local level, from province down, certainly at district, fosters de facto integration of all government programs in the mind of the local chief. To attempt to impede this integration by tight departmental control from the

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\*People who have had provincial or district responsibilities generally support this approach. A recent example is John O'Donnell, "Strategic Hamlet Program in Kien Hoa Province," in P. Kundstadter, Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities and Nations, Princeton, 1967, pp. 703-744.

center requires more and better cadres than are available to GVN, and may lead to the type of unintegrated economic-political-military programming too often characterizing Vietnam. Another advantage of no mean value is the greater enthusiasm and creativity engendered in local officials once they have been given the right and means of doing something on their own. Thus while there must be a general plan and structure giving an overall strategic direction to the efforts, there should remain a broad scope for local variation. To a considerable extent the present pacification effort is built out of local experiments.\* The habits of local reliance built up in this way may also serve well if there is again confusion in Saigon, and an accidental lack of central direction to the provinces.\*\* Decentralized decision-making may also make possible a more rapid exploitation of local breaks in VC morale than would be possible with a more centralized policy.

From generalizations such as these, let us develop some ideas as to where the emphases of U.S. attention should be directed. In drawing up this picture I am not suggesting anything new. My suggestions are limited to the preservation of the present framework of law and working relationships in Vietnam or to marginal changes within this framework. The suggestions do not imply cutting off the peasant from the national government, but rather a smoother transition from local autonomy to national integration, the gradual development of national institutions with a sufficiently developed cadre to make them reliable. Government by laws not men is the goal, but there is not the structure to reach this tomorrow.

First, as long as the war continues, we should probably not attempt to restore Saigon's purely civilian operational authority at a lower level than province. Civilian provincial councils and chiefs could help to restore confidence, and support and protect the civilian economy with the aid of the ministries of the central government and the military forces of their areas. Province should probably cooperate closely with ARVN to maintain its major centers, to maintain and open the larger channels of civilian commerce, the main roads, railroads, canals, power and telephone lines. The role of province as a civilian inspectorate over the actions of other agencies, forces and local officials at the hamlet, village and district levels might also be emphasized. In this role province may often serve more as a mediator than an arbiter.

The peasant should generally come into direct contact with Saigon when he passes beyond the village and hamlet levels. The Diem government attempted to bureaucratize the village and hamlet levels, introducing its appointed agents directly at these levels. Today there is a particular emphasis on the hamlet level. But I do not believe that Saigon has the administrative resources to do this effectively, and appointments here also

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\* Cf. William Nighswonger, Rural Pacification in Vietnam, (New York: Praeger, 1966), pp 67-68, 107, 111 passim.

\*\* John C. Donnell, in rejecting the arguments for decentralization emphasizes how transitory he believes this advantage to be. ("The War, the Gap and the Cadre," in Asia. No. 4. 1966, p. 67).

conflict with the promise of a degree of autonomy at this level which local elections may imply to the peasant. Thus, there would appear to be more advantages than disadvantages to restoring the old feeling of running their own affairs to peasant communities as soon as possible. Apparently considerable progress has been made toward these goals in the limited village and hamlet elections.

It would appear to me as though strengthening the anti-insurgency effort from Saigon and Washington should be built around increasing the resources available at the district level, and particularly those resources available to the district chiefs.\*\* William Nighswonger confirms my own impression when he writes, "The main burden of local planning for pacification falls on the district chief, particularly for his choice of operational areas and sequence of activity in his district."\*\*\*\* The district is the lowest level at which I believe the central government can hope to build up an adequate bureaucracy, and the highest level at which Vietnamese leaders and their American counterparts can have really detailed and "face-to-face" knowledge of the insurgency situation and of other local strengths and weaknesses. Secondly, the district leaders and their assistants have developed knowledge of the insurgency and of counter-insurgency operations, they have their own ad hoc intelligence nets in place, and are therefore probably most ready now to use any additional resources which may be provided for either military or civilian projects. The point is not that district chiefs are a special breed, but rather that they are the most strategically placed and most experienced men in the system. Of course, only the good and mediocre chiefs should be kept. The really poor ones should be replaced. The task of replacement should perhaps be taken more seriously than appointment anywhere else in the system, and the personnel standards should of course be set in Saigon.\*\*\*\*

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\*There were, of course, many elections under the aegis of the strategic hamlet program of Diem and The New Life Hamlet immediately after. In a sense the recent elections, thus are merely another effort along this line. However, it is my impression the recent elections have been considerably freer and more often included the village level.

\*\* In line with the decentralized emphasis, I am really suggesting a "district-like" emphasis. For example, in some small provinces, province officials may operate like district officials elsewhere. In these cases, province might be that lowest level of operational responsibility in the system to which supplies and advice are directly funneled.

\*\*\* William Nighswonger, op. cit., p. 80.

\*\*\*\* Support for emphasis on the district may be found in a number of serious studies and journalistic accounts. These include: Nghiem Dang, Viet-Nam, Politics and Public Administration (Honolulu: East-West Center Press), pp. 142-143; Luther A. Allen and Pham Ngoc An, A Vietnamese District Chief in Action (Washington: Department of State, 1963); James Pickerell, Vietnam in the Mud (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), pp. 99-110. This question was originally brought to my attention in Ba Xuyen province. After that I remembered and noticed that examples in the American press of effective efforts in general pacification have particularly emphasized the district chief.

The province chief is both the civil and military superior of the district chief. Yet the nature of his job makes his position less crucial to the rural pacification effort. First, he must spend much more of his time at his desk because of the larger job of integration that he has. Secondly, he is more involved in urban politics and Saigon politics. Third, he lives generally in an urban environment, and must spend a good deal of his time responding directly to the needs of that environment. For control over rural affairs he must depend largely upon his district chiefs. Below the district level, villages and hamlets do not have administrations sufficiently competent to be given large amounts of aid directly without great waste. One's impression of these administrations in the literature is generally of passivity, and when active, of the expression of intensely local interests. It is also true that these levels cannot command the respect of the Vietnamese hierarchy that the district chief can.

The feeling for the priority of the district should be particularly extended to the question of military force development and allocation. The forces under the de facto control of many district chiefs are primarily regional forces and popular forces. The popular forces are, however, less well armed and more static. The villagers feel--properly so I think--that these forces are primarily at their disposal. The companies of regional forces in each district are, however, often under the direct control of the district chief. Unfortunately, at least half of these forces are tied down by the necessity to protect fixed points, often the district headquarters. This means that if there is any potentiality for the VC putting together a company-sized action in a district, the district chief finds it difficult even to occupy the government-controlled portions of his district without exposing his forces to undue risks of destruction in detail. It also means that intelligence cannot often be acted upon because of the dangers of dispersing forces, for example by employing the only mobile, regional force company in a district on what turns out to be a diversion.

The idea of emphasizing the development of the regional forces\* is not a new one. Thompson has apparently supported it for years because of the relative emphasis of these forces on police-type action, small unit action, and on light weapons rather than high firepower.\*\* The additional reason which I would use to justify this emphasis is the fact that regional forces are often controlled by a district chief--a local commander who is generally isolated enough that he receives relatively\*\*\* little interference from above, a man whose success is ostensibly measured by both the civilian and military aspects of pacification, a man in a position to use military, police, and local intelligence more or less as he sees fit.

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\*Again the emphasis is on forces under control of the local man at about district level who has both political and military responsibilities. In places PF's should be emphasized rather than regional forces.

\*\*Sir Robert Thompson, op. cit., p. 104.

\*\*\*Of course, many observers may feel that district chiefs are too often controlled today at the whim of higher officers. In as far as this is so, then I am not describing reality, but a condition I feel should become reality.

It would appear as though a relatively small effort to increase the capability of the forces directly under the district chief would have large dividends. There are perhaps 200 districts in South Vietnam which fit sufficiently the notion of the district developed here to be relevant. Let us imagine that on the average these have three companies of regional forces, averaging only 100 men each. I believe that to give each district chief one extra company might double his district's mobile forces, and thus significantly increase the area of the district which could be successfully defended against the resources of local VC units.

Where are these 20,000 men to come from? If we look at current figures for regional forces (on paper about 150,000) it looks as though they could be raised by relocating regional forces which are perhaps now in other roles. Relocation might be accomplished by using some of the ARVN units which are being trained for small unit work as replacements (e.g. guarding roads, canal traffic, etc.). If this is not possible (perhaps because the 150,000 is greatly overstated) then other means should be adopted for building up regional forces available to district--for example, additional incentives for young men to choose, or stay in, regional rather than other forces. An alternative might be to use some of the ARVN units being retrained for small unit actions on temporary assignment under district chiefs (although there might be serious problems of rank and status here). The increase in regional forces probably should also not be done at the expense of decreasing the regional identification of these troops. In fact, those regional forces which are presently outside of their home provinces may be inferior to ARVN for the regional force role suggested here. Improvement in regional-like forces will probably have to be done at the expense of building up Popular Forces, ARVN, CIDG, or building the RD cadre program beyond projected 1968 levels.\* On the other hand, the RD effort should gradually develop more and higher quality hamlet militia forces.

