PART II

THE COUNTERINSURGENT RESPONSE

SYNOPSIS

Chapters IV and V are a survey of the developing response of the Government of Vietnam and the United States to growing communist insurgency. Chapter IV deals with the various pacification efforts prior to the full blown emergency measures during and after 1961. Civic Action in former Viet-Minh areas in 1966-1956 is described. Military policy, political ideology (Personalism), mass organization, land reform and land development are described. Early efforts at population relocation and self-defense programs are introduced.

Chapter V summarizes the advent and development of the systematic national plans for pacification expressed in the Strategic Hamlet and New Life Hamlet campaigns. Other special pacification efforts are noted, including the innovation of United States combat forces for pacification.

CHAPTER IV

EARLY APPROACHES TO PACIFICATION

The Irrepressible Conflict

As has been noted, the Second Indo-China War is closely tied to the conflict before Geneva. The dramatis personae had changed, but the tactics of the insurgent and counterinsurgent were in the continuity with the previous war. The French had tried, under Navarre and de Lattre, to develop controlled areas, protected by Vietnamese troops, so that French forces could be more mobile.[1] The French had moved into their own rear area villages with Vietnamese cadres (called GAMO--Groupe Administrative Mobile) who served under the military government forces (Suppletives). With the input of American aid through the French, under the acronym, "STEM" (Special Technical and Economic Mission), a clash occurred between American and French officials concerning the content of village-based programs. General de Lattre resented the wide-open moves of Robert Blum to spur economic and social change in the country. Blum, the head of STEM, was bent on helping the people improve their lot. De Lattre considered the STEM role contributive to troublesome

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[1]Pacification efforts by the French in the Red River Delta are surveyed by Robert Donlevia, "Behind the Lines in Indo-China," Freeman, 25 January 1954.

anti-French nationalism. De Lattre once addressed Blum as "the most dangerous man in Indo-China."[2]

Diem inherited the insurgency with his accession to power. The nearly 90,000 Viet-Minh sympathizers who went to the North were mostly cadres and soldiers and their families, many of whom would return for subversive roles later. As they left, these cadres and officials issued warnings of retaliation towards any who cooperated with Diem's government, indicating that they would return after the uniting elections.[3] Agent systems were retained and caches of weapons and equipment were hidden.[4] Clandestine meetings of cadres and small acts of violence occurred even during the 1954-1955 peaceful period.[5]

Indeed, informally, the war had never really ended. Diem deeply resented the American belief that the insurgent problem was over.[6]

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[2]Quoted by Shaplen, op. cit., p. 86.

[3]Michigan State University Advisory Group, "Report on the Organization of the Special Commissariat for Civic Action" (June, 1957), p. 1. (Mimeographed.)

[4]Ibid., p. 2.

[5]Notes made from Government intelligence reports confirming these events were revealed to the writer during an interview with a highly placed American (Source Number 19) in 1965.

[6]Interview with Wesley Fishel, former Chief Michigan State University Advisory Group to Vietnam.

Civic Action and the Former Viet-Minh Areas

Using his armed forces, Diem moved into former Viet-Minh areas with a pacification program referred to as Civic Action, led by civilian cadres who had been recruited and trained (as had their Viet-Minh predecessor cadres in those areas) in a revolutionary spirit and a desire for reform. Col. Edward Lansdale, the American anti-guerrilla advisor who had been closely associated with Ramon Magsaysay's victory against the Hukbalahap communist movement in the Philippines, worked out much of the program. The cadres learned the "Three Withs: eat, sleep, and work with the people." Diem had refused to use the GAMO cadres developed by the French because he thought they had not been effective during the 1952-1954 period.[7]

They undertook a bewildering variety of political, social, and economic programs intended to stimulate self-help and implant a sense of solidarity between the peasant and the new government. Dressed in the traditional plain black peasant calico clothing, 1,800 cadres moved into these recently vacated areas.[8] Examples of activities reported as achieved included the following:

- census and surveys of physical needs of the village;
- building schools, maternity hospitals, information halls;
- repairing and enlarging local roads;
- digging walls and irrigation canals;
- teaching personal and public hygiene;
- distributing medicines and giving inoculations;

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Michigan State University Advisory Group, op. cit., p. 8.

- teaching children in school by day and anti-illiteracy classes at night;
- forming a village militia or self-defense group;
- conducting political meetings;
- explaining agrarian reform legislation.[9]

Political activities also included anti-communist denunciation campaigns (identical in function to the communist campaigns); sometimes involving peoples' courts where local resentments could be vented and where a conversion from communism of various Viet-Cong sympathizers was the rule of the day.[10] These public exhibitions were sometimes a brutal and physically painful ordeal for those marked as sympathizers because their kin had gone North to the communist regime. It is thought by some observers that these mistreated individuals became a significant source of support of the Viet-Cong in later years.[11] Unlike similar excesses by communist governments in Red China and North Vietnam, where no insurgent nucleus existed as an alternative, the mistreated fence-sitter in the South still had a champion to whom he could go with his grievance. Thus, even in the first counterinsurgent effort in the South, the improprieties of the government may have aided the enemy.

The early successes of Civic Action were also accompanied by other difficulties. The government tried to enlarge the operation by the transfer of regular civil servants from other

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[9] Ibid., p. 9.

[10] Donnell, "Politics in South Vietnam," op. cit., p. 290.

[11] Interview with Source Number 23, 1965.

agencies. The results were mass resignations by transferees and eventual abandonment of the effort. The various ministries, wanting a network of their own specialized cadres, closed ranks against an expansion of the Civic Action worker as a multi-skilled person who represented several ministries to the rural areas. Michigan State University advisors proposed elevation of the Civic Action Directorate to a Commissariat General within the Presidency, giving it more position in uniting the various ministries for effective work in the countryside, but the plan was rejected.[12]

The death in 1957 of Civic Action's dynamic first director, Cieu Cong Cung, permitted Ngo Dinh Nhu to move the organization into his expanding political and intelligence system. Activity in the field became more propagandistic and political, with less emphasis on economic and social services to the people.[13]

The American aid mission assisted the pacification efforts of Civic Action through equipment and funds. The Field Service Division of the United States Operations Mission had representatives in most provinces where grassroots aid was being administered. Originally the plan had been for USOM to assist provincial authorities with direct programs of aid, but the Diem government had channelled it into the Civic Action Directorate.[14]

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[12]Michigan State University Advisory Group, op. cit., p. 11.

[13]Interview with Rufus Phillips, former AID official, 1966.

[14]John D. Montgomery, The Politics of Foreign Aid: American Experience in Southeast Asia (New York: Praeger, 1962), p. 180.

The South Vietnamese government refused a proposal by the Field Service Division to assist province chiefs directly in carrying out community aid programs, saying the province chiefs had no time for such things. USOM technical divisions (health, education, agriculture, et. al.), were interested in their own specialized programs which they tried to keep independent of Field Service personnel who had been assisting various divisions at the province level. As a result of the antipathy of the USOM Divisions and the Vietnamese government,Field Service withered away as only a reporting and housekeeping department.[15]

Land Reform and Land Development

Ngo Dinh Diem's government engaged in four major social experiments before the strategic hamlet program: 1) pacification through civic action, 2) refugee resettlement, 3) land development and land reform, 4) creation of "agrovilles"--rural towns.

