the local terrain and support of the local people. The results achieved were neither positive nor enduring, however, perhaps because the integration process had not been total or drastic enough. The most serious handicap of the RF was their complex of inferiority which even integration could not eradicate completely, although their morale had been enhanced by a special statute in 1967 which gradually removed discrepancies in pay and allowances between them and regular forces. But while serving the RF interests, this statute had also the effect of perpetuating the discrimination between the RF and the ARVN which caused many difficulties in personnel assignment and promotion despite the fact that RF troops and cadres underwent the same training process as the regular infantrymen. This underdog feeling affected not only the original CG but also regular NCOs and officers transferred to the RF, which seriously impaired the effectiveness of this important combat force.[4]

We believe that only total integration of the RF into the regular infantry and treating them as such in all respects could ever have eradicated this adverse complex and at the same time opened up new opportunities for judicious manpower use and fairness in advancement for the entire RVNAF.

The second impediment which influenced the performance of the RF was their basic organization as separate companies.[5] This, coupled with the wide dispersion of RF companies within each province made it impossible for the province chief to control, support, and care for individual RF units properly. The RF officer, therefore, never saw a promising future in his military career.

Some JGS and MACV planners justified the continued expansion of the RF on a company basis during the 1964-1968 period by the extensive

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[4]By 1969, 14,526 ARVN NCOs had been transferred to RF duties, which represented 35% of total RF NCO strength. By 1970, 10,800 ARVN officers had been assigned to the RF who made up 56% of total RF officer strength.

[5]1,050 companies in 1968.

presence of U.S. and FWMA forces and the prevailing concept of force employment which saw U.S. and FWMA forces assuming what should have been the RVNAF combat role and the RVNAF actually performing RF responsibilities. Because of this task division, these planners maintained, it was not necessary to upgrade the RF unit organization since the RF were carrying out essentially a PF mission at the village level against Communist guerrillas. We agree that this was true. We also agree that this was logical in view of the additional costs involved in upgrading the RF and the prevailing U.S. penchant for an early conclusion of the war through military victory.

However, in line with our overall concept of counterinsurgency war conduct, we think that both the RVN and U.S. should have taken full advantage of the temporary presence of U.S. forces and the expedient deployment of ARVN divisions to populated areas for pacification purposes to drastically strengthen the RF by upgrading their companies into battalions and activating additional RF battalions as a further step. Given the requirements of the "small war" going on at the same time and the inevitable upgrading of the ARVN combat role, we believe that this was what would have been needed for the RF to perform effectively their assigned role in each province. Only at the battalion level and with adequate intervention reserves would the RF have been able to safeguard the outpost system and ensure territorial security.

While it was true that upgrading the RF in the manner advocated would have incurred additional outlays in materiel and cadres, this would have been more than offset by improved command and control, better support, and efficient care which were the essential conditions for the RF to become a truly effective combat force. We were never oblivious to common complaints by ARVN corps and division commanders about the RF weaknesses and their inability to perform the assigned territorial role when we discussed the problem of extricating ARVN divisions from the quagmire of territorial security. Before their integration into the RVNAF, the RF were understandably weak because they did not have a fair share of manpower and materiel resources. But this shortcoming had been partly overcome as soon as the RF received the same items of equipment and the same type of training as regular forces from which

they also benefitted a substantial infusion of cadres. Why, in spite of these improvements, did the RF continue to perform badly? We believe it all depended on the basic concept of organization and personnel policies. Another factor which seemed to support our advocacy of RF battalions during this period was the command and control system at the province or sector level.

Effective coordination of military and administrative activities was mandatory for the maintenance of security and order in a province. To achieve this the GVN had taken the logical step of unifying command under the province chief. During an early period, for example, the sector commander was his deputy for internal security, and the provincial CG commander was also his assistant for CG affairs. But this arrangement did not seem to work out satisfactorily because of unavoidable conflicts between civilians and military officers and among the military themselves and the complexity of provincial administrative and military organizations. To further streamline command and control, the GVN subsequently appointed military officers as province chiefs with control authority over both the province administration and the sector military organization. At the same time the provincial CG office was disbanded and its personnel absorbed into the sector headquarters. This solution worked out better and was perhaps more suited to the situation of South Vietnam, but it also made the province chief's responsibilities extremely burdensome. As a result, he was usually unable to devote proper attention to the command and control, support, and care of RF companies which were not only numerous but also thinly deployed throughout his province. To discharge part of his responsibilities, the province chief had to delegate his authority to the deputy sector commander, the deputy province chief, and the sector chief of staff, but this also seemed not entirely satisfactory. We believe, therefore, that the best way would have been to group RF companies into autonomous battalions.

During the 1964-67 period, the top defense structure of the RVN also underwent drastic organizational changes. The Ministry of Defense added the Directorate of Mobilization to its organization, and the Joint General Staff activated three new functional commands for training,

logistics, and political warfare in addition to making the Adjutant General system a separate branch of service. This reorganization made the conduct of war efforts smoother because management, administration, and support functioned more efficiently in the RVNAF. The deactivation of the Field Command was a logical move but the same could not be said of deactivating the ARVN Command. By reverting to the old concept of having the JGS double as an army command, the RVNAF no doubt had saved personnel and equipment, cut down on expenditures, and made administration more effective. In the process, however, the JGS also became burdened with routine operations and could not devote enough efforts to developing long-range plans of national significance. Perhaps the national leader at that time was still heavily influenced by the command and control practice of the French Expeditionary Corps in Vietnam which reflected an organization concept perhaps better suited to a theater of operations than a nation.[6] Then the deactivation of the RF and PF Command in 1966 and the absorption of its personnel and functions into the JGS also made the latter even more cumbersome. From experience, we are convinced that an ARVN Command would have been required to alleviate the heavy burdens shouldered by the JGS in the areas of organization, training, and management because the ARVN was not only rapidly developing but also the most important of the three services. This would have enabled the JGS to devote its efforts to long-range planning and the conduct of the war.

Many RVN military authorities thought that the RVNAF force structure expansion during the 1964-67 period had not been properly planned and was not judiciously balanced between combat and support requirements. They also felt that this program had not benefitted from a proper allocation of U.S. priorities. Unbalanced development, these authorities pointed out, made the RVNAF overly dependent on U.S. forces for firepower, combat support, tactical mobility, and logistic support. While

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[6]The French Expeditionary Corps was under the control of the EMIFT (Etat-Major Interarmees et Forces Terrestres), an organization similar to the JGS.

we agree that the U.S. should have placed a high priority on expanding the RVNAF and developing their combat capabilities before thinking of commiting its own troops, we do not think that the expansion program had not been properly planned or judiciously balanced.

The fact was that all expansion plans during that period had been carefully studied and implemented in keeping with South Vietnam's manpower capabilities which derived from the draft, partial mobilization, and recruitment. Political instability, however, had prevented the successive, short-lived governments from taking drastic measures to induct youths into military service as requirements dictated. As a result, almost every ARVN combat unit suffered from understrength in spite of improvements made in the areas of recruitment, personnel administration, and leadership. This shortage of manpower explained why the total of inductees under the FY67 expansion plan remained at the same level as the previous year.

As to "unbalanced development," we think that this was inevitable to a certain degree in the ratio of infantry combat and support troops although we have to admit that this imbalance was rather excessive not only during the 1964-67 period but also before that. An ideal equilibrium, in our opinion, was impossible to achieve for an army having to depend on foreign aid even for its subsistence. At the very least, however, there should have been some balanced development in firepower capabilities, primarily artillery and tactical air, which were required to enhance the effectiveness of ground combat forces. We believe that the ARVN Artillery Corps, experienced and capable as it was, should have encountered no significant difficulties in developing its capabilities for short range as well as long range firepower. The development of our tactical air, however, would have been more difficult since it required a much longer time for training. In any event, it was our firm belief that if expansion and development plans had been implemented for our artillery and tactical air, they would have met with no constraints as far as manpower was concerned.

Many military planners, however saw the Vietnam war as a conflict between the Free World and the Communists. They visualized that as long

as the Communists were not totally defeated, U.S. and FWMA forces would continue fighting alongside the RVNAF. In that context of international conflict, naturally these planners did not see any reason why the RVNAF should have developed their own artillery, helilift, and tactical air capabilities for self-support purposes. They argued that this was unnecessary since U.S. firepower and mobility assets deployed to South Vietnam had become common-use resources designed to pursue a common effort and coming from the same source of supply. Besides, the RVNAF were receiving adequate artillery, helilift, and tactical air support from U.S. forces for all of their combat requirements. It was indeed true that during that period ARVN infantry units were fighting effectively because of adequate U.S. support. Somehow, we feel that the RVNAF would have been more proud of their feats and more confident of their true combat effectiveness if that support had been provided by their own units. In the longer term, we also believe that the sooner the RVNAF had developed their combat support capabilities to sustain the war effort by themselves, the lesser the U.S. involvement and its psychological impact would have been domestically and internationally.