One of the things which scares me about American and Vietnamese planners engaged in developing pacification programs such as the RD program for Vietnam is their contempt for all that went before, for present programs, for landowners, merchants, for almost everything but their own programs. They speak too often of reforming the society, giving the people a new life, of revolution. Americans overseas too often forget the limitations of planning and centralized direction. If these men had detailed and reliable information about their countries, and if they had a highly trained and efficient bureaucratic structure to plan for, perhaps they could make such an approach work. But they have neither. In these circumstances, it seems

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\*According to the New York Times (July 28, 1967) current plans suggest a great increase in Popular Forces instead. This may or may not be the plan and the PF's may or may not be used as the regional forces I described.

to me to be far better to entrust the primary brunt of the pacification effort to men who regardless of their ideology have been forced for years to work out small political and military advances in terms of the concrete realities in their own areas of responsibility. (On the other hand, for areas under long-term VC control it might be desirable and acceptable to try to work out detailed plans, and push a necessary restructuring of life. But in this section I am discussing pacification primarily in the populated areas of the country considered government controlled or contested.)

In my opinion, the RD programs should not be allowed to clash with the local pacification program of the district chief (and his local American advisers). The emphasis of RD cadre development should be placed on quality rather than quantity. The RD program's contribution is probably reduced by being under Saigon's control and therefore less under the district chief's control. This is true no matter how good the particular director in Saigon might be. There may also develop too much of an attempt to channel all aid through the RD cadres and only to "their" hamlets. RD cadres should rather be developed to serve two functions. First, they should be able to offer scarce skills and manpower to the district chief. They bring along part of their own protection, thus extending the areas in which their abilities can be applied. In this mode the RD cadres sent to a district should serve the district leader's programs, rather than be developed for their own purposes. Clearly the district chief should have many other forms of aid that can be dispensed irrespective of RD. The second function of RD should be to hold and restructure VC hamlets after clear and hold operations, i.e. within a new perimeter of government control as created by integrated, regular force, land control operations.\*

Conservatively, there should be about 750, 59-man RD teams by January, 1968. One would imagine that a reasonable allocation, in terms of the philosophy suggested here, would be an average of 200 teams to special intensive work behind clear and hold forces (as in Hop Tac, in certain Binh Dinh areas, or near Da Nang), and 450 teams to the districts at an average of about two per district.\*\* This allocation conforms to the philosophy of decentralized planning, with emphasis on preservation of the strengths of the present pacification system before going beyond it.

It will be necessary to distinguish between the areas of responsibility of district chiefs and ARVN for those unpopulated or remote areas in which regional forces normally do not operate. Many jungle and other waste areas, although falling geographically within particular districts might be designated as areas of direct ARVN control. District leaders should be held responsible for people and the areas they live in, but need not be responsible for remote areas which are largely unpopulated. Of course many districts would have no land in the latter category, i.e. be entirely in the

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\*These may either be of the types currently mounted, or those suggested in accompanying papers. R.D. Gastil, Counterinsurgency and South Vietnam: Some Alternatives, HI-878/II-RR, August 8, 1967 and Frank E. Armbruster, A Military and Police-Security Program for South Vietnam, HI-881-RR, August 10, 1967.

\*\* Assuming 100 teams would be in reserve, training or other status at any one time.

civilian-military sphere, while many other districts would be largely assigned to ARVN, at least temporarily. District operations in these latter areas may remain rudimentary in the initial stage of the suggested program. However, in the sphere in which the district chief operates, there should be no military or civilian operation about which he is not consulted. As is already common practice, agreement to bombings, bombardments, and clearing operations should be emphasized at the district level--not at division, corps or province. A district chief will often consult with province and with the villages and hamlets affected, but his judgment should be crucial. For again, his is the level most likely to have a broad but detailed opinion, to be listened to by higher officials, yet he is close enough to the local situation to really know what is going on. If he makes mistakes there are many above and below who can later complain.

In pacification the mission of ARVN and to a lesser extent of the U.S. forces might well be confined to guarding specified points or transportation routes, and responding to threats to these. In these latter areas ARVN generally will work with the province. Conventional forces should also be responsible for military areas (as described above), but may well confine their interests in these areas to reconnaissance and peripheral ambush. In many provinces conventional forces will primarily serve as blocking forces standing between the VC areas and the more or less pacified ground. Some mobile conventional force reserve should also be able to respond to emergencies at the request of district chiefs. A very few ARVN units trained for small unit actions might also be made available for intensive pacification efforts (described in accompanying papers).

In carrying out the district programs the district chief must be given a number of guide lines. Many of these are familiar, but a number are not. One of the most important is the encouragement and strengthening of all of those local and regional, political, ethnic and religious forces in Vietnam which have been responsible for a good many of the success stories of the past three years. The district chief does not necessarily have to be a member of the group which dominates the local scene. Often the clash of local factions means that it would be better for him to be an outsider. But he does have to work with local forces, even divide what is in effect patronage among them. He should also strive to create or recreate the community identification of the villagers from the several constituent hamlets. Where this cannot be done upon the basis of the old structure of the village Dinh and the council of notables, perhaps it can be done in terms of elected representatives and farmers' organizations. There might in either case be greater emphasis on the village's own legal and moral code, the village customary. Where the village lines have been drawn arbitrarily or the old identifications lost, district should attempt to create the sense of community primarily on the hamlet level, and develop the hamlet customary as a replacement for the village. The decision as to the correct emphasis should be worked out on the basis of a local understanding of where the real identifications of the people are or could most easily be developed.\*

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\*In most areas the village, not the hamlet, was formerly the level of primary peasant identification. In some central coast areas such as Quang Ngai, in montagnard areas and perhaps elsewhere, the village is an artificial unit comparable to the canton. (See Appendix A.)

To build up the quality and capability of district also means to build up the quality and capability (but not the numbers)\* of U.S. personnel operating regularly at this level. As others have suggested there should be more discretionary funds at this level, and there should be longer terms of service at this level for Americans. There should be a working relationship between American and GVN officials which enable the American to indirectly reward cooperation (but does not give them an obvious hold over district officials). Americans might particularly be used to improve logistics at this level by direct supply in some cases, or typical scrounging.\*\*

Additional forces are placed at the disposal of the district by the police structure of the country. This consists of at least three strands. The village and hamlet policemen are under local control, although tied to a national structure. The police bureaucracy at district levels up to the national provides another intelligence service. Finally, the police field forces provide a supplementary force to that of the regional forces. It might be desirable to place a squad or two of the field forces at the disposal of each district. These should primarily be used to enhance the capability of local security forces in the use of police techniques, and to help tie-in to national intelligence nets as these are refined. However, the primary integration of the field forces into the proposed system should probably be immediately after sweeps, while they will often be employed in exploitation of their own specialized intelligence leads more or less irrespective of local structures.

The more static defensive forces below district level--popular forces and hamlet militia--should be expected primarily to defend their restricted areas of responsibility. Greater effort should, however, be made to extend the area and frequency of night patrolling by these units within their hamlet or village boundaries. The popular forces should be given considerable time off in less tense areas so that they may contribute more to their families, and thus to the economy. They should become a superior form of local militia rather than an inferior form of government troops. This may at the same time reduce the gulf between them and the rest of the population, and improve the capacity to generate intelligence at this level. The village-hamlet levels, even in contested areas should be seen as generating much

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\*A civilian adviser is now being brought in at District and a whole American team established. We should be careful here. The more Americans, the more Americans talk to one another and not the Vietnamese. The more non-military Americans, the more the district chief must use his security resources to defend the Americans.

\*\*The difficulty of improving this relationship should not be minimized. Two ideas come to mind. First, in his evaluation of the counterpart, Americans should be given more credance by higher officials. Secondly, the American sub-sector adviser's first tour of six months might be as assistant adviser, to be followed by a year elsewhere with a new counterpart and a fresh start. Thus, there would be six months on-the-job training, the mistakes of which would not have a legacy during the succeeding period of real responsibility.

more intelligence on passing strangers (if not VC neighbors) than is now the case. The increased density suggested above of reliable military force in the district should aid in the development of this information. Thus, the effort here is to slowly improve tactics, improve morale and gradually lace a military-civilian net across the districts through developing the strength and confidence of the village-hamlet level of society. The peasant society then becomes by its very nature an excellent intelligence network, channeled through its natural leaders to district.

#### V. Conclusions

I am suggesting that regardless of what new programs are being developed for South Vietnam, the primary emphasis should be put on maintaining and extending the best features of our present response to the insurgency. Thus, we should maintain present levels of pressure on more or less conventionally organized VC and NVA units. We should increasingly expose communist "secure" areas to destruction. We should maintain the blocking forces that now screen Vietnamese populated areas from the larger VC or NVA units. But the concentration of new effort should be upon pacification. And in pacification I am suggesting that the district chief's ability to pacify his district on the basis of local intelligence should be strengthened. Current programs look toward the retraining of ARVN for pacification and the rapid buildup of RD cadres along national guidelines. I believe that it is safer to use the experience and flexibility of adaptation of the district chief and his RF units as the primary forces. ARVN will provide a better blocking force if it becomes accustomed to independent small unit action, but it should remain primarily a blocking force. It might take years for its officers to really handle local problems. RD teams should augment the district programs. We should at the same time not urge the central government to overextend, by trying to make it really effective at the village level in a multitude of "coordinated" programs. We should rather build up the village's own capabilities, and allow the district chief to integrate the multitude of government programs at his level.