Refugee resettlement is not directly relevant to pacification, except as it is expressed in the third program of land development and land reform. (Later in the chapter, agrovilles will be discussed). In subsequent programs, Diem and Nhu were consciously trying to articulate the nation-building ideology of "Personalist revolution." Its first major application was in land reform and development.

Land reform, particularly in the Delta was given a great

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[15] Ibid., p. 181.

deal of attention by the Viet-Minh and, later, the Viet-Cong. Land abandoned by absentee French and Vietnamese landlords was given outright by the communists to the cultivators.

In 1956 Diem began a land reform that was more modest in scope. He permitted landlords to keep up to 100 hectares (250 acres), with the rest being sold by the government to landless farmers, who would pay the government over a six year period. In turn, the landlords would be compensated. Rent control contracts were created. The contracts specified a minimum rental of 15 per cent of the crop and a maximum of 25 per cent. The tenant was assured use of the land for a five year period.

The government took over about 25 per cent of the riceland in Vietnam, 646,000 hectares, from French and Vietnamese landlords when the program began. Approximately 300,000 hectares of this amount were sold to 121,123 tenants over the next four years. These tenants represent about 10 per cent of all the tenant farmers in Vietnam.[16] Rent controls have not been enforced. Landlords have been able to make arrangements on the side for higher rents in some areas, and the Viet-Cong have forced rents below the specified levels elsewhere.

As has been noted, the land problem in the Delta has been a powerful issue in the insurgency. The Viet-Cong fought the

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[16]USOM Rural Affairs memorandum, "Summary Estimate of Land Tenure Status in South Vietnam" (Saigon, 15 June 1964). A report of land reform measures in South Vietnam is given by Wolf Ladejinsky "Agrarian Reform in the Republic of Vietnam," in Wesley Fishel, Problems of Freedom, op. cit., pp. 153-175.

milder government efforts at reform by urging and threatening the peasants to refuse to cooperate.

The Diem regime turned away from its emphasis on land reform as the insurgency intensified in 1960. Ironically, funds were diverted from land reform in order to finance stronger security programs. At the very moment that bolder land reform measures for popular support were needed, the regime chose stronger control programs instead.

Land development was an ambitious program for settling refugees and emigrants from densely populated regions on sparsely settled and underused land. Its relevance to pacification lay in Diem's strategy of placing a "human wall" of new settlements along the western border of the Highlands to obstruct communist infiltration. In previously insecure Delta areas the new settlers pushed Viet-Cong squatters off valuable rice land, denying the communists a valuable source of production.[17] American opposition to the program on technical and administrative grounds delayed USOM participation for a time. No objection by the Americans to the strategic concept of spreading communities over a vast wilderness area was raised, but later, the difficulties of supplying and defending these isolated and loyal communities became very serious. An unexpected political problem was created by the resettlement through the expropriation of Highlander tribal lands for cultivation by the Vietnamese.

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[17]Interview with Milton J. Esman, former AID official, 1965.

Severe resentments between Highlander groups and the Vietnamese settlements undoubtedly served the propaganda interests of the Viet-Cong.

Excessive preoccupation with the many needs of the newly settled groups created a serious unbalance of government activity vis-a-vis the total population. It was estimated by USOM that the 2 per cent of the population thus resettled was getting 50 per cent of all agricultural aid.[18] Further, the overwhelming predominance of Catholic and northern refugee settlers created resentments because of religious and regional favoritism.

Nation-building Via Political Mechanisms

Diem started with almost no control of elites or grass-roots political elements. His brother, Nhu, led the development of a political base for the regime in a manner that reflects the methods of communist mass organization whose goal is total immersion of the individual in its social policy by control of all social units. The organizations included divisions by age, sex, family, and vocation.

American advisors urged from the first that Diem encourage the various non-communist nationalist elements to express themselves politically, but the Ngo brothers suppressed and imprisoned their opposition instead of encouraging them. Key Americans

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[18] Ibid.

asked for pressure from Washington against Diem's policy, but were refused by their superiors in Washington.[19] Instead of moving towards democratic pluralism, even in a modest way, the Ngos imitated the totalitarian single party approach of communism.

National Revolutionary Movement. Beginning in 1956, a broadly based national party was formed, intended to include practically every voter. Never screened for communist influence, or well organized, the National Revolutionary Movement was largely a formal paper apparatus without elan or particular utility (except in Central Vietnam where Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Can, made it his instrument of control).

Can Lao. The heart of the mechanism for control of administrative and political elites was the secret Can Lao party. Patterned after the communist system, even using the term "comrade," it included every key civil servant and served as a spying agency on the behavior of all government officials. Donnell has pointed out that the Can Lao's role was to approve the program and personalistic philosophy of the Ngos, thus serving functionally in a "post-decisional" role.[20] It never contributed, but only executed and explained what the Palace had proposed.

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[19]David Wise and Thomas B. Ross, The Invisible Government (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 158. This view is substantiated by interviews concerned with this period.

[20]Donnell, Politics in South Vietnam, op. cit., p. 227.

Farmers associations. Although some 288 farmers associations at the local level were claimed by the Government on paper, USOM is reported to have maintained that only 35 were functioning as associations of farmers.[21] Such paper formalities became a characteristic of the mass organizations and government operations as a whole in the countryside.[22]

Republican Youth. In 1958, Nhu organized a younger alternative to the National Revolutionary Movement. By 1960, its emphasis had begun to be on paramilitary training and political intelligence activities.[23] The provincial civil administration was the party vehicle, and the Deputy Chief of Province for Security was nearly always the Republican Youth Director. Nhu saw his Republican Youth organization as the means of bringing "controlled liberty" to the countryside.[24] The accent was clearly more on control than on liberty.

Republican Youth and Madame Nhu's Woman's Solidarity Movement--its feminist counterpart--provided crowds, demonstrations, and other "spontaneous" activities needed to build the impression of popular support towards government policies. Whatever its intent, the mass organizations of the regime had the traits of rigid control from the top, wooden and formalistic activities, and inflated estimates of their size and influence.

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[21] Ibid., p. 246.

[22] Ibid., p. 257.

[23] Ibid., p. 255.

[24] Ibid., p. 271.

Elections. The Ngo apparatus delivered overwhelming majorities for Diem and his chosen candidates--in a pattern familiar to totalitarian governments. Patent manipulation of voters and voting records, and restriction of opposition candidates were standard practices. The increasing threat of communist influence in the elections justified precautionary screening of candidacies in some areas, but the Ngo strategy for survival included more than the defeat of communist insurgency. They sought to secure their own political position against all forms of political opposition.

In 1956, the regime took a giant step away from rapport with the coontryside by changing elective village offices to positions appointed from above--only months after some areas had enjoyed the first local elections since the departure of the Viet-Minh. These earlier local political expressions had been both revolutionary and highly meaningful to the rural participants.[25] Apparently Diem felt that he needed tighter and more far reaching control from the top, and decided to appoint even the lowest level officials. It was a costly decision in terms of the need for rural support in the later insurgency.