U.S. Participation in the War

The multitudinous intervention of U.S. forces in South Vietnam since 1965 was a timely move that pulled our country away from the brink of disaster. This intervention had helped South Vietnam reverse its checkmate position and made it possible for the free republic to survive for another ten years. The comcommittant participation of Free World forces had the effect of enhancing the cause of human freedom for which U.S. troops were committed and removed all misconstruction about American imperialist or colonialist designs. There was no doubt about it, but the large presence of foreign troops also had a profound impact on the South Vietnamese people and armed forces.

As a people burdened by the trauma of a long colonial past, the Vietnamese, North and South, were extremely sensitive about the presence of foreign troops on their soil. This presence was to leave an extensive

socio-political imprint on the hearts and minds of Vietnamese on both sides of the DMZ.

Well before the U.S. participation, national sensitivity had been the primary motive which impelled President Diem to decide by himself where to deploy U.S. advisory teams during the 1955-56 period. National sensitivity had also dictated the JGS to clarify the nature of U.S. advisers' duties at least twice and define the responsibilities of RVNAF commanders vis-a-vis U.S. advisers. These facts spoke for themselves. However, the South Vietnamese, especially the rural people, did not become conscious of the U.S. military presence until 1962 when U.S. combat support troops were deployed to assist the RVNAF in counterinsurgency operations and after the Communists stepped up their anti-American propaganda. Despite the GVN explanatory efforts, the majority of the South Vietnamese seemed to remain suspicious. A small but significant segment fully trusted the American goodwill in helping South Vietnam defeat the Communists while another equally significant segment also believed completely in Communist propagandistic slants.

Not until 1967 and especially 1968 did this majority of the South Vietnamese population come to fully appreciate the value of the U.S. military presence and the fallacy of Communist propaganda. They had seen for themselves how U.S. forces had effectively interdicted and driven major Communist units away from populated areas, which restored security to most villages and hamlets. They had witnessed the rehabilitation and construction of roads and bridges which made communication between cities and rural areas much easier and faster. This came as a revealing contrast to Communist sabotage activities. The rural people of South Vietnam also began to benefit directly from various U.S. aid programs which sought to rebuild the damaged countryside and restore agricultural production by putting science and technology at the service of rural life. Indeed, the affable image of the American friend, as reflected through diligent engineer teams, solicitous civic-action groups, and dedicated district advisers, to name just a few, who made the rounds of villages and hamlets across the country, was to remain ineradicably engraved in the hearts of the rustic peasants of South Vietnam.

The presence of U.S. and FWMA troops had entailed the migration of large numbers of rural workers to urban centers and around major bases. For these people, the U.S. presence had brought well-paying jobs. For the big cities, this presence had transformed their economic life into one of incredible though fictitious affluence through consumer goods of all descriptions overflowing stores and street stands and with fashionable night clubs, bars, and restaurants crowded with chic clienteles. For the shrewd entrepreneurs, the U.S. presence also meant instant wealth because of lucrative business especially in services, construction, and transportation. For the GVN, the presence of U.S. troops had brought to its coffers huge dollar reserves which to some extent compensated for the decline in exports. It also trained large numbers of technicians and specialists of all skills who, for post-war development projects, would have been eminently useful. All this represented perhaps the bright side of U.S. participation in the war.

On the other hand, the U.S. presence had produced a significant disruptive effect on the labor market especially as far as GVN agencies and RVNAF support organizations were concerned. High service demands on the part of U.S. forces and contractors coupled with more lucrative pay had about absorbed all the skilled labor of South Vietnam, to include even those civilian technicians who were serving the GVN and the RVNAF. Some opinions also attributed the dismal state of social divisiveness and decadence to the presence of foreign troops who seemed to be the catalyst for such social ills as prostitution, drug addiction, street hooliganism, etc. For our part, we do not think so because divisiveness and social ills are the hallmarks of every country at war, especially a long, vicious, and subversive war like the one waged by North Vietnam with the purpose of destroying the very social fabric and national unity of South Vietnam. The impact of the multitudinous presence of foreign troops only added to South Vietnam's social problems and made them more difficult to solve.

The Communists in the meantime exploited the U.S. presence to the hilt psychologically and politically, directing their propaganda not only at domestic opinion but also at world opinion. Of course they

blamed all destructiveness and social ills on U.S. troops. To incite traditional patriotism among Vietnamese on both sides and to obtain aid from the Communist bloc, they vocally denounced U.S. forces as imperialist aggressors. Whatever our feelings we have to admit that the Communists had been successful in instigating Vietnamese patriotic ardor, especially among the rural peasants of South Vietnam and as early as 1962. This success was one among several factors which contributed to the rapid subversion of the South Vietnamese countryside and the growth of insurgent forces during the initial stage of the war. By 1967, however, patriotism as a Communist propaganda decoy no longer fooled the majority of the South Vietnamese people.

On its part, Hanoi also used the presence of U.S. troops as a pretext to infiltrate its major units into South Vietnam. NVA troops on their way to the South were convinced that they had the sacred mission of "assisting our blood fellow countrymen" as the Hanoi Politbureau had told them. The people of North Vietnam never had any inkling about South Vietnam's prosperity and freedom or what the U.S. had been accomplishing for the good of the South Vietnamese people. Through deceitful propaganda, they only saw and heard about atrocities and destructiveness, the painful spectacles of war that the Communist Party had concocted for their consumption and blamed on U.S. doings. For the basically fervent but gullible and stultified North Vietnamese people, this came as a shock, and it fomented their hatred toward Americans. Hatred was the primary factor that accounted for the incredible fanaticism of NVA troops fighting in South Vietnam.

The U.S. and Free World military presence also influenced the RVNAF in several ways. First and foremost, it effectively redressed the declining morale of RVNAF troops and built up their faith in ultimate victory. It could be said that most RVNAF servicemen believed that the presence of U.S. and FWMA troops would help bring about victory for South Vietnam as it had for South Korea. This presence had given the RVNAF the time required to consolidate their ranks and improve their combat effectiveness through learning. Indeed, through daily contacts and combined operations with U.S. forces, RVNAF units had absorbed a

great deal of modern and sophisticated weapons systems. Above all, U.S. forces seemed always eager to provide as much support as RVNAF units ever required. While this support proved immensely beneficial to the RVNAF and contributed to cementing the camaraderie between combatants pitted against the same enemy, it also falsified the RVNAF's true requirements in combat and conditioned RVNAF troops to the superiority and abundance of U.S. resources. In time, they became addicted to U.S. support, and it was hard to reconvert them to "back home" amenities without affecting their morale, even when the situation subsequently dictated. This truth was reflected through the plain remarks by ARVN troops of the 5th Ranger Group when they recounted their experience fighting alongside the U.S. 196th Brigade during Operation Fairfax: "If we had the kind of support the 196th Brigade had given us, we would fight to death."

The RVNAF had also been quite impressed by the modern and powerful equipment, the strong tactical support, and the lavish logistic services enjoyed by U.S. units. However, the majority of RVNAF servicemen did not envy this American opulence nor did they feel depressed by the modesty of their own means. They fully understood that South Vietnam was just different from the U.S. economically and militarily. But this did not prevent them from aspiring for better equipment and better support in order to fight more effectively. Apparently, the U.S. participation in the war had pre-empted all priorities otherwise enjoyed by the RVNAF in terms of equipment modernization and allocation. The delay in equipment deliveries which had been programmed for the modernization of armament, communications, and transportation, to include in particular the replacement of M-1 rifles by M-16s intended to counteract the deadly AK-47 that Communist troops had used since 1964, was the most obvious case in point.

The buildup of U.S. forces and the concomittant participation of FWMA units in a common war effort also shared by the host country inevitably posed the problem of command unity that history had proved vital for success. In the case of South Vietnam however, we do not think that a U.N.-type command like the one instituted during the Korean War or a

NATO-style supreme command would have improved cooperation and coordination between RVN and allied forces to a significant extent. Because of the ideological nature of the conflict, the small military advantage gained through a combined command would have been more than offset by the bigger and more important psycho-political disadvantage such a command would have created. The institution of a combined command would have given more grist to the Communist propaganda mill, and this would have worked against the regime of South Vietnam which still had to win over a population extremely sensitive about national sovereignty and newly recovered independence. We don't believe that the South Vietnamese population would have readily accepted an American general at the command of the RVNAF even though he had all the talent and qualities that they admired and respected. On the other hand, we also think that the American public would have balked at the idea of placing the mighty and internationally reputed U.S. forces under the control of an indigenous general whose country was receiving aid from their tax contributions. Furthermore, the creation of an allied command headed by an American general would have bound the U.S. more firmly to the fate of South Vietnam, and this would have made it extremely difficult for the U.S. to extricate itself without damaging its honor and world reputation as long as a military victory was still evasive.