In making these suggestions, I have proposed a use for the greater part of the human material resources which GVN and its allies might be supposed to be willing and able to put into pacification over the next two years. It is very difficult to judge the likely results of this effort in terms of greater security, because we do not know the balance of success and failure which we had in 1966, or how representative that year was. Political instability in urban areas hurt the first half of the year, and this instability may recur. A good deal of recent success may have come from picking up the slack, in other words, from coming to recontrol areas of traditional anti-communist organization and attitudes. In such areas it was only extreme government weakness in 1964-65 that allowed the VC in. There is probably still some slack to pick-up, but I don't know how much.

Optimistically, it may well be that the program described here is enough to turn the trend of the small war decisively in the government's direction. If a trend against the VC in peasant control lasts for a year, the whole VC effort may begin to collapse. If the VC are effectively destroyed in even a

few additional districts, then some of the resources of these districts can contribute to neighboring districts and so on. Regional force units should, however, not be moved far from their areas. (Of course, while within these constraints I would transfer surplus regional force companies; I would not quickly transfer good district chiefs and their civilian aides out of successful districts. Any ARVN units being used in the "small war" would be more easily transferred.) If planned for, a trend toward expanding areas of security may move very rapidly.

Less optimistically, the suggested program may reach a plateau, with large areas of the country still VC-controlled. But even under these conditions, we may have a situation in which the U.S. can withdraw some of its heavier support forces as the over-all level of capability of the GVN rises.\* Even the reduction of our forces by a division in 1968, with the understanding that the division can quickly return, might help both the U.S. and South Vietnamese domestic scene. As long as the threat of large scale conventional victory is removed, and if the security situation of the better areas can be somewhat more generalized--particularly around Da Nang, Saigon, and along Route (4)--then South Vietnam can breathe again. Burma functions at a level of security very little better than this, and perhaps South Vietnam can too.

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\*Cf. accompanying document by R. D. Gastil, Principles for Settlement in South Vietnam, HI-878/III-RR, August 8, 1967.

## APPENDIX A

THE COMMUNE CONCEPT AND THE HAMLET-VILLAGE  
DISTINCTION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Americans conversant with Vietnamese problems find it exceedingly difficult to avoid calling a hamlet a "village," even when it would appear to be very important to be clear about the unit being referred to. If this were merely a problem in communication, it would be an irritating annoyance and nothing more. However, during recent discussions with a broad sampling of Americans directly involved in Vietnamese questions, I have felt that the lack of the ability to make the linguistic distinction is related to a very general underestimation or misunderstanding of the significance of what is translated as "village" in discussions of Vietnam.\* The purpose of the paper is to inquire into the reasons for this misunderstanding, to try to suggest what the importance of the "village" really is, and to point out how a clearer understanding of the concept might help in planning for pacification and for nation-building in Vietnam.

There are a number of reasons why Americans have fixed upon the hamlet as the basic unit of Vietnamese rural life, the unit which must be defended, pacified and made self-sustaining. First is the fact that the initial emphasis of counterinsurgency in Vietnam in the Diem period was placed upon the defense of a point, of a defendable group of houses with natural boundaries. This unit, the hamlet, could be clearly grasped by the foreigners. Secondly, the mildly sophisticated American officer or AID official knew that peasants in most of the world lived in "villages" of about the size and character of these hamlets, *ergo*, this was the unit of life with which he must be concerned. Translation was difficult, and the most he learned of peasant social structure, was from the direct translation of such simple questions as: "What do you call this place?" and, "Who is its chief?" Third, in many areas in which Americans had their earliest experiences, e.g. around Da Nang or in the Highlands, the "village" was often an artificial administrative division, while the hamlet (or hamlet plus tribal affinity in the Highlands)\*\* was the real unit in the consciousness of the people. Fourth, the war, the insecurity, has tended to split up those natural units which were villages into VC-controlled hamlets (off main roads) and GVN-controlled or contested hamlets. At the same time, the war drove many of the natural village leaders out of the countryside, leaving only the poorer and less educated, but less mobile hamlet leaders for the Americans to meet. Finally, Americans involved in administering or planning for Vietnam do not seem to be familiar

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\*Dr. Gerald Hickey assured me in private conversation that this misunderstanding is general among Americans in Vietnam.

\*\*For the situation in the Highlands see Gerald Hickey, "Some Aspects of Hill Tribe Life in Vietnam," in Peter Kunstadter (ed.), Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities and Nations (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 745-769, especially page 754. For social-political organization in the individual tribes one should consult Frank M. LeBar, *et al.*, Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia (New Haven: HRAF, 1964).

with or use in their thinking, even the most fundamental sources on Vietnamese society.\* They miss a good deal of the detail of Vietnamese life. (This may be true even of some Americans who learn to speak, read and write Vietnamese.)

All of this would be inconsequential if it made no difference to our performance in Vietnam. However, I believe that many Americans and GVN officials do operate as though the village were meaningless and arbitrary, and many carry this attitude into areas of planning and nation-building in which the attitude may cause a considerable loss in the efficiency of our efforts. Again there would be no problem if the Vietnamese whom Americans work with really understood the structure of their own rural society, and felt the importance of imparting the information to the Americans. The educated, city-bred Vietnamese we most often deal with often fall down on both counts. In addition, a Vietnamese counterpart may often have knowledge of one area which is quite wrong in another.

One of the best ways in which I can demonstrate the significance of this problem is to quote from the recently published remarks of a Marine senior adviser to the RD program:

"The basic element of the RD Program is the hamlet. The hamlet, of which there are about 13,600 in South Viet-Nam, can best be described as a geographic area in which there is a traditional and established relationship among the people, including family ties, customs, religion, vocations and a common history. The actual structure of the hamlet varies somewhat depending upon the region in which it is located; i.e., delta, central or northern Viet-Nam. The hamlet has existed as a foundation for the Vietnamese civilian for over 2,000 years and its political significance is found in the ancient saying that 'the power of the emperor stops at the hamlet gates.' Despite 1,000 years of Chinese occupation and over 80 years of French colonialism, the hamlet remained virtually unchanged until 1945.

"The caï dinh or community center in each hamlet was a focal point of a hamlet's existence. Often, it was merely a raised platform where the people could meet to share in the common problems of a hamlet. Hamlet officials were traditionally selected by the people, unpaid, but honored and respected. The soil of the hamlet was divided into two categories: Private Land and Community Land. Each year, the people met to decide how the community land would be tilled. The poor people were allotted plots from which they would benefit from the yield. Vital statistics were a part of the hamlet administration. Thus, the hamlet was a self-contained community, having little contact with even adjacent hamlets. The emperor or central

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\*For example, Gerald Hickey, Village in Vietnam (New Haven: Yale, 1964).

government paid little heed to the hamlet, other than to collect taxes and to enlist the young men in the army.

"The Viet Minh, when it became dominated by the communists, recognized the need to break up the solidarity of the hamlet in order for its foreign ideology to have any chance of success. Therefore, the Viet Minh created an administrative super-structure, which, translated, is called "village." The village was given the power of population control, registration of vital statistics and the determination of how the hamlet community land would be utilized. Although each hamlet was represented on the village council by one representative, his single vote was often ineffective in meeting the challenge of the communist's more skilled political cadre who then ran the village council. Like the hamlet, the actual structure and composition of the "village" varied according to the geographic region. It is interesting to note that in later years, the Emperor Bao Dai and the Ngo Diem regimes both continued to use the village structure as a basis of their control of the hamlet....

"The war has been and is being fought in and around the hamlets with the result that the hamlet people who comprise over 80% of Viet-Nam's population have suffered the most from the war.... Yet, despite all these problems, the hamlet remains the one and only basis upon which the program for winning the war can be built.

"Thus, the RD Program has been designed by Gen Thang to rebuild the basic infrastructure of the traditional Vietnamese society in the hamlet and at the same time to institute those changes that will bring the people a more prosperous and happy life. The rebuilding of the hamlet and the instituting of necessary changes is realized by the creation of the New Life Hamlet."\*

Lt. Col. Kriegel has given an excellent account of the basic unit of Vietnamese life. Unfortunately, the quotation above that the power of the emperor stops at the "hamlet gates" actually referred to the "village gates." More unfortunate is the fact that the Marine adviser suggests that the village is an artificial creation used to break up the communal feelings of the people. As we will see below, in the area of Lt. Col. Kriegel's field experience in Binh Dinh province, his interpretation is correct, and thus honestly built upon his experience and that of the Vietnamese around him. But as Americans and Vietnamese transfer their programs to the more populous Delta, this interpretation may often be incomplete or wrong. It is to a large extent to avoid this mistake of transfer that this paper is written.