The Ngo regime's attitude towards opposition elements had become particularly frustrating to intellectuals and other nationalists by 1956, when Diem had collected the reins of

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[25]Richard J. Evans, Field Service Officer for USOM, describes the impact of one such election held in 1955, in a report to USOM dated 22 July 1955. The voters had free choice and were deeply proud of their opportunity.

power and could have afforded overt opposition. Diem appeared to invite popular expression in the various elections, and such activity revealed a great popular interest in political participation. Donnell compares the government's response to this political expression with Mao's "hundred flowers" repression.[26] The stimulation, and subsequent frustration, of these political elements in the cities and the countryside discouraged genuine popular support of the regime's counterinsurgency objectives. Some authorities feel that Diem could have profitably and safely widened popular participation after he established his position in 1956, but that his failure confirmed the dictatorial character of the regime and the doubts of the intellectuals.[27] In the Hoa Hao areas some researchers found a correlation between government suppression of Hoa Hao political activity and rate of increase of Viet-Cong influence.[28]

Military and Civil Defense Policies

American policy. After 1956, the approach of South Vietnam and the United States to the problem of defense against potential

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[26]Donnell, Politics in South Vietnam, op. cit., p. 369.

[27]William Henderson in Richard W. Lindholm (ed.), Vietnam--The First Five Years (Michigan State University Press: Lansing, 1959), p. 343. See also, Scigliano, op. cit., pp. 98-100.

[28]Michigan State University Vietnam Advisory Group, My Thuan: A Mekong Delta Village in South Vietnam (Washington, D.C. Department of State, 1961), p. 37.

communist aggression had shifted radically from reliance on people-oriented Civic Action campaigns to preparation of a conventional army. Initially the White House apparently intended to duplicate the Magsaysay successes against the Huks through skilled anti-guerrilla forces.[29] President Eisenhower's personal emissary, General Lawton Collins, was reported to have planned for "a smaller but more reliable armed force chiefly designed to maintain internal security," with protection from "external aggression" supplied by SEATO nations.[30] Lt. General John W. O'Daniel, who headed the army advisory program for training, was quoted in the same month:

> The army will be above all, according to American ideas on the subject, a police force capable of spotting communist guerrillas and communist efforts at infiltration.[31]

The results, however, were quite another story. Military Advisory Assistance Group commanders began to refer to the danger of mass invasion from the North. The Vietnamese army took on an appearance in its equipment, organization, and training much like American units of that period. Mechanization and elaborate command structures were instituted. Col. Amos A. Jordan has called this tendency "mirror-imaging" of the armed forces of

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[29] Wise and Ross, op. cit., p. 156.

[30] Baltimore Sun, 1 February 1955, p. 1.

[31] New York Times, 13 February 1955, p. 1.

of the United States.[32] While Vietnamese army units acquired conventional capability against invasion, the insurgency was steadily growing. Top American military advisors, however, tended to belittle the rising insurgent threat in public statements such as that of Major General Sam Myers in July, 1959: "The guerrillas were gradually nibbled away until they ceased to be a major menace to the Government."[33] The rising insurgency was not, in fact, considered serious until 1960 by American military or civilian officials.

With the establishment of comparative political stability in 1956, there was a movement in all fields of United States-Vietnamese relations towards conventional programs and traditional patterns of diplomatic involvement.[34] The continuing political problems were ignored in the absence of overt crisis. Relations were formalized, and advisors were cautioned against being too involved in the other country's affairs.[35] After Lansdale left, in 1956, American influence in the Palace began to fall in inverse proportion to Nhu's growing influence with Diem.[36] Nhu eventually

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[32]Amos A. Jordan, Jr., Foreign Aid and the Defense of Southeast Asia (New York: Praeger, 1962), pp. 50-51.

[33]Quoted by Robert P. Martin, "U.S. Bungle in Vietnam: The Inside Story," U.S. News and World Report, 14 September 1964.

[34]John Dallas Stempel, "Policy/Decision Making in the Department of State: The Vietnamese Problem 1961-1965," unpublished dissertation, (Berkeley: University of California, 1965), p. 98.

[35]Interview with Source Number 45, USIA, 1965.

[36]This is the consensus of Americans interviewed who were present during the period of change.

came into control of virtually every regular contact which Diem had with the situation of the country outside the Palace.

Armed Forces and Civil Defense Measures

At the beginning of the Diem regime, there was a sizable collection of various armed organizations from the earlier war, all more or less in disarray. These units have been traditionally classified into regular, regional (provincial), and popular (local village) forces. (For current force personnel levels see Figure 4).

The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). The regular army, in terms of its service in a guerrilla war, was improperly trained and equipped in the pre-emergency period. Its combat performance and other problems are well known through various journalistic writers.[37] Until 1962, regular troops had not been widely employed in systematic pacification, being reserved for major force engagements which rarely came. Even currently, their pacification role appears to be secondary, though increasing in priority.

The Civil Guard (Bao An). A direct descendant of the French Garde Civile, the Civil Guard is a provincially based force, organized and equipped along the lines of the regular forces. From 1957 through 1960, the Civil Guard was stymied

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[37] Intimate and generally accurate reporting on Vietnamese military operations are provided by David Halberstam, op. cit., Denis Warner, op. cit., and Malcolm W. Browne, The New Face of War (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965).

in its development, remaining as an ill-trained and poorly equipped regional organization caught between conflicting philosophies concerning its role in protecting the rural population.[38] The Michigan State University Group in Vietnam (MSUG) had, as a USOM contractor, agreed to train the Civil Guard as a lightly armed (up to submachine guns) constabulary, living as small units among the people to perform the police role in a traditional sense. Diem wanted a hard hitting mobile force (on wheels) that would be heavily armed and organized in larger units. The issue was basically whether the Civil Guard would function as rural police or military units. Michigan State advisors were not thinking of the counterinsurgency aspects, but of the need for an effective rural constabulary designed for a normal situation.[39]

MSUG eventually withdrew from this role in 1959 and the USOM/Public Safety Division was directed to build a staff to take over the MSUG training role. USOM/Public Safety initiated an anti-guerrilla training school at Vung Tau in 1960, preparing several classes in special police techniques. However, it was decided in Washington to turn over the training and equipment role to the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) in late 1960. Some elements in MAAG, and other even higher in the

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[38]The complicated controversy is discussed by John Montgomery, op. cit., pp. 64-70, and also in Robert Scigliano and Guy H. Fox, Technical Assistance in Vietnam: The Michigan State University Experience (New York: Praeger, 1965), pp. 10-17.

[39]Interview with Ralph Turner, Michigan State University, 1965.

United States command, are reported to have deliberately obstructed USOM efforts to equip and supply the Civil Guard units at the Vung Tau center.[40]

Popular Forces. The Self Defense Corps (Dan Ve) was an even lower level of local forces. Normally responsible solely for the defense of their own village, these black clad, lightly armed troops have been the first line of defense in the current conflict. Their number has varied upwards to around 140,000, with the inclusion, in 1964, of large blocks of the volunteer hamlet militia as full time popular force members. Earlier in the emergency, the Self Defense Corps was also part-time, and was paid by the Government for duty on a part-time basis. In some areas, these forces were supported by a Hamlet Volunteer Guard, consisting of all able bodied men between 18 and 50 years of age, who were armed with assortments of guns, knives, and sticks.[41] The Self Defense Corps was elevated to military status and put on full pay in 1961 as a part of the United States Military Assistance Program. However, it is commanded by the local district chiefs. There are still large numbers of militiamen who have not yet been assimilated into the full pay status of popular forces. These are expected to serve as guards for

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[40]Interview with Source Number 4 (AID), 1965 and confirmed by Source Number 7 (formerly Department of Defense), 1965.