As a result we think that the concept of cooperation and coordination predicated on the principles of equal partnership and division of responsibilities according to capabilities was perhaps the wisest and most appropriate in the Vietnam context. With the support of an extensive advisory system which functioned in all areas and at all levels down to the battalion and district, with a total authority over the management of military aid which was the RVNAF very lifeline, and given the trust and admiration bestowed on them by almost all South Vietnamese military and civilian authorities by virtue of age, professional experience, and leadership qualities, we believe that the MACV commander as well as U.S. Field Force commanders always had enough information, authority, and resources to coordinate and conduct war efforts effectively and convince their South Vietnamese counterparts to take heed

of their suggestions and recommendations although they did not directly control the RVNAF.

Cooperation and coordination would have been more productive, however, if both MACV and the JGS had provided more comprehensive guidance on how the concept should have been implemented instead of leaving it to the discretion of individual field commanders. Such vital factors of effective coordination as the co-location of command, headquarters, paring or full integration of staff elements in war rooms, JOCs, TOCs, fire support centers, logistic support centers, etc. should have been emphasized and strictly observed. We should have avoided constraining situations such as those resulting from the excessive separation of command headquarters in the case of II Corps and IFFV or I Corps and the U.S. XXIV Corps during LAM SON 719 for example.[7] The essential requirement for cooperation and coordination to achieve best results was to give every participating commander a true picture of the overall situation at any given moment; this was especially true of decisions concerning the activities of U.S. and FWMA forces about which RVNAF commanders usually knew very little. Combined staff work proved to be necessary to achieve this as experience had amply demonstrated; excellent examples were in the area of intelligence and the activities of CICV, CMIC, CMEC, and CDEC or in logistics when a combined logistic coordination center was temporarily set up at Khe Sanh for LAM SON 719.

To maintain cooperation and coordination on a continuously productive basis, we believe that counterpart commanders should have met daily in a combined situation room to discuss issues and problems that each brought forth with no holds barred and arrive at solutions after considering all resources available. Both should also have created opportunities for their counterparts to visit combat and support units in their area of responsibility on a regular basis. By doing this, they

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[7] II Corps was headquartered in Pleiku while IFFV was at Nha Trang on the coastline, a physical separation of 140 miles. During LAM SON 719, I Corps Forward was located at Dong Ha, 10 miles removed from the U.S. XXIV Corps Forward at Quang Tri.

should have been able to learn more about the situation in the field and at the same time set the example of close cooperation and coordination for subordinates.

The division of tasks and responsibilities between the RVNAF and U.S. and FWMAF, which had been formalized since 1966 by annual "Combined Campaign Plans," was both logical and harmonious in that it judiciously exploited the strengths and weaknesses, the capabilities, and the resources of each force. The RVNAF, which were short in combat support resources but long on familiarity with the environment, concentrated their efforts on supporting the GVN pacification program and maintaining territorial security. Through the conduct of long-duration clearing operations and daily security activities, they endeavored primarily to protect and expand secure areas and keep open all key lines of communications against their main adversary, the Communist local forces, guerrillas, and mini-bases. In other words, the RVNAF were employed to fight the "small" war. Meanwhile, U.S. forces, which enjoyed extremely strong and effective support in firepower and mobility but were alien to the environment, devoted their efforts to disrupting major enemy bases and sanctuaries in outlying and rugged areas and at the same time destroying Communist main force units which usually took shelter in these base and border areas where the population was sparse. They were called upon to confront the enemy in the "big" war.

This general delineation of responsibilities did not rigidly imply that U.S. forces only fought the big war away from populous areas and the RVNAF had just to contend with the small war. The actual employment of forces was far more flexible depending on the situation. In many instances, U.S. units were also committed to pacification support operations, especially in Binh Dinh Province (MR-2) and the coastal plains of MR-1. Likewise, substantial RVNAF airborne and marine forces were frequently pitted against major enemy units.

Despite its rationality and flexibility, this employement of forces was not entirely immune from critical opinions. Some self-conscious authorities considered the secondary role of the RVNAF detrimental to their value and adverse to their combat spirit and aggressiveness. They

argued that in the long term this would affect RVNAF combat effectiveness especially if someday we were required to fight a big conventional war. More poignantly, it seemed that only U.S. forces were actually fighting the war for South Vietnam.

National pride was undoubtedly at the source of such criticism, laudable yet entirely misplaced. It also reflected an ignorance of the dual nature of the war and the true capabilities of the RVNAF at that juncture. Indeed, to confront both the "big" and "small" aspects of the war, entwined as they were and equally instrumental for the enemy to control the countryside and strangle our cities, we could not afford to underestimate either. Both efforts should have been mutually supportive and conducted hand in hand; hence fighting the "small" and "big" war was equally important. Given the intricate political situation of South Vietnam during this period, naturally we could not assign responsibilities for territorial security and pacification support to U.S. and FWMA forces. Likewise, it would have been a folly to throw the RVNAF after enemy bases and main force units for the simple reason that they were not yet fully capable for this task.

Besides, the assignment of tasks for the RVNAF in yearly combined campaign plans, especially the commitment of ARVN infantry divisions to territorial security, was just a continuation of what these forces had been doing since 1961 when the DTA structure was instituted. It was true that in order to carry out this mission, each infantry division had to spread out its forces in static defense and frequently lost track of those individual battalions placed under operational control of sector headquarters. In time the tedious routine of security activities conducted within the same environment year in and year out made divisional units lethargic, complacent, and much less aggressive; their comabt effectiveness also eroded in the process, having been accustomed to small-unit actions for too long. All this indeed did not prepare our divisions for large-scale battles that they were called upon to fight when subsequently confronted with the big war. This constraint, however, could have been avoided in 1961 or 1964 at the latest when they became part of the RVNAF to take over what our divisions had been doing, as suggested earlier in this chapter.

The allegation that only American troops were fighting the war, which issued primarily from American and world opinion, did not necessarily stem from the fact that U.S. forces were assuming the major combat role. Whether founded or unfounded, it seemed to reflect a certain truth: the limited number of RVNAF forces available for big actions and the small proportion of ARVN forces employed in large-scale combined operations. More importantly, this allegation also derived from misinformation or impartiality on the part of the media, especially the U.S. press.

The truth was that during the period of U.S. participation, the RVNAF capabilities for big actions consisted solely of airborne units which were upgraded to a division only in 1966 and a Marine brigade. Also, during major combined operations, the role played by ARVN units seemed virtually a symbolic one since they were mostly assigned peripheral missions such as blocking, screening, LOC security, and evacuation of the local population. Obviously, either U.S. field commanders did not trust ARVN capabilities, or their acceptance was only half-hearted. On the other hand, ARVN field commanders were also hard-pressed to produce larger forces for these operations mainly because of our territorial security commitments; in fact ARVN forces already deployed for territorial security never seemed sufficient. Although RVNAF casualties resulting from daily skirmishes of the small war were comparable or often larger in size to those incurred by U.S. in periodic search-and-destroy operations, they seldom attracted the interest of the foreign media. Most of the headlines, therefore, only referred to large-scale U.S. operations conducted with intense fighting and heavy casualties on both sides. Also, while MACV appeared to enjoy a good rapport with the media which it wisely exploited to support U.S. activities, the GVN seemed to shun all relations with the local press as far as military operations were concerned. This indifference derived less from distrust in the objectivity of press reporters that their normal penchant for sensational stories which in most cases did not serve the war effort.

Pacification and Rural Development

The pacification and rural development program was a harmonious integration of military and civil action efforts designed to confront the total war of insurgency waged by the Communists. In major aspects, it was a continuation and amalgam of various programs that the First Republic administration had initiated to restore security to rural areas and develop the agricultural base. All these previous programs had suffered from incohesiveness, poor planning, lack of military-civilian coordination, and inadequate support. They were almost totally interrupted and underrated for two years following the 1963 coup for reasons of political instability.