Let us turn, then, to a somewhat detailed sketch of what the actual situation seems to be. Traditionally, there has been a basic land-holding unit in Vietnam known as the lang or xa, words which are now translated as "village." Any communal land was owned by this unit, and a person defined his origin by it. The xa's land might not all be contiguous, so that one

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\* Lt. Col. Richard C. Kriegel, "Revolutionary Development," Marine Corps Gazette, March, 1967, pp. 38-39.

xa might be intermingled with another. But nevertheless there was a village dinh or central house of worship for this community, and it had its own organizations of scholars, etc. Under more recent emperors the xa developed their own moral-legal codes or village customaries, in terms of which they ruled themselves. It is said that the Emperor's rule stopped at the gate, but the actual situation seems to be that the local district chief would not administer the villages in detail, but rather pass on requests for so many draftees, so much taxes, etc., and the villages would directly administer the requests.\*

If we look at the xa or lang in the Tonkin Delta as described by Gourou in the 1930's many of these are actually independent communities of contiguous houses, surrounded by a fence, and with a main gate. They appeared, in other words, to be spatially arranged like the South Vietnamese hamlet (generally ap). Gourou's figures for the sizes of these communities also look a little more like the South Vietnamese hamlet than the present village.\*\* However, a number of such units also had hamlets or thon directly adjacent to one another, or scattered as the Mekong Delta pattern. In a few cases, he found the houses to be scattered on the farms. In some cases the thon was structured like a diminutive village, with its own dinh, pagodas, etc., but it still bore allegiance to, and remained within the emotional if not the physical wall of the xa.

Since thon here serves for what is often translated hamlet in the south, it is well to note that in Tonkin a thon was often only a ward in a concentrated village, while only a minority of xa in the Tonkin Delta had spatially separate thon in the 1930's.

In Central Vietnam, the situation appears to have been much the same as in Tonkin. However, apparently in this area the xa or lang village unit was referred to as the thon, while the subunit was the xom.\*\*\* Thus, by size, structure and religious sense of community, the thon seems to be the unit here and there was no functioning unit of larger peasant loyalty. On the other hand, the xom of 50-150 families, with its own shrines and customs, if not spatial separation, functioned like the thon Gourou describes for Tonkin.\*\*\*\* Here the "thon" or basic unit of Vietnamese life is a contiguous group of houses often surrounded by a bamboo fence, and this is the land-holding unit.

\*Nghiem Dang, Viet-Nam: Politics and Administration, op. cit., pp. 146 ff. Pierre Gourou, The Peasants of the Tonkin Delta (New Haven: HRAF, 1955), 2 vols. (originally Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois, 1936), pp. 269 ff.

\*\*Gourou, ibid., p. 278. Lloyd W. Woodruff, Local Administration in Vietnam (East Lansing: Michigan State/AID, 1936), medians, pp. 20 and 26.

\*\*\*The xom exists elsewhere in Vietnam as a word for a sub-sub-division of the village, but in rural Vietnam it may have been largest and most important in this area.

\*\*\*\*John D. Donoghue, Cam An: A Fishing Village of Central Vietnam (East Lansing: Michigan State/AID, 1963), pp. 5-9.

However, as Lt. Col. Kriegel points out, the Viet Minh superimposed upon this unit an "inter-village" or lien-xa organization which the GVN accepted and referred to administratively as the xa or village. It seems useful to quote the following account of this process as found in a Michigan study:

"This mixture of ordinary hamlets and thon in the Central Lowlands points up the transitional period of local administration in that area. The origin of this period is the advent of the Viet Minh following World War II. Under that regime many of the smaller villages were consolidated in the Central Lowlands region to form more efficient units--the former villages which are called thon became parts of larger villages called lien-xa or group of villages. The impact of this reorganization on socio-administrative patterns undoubtedly varied considerably from area to area, even within the same province. In some cases probably all vestiges of the former patterns were destroyed while in others many remained. Thus, the mixture of thon and ap (hamlet) still is found. This mixture is found not only within districts but even within villages--several villages reported both thon and ap as equal units; others indicated that the latter were subordinate units of the former.\*

For a more specific example, it is suggested that in Cam An, a village of southern Quang Nam Province, the four thons were separate administrative units until 1956, but are now grouped in one village, although "village identity does not exist among the people."\*\*

In South Vietnam, on the other hand, we find a significantly different pattern. Here the basic unit is apparently the village (xa or lang), with its dinh, its notables and sense of identity, while the hamlet (ap) is a less important residential grouping. This basic pattern was first described in some detail by Hickey for Khanh Hau in Long An province, and seems partially confirmed by the studies of My Thuan\*\*\* in southern Vinh Long province, as well as Hickey's more general survey of the Delta.\*\*\*\* Questioning by the author in An Giang seemed to suggest that the Vietnamese peasant even in the really large, dispersed village of the Delta, often feels himself more tied to the village, the xa, than to the ap. However, the poorer the

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\*Lloyd W. Woodruff, op. cit., p. 23.

\*\*John D. Donoghue, op. cit., p. 6.

\*\*\*Truong Ngoc Gian and L.W. Woodruff, The Delta Village of My Thuan and My Thuong, A Mekong Village in South Vietnam (East Lansing: Michigan State/AID, 1961).

\*\*\*\*Notes on the South Vietnamese Peasant of the Mekong Delta, RM 4116/ISA (Santa Monica: RAND, May 1964).

person, the less likely he would be to take an active life in the village, confining perhaps the majority of his political and social activities to the hamlet. James Pickerell notes, however, that in some of the areas in the Delta in which houses are strung along canals or roads, the average person will not know which hamlet he is in, while he will know his village.\*

Several conclusions, then, are important. First, there is a basic socio-cultural and political unit. This unit is usually called a "village" in parts of the Delta and a "hamlet" in Central Vietnam. It is often a single settlement in the Center, but a dispersed settlement or several settlements in the South. To avoid terminological difficulties resulting both from this confusion and the general American usage of the word village for a unit in other nations, I would suggest that more persons adopt the term commune, in referring to this unit. This usage is already in the literature and seems preferable to creating still another term.

The commune was, and insofar as possible still is, a "small world" ruled over by a respected group of old and usually "wealthy" men.\*\* There may be a formal group of rulers consisting of the village chief, the council and the village policemen, and an informal, often even more powerful, council of notables or analogous group. Past village chiefs may be of special prominence among the notables. But the "rule" of these groups is probably not oppressive in most cases. The communal chief appears to be more a judge of civil disputes than an administrator. Yet in this primary role he tries to take the position of a mediator, to express the communal consensus and communal ideals to the disputants. He is seldom an arbitrator. The commune collects taxes and enforces the collection of rents, but the system is marked by great flexibility. Rents or taxes may be forgiven or renegotiated for numerous causes. While an agricultural society, practically all of the load of taxes is put, at least directly, on the business community which tends to be less popular. (However, communal land rents which help support the communal budget may be high, if the land is auctioned among prospective tenants.) While the wealthy pay few taxes and collect rents, they are expected to contribute often fairly substantial sums to the upkeep or building of communal structures (schools, shrines, etc.) and to the financing of celebrations. Although charged with the execution of national policy, the communal hierarchy appears to try to soften the impact of national programs as much as possible. Finally, while the Viet Cong is feared by pro-government village leaders, the main desire of the village leaders seems to be, or to have been until recently, to stop the cissension

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\*James Pickerell, op. cit., pp. 81-82.

\*\*In addition to the foregoing references I have used James Hendry, The Small World of Khanh Hau (Chicago: Aldine, 1964); Virginia Thompson, French Indo-China (New York: Macmillan, 1937); John Cooper, "Land Reform in the Republic of Vietnam," Memorandum, March, 1966. This and the next four paragraphs contain material from R.D. Gastil, The Problem of Counter-insurgency in South Vietnam, HI-707-RR, June 20, 1966, pp. 5-6.

to stop the suspicion, to forget the past, to reintegrate the community.\* This may be in marked contrast to the attitude of military officers (and therefore often to that of district or provincial chiefs) in areas in which they are not personally connected.

The villager desires to grow old in respect and to leave behind him a home, a tomb, enough land to support the ancestral cult and to support his children. In some communes where most land is communal and in those parts of the Delta in which peasant ownership is uncommon, this desire for land may be muted, being replaced by desires for low rents and inheritable tenancy rights. However, in the majority of communes I imagine that land ownership is a highly respected institution and land acquisition an important motivation for many peasants. On the other hand, "more than enough" land leads to absenteeism, and the outside landlord may become passively rejected just as the outside world is. If an absentee landlord uses a middleman, and/or local officials, to collect his rents, the peasant may in fact find it difficult to distinguish between rent and taxes, and may see little legitimacy in either. (By "absentee" we mean here someone without current village ties, not someone currently living in a neighboring town because of fear of Viet Cong.)

With this preface, let us distinguish the following general economic classes:

1. Absentee large owner
2. Large owner-resident
3. Owner-tenant
4. Tenant-laborer

In this hierarchy only the first group is likely to be resented because of its economic position, although anyone will be resented if he exploits unduly, or fails to live up to the responsibilities of, his economic or political position. In the commune there are relatively few owners who live off their land without working, and many "owners" have such small plots that they must rent additional land to achieve the desired level of living. Part of the reason for the tenant's relatively high social position is that the unit of agricultural administration is the small unit, very seldom the large holding with many laborers and tenants under a landed administrator or bailiff. Thus, a tenant's administration of his land varies little from that of an owner, and transition from one status to the other is easy and frequent. Finally, laborers often rent or own some land, but they must supplement their production by additional work. It is only at the laborer level that one finds many families that participate relatively little beyond the hamlet level. Persons at the laboring level are perhaps most likely to reject the scheme of

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\*See also Appendix B: "Political and Economic Factors in Counterinsurgency" for references concerning Vietnamese attitudes.

values of the commune, and some are very mobile, moving in search of better work. The numbers involved in the separate classes vary greatly from commune to commune, but perhaps not more than a third would be in the essentially laboring group, with relatively few chances for advancement or recognition in the old scheme of things. But nearly all able-bodied people in the commune work at about the same jobs at the same time--they are all peasants.