[41]This data is taken from research conducted in 1958 in a Thua Thien province village by Nicholar Luykx in Some Comparative Aspects of Rural Public Institutions in Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, June 1962), pp. 682-686.

hamlet defense only.

Police. The role of the police in the early counterinsurgency programs was severly limited because of the controversy that led to the military takeover of what would have been a rural constabulary. In 1961, USOM/Public Safety and the National Police proposed an increase of National Police from 21,000 to 72,000 to meet the problem in rural areas. It was not until the fall of 1963 that the increase was approved by the United States.[42]

Other Civil Defense measures. In 1959, as the insurgency grew, the Government issued Law No. 10/59, ordering the death penalty for acts of sabotage and other insurgent crimes, setting up military tribunals and "reeducation centers" to handle the cases.[43] There also was an acceleration of "denounce communists" campaigns beginning in 1959.

The regime organized inter-family groups (lien gia) within each hamlet in order to have tighter control over the rural areas, and to propagandize. A family member was put in charge and the group as a whole was made responsible for individual behavior. This was a precise imitation of Red Chinese and

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[42]Interview with Frank Walton, former Chief, USOM/Public Safety, Vietnam, 1965.

[43]An English translation of Law 10/59 is available in Luther A. Allen and Pham Ngoc An, A Vietnamese District Chief in Action (Washington, D.C.: Agency for International Development, 1961), pp. 69-71.

Viet-Minh tactics.[44]

As an upgrading of the French-instituted identification card system, the Michigan State police advisors arranged in 1958 for a less easily duplicable system through improved laminating machines. Insurgents had previously forged false cards with ease. The Michigan State University advisors also obtained Vietnamese action to convert to the superior Henry Method of fingerprint classification.[45]

Relocation of Population

The relocation of population was an old technique for the Government in its land development and refugee resettlement programs. These two relocation efforts were both intended to fulfill a national revolutionary strategy and to provide a string of settlements in remote areas to deterr Viet-Cong invasion or infiltration. Later relocation programs, while still concerned with revolutionary development, were more heavily oriented towards improved control of the population.

By February 1959, relocation of families within communities had begun and, in contrast to the land development and refugee activities, these relocations were often forced. The earliest form of relocation was into "rural agglomerations" of two types: 1) qui khu for Viet-Cong related families, and 2) qui ap for

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[44]Donnell, Politics in South Vietnam, op. cit., p. 294.

[45]Interview with Ralph Turner, Michigan State University, 1965.

loyal families in indefensible areas. The program was apparently a "bare-bones" military effort, devoid of economic or social consideration.[46] Both regroupings elicited negative reactions from those families relocated.

In April of 1959, more sophisticated relocations were planned as a part of a "strategic route system"--key highways protected by rural towns, called agrovilles (khu tru mat). These agrovilles were to be social and economic centers. About eighty were planned, with smaller agro-hamlets (ap tru mat) as satellites. The relocated families would labor to construct defenses, homes, schools, and dispensaries in a spirit of self-help. Able cadres for administrative posts would be trained, and public land sources would be developed (such as fruit trees and fish ponds) for community fund resources. Finally an active youth movement would be organized.[47]

In 1961 the program was discontinued after twenty-three agrovilles had been started. The application of the plan made enormous demands on the peasants involved: corvee labor well beyond the ten day assessment, and long commuting distances to their fields, which were often inadequate in size and soil quality. The Viet-Cong peppered the agrovilles with propaganda relevant to peasant resentments.[48]

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[46]Joseph Zasloff, Rural Resettlement in Vietnam: An Agroville in Development (Washington, D.C.: Agency for International Development, n.d.), p. 9.

[47]Ibid., pp. 10-11.

[48]Donnell, Politics in South Vietnam, op. cit., p. 188.

The smaller 100 family agro-hamlet was located more closely to lands tilled by the occupants. Construction was carried out at a slower pace fitted to the peasant's planting and harvesting schedule. By the end of 1961, the agro-hamlet had become the prototype of a vast civil defense scheme known as strategic hamlets Ap Chien Luoc. (To be discussed in the next chapter).

Summary of Early Efforts

Despite auspicious beginnings, by 1956 the Ngo regime had begun to destroy the confidence of key elites by autocratic behavior. Instead of building his good will be increasing popular political participation after consolidating his power, Diem continued the repressive measures of a typical police state, talking all the while of revolution and democracy. As Diem tried to tighten his control, the American mission diluted its influence over the regime by a return to conventional bi-national relationships. The peasantry and the urban political elites were at the mercy of the regime and had no power source to challenge Diem, except the Viet-Cong insurgency.

The insurgency heightened, and the governmental structure became the prime target in rural communities. Diem multiplied his demands on administrators and peasants alike for drastic programs in resettlement and relocation. The official Americans stood by, remote from the grassroots struggle of these two strikingly similar totalitarian systems each trying to destroy the other

and impose its own revolution on the Southern peasant.

After 1958, initiative and influence in rural areas shifted steadily to the communists, with the extreme counterinsurgent programs possibly accelerating the insurgent growth through the government's irritation of the peasantry. As United States policymakers were belatedly awakening to the crisis, the Ngo regime was concocting a coup de grace for the insurgency that it hoped would also be the coup d'eclat towards realizing the Personalist revolution. This was the immodest intent of the strategic hamlet program, which was the first truly nationwide pacification campaign against the insurgency.

The American failure to grasp the insurgency problem. It is widely understood that official Americans misread the nature and extent of the insurgent threat between 1956-1960. It is less clear as to why the misreading occurred. There are several possibilities. American officials had little contact with the peasants and lower officials who were in daily touch with the insurgency problem. The two key problems of the regime, the insurgency and its own internal administrative political malfunctions in the rural areas, were far from the Americans, who were concentrated in the cities.

Most American officials had little training or experience with revolutionary warfare. Most of the highly competent military and civilian advisors in Vietnam during this period were examining events and proposing programs in terms of their

previous experience with conventional programs of economic and social development and defense. As in many other historical situations, preparations for a future war were based on the requirements of the preceding conflict (i.e. Korea). Finally, as noted, American policy from Washington after 1956 discouraged the intimate involvement with Vietnamese political problems necessary for adequate analysis of the Viet-Cong threat.

CHAPTER V

NATIONAL PACIFICATION STRATEGIES 1962-1965

I. THE GROWING AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT

By 1960, American advisors had begun to respond to the insurgent threat. MAAG commander Lt. General Lionel McGarr had helped the Vietnamese Army to create sixty Vietnamese ranger companies geared to anti-guerrilla operations. The first plan for organized, "team" pacification was prepared by MAAG in late 1960. The plan was not immediately implemented, although, after many revisions, it served as the basis for later strategy.[1] The crisis was further complicated by the attempted coup of November, 1960. Diem had managed to bring in loyal forces to rescue him from siege of his Palace by paratroopers. Although the coup failed, it revealed the dissatisfaction with Diem's conduct of the war and his suppression of political activity.

Edward G. Lansdale (by then a general) was sent by the White House to study the sitoation. His pessimistic report was followed by formation of the inter-agency Vietnam Task Force in Washington. It operated under the aegis of the State Department, but included key personnel from the Defense Department, AID, USIA, and CIA. Plans were initiated to escalate the

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[1]Interview with Source Number 46, Defense Department, 1965.