Not until 1966 were these efforts resumed and strongly revived under the pacification and rural development (PRD) program, drawing on lessons learned from past efforts. The PRD program was subjected annually to centralized and detailed planning, which required coordination among all GVN and U.S. agencies involved in the effort. During the initial stage, coordination proved to be a difficult and complex proposition. In time, however, it became smooth and effective especially after the institution of the Central Rural Development Council (CRDC) on the GVN side, which functioned with a permanent executive body headed by the CRDC secretary general who was also the Minister of Rural Development, and the activation of CORDS, its U.S. counterpart, which was under the direct control of the Deputy COMUSMACV, an official with ambassadorial rank. Below the central level and similarly organized, the system of GVN and U.S. coordination existed at every echelon of our territorial structure down to the district. This system was efficient and entirely responsive to PRD requirements. Most of the achivements during the 1966-71 period were primarily attributable to this productive coordination effort and U.S. support. In general terms, the PRD program and its coordination system enabled both the GVN and MACV to make full use of every available capability and resource, combined all military and civilian activities for the elimination of the VCI, the guerrillas, the local and main force units, expand the areas under GVN control, and

bring about popular confidence in South Vietnam's free and democratic regime as well as the prospects of improved living.

As a concomitant to the PRD effort, the Phung Hoang (Phoenix) program which was initiated in 1967, embodied a vital strategic concept seeking to protect the South Vietnamese people against Communist terrorism. Its main target was the VCI, the enemy's most vulnerable point, long considered as the foundation of Communist insurgency in South Vietnam. The merit of the Phung Hoang concept lay in the fact that as long as the VCI continued to exist total victory could not be achieved. Destroying an enemy unit, whether local or main force, amounted to just a short term military victory. In that sense, it was not an exaggeration to say that the destruction of an enemy company or battalion did not matter as much as the elimination of a VC district or province commissar. As a matter of fact, the death or arrest of a VC province commissar inevitably disrupted or upset all enemy military and political activities in the province for some time. And if the elimination effort was sustained and extensive, soon the entire province would become "pacified".

In addition to this strategic objective, the Phung Hoang program also sought to overcome major shortcomings in the area of cooperation and coordination among military and civilian intelligence agencies at all levels and between intelligence activities and military operations. The establishment of operations and intelligence coordination centers at the province and district level (PIOCC and DIOCC) came about as a particularly bright spot in the Phung Hoang organization. Both the PIOCC and the DIOCC were pivotal agencies in charge of planning collection activities and the conduct of anti-VCI operations. But it appeared that this type of organization should have been extended to the village level where the VCI had its roots. The village chief and his security assistant could have played a key role if properly trained. And if the villagers had also been well organized and motivated to cooperate in the effort, we believe that the uprooting of VCI members would have been more successful.

There was no reason why the system should stop at the district level. Where else did VCI members remain hidden but in villages and hamlets?

It was in villages and hamlets that they took refuge and obtained protection, living blended with the inhabitants. It was therefore the villagers who knew better than anyone else the true identity of VCI members. But because they were living in constant fear of reprisals and without strong motivation or guidance, they usually resented serving as informants. Being basically peace loving people, our villagers never wanted to bring harm to anyone much less to those who had long been living among them although they were fully aware of what these individuals were doing. However, all this could have changed if we had had the resources to develop our intelligence system and place our own agents among the villagers as well. These agents, like VCI members, could have stayed and lived in the village, motivating the villagers and giving them protection against reprisals. If this could have been achived, we believe that the villagers would have been more amenable to cooperate with us in providing information and perhaps doing whatever we wanted them to do.

Since the day it became a national policy and received financial and material assistance from MACCORDS, the Phung Hoang program achieved significant results in terms of VCI members surrendered, detained, and killed. For those still at large, the program also deterred them psychologically since the overwhelming pressure it exerted had forced them to change identities and locations frequently to evade the dragnet. In time members of the VCI became hesitant and their activities declined markedly. During the 1972 Easter Offensive, the role of the VCI was insignificant especially when compared to the 1968 Tet offensive.

Despite its success, the Phung Hoang program, like many others, was not free of shortcomings or criticisms. The national police, which was the primary agency in charge, proved to be ineffective; its personnel and cadre ware insufficient and ill-prepared for the task. The trial of suspects by provincial security committees did not proceed as quickly as expected owing to the heavy work schedule of province chiefs, who served as committee chairman, and the complex, difficult investigative process conducted by the police and MSS. This resulted in prolonged detention which in turn incurred protests from suspects and their families. Among participating intelligence and security agencies, mutual

distrust and rivalry were still prevalent which made effective coordination extremely difficult on their part. ARVN unit commanders were also not very enthusiastic when they had to conduct operations designed to eliminate not an armed enemy unit but a group of people whose outward appearance and mode of living did not set them apart from other ordinary folks.

Public opinion, especially outside South Vietnam, was particularly harsh against the Phung Hoang program which it condemned for indiscriminate, cold-blooded killings. This adverse opinion derived in part, we think, from ignorance and misinformation on the objective of the program, the nature, character, and role of the VCI in the war, and the fact that Communists had been outlawed by the RVN Constitution. Most critics had the wrong impression that the Phung Hoang program was a terror campaign in disguise and that the GVN had taken advantage of it to assassinate and kidnap its political opponents as well. However, nothing could be farther from the truth; the program had never been designed with such a vicious scheme in mind. Probably these critics were either hostile to the South Vietnamese regime, driven by anti-war sentiments, or simply empoisoned by Communist propaganda.

We do not deny that the program was riddled with serious errors such as the arrest of wrong suspects, indecent treatment toward detainees, and accidental killing of suspects during skirmishes. But these errors were far from being deliberate actions condoned by a nefarious policy. They simply reflected the weaknesses and unwittingness on the part of certain elements, which was inevitable in an undertaking as large as the Phung Hoang program. GVN officials and U.S. advisers made every possible effort to prevent these unfortunate incidents.

As far as its goal and policy were concerned, we believe that the Phung Hoang program was a move in the right direction. It was undoubtedly a comprehensive effort to protect the people against enemy subversion and terror. Designed as an internal security program, it simply sought to identify VCI members and neutralize their activities through arrests and the dismantling of their organization. Most of the VCI deaths

resulted from armed resistance against arrest or accidental killings during operations. To be continually productive, we think that the program should also have been enforced during peace time as long as Vietnam remained divided and as long as Communists were outlawed by our Constitution. We are also convinced that the achievements of the Phung Hoang program would not have been possible without the concomitant efforts in social and economic development undertaken by the GVN under the pacification program.

Pacification alone, in the restricted sense of restoring security, would have been inadequate without rural development; it was rather a means to attain a goal, that of developing South Vietnam politically, socially, and economically. The rural development program undertaken by the GVN with U.S. aid and assistance since 1967 was indeed a long-term, large-scale, and comprehensive effort. It was a powerful ideological weapon to combat insurgency. Success in building and consolidating popular confidence in the free and democratic regime of South Vietnam and the improvement of rural life all depended on the constituent programs of this major undertaking.

Village elections, which were instituted in 1967 to replace the un-democratic appointment practice, came about as a sweeping innovation that should consolidate the popular base of the regime. Provided for by the Second Republic Constitution and encouraged by the U.S., village elections were implemented where security had been restored. The results achieved, however, did not match expectations. For one thing, the protracted war which was ravaging the rural areas and the demands of both sides had dislocated or pre-empted the majority of village male elite, leaving behind just women, elderly people, and children whose only concern was to live undisturbed. Therefore, village-born candidates for office were few, almost non-existent. Most of those who posed for candidature did not belong to the class of village elite who commanded popular respect; some were even suspected of being sympathetic to the other side. Those few who enjoyed true popular esteem were hesitant, noncommittal. As a result, we can say that most candidates for village office either belonged to the group of people sponsored and introduced

by province and district governments or were affiliated with local religious groups. Some came from the same district; some were brought in from other localities. When elected, these officials did not act as representatives of the villagers; they behaved like henchmen of the district or province chief and local religious leaders.

During this period of hot war, therefore, village elections were only valid to the extent that they provided rural areas with a coating of democratic veneer, other than that, they often served no useful purpose as far as the people were concerned. That elected village officials were compelled to undergo training and indoctrination at Vung Tau often caused concern and even suspicion among some of our people about the democratic system. However, this training and indoctrination were necessary if we wanted them to truly serve the people.

The Chieu Hoi (Open Arms) program, another significant pacification effort, embodied the very spirit of national reconciliation by giving amnesty to those enemy personnel who wanted to make amends of their mistakes. Given the statistical figures on ralliers who seemed to have defected en masse, the program was quite a resounding success. A closer look revealed, however, that the program had failed to attract middle- and high-level enemy cadres, military or political. Most of those who rallied were the rank-and-file VC soldiers, and a small number consisted of low-level VCI members. They came over to our side, not out of ideological conviction, but primarily for personal reasons such as fear of hardship, war weariness and family problems. The GVN had gone overboard in welcoming and treating these ralliers as decently as resources permitted. By doing so, it aroused the envy and jealousy of our underprivileged soldiers, particularly those deserters who were serving time in spartan military prisons. This was a dilemma for both the GVN and the RVNAF leadership.