This is, then, not a very dynamic world, but one in which a minimum control apparatus allows most peasants a chance for achievement within the limits of customary behavior, and preserves the harmony of society through the maintenance of a community cult honoring the common ancestors. The commune expects the outside government to both protect it and make demands upon it. Given security many peasants would be satisfied to be left alone. Of course, this picture is idealized, but compared to other peasant societies the peasant society of South Vietnam in the late 1950's was probably a relatively pleasant one, and certainly a relatively prosperous one. Much of the bribery and graft within the commune is accepted as the right of those concerned--both to give and to receive.\* This is less true of the exactions of those from outside, but even this exploitation is often accepted in a spirit of fatalism, as is any outside demand by government, Viet Cong, or local warlord which cannot be opposed.

It would seem, then, that we should endeavor in each area to search for this communal structure in our attempt to bring peace, quiet and reconciliation to the Vietnamese.

There are, however, other possible conclusions. Many seem to feel that the old communal structure is so shaken that the new life has to be redrafted, so to speak, on any available basis. Hickey, himself, has pointed out the weakened communal structure in the Delta as compared to, for example, the old unitary commune of Tonkin.\*\* A Vietnamese public administration analyst, apparently under the influence of the strategic hamlet and new life hamlet programs, and the imposition of new artificial villages on the central provinces in the 1950's, believed that the future would see the hamlet (officially designated ap) become the new natural unit that formerly existed at the xa level.\*\*\* In this process the village customaries would be supplemented and perhaps replaced by hamlet customaries. The evolution

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\*This does not mean that when peasants are given a chance to complain--as with the Census Grievance program--that they will not complain of local injustices. However, I judge that many petty complaints of this kind are actually more the expression of small town hostilities than of outrage at unreasonable extortions. Cf. The Vietnamese Peasant: His Value System (Washington: USIS, Research & Reference Service, October 1965), p. 5.

\*\*Gerald Hickey, Notes on the South Vietnamese Peasant of the Mekong Delta, op. cit., pp. 20-22. This weakening is also suggested in Long An Province Survey--1966 (Saigon: JUSPAO Planning Office, October 1966). Many studies have the weakness of interviewing at only one level. Of course the Hamlet Chief and those around him emphasize a picture with themselves in the middle--and mutatis mutandis for the Village Chief and his fellows.

\*\*\*Nghiem Dang, op. cit., pp. 150-165, passim.

of the word thon from the designation of a sub-commission in Tonkin to the meaning of commune in Central Vietnam could be repeated again through a gradual governmentally supported change in the significance of ap.

Thus, I am not suggesting that we foreclose change, but I am suggesting that wherever a program is put into operation in Vietnam which has as its object the development or strengthening of a local basis of loyalty, that we examine what that basis is, find out what units the local dinhs serve, what unit controls the land, what unit the peasant psychologically identifies with. We should find out where and on what level or levels the sense of community has meaning. Then we can decide to strengthen or modify this structure as seems fit.

In making this choice of modification or adoption, my tendency is to make a conservative choice. It seems to me that we should prefer the village if that is at all a lively possibility, but be content with the thon or the ap where only an artificial "village" has been imposed. I would generally prefer the village because the number of villages is more manageable, and because I believe village consciousness tends to give a more area-conscious rather than point-conscious attitude to local defense.\*\* The village can provide both more manpower and less cumbersome re-enforcement procedures for self-defense on a local basis. And that defense can proceed on the basis of saturating an area with patrols, rather than narrowly restricted attention upon a hamlet barrier. However, an artificial village may not usefully defend itself, for its hamlets are much less likely to respond to, or inform one another of, impending dangers.

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\*Ferguson and Owens, (op.cit., especially p. 6) recommend on the basis of experience outside of Vietnam that the village rather than the hamlet be emphasized for local government and development.

\*\* Cf. The accompanying papers by Frank Armbruster: A Military and Police-Security Program for South Vietnam, HI-881-RR, August 10, 1967 and R. D. Gastil, Counterinsurgency and South Vietnam: Some Alternatives, HI-878/II-RR, August 8, 1967.

## APPENDIX B

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS  
IN COUNTERINSURGENCYIntroduction

It has now become a cliché to say that defeating insurgents is as much a political and economic problem as it is a military or security issue. However, to examine the depth and importance of this position is both very important and unusually difficult. The political and economic solutions generally suggested by those who purport to accept this cliché are based upon a wide variety of theories as to what motivates people under pressure to choose among alternatives.

To some the political struggle is directly a struggle for ideological allegiance, much like that between religious movements in the Middle Ages. Others stress economic development as fundamental. According to the thesis espoused in an accompanying paper, most insurgencies in underdeveloped countries are due to a well-nigh irresistible nationalist and/or anti-western upsurge of emotion, an upsurge which, in the present world context is most conveniently captured and given form by communism.\* Once communism becomes identified with nationalism attempts to oppose a communist insurgency then become nearly impossible. However, others believe that the ideological predispositions of people are important, but not this important, and that the degree of identification of nationalism and communism within a country can vary widely and quickly in terms of other realities. It may also be felt that important ideological issues exist irrespective of nationalism, and indeed many of the most dedicated communists and anti-communists within threatened countries may be internationalists or localists,\*\* rather than nationalists or the proponents of an anti-western doctrine.

On the other hand, many of those who support the thesis that political and economic questions are primary believe that peoples are more interested in actions than in ideology. Some suggest that a people will in the end support the side which seems most just or egalitarian. Others stress economic development as fundamental, suggesting that a people will support that movement which gives, or promises to give, the greatest prosperity to the greatest number. A variant of this is, of course, the promise of prosperity to potential leaders, intelligentsia, etc. Going one step back, many believe that rebellions occur as a more or less predictable response

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\*William Pfaff, The National Factor in Internal Wars, HI-866-D, July 14, 1967.

\*\*There are two very different kinds of persons who are generally lumped together as "nationalists." The first is a conservative supporter of the old order, which may be either broader or more narrow than the nation. This person is generally anti-foreign. The second is intensely interested in reforming the old system so that it may compete with the West. Since only the latter is likely to be open to communist appeals, nationalist struggles against the "West" naturally take on a many-sided character.

to a gap of severe proportions between expectations of justice or prosperity and the present reality. Rebellion is thus often seen as explainable in terms of a response to severe oppression, exploitation, and underdevelopment.

This paper is written in an attempt to try to get a feel for the relative importance of political, economic, and other factors in the generation and success of revolution and insurgency, especially in the light of Vietnamese experience, and to suggest on this basis some priorities in political-economic counterinsurgency policy. First, in order to make the issues clearer, I attempt to circumscribe the meaning of the word "political" as used in the discussion of insurgency. Then I turn to an attempt to judiciously appraise the comparative importance of a number of political, economic and security factors in the development and continuation of an insurgency, and especially of the Viet Cong insurgency.

#### Distinguishing Political Factors from Security Questions

There is usually agreement on what is meant by an economic problem or solution. Yet "political" may mean anything from police work to education--it may or may not be thought to include many security questions. It should, therefore, be useful to try to refine the meaning of "political" in the counterinsurgency discussion.

Generally the guerrilla can succeed more easily if he has the cooperation of a significant group or percentage of the people among whom he traditionally operates, and if he has at least the neutrality and silence of nearly everyone in his area of operation. If he has neither of these assets, then he will not be able to recruit, obtain supplies, and generate sufficient intelligence, while the intelligence available to the counter-guerrilla effort will be excellent--if taken advantage of with even fair efficiency.

The previous paragraph would seem to indicate that the insurgency struggle is a "political" one. Yet if the political question is: "Who does the average peasant fear most?" then it is political in the sense of interacting patterns of control over violence and the expression of violence. If government emphasis is on capturing or killing the guerrillas, then the degree of cooperation of the people may be based on the relative effectiveness of this operation. On the other hand, if the counter-guerrillas terrorize the population more than the guerrillas can, then it is possible for a government to succeed without an effective, intelligent or even well-manned program. The guerrillas likewise have the option of operating against the government security forces primarily, or against those elements of the civilian population which tend to oppose it. In a badly decayed situation both sides find it easier to attack civilians than each other. In South Vietnam we might picture the possibilities on the guerrilla level as:

GVN security forces vs. VC security forces

GVN security forces vs. population

VC security forces vs. GVN security forces

VC security forces vs. population

Since asymmetries are possible, all four combinations are necessary. To call this level of discussion "political" may be illuminating, but I would rather think of it as the guerrilla war aspect of the larger military-police operation in counterinsurgency.

In this regard it must be remembered that it is only for convenience that we divide insurgencies such as Vietnam into guerrilla and main force aspects. In typical engagements in the Delta all kinds of forces are involved. As their movement progresses, main force successes become the essential elements in the guerrilla's view that he is on the winning side. On the other hand, the intelligence superiority that the guerrillas provide their main force units makes the success, and even continued existence of these latter forces, possible. Moreover, the existence of large insurgent units compels government forces to stay bunched up, thus allowing a free ride to guerrillas on the many small missions which the insurgent leadership regards as necessary for control in detail.