American contribution in Vietnam. Two study missions to Vietnam in 1961 were led by Eugene Staley and General Maxwell Taylor.[2]

In sum, the studies called for: political and administrative reform, new economic programs for rural areas, greatly increased United States advisory and supply efforts, a larger and more effective Vietnamese army, and other armed elements. Diem successfully ignored American pressure for more popular political participation, and the United States began sending the increased aid without the strings of political reform. The United States Special Forces were already engaged in an early form of pacification among highland tribes by early 1961. But the MAAG advisors did not operate below the division level until 1962, and thus had tended to be remote from the village security problems.[3] MAAG was doubled in 1960, and further increased from 685 to 10,000 by the end of 1962, when teams of advisors were assigned to provincial (sector) headquarters throughout the country.

USOM enlarged its apparatus in preparation for pacification operations to be managed primarily at the province level. The Division of Rural Affairs was created in the Spring of 1962, and was changed to the Office of Rural Affairs in June.[4] Rufus Phillips,

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[2]Stempel, op. cit., pp. 121-122, gives a comprehensive version of the contents of the Taylor study. A report on the eleven point proposals of the Staley Mission is in the New York Times, 5 January 1962, p. 1.

[3]Interview with Source Number 7, formerly Defense Department, 1965.

[4]Interview with Source Number 5, formerly AID, 1965.

a former Lansdale aide, was appointed Assistant Director in charge. Recruiting began for USOM province representatives for field work in close cooperation with the forty province chiefs and MAAG Sector Advisors functioning as provincial committees for rural rehabilitation.

II. SOURCES OF THE STRATEGIC HAMLET CONCEPT

As noted earlier the practice of fortifying villages was a tradition in North Vietnam. It was natural that, as the Viet-Cong rural threat developed, innovations of this nature would be attempted in various provinces. Perhaps the first effort of this nature under Diem was by Col. Khanh, the province chief of Ninh Thuan, in 1960. He had been an officer in the army under the French when they tried to fortify villages in the northern Red River Delta.[5] Col. Khanh organized several villages for self-defense, including armed volunteer militia and fences. In the refugee village of Trung Hoa, Darlac province, the Catholic priest had led in the construction of defenses and had asked in May, 1961 for thirty shotguns to help defend the village from Viet-Cong incursions. Later Ngo Dinh Nhu is said to have stated that Trung Hoa was among Vietnam's first "strategic hamlets."[6]

The previously described agroville program had been tried several places in the Delta and was undergoing considerable

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[5]Interview with Rufus Phillips, formerly AID, 1966.

[6]Interview with Thomas Luche, AID, 1966.

revision, because of many complaints from officials and peasants, and a perpetual propaganda barrage from the Viet-Cong. In July, 1961 Vinh Long became the scene of the first three completed "strategic hamlets."[7] Many were also established in Quang Ngai province shortly thereafter, and the universal stress was on the isolation of the insurgents from the population and winning the loyalty of the villagers through increased government services and civil defense organizations.[8]

Vietnamese officials had long been acquainted with the Malayan program, and Diem eventually invited Sir Robert Thompson, former Defense Minister in Malaya, to advise him. Thompson arrived in September, 1961, assisted by several British experts with experience in Malaya. The mission was terminated in the fall of 1965, when Thompson returned to Britain.

During the height of the experimental period (the last half of 1961), broad economic and social programs were under discussion by Vietnamese officials and members of the Staley Mission--including problems surrounding the agrovilles and how the resettlement might be improved.

Although there was a variety of sources for the strategic hamlet concept, the point of their convergence into a single

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[7] Vietnam Press, 30 July 1961, as reported in Milton E. Osborne, Strategic Hamlets in South Vietnam: A Survey and Comparison, Data Paper Number 55, Southeast Asian Program, Department of Asian Studies, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, April, 1965), p. 25.

[8] Ibid.

plan was Ngo Dinh Nhu. He was given credit for the program by the Government which called him "architect and prime mover."[9] Nhu created the conceptual framework for the plan and set its pace for completion.

III. THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE STRATEGIC HAMLET PROGRAM: "TOTAL REVOLUTION"

Ngo Dinh Nhu's Personalist Revolution

By the time the nationwide strategic hamlet program was announced in March, 1962, Nhu had worked out a rationale for the campaign drawn from his personalist philosophy. For the Ngos, at least, the strategic hamlet program was to be the vehicle of total revolution for the entire nation--rural and urban. The war had created, Nhu thought, the occasion which demanded a Herculean effort of people both to defend themselves and bring about a revolutionary change for "democracy and development" at the grassroots.[10]

Nhu saw his plan as a new pattern for self-sufficient development appropriate to emerging countries. In an interview he said:

> My ambition is that the fortified hamlets may thus form a new approach to the saving of civilization. It is better than the Indian system of trying to get progress as a gift of the capitalist societies.11

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[9]Republic of Vietnam, Vietnam's Strategic Hamlets (Saigon: Directorate General of Information, February, 1963), p. 5.

[10]Speech by Ngo Dinh Nhu, Ibid., p. 20.

[11]Interview by Charles Stevenson, Washington Editor of Reader's Digest, March, 1962.

This total revolution would have several facets: military, political, economic, and social.

Military revolution. Nhu argued that the communist advantage in fighting a "frontless war" would be eliminated by making every hamlet perimeter a defended "front" against the insurgents.[12] He criticized the conventional equipment and training of the Vietnamese army as inappropriate to the present conflict. The new government defense strategy would have a "bi-polar organizational base," involving 1) "popular guerrilla action" by hamlet people (backed up by Civil Guard and Self Defense Forces), and 2) "Special Ranger Forces," which would fight in areas controlled by the enemy.[13] One of the initial six points for creation of the hamlet included establishment of a "stay-behind" cell of hamlet guerrillas to harrass the attacking Viet-Cong force if the militia had been forced to withdraw and leave the hamlet open to the Viet-Cong.

The Personalist stress on self-sufficiency is seen in Nhu's naively ambitious policy for arming the hamlets by imitating the Viet-Cong technique:

> The Government of Vietnam will lend weapons to the hamlets for six months. Paramilitary forces will have to count on arming themselves by takin weapons from the enemy. The Government will supply ammunition.14

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[12] Vietnam's Strategic Hamlets, op. cit., p. 6.

[13] "The Strategic Hamlet and Military Policy," Times of Vietnam Magazine, Vol. IV No. 43, 28 October 1962, p. 20.

[14] Vietnam's Strategic Hamlets, op. cit., p. 10. (emphasis added).

Political revolution. As a step towards democracy, the strategic hamlet was to have an elected administrative committee and new village by-laws to serve as a "legal framework for democracy (for example, there would be no arbitrary arrest or imprisonment. . . and equal rights and duties for all villagers)."[15]

Self-sufficiency was invoked as the approach to finance, with the committee members getting no salary and having to "exploit public and private estates" for costs of administration.[16] There was a dramatic move to emphasize the hamlet (ap) level for organization and defense in place of the village mechanism (xa). But the Government avoided legalizing hamlet taxation which the village level had always enjoyed.