The Ethnic Minority program, especially with regard to Montagnards of the Central Highlands, succeeded only in part in alleviating political and racial problems. It would have taken perhaps a few more generations to solve these problems satisfactorily. Only through prolonged social mixing between Vietnamese and Montagnards, constant exposure of Montagnard to modern civilization, and the introduction of science and technology

to the service of their daily life could we ever hope to eradicate ethnic disparities. Even if we had tried to give them some form of autonomy, the way North Vietnam had experimented with its own ethnic minorities, this would only have amounted to nothing more than a political veneer which eventually would have disappeared by force of assimilation. The long history of Vietnam had demonstrated that no ethnic minority was able to resist assimilation if it lived as part of the Vietnamese community for a long time.

Other development programs such as rural health and education, fisheries, and agriculture responded most realistically to the aspirations of the rural people, especially the rural electrification project and the "Land to the Tiller" program which was initiated in 1970. Through these programs, science and technology, the underpinnings of modern civilization, had been introduced into the life of rural masses, the very foundation of South Vietnamese society. In addition, the strategic LOC and communal roads program not only facilitated the conduct of pacification operations, but also speeded up the flow of commodities and reduced the economic gap between the rural and urban areas. The joy of the rural people at the spectacle of widened and improved village access roads was genuine, ineffable. To say that "pacification reaches where roads go" was not an exaggeration.

In general, the various programs of social reform and economic development concomittantly undertaken within the framework of pacification had harmoniously combined to change the outlook of South Vietnam's rural areas completely toward the end of the 1960s and in the early 1970s. They had the salutary effect of enlightening the rural people as to which side of the war was truly working for their benefits. The battle of the hearts and minds was still far from being won but there were indications that the attitude of the rural people was gradually changing in our favor. Nevertheless, there was a truth that hardly anyone could deny: without U.S. technological assistance, U.S. funds, and U.S. materials, all these programs could never have brought about such remarkable results in so short a time. This was a definite advantage for the GVN, but on the other hand, this advantage could also turn into a tremendous handicap

when these resources no longer existed and South Vietnam had to face its own realities.

The long-range community development program that the GVN instituted in 1970 in conjunction with other related efforts was designed with definite prospects in mind. It sought to achieve economic self-sufficiency for the rural sector by encouraging village self-help projects. The villagers determined priorities, contributed labor and resources, and participated in management with partial assistance provided by the government. Aside from its practical benefits, the community development program also sought to achieve national solidarity, overcome indifference and dependence on the part of the people, and create favorable psychological conditions for a protracted counter-insurgency war. Only by building something with their own hands did the people appreciate its true value and protect it jealously against Communist efforts to destroy it. That was the rationale behind the whole concept which had proved true in many instances. Experience also indicated, however, that no development was possible where there was no security. To maintain security, it was essential for the local government and troops to remain with the people and protect them. But whether or not we could ensure a lasting security depended on how well we did in eliminating the VCI and the effectiveness of the shields provided by RVNAF units. Development and security, therefore, were inseparable from each other.

The basic strategy of pacification which was built on the concept of the "spreading oil stain," i.e., expanding control from urban or secure areas, led to the division of the territory into secure, consolidation, and clearing zones and the employment of the clear-and-hold tactic. This strategy had proved sound and effective. The clear-and-hold tactic in particular had brought reassurance to the people living in consolidation zones who usually believed that our troops just came then departed while the Communists might have gone but they always came back and stayed. This was indeed a great improvement from the period of mopping-up operations during which most of the mischief that alienated the people in contested areas occurred. The clear-and-hold pattern had

changed all that especially after the ARVN had undergone an intensive political education program initiated in 1965. Familiarity with the local people through long months of social contact effectively developed rapport, which reduced apathy and indifference on the part of the people and mischievous acts on the part of the soldiers.

The major shortcoming of clear-and-hold operations was that they inevitably required a long duration, many troops, and substantial support facilities. A minimum of six months to one year was normally needed to eliminate or drive away enemy guerrillas and local forces, screen the population, root out the VCI, consolidate the local security system, establish the local government, and create the favorable conditions for the development process to begin. Time was also necessary to develop mutual trust between the local government and the people; this could only be achieved through the arduous process of trial and error.

There had to be adequate troops and support facilities to accomplish a variety of purposes: an outpost system to interdict enemy accesses into the area under pacification; the protection of government installations, economic resources, and arteries of communication; a system of operational and fire support bases as well as logistic support installations; and the formation of intervention forces, especially at the district and province level, which were essential to keep small enemy units at bay, support the outposts in case of attack, and put constant pressure on the enemy in the area. These tasks were required not only to gain the military initiative but also and more importantly to reassure the local people of the government's permanent presence and the determination of governmental troops to stay and protect them, which was a key psychological factor that induced local villagers to cooperate. All of these requirements in troops and support were satisfactorily met by the full commitment of ARVN infantry and ranger units to pacification, the quantitative and qualitative development of regular and territorial forces, and the effective support provided by American firepower, mobility, and logistics. Rural security, as a result, improved and expanded by leaps and bounds during this period, which was the source of optimism among RVN and U.S. authorities.

Experience indicated, however, that in due time those enemy units which had often been destroyed were surfacing again. Apparently, they had been regrouped, refitted, and reorganized in base areas with the manpower and equipment infiltrated from North Vietnam. The maintenance of area security had therefore become a frustrating task, for no matter how dense our outpost system or how well motivated our troops were, the enemy could always find loopholes to penetrate and weaknesses to exploit. Ups and downs in village or area security were an inevitable reality we had to face and accept as long as the conflict remained a test of perseverence and will.

Experience also proved that although the "outer protective shield" provided by ARVN and U.S. forces was effective for the protection of pacified areas, it was not completely impenetrable to enemy elements no matter how thick or solid it could be. When major units arrived in an area they brought supplies and support for the smaller local or guerrilla forces, and their activities almost always revived or invigorated these small units into action. Therefore, the destruction of enemy major units was imperative for the success of pacification.

Major Operations

During the war the enemy's control headquarters, his main force units, and those local units driven away by pacification forces all took shelter in major base areas and border sanctuaries which were conviently located in the most rugged type of terrain. Therefore, the U.S. efforts to destroy this war-making machinery from 1966 to 1967 were mostly directed at long-established enemy base areas in South Vietnam.

It was not a disgrace for us to say that only U.S. forces had the capabilities -- firepower, mobility, and logistic support -- to strike at enemy base areas. Major U.S. operations that made history such as CEDAR FALLS, launched against the Iron Triangle, JUNCTION CITY against War Zone C, and DELAWARE/LAM SON against the A Shau Valley had shattered the enemy-publicized myth that these bases were impenetrable. All of these operations had a tremendous psychological impact on both enemy and

RVNAF troops. The fact was, in spite of gross exaggerations concocted by the NVA Command on U.S. casualties and losses during these operations, our enemy was unable to stop the shock that rippled through his ranks. Enemy documents captured subsequently confirmed this fact; our enemy admitted that these operations were a "disaster" for him. For the RVNAF, the disruption of major enemy bases was a source of tremendous encouragement and satisfaction because it had been a long-nurtured but hard to attain objective coveted by the JGS and MR commands for several years. Through this feat, the RVNAF also felt reassured of the U.S. military might and ultimate victory for our side.

Besides this significant morale boost, U.S.-conducted operations against enemy bases also destroyed large quantities of enemy supplies and a major part of the enemy's fortifications, underground shelters and tunnels which would have taken him years to rebuild. As far as the total destruction of major enemy units and the enemy's command headquarters was concerned, U.S. forces fared less well because the enemy was evasive. His constant change of headquarters location often made our intelligence reports outdated despite their accuracy. U.S. and ARVN forces were usually not numerically strong enough to close a tight ring around a base area and to stay inside long enough to make a thorough search. The rugged, heavily covered, and immense terrain with which the enemy had long been familiar also made it possible for him to disperse and avoid contact or to regroup and attack at will. For this the enemy seemed to have ample time since the advance of friendly troops was often slow and the fact that we were not as familiar with the terrain. Also, it was difficult to keep secret a large-scale operation which usually required troop movements and the pre-positioning of logistics prior to D-day despite diversionary efforts. The duration of operations was never long enough for our troops to conduct a thorough and more diligent search, to dispirit the fugitives and force them to surrender, and to build more airstrips, LZs or pioneer roads to facilitate the rapid subsequent reinsertion of troops. Therefore as soon as friendly troops withdrew, the enemy always came back, and soon this base was operational again. This was regrettable indeed, but perhaps we could

not do otherwise as long as U.S. and ARVN troops were insufficient for long-term commitment in these base areas. Since a permanent troop presence was not feasible, it ensued that in order to control enemy reinfiltration, frequent operations against the same base area were indispensable.