#### Political Organization and Violence on the Local Level

However, more than the extent of violence by the official antagonists is involved. In many cases the success of insurgents in achieving the condition where they can operate freely in a populated area, has often been abetted by the lack of a coherent local political structure to oppose them. Thus, in Vietnam each village, and sometimes each hamlet or even sub-hamlet,\* stood essentially alone in its loyalties, with no close organizational ties to either a regional or national structure. In this condition, the hamlet might defend itself against an attack, but more often sought peace with all armed men. As the insurgency grew, the members of the local commune\*\* tended to break apart from one another, and chose loyalties in terms of their interpretation of their private interests. In other places, however, such as in An Giang province, there was a fairly coherent regional structure which could express counter-power, so that it was more dangerous to shield a Viet Cong in a hamlet than to report on a Viet Cong. The same thing, of course, happened in the cities where GVN's military and police power continued to make cooperation with the Viet Cong more dangerous than support of the GVN.

What I am saying is that there is not in actual countries such as Vietnam the pure power struggle in a vacuum suggested in the model above. People judge strengths from local incidents, and so need little encouragement to make safe judgments in terms of the local political reality.

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\*This extreme division of local loyalties can be seen in the older central Vietnamese situation: see John D. Donoghue, op. cit., pp. 5-9.

\*\*See Appendix A, "The Commune Concept and the Hamlet-Village Distinction in South Vietnam."

Violence may thus be expressed much less often than the model would suggest, in order for organizations to grow on the basis of power alone.

If we think in terms of gangster control in Chicago or Sicily, then little more than the foregoing discussion is necessary. I suspect that guerrilla success or failure can be explained far more frequently in terms of purely military and police operations than is often realized by experts in counterinsurgency. To the extent this is correct, ideas, ideals or group and personal dissatisfactions are irrelevant.

#### Political Opportunities for the Creative Minority

There are, of course, political and economic realities which give rise to insurrection, even if we are speaking of insurrection as only a special form of gangsterism. I have given above the reasons for the adherence of the followers, but not for the recruitment of the leaders of such a movement. In terms of the foregoing discussion, the leaders are those who decide to try to work for places of authority or material return within the balance of power, while the followers desire only to live safely in terms of this balance. More adventurous persons, or those failing to rise rapidly within the context of loyalty to the government, will often gamble upon a revolutionary movement with current weakness but signs of future success. While the chance of success may be lower initially, and the hardships greater, if the gamble pays off for these persons there will be much more power or profit through this road than the more conventional paths could offer. If a society is fairly rigid, this suggests that the guerrillas can often recruit more ambitious and intense young men than can the conventional society.

#### A Role for Idealism in Insurrection

However, there often appears to be more than force and opportunism. For example, if there were not some ideals or standards involved, the peasant would probably be attacked by both sides much more often than he is in Vietnam. Many leaders on both sides appear to feel that they are a part of mankind, and that their personal interests and those of the people among whom they live coincide in large measure. Therefore, their preferred solution becomes keeping population attack to the minimum while concentrating on eroding the opponents' security forces to the point where they can neither protect the population nor threaten one's own forces.\* if

\*One can cite numerous pieces of evidence here. This is certainly the flavor of the situation in Long An province. See Long An Province Survey--1966, op. cit., as well as other accounts such as Susan Sheehan's Ten Vietnamese (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1967). The force populaire developed in Central Vietnam under Diem's brother very strongly represented approach. (William Nighswonger, op. cit., pp. 67-69.) On the other side Douglas Pike, Viet Cong (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1966) gives evidence of similar VC policies in the early period.

this reasoning is correct, then if either side becomes desperate or demoralized, population attack will increase.

A second reason for being dissatisfied with the pure force argument is that there appear to be too many people on both sides willing to take risks in daily life which the average American would never accept. I would judge that there is a good deal of heroism in Vietnam which is more than self-seeking. One explanation is that Vietnamese value economic, political, and educational opportunities relative to physical security more highly than one would think. A second one is that the self-image of a significant number of Vietnamese requires some self-sacrifice in the defense of values. Of course, they also more fatalistically accept the fact of death than we do.

Assuming, then, that there is a battle for moral allegiance which goes beyond that of relative security, we have the problem of asking what is the relative significance and the nature of these factors beyond force. There are, of course, high morale communities which without internal compulsion will accept extinction rather than bow to pressure to change external or internal leadership or ideology. But in most peasant societies communities do not appear to be this strong or committed. If these people fight to the last, it is probably more due to the intensity of internal organizational control than to strength of conviction and loyalty. And it is the new, the missionary, the minority society rather than the old and traditional and majority society which is likely to generate communities with the <sup>\*</sup>strength of either organization or conviction required for such heroism.

#### Choosing Between the Government and the Rebels on the Basis of their Respective Behaviors and Policies

Peasants do, of course, rise in revolt out of desperation, but this is usually the desperation of actual starvation rather than that of high rents or poor schools. People often rise against governments because of a rapid and negative change in their standards of living. Sometimes there is deep national hatred or religious belief involved. I believe none of these factors is central to the insurgencies we have seen in recent years. In particular, the kinds and intensity of social and economic injustice in South Vietnam helped but did not cause the strength of the Viet Cong. Many countries have worse conditions, and worse trends than did South Vietnam in 1954-1961, but they had no serious insurgency problem.

Yet, I judge that at the margin, what is done for the people, their attitude toward government, injustice, legitimacy and other intangibles often does make a difference.

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\* This is, of course, a large part of the explanation for recent Arab defeats, but in another day and age explained much of Muslim success against great odds in the Middle East and India.

In considering these issues of good government it is important to distinguish for whom the government acts well or ill. Diem did a great deal to develop the country between 1955 and 1960. But two things must be remembered. First, a great part of the development was for refugees who were Catholics, and in the process montagnards and even lowland Vietnamese frequently felt threatened. But more important, Diem pursued nearly all dissidents, including most rural Viet Minh, with considerable tenacity. To ensure the loyalty of his rural population, he appointed rather than allowed to be elected the local peasant leaders. Thus, he offered economic development and political integration at the expense of favoring certain groups and of taking away even traditional liberties. But most important, he forced a community to grow in the rural areas which simply had no future in his society, a community of outcasts with ready-made connections to a communist apparatus.\*

Thus, Diem ended up with a few hearty supporters, many lukewarm advocates, and an unnecessarily large group of former Viet Minh, VNQDD, Cao Dai and others with no future in his society. When Diem's security system failed to overcome its natural and unnatural opponents, and the people could not be protected from them, the communist insurgency seemed the inevitable victor.

What is clearly implied here is that economic development is not what Vietnam needed most. It was not the degree of hope granted or not granted to the majority which may have been decisive, but the stripping of hope from large sections of the creative minority. To a lesser extent the outcome was influenced by the way in which what help was available was distributed rather than the totals. Perhaps the best proof of this thesis can be found in what apparently happened after 1963. When Diem was overthrown, the people did not rise up on behalf of the Viet Cong, but rather relaxed and returned against them. From this time on the Viet Cong had to use more force and less persuasion.\*\* If so, then why? Did people relax their opposition to Saigon because a new and better program was emanating from there? No, they relaxed because the ousting of Diem resulted in weak government, in the possibility of greater individual and communal freedom.

#### The Importance of Verbalisms in Insurrection

The next level on which many political warriors would oppose communist insurgency is that of ideology. The cement of communist movements is often thought to be the appeal of its revolutionary ideas. I imagine that to a small but important minority of communists this is very important. They have not had a "modern" theory of history and plan for political organization before. Communism clearly lays out both theory and action. But I also imagine that for most people in communist movements the ideological

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\*William Nighswonger, op. cit., pp. 35 ff.; Luther Allen, A Vietnamese District Chief in Action (U.S./AID, 1963), pp. 44-45 passim; Bernard Fall, The Two Viet-Nams (New York: Praeger, 1966); Douglas Pike, op. cit., pp 71-72, 83.

\*\*Cf. evidence in D. Pike, Ibid., pp. 102, 163-164.

discussion is a symbol of acceptance and belonging, much like a fraternity handshake. Thus, probably more people are converted to the acceptance and use of the symbols of communism than to imaginary participation in the dreams of communism--and this may well include the leaders.

However, we must make a distinction here. While the communist movement is gaining adherents many do take the ideological dreams and promises sincerely, or at least try to, since communism appears to be the winning side and they need to explain to themselves why they are cooperating. But once communism is in power in an area, then the continual mouthing of communism, the failures of practice, the demands for adherence grate on the average man, particularly if there is a possibility of escape. He would be free of the whole thing if he could.\* I believe that cynicism and ideological weariness does not affect only the average man, but also the idealistic cadres. Incipient disillusion may lead to stronger intensity of belief, while its further development leads to full cynicism or other forms of escape.\*\*

I see no evidence that the possibility of ideological weariness is taken into account by either American or Vietnamese constructing revolutionary programs for Vietnam. Like the Diem cadres before them, the revolutionary cadres and the VIS try to fight ideology with ideology, revolutionary song with revolutionary song, rigidity with rigidity. This seems wrong on two counts. First, as ideology, what Saigon's cadres have to offer cannot compete with the communists--and it is unnecessarily elaborate for a symbol. Ultimately in the Western European world intellectuals have come to reject ideology rather than the specific communist branch, and this partly because as ideology, as myth, the ideas which rule these countries are simply too pragmatic and mixed a bag to stand up. But more important, it is probably a mistake to fight communist ideology on its own terms, because the peasant may well want to be given the chance to choose individual freedom, privacy, moderation, pluralism. I think he would often rather have these goods than a new bridge and wall. Because he cannot verbalize these wants as clearly as his economic wants should not mislead us into believing that the average man doesn't care about these values.