Nhu believed that the Personalist "middle way" between western democracy and dictatorship, "liberalization" and "centralization" was ideal for the Vietnamese situation. The strategic hamlet program was intended to unite these two opposite forces of democracy and dictatorship into a creative synthesis. Some of the finer print in the "how to" sections of achieving political revolution implies a rather unfortunate blend of the two, from the democratic point of view. The following example is official advice from the Government of Vietnam to cadres on holding a "free" hamlet election:

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[15] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

[16] Ibid.

> If the district chief is prudent enough the inhabitants will elect the persons selected by him. This type of election is very advantageous in the psychological field. Since these people will be different from the persons designated by the district chief (as in the case of the former village councils), those who are elected will not be influenced by the district chief to be dictatorial towards the inhabitants. . . .[17]

This confused counsel is typical of Nhu's internally contradictory personalist system, in which central authority was to insure proper choice in the village while, on the other hand, free popular will was to be expressed at the same time.

Economic revolution. A bonanza of economic development was planned for strategic hamlets--involving improved agriculture, village industries, schools, health facilities, and self-help projects, the last freely chosen and built by the villagers. Most of these economic programs were to be backed by USOM.

Social revolution. The strategic hamlet would also reshape the social order of the community, putting the anti-communist combatants and other Government supporters at the top. No longer would the hamlets be "ruled by the law of the powerful and the rich, but by a new system of values based on the contribution of each to the common struggle."[18] Also

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[17] From an anonymous Vietnamese government (emphasis added) document translated and reproduced in "USOM Province Representatives Guide" (Saigon: United States Operations Mission to Vietnam, December, 1962), p. 40. (Mimeographed.)

[18] Vietnam's Strategic Hamlets, op. cit., p. 19.

another national social goal would be the uniting of Highlanders and lowland Vietnamese in a synthesis, stressing their allegedly common racial source.[19]

The lofty, if sometimes fuzzy, philosophical concepts described above were not successfully communicated to the Vietnamese peasant. His more pedestrian perspective of the strategic hamlet program was mostly concerned with what it would provide himself and his family in the way of protection and a better life and how much he would have to pay for it.

An American Concept of Strategic Hamlets

The strategic hamlet program was well on its way by the fall of 1962, when American civilian and military personnel were operating throughout most of the provinces. The various strategic hamlet activities, involving relocation, militia training, construction of physical defenses, civil defense organization, and economic projects, enjoyed general concurrence among United States and Vietnamese officials. The idea of revolution as a motivating factor in securing popular support had been stressed by AID officials in training their representatives for field activity.[20] The basic strategy of isolating

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[19]Gene Gregory, "The Strategic Hamlet in the Perspective of Vietnamese History," Times of Vietnam Magazine, Vol. IV No. 43, (28 October 1962), p. 13.

[20]The writer attended various USOM sessions in which genuine hamlet political and social reform were stressed as vital aspects of the program.

the Viet-Cong from his contacts in the hamlets and winning village support through relatively just and effective government programs was emphasized by Vietnamese and Americans alike.

However, there were significant divergences of view, which became apparent as the program unfolded. Vietnamese and Americans often meant different things when saying the same words. When the objectives were identical the means of carrying them out often varied. It was clear that Vietnamese and Americans sharply differed on the relation of the peasant to the program and particularly his participation in it. The regime was trying to articulate a revolution in terms of what it believed was necessary and proper for the Vietnamese people. The official statements (cited earlier in this chapter) about the need for "democracy and development" were quite familiar to the western-educated elite at the top of the Vietnamese bureaucracy. But there is little evidence of concern about the peasant's interests and probable response to the program.

In contrast, the USOM Office of Rural Affairs had given a great deal of attention to assessing peasant motivations and reactions concerning the strategic hamlet program. This perspective was expressed in an analysis prepared by the Office of Rural Affairs in the summer of 1963, two years after the strategic hamlet program had been informally begun by the Vietnamese.[21]

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[21]USOM Office of Rural Affairs, Notes on Strategic Hamlets (Saigon: 15 August 1963).

The study examines the basic desires of the peasant and the means of satisfying his wants in ways normal to his tradition. These desires are:

> A reasonable degree of safety; a reasonable livelihood; a reasonable amount of elementary justice; a reasonable chance for his children; a reasonable degree of status in his community; . . . and a reasonable degree of opportunity.22

It is with such popular desires in mind that the officials must carry on the hamlet program, not allowing form to supplant substance, carefully keeping in mind the expressed needs of the peasant, and asking his help, but not requiring more than he can give without serious personal deprivation. In response to these peasant motivations, the report maintains that the first task in the strategic hamlet is to offer the peasant: "1) reasonable satisfaction of his wants; 2) organization and facilities for self-defense; and 3) motivation to defend himself and his community." The second task is "to teach, through experience, the practices and processes, the requirements and rewards, of self-government." The final objective is "establishment of a stable, prosperous, self-governing nation, offering adequate and equal opportunity, under law, to all its loyal citizens."[23]

The objectives of Nhu for a personalist synthesis of "liberalism and centralism" were a long way from this American

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[22] Ibid., p. 6.

[23] Ibid., p. 15.

proposal, although the words were often identical. An indictment of both the Ngo regime and the Viet-Cong is implied in this comment from Notes:

> If the practices, the ideals, the strengths and weaknesses of democracy are well learned in the strategic hamlets, no oppressive or alien government can long endure in Vietnam--neither can an insurgency inspired by an alien ideology and officered by its dupes.[24]

Another theme of the study is an effort to define a strategic hamlet beyond the obvious visual attributes of fences, weapons, and propaganda signs.

> The essential, unique attribute of the true strategic hamlet is the commitment of the majority of its residents to resisting the communist guerrilla, the Viet-Cong (or to supporting the government, the other side of the same coin). This commitment is essentially a state of mind to be fostered and strengthened, to be reinforced by every physical and psychological means . . . .[25]

The study repudiates the view that a police-like control of the population is the program's primary purpose. Control within the hamlet should be implemented by the people themselves. This approach would be based on the ability of the hamlet, through use of its tightly knit social structure, to police itself if the majority wills to do so. Such internal control must be coupled with arms and defenses that make it

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[24] Ibid., p. 13-14. It is possible that Nhu himself could have endorsed this very quotation, without accepting its relevance to the Ngo regime, for he and Diem clearly felt that the regime was neither oppressive nor alien to the people. (Emphasis added).

[25] Ibid., p. 3. (Emphasis added).

possible for a willing citizenry to protect itself from intimidation and attacks by Viet-Cong forces coming from outside the hamlet.

USOM Public Safety officials held that effective resources control required much greater professional police activity in rural areas.[26] Resources control problems will be further discussed in Chapter VIII.

Differences in concept between the Ngo regime and USOM Rural Affairs did not affect American support of the strategic hamlet program. All American agencies continued to be fully involved in the campaign.

IV. THE EVOLUTION OF PACIFICATION PROGRAMS: 1962-1965

The Strategic Hamlets (Ap Chien Luoc) 1962-1965

In mid-1961, the strategic hamlet program had been started (although not yet announced) by Ngo Dinh Nhu. He moved in advance and independently of American planners, including the members of the Staley mission who were discussing plans for rural rehabilitation at that time. Nhu's strong dislike for Americans may have made him more committed than ever

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[26] Interview with Frank Walton, former chief, USOM Public Safety, 1965.

to the personalist principle of self-sufficiency.[27]

In September 1962, the United States tried to speed up American assistance to the rapidly moving program through direct dollar purchase of $10,000,000 worth of Vietnamese piasters, enabling immediate release of funds to urgent projects instead of the long delay associated with usual USOM counterpart financing.