Some critics of the search-and-destroy tactic argued that these large-scale operations were "aimless," "destructive," "inhuman;" they suggested that efforts should have been conducted at the small-unit level instead. We totally disagree with this. These arguments not only did not take account of the dual nature of the war and the primordial role played by NVA units, they also reflected misinformation about the objective of search-and-destroy operations. To fight a war without frontlines against an enemy who was continually evasive, what tactic other than search-and-destroy in areas where our intelligence had revealed his presence would have been more effective? With some variations, the search-and-destroy tactic had long been used by units of all levels with success. More importantly, it had served our common strategic goal. Perhaps the sensational portrayal of destructiveness on TV, newspapers, and magazines, the spectacle of hamlets being leveled -- after its inhabitants had all been evacuated -- had conveyed a wrong impression about the real objective of search-and-destroy operations and led to the condemnation of this tactic. But no war could ever be fought without some destructiveness. It was the strategic goal that mattered and only those involved were able to grasp fully its significance. The evacuation of hundreds or even thousands of people from villages or hamlets in the contested area, to our judgment, was certainly more human than leaving them undisturbed to become victims of the fighting. Those who criticized the use of major units probably forgot the presence of enemy main force units. Perhaps they failed to realize that the Vietnam war was in no way comparable to other local insurgencies in which there was no major involvement of outside forces. In South Vietnam, local insurgency alone posed no big problem. Indeed insurgent forces -- the VCI, the guerrillas, the local force units -- owed their survival to major NVA units, and by extension, to war supplies and reinforcements from North Vietnam.

Therefore destroying the small units would never have solved the main war problem as long as major NVA units remained intact. On the contrary, if the major units were destroyed, we are certain that local insurgent forces would be exhausted and eventually dissipated.

The conduct of major operations certainly entailed substantial casualties, at least in the initial stage, but they saved many lives during the course of this protracted war. Not accepting the inevitable losses incurred during these operations and failure to keep after major enemy units only encouraged insurgency, fostered its strength, and prolonged the war. Assassinations, kidnappings and skirmishes, big and small, would have continued as a tedious routine, given the false impression of insignificant casualities, and eventually far exceeded those we suffered during major operations. Only if we were determined and perseverant enough to locate and strike enemy main forces in their very sanctuaries could we ever make our enemy realize there was no secure place for him in South Vietnam and no hope for a military victory. We believe that only when our enemy realized this, would he perhaps be inclined to accept a negotiated settlement.

Therefore, we believe that in the conduct of the Vietnam war, we could neither devote all out efforts to small insurgent forces and ignore major enemy units nor concentrate on major operations and neglect small-unit operations in support of pacification. Fully aware of this dual aspect of the war, both the JGS and MACV agreed that efforts should be judiciously divided between both types of operations and conducted in a mutually supporting way. Our force structure organization, training, and force employment were flexible enough to switch from one war to the other as the situation required and in keeping with North Vietnam's reinforcement capabilities. The ratio between large-unit operations and operations in support of pacification, therefore, depended on the situation, but over the years it appeared that on balance, small-unit operations always had a higher frequency in view of their daily occurrence in all parts of the country. By contrast, major operations took place only occasionally. Their conduct depended on the presence and location of major enemy units which were usually detected during their effort to infiltrate into South Vietnam.

Anti-Infiltration

Infiltration was a strategy that North Vietnam initiated in 1955 and increased significantly as of 1959 to gradually build up its forces and war materials in South Vietnam. It was a cunning scheme Hanoi conceived to cover up its bloody involvement in the war and deceive world and domestic opinion as to its true design to conquer South Vietnam by force. North Vietnam never admitted the presence of its army in the South. But the rural security situation as well as the level of fighting in South Vietnam depended on the extent and effectiveness of North Vietnam's infiltration.

For infiltration purposes, our enemy took full advantage of South Vietnam's 200-mile coastline and equally long border winding through mountains and jungles in MR-1, MR-2, and MR-3 and the swamp lands in MR-4. Since South Vietnam's terrain definitely favored North Vietnam's infiltration, it made the U.S. and RVN's anti-infiltration efforts most difficult. A completely effective defense against all infiltration would have required a force structure and materiel support that were not available. North Vietnam even used the DMZ and the territories of Laos and Cambodia for infiltration purposes, making a mockery of these countries' declared neutrality. The RVN and U.S., meanwhile, dutifully respected international agreements and the sovereignty of these neighbors, which gave North Vietnam a free hand to build sanctuaries, logistic installations and transit stations on the other side of the border. Cambodia's major port, Kompong Som, was used as an entry point for the deliveries of weapons and ammunition to Communist forces in MR-3, MR-4 and a considerable part of MR-2.

Both the RVN and U.S. fully realized that if our anti-infiltration efforts were successful, they would help reduce the level of fighting in the South. If not, the war could drag on indefinitely. The primary source of all infiltration was North Vietnam, the big base that supported Communist war efforts in South Vietnam and the eventual expansion of Communist domination in Southeast Asia. To strike at North Vietnam therefore appeared most desirable to end the war. However, this move

was politically unsound and portended the dangers of war expansion. We believed that only a RVNAF action could minimize these dangers, but the RVNAF was not trained or equipped for an invasion of North Vietnam, which was not a goal of the GVN or the U.S. We just wanted to be permitted to live in peace and develop South Vietnam into a true democracy.

The strategy of exerting pressure on North Vietnam and thereby forcing its leaders to abandon their policy of supporting the war in South Vietnam, to our judgment, was the most logical in that it minimized the dangers of expanding the ground war. However, the measures applied by the U.S. and RVN did not create the required pressure to break the will of North Vietnam's leaders and stop the flow of men and supplies into South Vietnam. It appeared that the greater the pressure the U.S. and RVN exerted through the "escalation strategy," the larger and more determined North Vietnam's infiltration seemed to become.

Back in 1961, the RVN had endeavored to airdrop small teams of special commandos into North Vietnam with the purpose of gathering intelligence, disrupting enemy activities, and hopefully to cause Hanoi to have second thoughts about its war policy. Although a laudable effort, these audacious but small actions were not too effective. This was caused primarily by the tight Communist control over the North Vietnamese population which deprived our action teams of popular shelter and support. The strongest anti-Communist segment of North Vietnam had probably all relocated South after the post-Geneva evacuation. We think that as long as we did not have a "political nucleus" and some popular support in North Vietnam, there could be no shield or protection for our commandos. Their eventual discovery and elimination were inevitable no matter how well they had been trained.

The U.S. congressional resolution adapted in the fall of 1964 in the wake of the Gulf of Tonkin incident opened the way for the air war over North Vietnam. Conducted initially on a retaliatory basis, U.S. bombings soon continued with regularity. U.S. authorities had hoped that these bombings would eventually break down North Vietnam's will and help end the war. However, after over two years of bombing, our enemy appeared more determined than ever. Perhaps the U.S. had underestimated the

endurance and resolvency of the North Vietnamese leaders and people; or perhaps it had been constrained by consideratons of Chinese intervention and its own complex as a major world power which found it morally improper to "punish" a small and underdeveloped country too harshly. In any event, the U.S. had refrained from applying its airpower forcefully and rapidly enough against all vulnerable targets in North Vietnam. Its strategy of "gradual escalation", progressing from the 17th parallel northward and responding to Hanoi's attitude had apparently failed to convey its determination to Hanoi's leaders; on the contrary, it had been misinterpreted as a weakness on the part of U.S. leaders. This air war strategy gave North Vietnam the necessary time to adjust to the circumstances and to motivate the populace in organizing for self-defense and develop their hatred toward the U.S. It also accorded North Vietnam enough time in receiving emergency military aid from Russia and China to modernize and strengthen its air defense system. Eventually, this improved defense system made the U.S. air war increasingly costly in terms of human and material losses, which in turn divided the ranks of U.S. leadership in policy matters. This division was further compounded by adverse world opinion and the mounting anti-war movement in the U.S.

From our military point of view, we believe that the only alternative to "gradual response" should have been massive and constant bombings against all vital objectives in North Vietnam the way they had been conducted against Nazi Germany during World War II. That was perhaps the only way to shatter Hanoi's wil and shorten the war. If this was deemed inappropriate we believe at that juncture, the U.S. should have discontinued its air war over North Vietnam and implemented another alternative designed to reduce infiltration such as combining air power and infantry forces to strengthen the defense of the DMZ and the border area along the Laotian infiltration corridor.