#### Outline for Political-Economic Strategy in Counterinsurgency

On balance, people do care, of course, what the government does, and they do consider their future prospects under alternative systems when

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\*This weariness with propaganda is evidenced in many sources, including the Long An Province Survey, op. cit.

\*\*A perfect example of this process is given in Susan Sheehan, op. cit., pp. 149-168.

there appear to be alternatives.\* Traditionally, peasant peoples are satisfied if the government protects them against armed groups larger than they can handle. But once the government starts doing more, as with U.S. aid, then the people may come to expect more. Hopes rise rapidly and failure to meet these may lead to disillusionment. For many, this disillusionment is desirable, for without it they come to see charity as a right, and to expect to receive much for little effort. I doubt if a group made dependent in this way can be expected to defend itself against guerrilla threats because of the charity it has received. Parasitic peoples are not strong peoples, except perhaps when they are strictly a warrior caste. But there are levels of hope and desire which it is fitting that we help the GVN to meet, and which if not met will reduce somewhat the effectiveness of purely security operations.

I think the most important thing we can give a person is hope, if not for himself, then for his children. This means primarily an educational system with opportunity at elementary and secondary school levels. Promotion by educational attainment is an old Vietnamese tradition, still alive today, and nearly every hamlet is aware of it. For the peasant, the next most important thing is a bigger crop, or a larger share of the crop. I think these are probably of equal importance. Thus, the distribution of fertilizer is probably as important as the reduction of rents--but the latter has a longer-term character. Hope is also offered by steady remunerative work. Thus land reform is important only to the extent that equally appealing work is not available elsewhere, and as long as occupational and educational mobility is low. Of course, for many, hope is title to present land, or a reasonable chance to acquire title. But at the same time we want to support the successful farmer's hope that he can build up his land and his income over a period of years by acquiring the land of others. For the hope of the Vietnamese nation may be largely dependent on the degree to which modern farming increases its exports, and this may depend on the number of highly motivated middle-sized farmers capable of rapidly introducing new techniques.

Experience with more or less authentic use of the mechanisms of democracy also affords a chance to increase the average person's adherence to the non-communist nation. In a context such as Vietnam this is particularly desirable since communists do not allow authentic elections and the peasants are very aware of the difference. Elections are now widely accepted as a legitimizing procedure for rule, particularly on the national level. In a sense the electoral process therefore may come to be a symbol of the

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\* Thus, while generally I find the hard line expressed by Charles Wolf, Jr. ("Insurgency and Counterinsurgency: Older Myths and New Realities," The Yale Review) persuasive, he goes too far. Whether the peasant likes you and whether he thinks you will win in the long run appear from accounts of success and failure in Vietnam to be decisive. This effect is mediated in several ways, but I think most crucially through willingness to give intelligence, a variable more important than Wolf's analysis would suggest.

anti-ideological desires of the Vietnamese. But its symbolic value would be increased, and the distinction of communism and non-communism increased, if the Vietnamese did not feel that he was compelled to vote.\*

I do not believe that political warfare is a war of words and symbols--although there are communists and non-communists who manipulate symbols easily, who have a vested interest in making this appear to be the game. If propaganda were made information, real information, then it would probably be more effective in the long run. Information officers should be made a part of the structure of the counterinsurgency effort, so that the ad can improve the product through the direct need of the information officer to have a more palatable truth to tell. For example, if chieu hoi works poorly, the job of the local information officer should be to refuse to advertise it until it improves. If the information services gain a reputation for accuracy, then any GVN or allied successes in military and civic action will have a magnified success. Thus, the dissemination of misinformation quickly becomes \*\*pointless, while solidly backed news can be used to gain real values.

People tire of words and promises in war and end up valuing only the individual acts of one another. In the chaos of values, human attachments may come to be a substitute for values, and people may take great risks for the man who inoculates a baby or helps an old woman. Behavior, then, becomes a central aspect of psychological war, much more valuable than a flood of words.

### Conclusion

In summary, "political" actions should be distinguished from the low-level violent struggle of security systems, guerrillas, and local infrastructures with one another and the general populace. For it is difficult to separate the struggle at this level from the larger-scale violent struggle intimately connected to it. In some insurgency situations, if we exclude the use of violence from our definition, then "political" questions may be of only marginal importance in the success or failure of a movement. However, in many situations, including at least the South Vietnamese Delta today, it may be just such marginally important factors which are ultimately decisive. In other words, the potential heroes, those who will stand up for what may be a losing cause if they think it important enough, may be the "swing vote."

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\*Of course with present heavy security the peasant often uses "compulsion" as an excuse when questioned by local VC. He may want to seem "compelled."

\*\*The integration of information with other aspects of counterinsurgency was one of the outstanding achievements of Lt. Col. Chau in Kien Hoa province. See John O'Donnell, "The Strategic Hamlet Progress in Kien Hoa Province, South Vietnam", in Peter Kunstadter, (ed.), op. cit., pp. 703-744 (723-731).

I suggest that this swing vote is liable to go against the government if a significant, nationally acceptable minority is excluded from hope under a national government--regardless of the over-all economic effectiveness of the government. It also seems to me that people are often more interested in being left alone in their traditional rights, or with local and communal control, than they are in losing these in exchange for either the communist or non-communist goodies which might accompany ideological "revolution." Beyond security, I suggest that what most peasants want is hope for advancement, at least for their children. This means greatly increased educational facilities and/or more economic opportunities. Land reform is only one means to the end of greater economic hope, which perhaps can be promoted as well by fertilizer and urban jobs. Political warfare it seems to me should not be seen as a war of words, but of deeds accompanied by factual explanations and acceptable behavior.

## APPENDIX C

## SPECIAL APPROACHES FOR RAPID MOVEMENT IN PACIFICATION

Those currently in charge of pacification programs in South Vietnam seem wedded to the idea of slow steady movement, on quality instead of quantity. As suggested in the main body of this document, this approach seems thoroughly justified by the history of recent attempts to pacify, and the need for solid progress.

However, according to one theory of victory in Vietnam, current pressure, and the current VC drought in the victory column, may soon lead to a critical fissuring of VC morale. It may well be that if this is the case, then the current pacification philosophy and time schedule, based on the RD "treatment" may fail to catch the decisive moment for a rapid movement toward the elimination of all but a desperate fringe element comparable to that remaining in Malaya and the Philippines.

It is suggested in the main text (above) that the best way to get around the inherent clumsiness of national program reaction to VC morale breaks is to emphasize district or province control over pacification. It is clear that intimations of VC collapse will not come all at once and everywhere. It will occur first at a few points, with possibly little perturbation in the over-all national figures for chieu hoi ralliers, surrenders in battle, willingness to give intelligence, etc. But in certain districts the Americans and Vietnamese on the spot may sense a real change in the quality and quantity of people and information coming in, and devise local programs to rapidly expand GVN presence in a district, and thereby to increase opportunity for surrenders and defections.

It might be well, however, to also suggest certain national programs and plans which might be interjected at critical moments either on national or local levels into the present pacification effort. These might include:

1. a more creative system of rewards and incentives
2. pre-arranged area submission
3. large scale refugee collection

#### 1. A More Creative System of Rewards and Incentives

It should be possible to give more emphasis to the campaign for prisoners and defectors. The standard solution is to urge harsher treatment of those who mistreat prisoners, to improve GVN understanding of how to obtain information without torture, to give more adequate administration to the chieu hoi program, and to upgrade the prison camp system. Another approach is positive rewards to soldiers and officers for authentic VC who are captured alive, with greater benefits if they seem upon examination not to have been mistreated. Officers with very poor records as to

the number captured in relation to killed might be reprimanded, while those with very good records should be rewarded. Of course, this program must be worked out in such a way that floods of innocent villagers are not picked up as suspects. Perhaps it could be confined to battle-fields in unpopulated areas.

Relatives or others who act as go-betweens in bringing in authentic ralliers might also be given rewards, perhaps scaled according to the importance of the event. However, contrary to current practice, the person who makes the claim for the relative or other agent would be the rallier himself, so that the slogans of appeals could be "Turn yourself in and help your relatives," "Don't wait to get captured." This would avoid direct appeals to the cupidity of relatives. However, the material advantages and desires of both parties would be served.

## 2. Pre-arranged Area Submission

The RD program as currently implemented may be able to move relatively rapidly in contested areas. But in VC-controlled areas RD is being asked to reconstruct a society in which the acknowledged leaders have often been part of a communist apparatus for over a decade. Many of these leaders were often by no means convinced communists. As the morale of the NLF declines it may be possible to work out plans for the pacification of natural blocks within VC areas through what is in effect a process of one-sided negotiation with the people and even leaders of the area. The approach emphasizes pre-planning, pre-intelligence, and pre-contact with the VC area to be pacified. It is specifically developed for VC-controlled areas. And it tries to make it possible to negotiate individual VC, VC units and VC hamlets out of the war.