However,the rate of activity in the earlier Vietnamese program--planned and executed without USOM assistance--was so great that one-third of the population of 15,000,000 was reported as already in 3,235 "completed"[28] hamlets by September, 1962, when the United States funds were becoming available. (See Figure 3). Another third of the population was scheduled to be in completed hamlets by the end of December, 1962.[29] In fact, however, the two-thirds goal was not reached until the next summer. The total goal was inclusion of all 12,000 of Vietnam's hamlets as a part of the system. The limited value of statistics in the Diem period will be discussed later.

By not waiting for funds, materials, and specially trained cadres, the full burden of the program fell on the

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[27]Nhu had expressed his willingness to carry out the revolution without foreign aid in the interview with Charles Stevenson, op. cit.

[28]The criteria for a "completed" strategic hamlet were: 1) census and elimination of Viet-Cong infrastructure; 2) organization of civic groups; 3) organization of civil defense system; 4) completed physical defenses; 5) organization of secret guerrilla cells; 6) hamlet committee elected by secret ballot.

[29]Times of Vietnam Magazine, op. cit., p. 22.

Strategic and New Life Hamlet Programs

Date	Hamlets completed/ constructed	Hamlets under construction	Population in New Life Hamlets
September 1962	3,235	2,217	34%
November 1963*	8,544	1,051	85%
April 1964**	6,562	782	55%
May 1964***	4,207	n/a	n/a
December 1965	3,800	n/a	n/a

* Inflated data under Nhu program.

** Last revision under strategic hamlet criteria.

*** Re-revision under New Life Hamlet criteria.

n/a - Not available.

Sources: 1962: Times of Vietnam, October 28, 1962; 1963-1964; USOM/Rural Affairs Memorandum, 1 July 1964; 1965: Robert Shaplen,"Letter from Vietnam" New Yorker (12 March 1966).

Figure 3. Comparative statistics on "Constructed" vs. "Completed" hamlets.

peasants and regular civil servants, whose other duties inevitably suffered. The pace of completion, and the even more impossible schedules announced but not made, created an air of unreality in the early process, which carried over into the later period of construction (1963) when materials, money, and cadres were available.

Some activities in the strategic hamlet program were financed by Vietnamese funds and others through agreements made by the Vietnamese with USOM or the Military Assistance Program (MAP) of MACV.[30]

By the summer of 1963, when the Buddhist crisis paralyzed much of the nation's administrative and military apparatus, most of the province programs had been staffed and were operating at full strength. The fall of the Ngo regime was accompanied by a complete collapse of the pacification efforts in many areas, and vast regions that had been under government control quickly came under the influence of the Viet-Cong.

In the months prior to the coup, USOM Rural Affairs officials had grown quite concerned about the reports from their Delta field representatives that the hamlet campaign was not being thoroughly executed or correctly reported to the Vietnamese Government. Reports from USOM and MAAG provincial advisors often arrived in Saigon with opposing conclusions. President

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[30]See Appendix B for pacification activities funded in a typical USOM release agreement with the Government of Vietnam.

Kennedy received the report of the McNamara-Taylor visit of late September which led to the announcement on October 3, that most of the military advisory effort would be completed by 1965, and that 1,000 advisors would be home for Christmas, 1963. Rufus Phillips had made a personal report to the President earlier in September, giving the estimate of USOM Rural Affairs that the Delta was falling under Viet-Cong control in areas where pacification was supposedly complete.[31]

The strategic Hamlet program was, in fact, overextended and falsely reported as completed. Subsequent chapters will deal with this subject.

The New Life Hamlets (Ap Tan Sinh) 1964-1965

The Viet-Cong struck like lightning in the rural areas amidst the military and political disarray of the post-coup period. Some ARVN corps headquarters produced pacification programs of their own while Saigon shuffled its leadership.[32] By January, the pacification program had been renamed "New Life Hamlets," stressing rural reconstruction. New criteria were set for judging a hamlet as completed, and safeguards against forced relocation, widespread in the previous program, were

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[31]The writer was involved first hand in the USOM-MACV drama that preceded the coup. A readable account of the situation is given by Halberstam, op. cit., pp. 253-254. For a description of the Viet-Cong penetration in the Delta, see his Chapter XVIII.

[32]See Chapter VII for a description of the Rural Restoration Campaign in the I Corps area after the November revolution.

instituted.[33]

During early 1964, enormous planning exercises for new pacification programs in all fields of government were carried out, involving many months of delay caused by red tape and repeated political eruptions. Great increases in MACV, USOM, and USIS personnel in 1964 and 1965 added to the American presence but did not appear materially to improve the generally stagnated pacification program (see Figure 4). These efforts were also hampered by lack of coordination with regular military forces. Meanwhile, the Viet-Cong steadily increased their military and political position, both from internal recruiting and North Vietnamese infiltration. The advent of American combat forces in March, 1965 marked a new phase in pacification, with the assignment of the Marines in Danang to the responsibility for a special pacification zone around the city and the adjacent province of Quang Nam.

Rural Construction: 1966

The reappointment in July, 1965, of Henry Cabot Lodge as Ambassador, and his choice of Major General Lansdale as his special liaison officer for counterinsurgency matters, marked a

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[33]The six criteria for a completed New Life Hamlet are: 1) elimination of Viet-Cong infra-structure; 2) trained and armed militia; 3) physical defenses completed; 4) communications systems for requesting reinforcement set up; 5) organization of community for civil defense and social development activities; 6) free election of hamlet committee by secret ballot.

Allied Armed Forces in South Vietnam*

		TOTAL
Republic of Vietnam		635,000
Regular Forces	300,000	
Regional Forces	120,000	
Popular Forces	140,000	
Civilian Irregular Defense Groups**	25,000	
National Police	50,000	
United States of America		170,000
Republic of Korea		21,000
Australia		1,500

*All amounts based on data as of December 1965, from United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, The Vietnam Conflict: The Substance and the Shadow 89th Congress 2nd Session (January 6, 1966).

** Many more irregulars are in other armed militia units.

American Advisors in Vietnam*

Military Assistance Command (MACV)	8,500
United States Operations Mission (AID)	800
Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (incl. USIS)	150

* Data as of the first quarter of 1966, supplied in interviews with Defense Department, Agency for International Development, and United States Information Agency (1966).

Figure 4

Allied Armed Forces and Advisors in Vietnam.

watershed in pacification emphasis. Although the programs which Lansdale has encouraged have yet to be put in full operation, cautiously favorable reports on the new emphases in the recruitment and training of Rural Construction teams indicate an adjustment to avoid some of the shortcomings of previous pacification efforts. Teams are recruited and trained in an atmosphere of close identification with the peasant and his problems. Pacification scheduling has been drastically decelerated with 1966 goals set to cover only fourteen per cent of the population.[34] Unrealistic schedules, as noted previously, have been a nemesis of earlier programs.