Up to that time, the U.S. had been constrainted by its respect of Laotian neutrality. Its anti-infiltration activities over the Ho Chi Minh trail and the Laotian corridor had been covertly conducted through cooperation between the Laotian Royal Air Force and the U.S. Air Force. Although it had brought its superior technology to bear on this problem,

the U.S. Air Force was unable to stop the flow of infiltration down the corridor. The enemy had taken full advantage of the limitations of air power and terrain features to adjust his activities, develop alternate routes, and keep infiltration flowing. It was obvious the Air Force alone could not win this battle without the cooperation of ground forces.

Inside South Vietnam, anti-infiltration efforts had been concentrated on two geographical areas -- the DMZ and the long border facing Laos and Cambodia. The defense of the 900-mile border was entrusted to approximately 45,000 CIDG and Special Forces troops deployed in camps at strategic locations. Patrol activities conducted from these camps to control major infiltration accesses into South Vietnam and quick-reacting operations which combined airpower with helicopter mobility created many difficulties for NVA units. To overrun some of these border camps, our enemy was compelled to concentrate major units of regimental or large size. Several camps were thus lost to the enemy because we did not have enough defenders and reinforcements to counteract determined enemy attacks and because of adverse terrain and weather which were not conducive to resupply or tactical air support. As a result, these lost or evacuated camps were only retaken when conditions permitted and troops were available. The A-Shau camp which controlled the major enemy infiltration access and avenue of approach into the Hue-Da Nang area and the Plei-Me camp which controlled the southwestern access into Plieku were most representative of this border defense system.

The rugged terrain combined with the length of the defense line and the shortage of RVNAF and U.S. troops made our border defense ineffective in certain areas. If instead of deploying our forces along the long border, we had organized an east-west defense line across the 17th parallel and reaching toward the Mekong River in Laos along Route 9 for example, our border defense would have been perhaps easier, less costly and would have provided more guarantees of success, tactically and strategically. This of course would have required the combined efforts of both Laos and South Vietnam.

The DMZ area, five miles deep on both sides of the Ben Hai River, was a big constraint for the U.S. and RVN which scrupulously respected

its demilitarized character. One hundred RVN policemen and an ICC team at Gio Linh were just incapable of monitoring this large zone. In May 1966, the entire NVA 324B Division infiltrated across the DMZ into South Vietnam without being challenged. Still both the RVN and the U.S. governments were not agreeable to our requests for using artillery or naval guns against enemy troops in the DMZ. Not until late 1966 after several bloody battles had occurred between our forces (U.S. Marines and the ARVN 1st Infantry Division) and the NVA south of the DMZ, which was supported by its artillery positioned in the DMZ's northern half, did U.S. and ARVN forces finally receive permission to use counterbattery fire. Not until a year later were our forces authorized to pursue the enemy in the DMZ. Even then, they were compelled to withdraw from it as soon as contact was lost. How could we defend ourselves effectively under such constraints?

In addition to our constant patrolling, the strongpoint and obstacle system which was supported by tactical air and air mobile reaction forces also contributed significantly to our anti-infiltration defense. We think that this tactical approach to a most difficult problem was sound and well founded. Such bases as Gio Linh, Con Thien, Cam Lo, and Khe Sanh had earned a much deserved place in the glorious history of RVNAF-US defense against North Vietnam's oppression. It was at these very bases that North Vietnam's attempts to duplicate a Dien Bien Phu-type victory were completely shattered. The professionalism, endurance, combat spirit, and sophisticated techniques of firepower coordination also found their highest expression through this strongpoint system. The modern U.S. sensor system and the perservant army of U.S. bulldozers also made a major contribution. It was just unfortunate that this system was stopped at the Laotian border. Had it reached across the Laotian panhandle toward Tchepone, the very hub of North Vietnam's communication and transportation system in that part of Laos, we believe that enemy infiltration could have been drastically curtailed which would have had a major impact on the course of the war within South Vietnam.

An initial challenge which was accomplished with outstanding success was the interdiction of the infiltration of supplies across the

beaches of South Vietnam. Our coastline was tightly sealed through the combined efforts of the U.S. and RVN navies. However, the enemy made use of both Communist and neutral vessels to bring supplies and war materiels through the Cambodian port of Kompong Som. Again, because they respected Cambodia's declared neutrality, both the U.S. and RVN governments prohibited the use of tactical air and pursuits against enemy sanctuaries on Cambodian soil.

In summary, the entire anti-infiltration campaign conducted through the combined efforts of RVN and U.S. forces inflicted many losses in both personnel and materiel on North Vietnam. It also caused North Vietnam to divert additional resources for the defense and maintenance of its infiltration routes down the Laotian panhandle. However, with the exception of our successful "Markettime" operations, which eventually prevented resupply through South Vietnam's national waters, our total efforts failed to stop the flow of men and supplies into the South. Those of us in senior positions with the RVNAF believed that it would have been impossible to accomplish all our objectives until this infiltration problem was defeated.

Significant Lessons Learned

1. In retrospect the regrettable death of President Diem, a leader with enough stature to oppose Ho Chi Minh, was a great disaster for South Vietnam in time of war. The three years of political instability that followed edged South Vietnam toward the brink of collapse which was averted only when the U.S. committed its combat troops to fight the ground war. North Vietnam and its servants, the Viet Cong, took advantage of South Vietnam's turmoil to step up subversion of the rural areas and aggregate South Vietnam's political vulnerabilities by advocating the policy of neutrality. This proposal caused concern among the U.S authorities that South Vietnam could come under Communist control if the U.S. was invited to leave. On the other hand, North Vietnam increased the infiltration of personnel, war materiels and major units into South

Vietnam to prepare for a takeover by force. On the RVN side, political instability dispirited and confused the ranks of civil servants and servicemen and diluted its war efforts.

2. Political turmoil made it impossible for South Vietnam to have a stable government which was required to prosecute the war efficiently and develop long-range plans, especially as far as manpower was concerned. The RVNAF, therefore, was always short of manpower requirements. This was the major reason why U.S. authorities were cautious when reviewing the RVNAF annual force structure expansion plans. This also explained why the U.S. could not implement President Kennedy's sound assessment of the war situation during the period 1964-1967.[8]

3. Just as during the previous period (1954-1963, the RVNAF were not expanded and developed in a proper and timely manner to counter North Vietnam's stepped up war efforts and assume the primary combat role. Instead, they found themselves performing a secondary role in their own war.

The hasty and poorly planned integration of the Popular Forces into the RVNAF was a major mistake. It made administrative burdens excessively heavy and wasted manpower resources vitally required by the regular forces. We think that the PF should have continued to serve as a people's component to fight Communist insurgency at the grass roots level. The RVN should have made greater efforts to motivate the rural population to participate in village and hamlet defense as a part-time self-defense force. This would have fully prepared rural youths for subsequent military service. Our intelligence system should have been expanded to the village level, and village chiefs and security assistants should have been trained for effective leadership.

The integration of the Regional Forces in the RVNAF as ARVN organic infantry units was a sound move, but it was a mistake to let

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[8] "It is their war. They are the ones who have to win it or lose it. We can help them, we can give them equipment, but they have to win," President Kennedy's statement in September 1963.

them function under a separate status. This stimulated the RF troopers' feelings of inferiority with regard to ARVN soldiers, complicated personnel administration, and seriously limited the rotation of jobs and cadres in the RVNAF. The expansion of the RF by activating more companies required less cadres and equipment but made command, control, administration, and care extremely difficult for the province chief. Force employment, as a result, was inappropriate and ineffective. We continue to believe that if the RF had become fully integrated as ARVN territorial infantry battalions with self-administration capabilities and four rifle companies each, their force employment in static defense and intervention missions at sector and district levels would have been more responsive, their administration easier, their command and control better and their overall performance markedly more effective.

The RVNAF force structure expansion during this period was also not appropriate as far as the Marines and Paratroopers (the JGS's strategic reserves), the VNAF and the VNN were concerned. We are certain that these forces would have had no problems in obtaining recruits for their expansion requirements. The very nature of the Marines and Paratroopers, which seemed no longer appropriate for the age of helicopter and our concept of defense, was perhaps one of the reasons that made MACV cautious in approving their expansion. Moreover, when the JGS requested their upgrading into divisions, its sole concern was to develop the excellent combat traditions of these forces and to increase our much needed strategic reserves. The failure to develop the Marines and Paratroopers as required during this period and the deepening commitment of infantry divisions in territorial security deprived the RVNAF of vital strategic and tactical reserves. The RVNAF were therefore unable to contribute more positively to large unit operations conducted by U.S. Forces against NVA units.