Let us see how such a program might be developed for one district in order to get the process under way. In Long Phu District of Ba Xuyen Province the government controls about 50% of the hamlets, with 25% contested and another 25% Viet Cong controlled. There are two RD teams in two contested hamlets, and next year an attempt will be made to go into a couple of others in this group. But beyond there are areas in which the district forces seldom go, although they may be able to make an occasional show of force. In particular, there is a cluster of three islands controlled almost wholly by the Viet Cong, with perhaps 6000 persons in 14 hamlets, of which the government contests one. This has been an old Viet Cong area. In fact the battle lines in this district have not changed in many years--although many refugees have left the islands.

It would be possible to mount sweeps through the islands with ARVN units, and leave an additional company on the islands with 14 RD teams to administer and defend the area for the next year or so. The RD teams could not be all from the local area, for it probably cannot produce so many teams, especially with conflicting demands. The fighting men will still be largely away from the islands with VC units or infiltrated back in small units. At the end of the period there might still be no end in sight to the occupation. Better results might accrue if a firmer ground-work were laid for the operation and a firmer curtain were put around the

operation initially. With such a plan fewer families would remain tied to VC, because of the greater emphasis on individual and unit desertions, and prisoner rehabilitation.

Months before the operation we might send a specialist team of three Americans and three Vietnamese (e.g. in intelligence, community development and security) to Long Phu district for a three-month period of study and analysis. They should go over all available intelligence reports on the islands, and manufacture their own intelligence from refugees, ralliers and prisoners. They should learn in detail the nature of the power structure of the Viet Cong hamlets, of the Viet Cong groups on the island, and of their relations with other groups. Their data should include biographies of hundreds of Viet Cong and their acquaintances. They should learn the division of land, rents and taxes in each hamlet "before the war" and at subsequent periods up to today, as well as the current Viet Cong taxes--and where this money goes. They should learn the special problems of each hamlet and its antagonisms and allegiances.

During the next month the special team should attempt to develop a plan of how the islands should look in economic and political terms a few months after securing. The team should then get this plan approved in detail by district, province, and the central ministries involved (obviously procedures to expedite this process should have been developed in the interim). The next few weeks should be devoted to detailing the government's plan to the people of the islands through a variety of methods (leaflets, personal contacts, infiltration). This information should be very specific. For example, family X in village Y may learn that it is to have two of its hectares rent free, but to pay 25% rent on the rest. Perhaps the draft will not be reinstated in these hamlets for a year. Lists will be prepared dividing the people into categories such as:

- A. Viet Cong criminals to be tried for specific crimes (punishment up to execution).
- B. Viet Cong to be permanently removed.
- C. Persons to be temporarily sent away to province for indoctrination.
- D. Persons to be permitted no participation in politics for a period of years.
- E. Persons permitted to live normally and take part in politics.

Certain highly placed Viet Cong on the islands might then be secretly informed of their place on a list. It might well be found just, and certainly expedient, to place present VC cadres in categories A-E, with most of the people in E.

A VC leader who was known and liked by the general population, who had perhaps attempted to soften the weight of Viet Cong exactions, might be allowed to compete for a position of power and influence in the near future. On the other hand, executioners and "enforcers," liaison persons and outsiders should probably be placed in categories A and B. The exact method and timing for getting the information as to category through to a person should vary with the situation. Individuals in group A should probably not be contacted.

Such detailed information might have several effects. First, it should split apart the Viet Cong structure by making government victory look very different to different VC leaders. For some, there will be hope of obtaining positions under government control. Secondly, the average person in the islands will come better to understand what his future will be like under the government, and thus be more ready to co-operate. Third, the categorization should be such that the average person should see a good deal of justice in it. Allowing the best of his leaders to stay may increase the average peasant's sense of security. But it is essential that he believe that the potential agents of VC revenge be eliminated from the country.

The people will be informed some weeks ahead of the event that the government will soon sweep the islands in overwhelming force, and that the people should be prepared to give information and cooperate in other ways as early as possible after the first units hit the beach. Individual Viet Cong leaders and units should also be contacted in advance to make possible unit defections.

During this same period the government should plan to make all preparations for a two-week, battalion-sized campaign on the islands. Toward the end of the preparatory period, four RD teams, two extra companies of soldiers (e.g. the new regional force company assigned as above and one ARVN company trained for small unit actions) should be placed under direction of the Special Project team.\* The officers of the temporarily assigned battalion, of the RD teams, and of the additional companies under team control should have time to be thoroughly briefed on conditions on the island and the role they are to play in its securing.

River patrols should gradually increase the isolation of the Viet Cong islands during this period. Thus, several months after the beginning of the proposed study the islands might be "swept" by the ARVN battalion and the independent companies for one month, in conjunction with the establishment of fairly tight, if temporary, river control. The two new

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\* From this point until the ARVN battalion leaves the islands, the team will be under direction of the highest ARVN officer involved. He will be advised by the American battalion adviser, the District Chief and the specialist team mentioned above. Needless to say this officer must have a good record for cooperative working relations with district chiefs, regional forces, and U.S. advisers, and understand well the relevant principles of pacification. After this period direction will revert to District, with the specialists as advisers for the island part of the district.

district companies and the four RD teams will now occupy the islands (in conjunction with the small popular force contingent already on the island). The blocking force can be relatively thin here since heavy river patrols may be maintained for the next year. The team of six specialists will continue to oversee the implementation of their program for the islands, and to integrate and equalize the program of aid and revitalization for the islands with that for the rest of the district. A platoon of the police field force should now be assigned to the islands for two months. The RD teams provide another new source of intelligence as they gradually move through the island at the rate of four hamlets every three months (i.e. with hamlets here averaging 425 persons each--6000 persons in all--about one hamlet is "processed" by each 59-man team every three months). At the end of a year, two teams may be left behind for a further year of dispersed effort and monitoring. The special U.S.-GVN team for the district may gradually be reduced to one or two men serving as staff to the District Chief. But by this time the hamlets should have fully functioning elected hamlet and village structures and be reintegrated into the district. In addition, the pacification effort on the mainland on both sides of the islands will have been given an extra margin of protection. But most important, the Viet Cong of the Delta will be shown not only that the stalemate is ended, but that for many of them there is a way out with honor--even in their own communities. And thus a general decline in VC morale might be turned by the application of the formula above into a cascading movement away from the Viet Cong.

After two years the district as a whole should be able to maintain the new level of control with the standard country-wide district force allocation (of regional forces, RD cadres and police field force), although the pacification will be accompanied by some considerable build up of hamlet militia by the RD effort on the islands.

If such a program can promote unit defections, of even very small units, it will become known over wide areas that the VC is on a slide. At this point more careless and rapidly implemented programs of this general type might be devised.

### 3. Large-Scale Refugee Collection

Refugees have generally left VC areas more to escape the war than to escape VC control. Yet the VC need the production of these refugees, and often try to stop or discourage their movement. One evidence of this is the tendency of U.S. sweeps in certain areas to be accompanied by a large-scale movement of refugees out of the area with the withdrawing U.S. forces.

It would seem to me that the natural movement of refugees should give an idea to those concerned with increasing the speed of VC breakup in VC controlled areas. Collecting refugees could become an objective of our sweeps in some areas.

A sample operation would begin with the construction of a large U.S.-advised refugee camp or camps. A VC area would then be swept. After the initial stages of the sweep, certain hamlets would be surrounded and

occupied for perhaps 24 hours. Each family would then be interviewed by itself in its home. They would be asked if they would like to leave the area for the duration. They would be supplied information as to the means of transportation, the nature and location of the refugee camps, work and schools available there, and the time of departure of U.S. forces from the hamlet. It might be well to provide alternative camps, for some potential refugees may want to settle in the closest GVN area, while others would prefer to move as far away as possible (perhaps out of fear).

The suggested operation here is similar in some respects to the recent clearing of the Iron Triangle. However, in that case the people were all forced to leave. Here, I presume that the anti-VC would at least predominate in the refugee camps, so that with an internal intelligence system in these camps, a large group of Vietnamese could be effectively freed of VC control in a way which may be extremely difficult in the Iron Triangle-type evacuation. For in cases of the total evacuation. For in cases of the total evacuation of VC hamlets, I imagine that we have merely moved a VC community from one place to the other.

Aside from freeing a group from VC control, the loss of these people may seriously affect those who do not leave. If a large percentage of the population is taken from VC-controlled hamlets, the people left behind are apt to be deeply depressed by their new environment. Declining populations, abandoned buildings, weedy fields are depressing. In addition, the inability to meet VC tax or other demands, now imposed on a smaller group, will tend to further break down morale. These communities may then become ripe for a different kind of pacification under clear and hold operations which will be followed by the return of refugees.

In the refugee approach it might be well to allow those from each village or hamlet who wish to live together to form a government-in-exile, complete with elections. Such a community could then develop plans to take care of problems such as a land distribution or education, when they return. The exiles might also participate in the training of a hamlet militia under an RD team assigned to the community-in-exile. In cooperation with this team and American advisers new skills might be learned, and the groundwork laid for new operations and industries.

In conclusion, I am suggesting that plans be developed specifically to speed up the pacification efforts in those cases in which it is felt that VC morale is breaking and only an additional push is necessary. Many of the suggestions developed here are not new, or are new only in their nuances. Nevertheless, by emphasizing the exploitation of success as an area for which new plans may be necessary, perhaps something has been gained.

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