The pacification strategy devised by the end of 1965 included choosing of four province areas as foci of intensive pacification efforts, using the full resources of Vietnamese and American agencies and armed forces. The four areas selected are: 1) Danang--the area encompassed in the perimeter defended by American Marines, reaching out from the air base into Quang Nam Province in a ten mile radius, 2) Binh Dinh--Quinhon and surrounding districts, defended by Korean forces, 3) Saigon--the multi-province pacification program called HOP TAC, underway since 1964, and 4) An Giang Province--a relatively peaceful delta area suitable for economic and social projects.[35]

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[34]An accurate description of the current pacification emphasis was made by Charles Mohr, "To Win the People to Win the War," New York Times, 13 February 1966, p. 4E.

[35]Interview with Source Number 50, State Department, 1966.

V. ANCILLARY PACIFICATION PROGRAMS

Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG)

The United States Army Special Forces teams have conducted pacification efforts among Highlanders in Central Vietnam and in extremely difficult areas of the Mekong Delta. Beginning with the Rhade tribe around Ban Me Thuot in Darlac Province in early 1961, American "A" teams of a dozen specially trained men joined Vietnamese Special Forces counterparts in training and equipping young men from Rhade villages.[36] After six weeks of instruction the well-armed young men are returned to defend their hamlets and report movements of Viet-Cong.

By 1965, scores of "A" teams were at work in Vietnam, relying on "strike forces" of around 200 men assisting in operations to reach new villages for inclusion within the protection system. The American and Vietnamese team members live and eat with the tribesmen and the Americans have generally developed close relations with them. The Vietnamese have remained suspicious of Highlanders and have been reluctant to see them armed. Comprehensive civic action projects are carried out in the hamlets, including medical care, construction projects, and education. More than 25,000 tribesmen have been armed under the program, but the vast area of the Highlands and the movement of large units of Viet-Cong and North Vietnamese troops have reduced the

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[36] An intimate early report of United States Special Forces in Darlac province is given in the New York Times, 29 April 1961, p. 1.

effectiveness of the effort.

A costly failing in the assembling of strike forces has been the recruiting of Vietnamese in the lowlands and then moving them far from their homes to the jungles. There have been many instances of desertion and betrayal as a result.

Force Populaire (Luc Luong Nhan-Dan)[37]

Ngo Dinh Can, the youngest of the Ngo brothers, had developed an alternative program of pacification for his own area of control, which was Central Vietnam. Can's background and viewpoint were much closer to the peasant than any of his brothers, and in direct contrast to the French-educated Nhu. His tightly run section of the National Revolutionary Movement was an important arm of control in the villages, particularly in the provinces nearest his home in Hue. From within this political organization Can fashioned a force of highly motivated and well trained peasant teams who moved unobtrusively into the countryside to live and work with the peasant much as the Viet-Cong does. Although armed, they would not attack the Viet-Cong unless they threatened the peasants. Their intent was to build confidence in the peasant that they would be around a long time.

Selection of trainees was carefully made. Can insisted that all be volunteers and peasants. Members of the National

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[37]Data for this section was secured in an interview with John Helble, former United States Consul at Hue, and from occasional contacts with Force Populaire operations in Quang Tin and Quang Nam provinces in 1963.

Revolutionary Movement--Diem's mass party--were not considered "hard-nosed" enough--too decadent. Many recruits were sons of parents who had suffered at the hands of the Viet-Cong.

Force Populaire members helped peasants at their normal chores of harvesting, woodcutting, weaving conical hats, cutting hair, etc. They always paid their board so as not to be a burden. They operated in company size, fanning out in a village of perhaps 4,000 people.

Training the Force Populaire was arduous and focussed on the development of esprit. Political activity was the major emphasis. Full and free discussion and self-criticism were a part of training. Instructors carefully engineered the absorption "in depth" of the instruction and the spirit of the program.

The pilot program was started in Thua Thien province (location of the city of Hue). Later cadres from the seventeen Central provinces were trained and prepared to open training centers in their own provinces. By the time of the death of Diem most of these province programs were operational. The early successes had encouraged Diem and even the strategic hamlet-minded Nhu. Diem ordered the expansion of the program into the Delta. Some cadres for the Delta had been trained when the Diem regime was toppled. As a program for use in contested areas, it gave great encouragement. There had been a dilution of effectiveness when the province training centers began turning out their own units. In sum, however, the brief life of the Force

Populaire stands as one of the best conceived and implemented programs attempted in Vietnam. In essence, it was an effective expression of the Government's interest in the life of the peasant, and could have provided a viable alternative to his subjection to Viet-Cong terror. Although Can had hoped to substitute the Force Populaire for the Strategic Hamlet Campaign, he was forced by Diem to maintain the latter. However, proper correlation of the two programs, with the Force Populaire serving as the spearhead in contested areas, might have achieved a highly successful result. The acquisition of intelligence in the early stages of pacification--leading to identification of the Viet-Cong supporters--is a delicate operation and requires the penetration of the outward "mask" of the village. This was the main approach of the Force Populaire.

Some of the Force Populaire methods are discernible in the current Political Action Teams that are part of the 1966 pacification plan. The Force Populaire, however, had a subtlety of approach--a "soft sell" which made it unique. When the Ngo regime fell in 1963, Can was imprisoned and eventually executed. His political organization vanished and the Force Populaire disappeared as quickly and quietly as it had begun.

VI. SUMMARY COMMENT

The failure of national pacification campaigns will be probed in subsequent chapters, but it is appropriate at this point to examine the problem briefly from a broad perspective.

The methodology of the Ngo regime in pacification was, as has been implied, almost identical in concept to that of Ho Chi Minh and Mao Tse-Tung. However, when the strategic hamlet program was launched, no apparatus comparable to the highly skilled and motivated communist rural cadre system yet existed. Instead, Nhu had accepted the network of mass organizations and the governmental bureaucracy as the "revolutionary vanguard." Nhu, in fact, made an irrational leap from his personalist philosophy to the creation of a hamlet level revolution without the benefit of a revolutionary apparatus. It would appear that he was more concerned with the idea of a grassroots personalist revolution than its realization. His subordinates accommodated him by reporting the progress he wanted to hear.

In addition to overestimating the capacity of his political and administrative networks to produce revolution, Nhu made a second costly departure from reality. He overestimated the will of the peasant to shoulder the substantial burdens required in his "self-sufficient" hamlet construction policy. In contrast with communist tactics, which are usually closely geared to the interests and tolerances of the peasant and the capabilities of its party cadres, the pacification

policy of the Ngos reflects the isolation of the regime from its own bureaucracy.

Subsequent governments, attempting pacification with even less political control or consensus, and with multiplied communist forces in opposition, have fared even worse.

Since 1956, the American involvement has been conceptually clouded. First the threat from the North was misdefined; then the insurgent threat was underestimated; and, finally, the solution was sought in terms of an uncoordinated proliferation of government programs to aid the peasants without the essential ingredient of protection from the Viet-Cong. The more fundamental question of the adequacy of the counterinsurgent government at the center was bypassed by Americans in favor of finding means of establishing its image and power at the grassroots. As Stempel notes, the United States was busily asking <u>what</u> to do to help Diem without pausing to ask <u>whether</u> he should be helped at all.[38] The parameters of analysis had been set to avoid this question, because no adequate alternative to Diem had been found or even conceived.

As a consequence, much of the United States involvement in pacification had been at the level of projects and programs--amounting usually to a superficial solution. These activities may resemble treatment of the symptoms of governmental

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[38]Stempel, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 120.

malignancy rather than the disease itself. For the student of revolutionary warfare, however, a healthy political and administrative context for a government's pacification campaign is a necessity.