The JGS and MACV did not have medium-range plans for the RVNAF. All planning was done on a yearly basis to keep up with the progress of the war. Despite this, we think that even in the annual planning process, priority should have been accorded the RVNAF in those areas which could be developed in the near future without difficulty.

The U.S. and the RVN wasted seven valuable years since 1961 by developing the RVNAF in a half-hearted way. We believe that the RVNAF would have been more combat effective had they been expanded in force structure during this period despite our difficulties with manpower. We also believe that had priority been given to this expansion and development, the RVNAF would have been able to assume more combat responsibilities during the 1966-67 period. This could have reduced the level of U.S. force buildup, helped de-Americanize the war, and alleviated some U.S. domestic problems at the same time. Only if properly and timely prepared to meet new challenges, could the RVNAF enhance popular confidence in the GVN and dispirit our enemy. If this had been accomplished South Vietnam would have required U.S. assistance only in the areas where the RVNAF were still deficient and did not have time to develop. Consequently, the impact of the war on world and U.S. opinions might have been different.

4. We believe that the U.S objective during this period was overly predicated on the safeguarding of the American honor as a major world power guaranteeing the protection of a small ally, the belief that war could be ended shortly with U.S. military might, and the underestimation of the North Vietnamese leadership's determination. All this resulted in the Americanization of the war and all priorities were given to the U.S. force buildup and conduct of the war in South Vietnam.

5. Bombing North Vietnam, from where the war was being directed and sustained, proved logical and necessary. Striking at the will of the enemy leadership was also wise strategy. We believe that it would have been more logical and desirable if the U.S. had helped the RVNAF develop the capabilities for this undertaking. The U.S. strategy of gradual response proved ineffective against a resilient enemy whose survival was guaranteed by his Communist sponsors. The air war over North Vietnam in that respect amounted to a contest between material strength and force of will. Two years of continued application of material strength had failed to subdue the enemy's force of will and stop his infiltration and war efforts. Faced with this impasse, the

U.S. changed its objective by using bombings to force North Vietnam to negotiate. Our enemy interpreted this change as a decline in U.S. determination.

6. Despite heavy air strikes, the USAF failed to disrupt significantly North Vietnam's infiltration corridor in lower Laos. This emphasized that modern air power alone could not completely interdict ground activities effectively. Only ground troops, especially large units, could control and sever this infiltration system operated by a determined and resourceful enemy. However, it would have been politically improper for the U.S. to use its major units for this task in Laos. For its own self-defense and survival, we believe the RVN would have been perfectly justified in occupying the dominating terrain features which controlled this infiltration corridor. Then it would have been reasonable for the RVNAF to withdraw only if there were guarantees that North Vietnam would cease to use the corridor for its war efforts or if replaced by an international peace-keeping force. We think that world opinion would have favored this move because the GVN only acted in self-defense. In that event, the NVA would have surely reacted in force and bloody battles would have occurred but we believe that this would have worked to South Vietnam's advantage. North Vietnam would have been unable to conceal its infiltration efforts even though it probably would have used a Pathet Laos screen initially. Losses for the RVNAF would have been high but the final tally of losses for the entire war would have been acceptable.

We believe, in retrospect, that the best way to eliminate the infiltration of personnel and supplies down the eastern side of the Laotian panhandle would have been to establish an international defense line south of the DMZ extending across Laos to the Mekong River. It is possible that SEATO or FWMA forces could have been committed to the defense of this line. Given its pro-western position, we feel that Laos would have supported this concept since it would have assisted in guaranteeing Lao neutrality. This would also have helped Laos obtain a lifeline to the sea. The most appropriate time frame for this strategic move, in our judgment, was when U.S. bombings over North Vietnam and

the Laotian infiltration corridor had failed to reduce infiltration significantly and when the U.S. and FWMA force buildup had reached an appropriate level. We believe that this strategic decision would have improved South Vietnam's security situation especially if efforts had been devoted concurrently to developing our territorial defense system and some ARVN divisions had been extracted to augment the RVNAF strategic reserves.

7. During this period the U.S. and RVN were excessively cautious concerning Cambodia. We think that the RVN should have reserved the right to legitimate self-defense and conducted pursuits of enemy units into Cambodia where appropriate. These pursuits should have been determined, forceful and continuously undertaken until there were guarantees that North Vietnam had renounced the use of Cambodian sanctuaries for the purpose of supporting military activities in South Vietnam. Because of strained relations with the Sihanouk government and the failure of diplomatic efforts, the GVN should have taken steps to sponsor and support a Free Khmer movement which opposed Sihanouk and used this force to disrupt enemy communications and logistic lines, especially the port activities at Kompong Som. With substantial Khmer Krom manpower in South Vietnam, this undertaking would have been a possibility. The development of a Free Khmer force might have also pressed Sihanouk into a less hostile policy toward South Vietnam or perhaps even accelerated the preparation of a new friendly regime in Cambodia.

8. The fact that anti-infiltration efforts outside South Vietnam were not effective led to the escalation of war inside South Vietnam in terms of intensity and level. The total buildup of Communist combat forces in the South exceeded that of U.S. forces. But as the buildup progressed, the U.S. was able to switch strategy from static base defense to search-and-destroy operations against major enemy units. These operations were initially conducted in the vicinity of enemy bases then against the very heart of these bases. All of these significant efforts not only pulled the RVN farther away from disaster; they also created a shock among enemy troops and forced North Vietnam to employ larger units in the south.

9. The RVN military initiative which had been utterly lost since the end of 1964 was regained during this period. This was made possible by the presence of a strong strategic strike force (U.S. major units), an acceptable level of DTA tactical reserves, and especially the availability of quick-reacting forces at the sector level (provided by ARVN infantry battalions attached to it). The security situation in rural areas therefore, began to improve which enabled the GVN to concentrate on pacification efforts.

10. The Pacification and Development program, in our judgment, was the best strategic weapon to counter and defeat the Communist concept of people's warfare in the South. Effective coordination was the decisive factor of this multi-faceted strategy. RVN-U.S. organization for coordination as applied since 1967 was effective and responsive. In addition to its multi-faceted or total nature, pacification and development was also a long-range strategy because its ultimate goal was to win the people's hearts and minds in a contest against a flexible and perseverant enemy. Consequently, the success of this program should not have been measured only by the decline of enemy subversion and progress in GVN sponsored projects. Success could only have been accurately reflected by the true attitude of the people toward our regime.

11. The Americanization of the war failed to produce victory as quickly as expected. Because of this, it fostered divisiveness among the U.S. leadership in matters of military and political strategy and among the U.S. public. The Vietnam war became a subject of debate in the preliminary rounds of U.S presidential elections. The U.S. began to waver, and its initial optimism gave way to pessimistic reassessments. This occurred while South Vietnam was beginning to stabilize politically amid widespread optimism among its ranks. The GVN therefore continued to view the U.S. posture with optimism, almost oblivious to political difficulties that the U.S. was facing because of our war. Perhaps it was because the GVN did not fully appreciate U.S. problems.

12. Despite RVN and U.S. achievements during the 1964-67 period, we believe that they could have been even more significant if:

a. The political situation in South Vietnam had been stabilized earlier which would have permitted the GVN to benefit from the continuity of long-range planning.

b. The RVNAF had been properly expanded and developed earlier with special emphasis on strategic and tactical reserves and territorial forces. This would have enabled the gradual release of ARVN infantry divisions for tactical and strategic mobile defense and facilitated the reorganization of South Vietnam into five or seven military regions for better command and control over sectors and more effective coordination of security and pacification activities.

CHAPTER III

VIETNAMIZATION: 1968-1972

The 1968 Tet General Offensive

Although it failed to sway the determination of Hanoi's leaders to pursue their conquest of South Vietnam, the U.S. air war caused extensive physical and material damage to North Vietnam, especially to its recovering economy. Military pressure and political tension had built up to such an extent that Hanoi had to promulgate a special law in March 1968 specifying harsh punishments against "anti-revolutionary crimes," to include the death penalty. Despite stepped up infiltration, during the dry seasons of 1966 and 1967 Communist forces in South Vietnam gradually lost the initiative. Their large-unit attacks had all ended in defeat with heavy losses inflicted by superior U.S. firepower and mobility. U.S. offensive operations, meanwhile, kept the enemy constantly off balance and greatly attrited his forces. Operations conducted by the RVNAF in support of pacification also reduced significantly the extent of Communist control in rural areas. The VCI and enemy local forces began to run into difficulties although they were still strong. The enemy strategy of subverting rural areas to strangle the cities no longer proved effective in the face of combined RVN-U.S. offensive efforts. The continuation of this declining military posture would affect the inability of the Hanoi regime and might even spell defeat in the south. Based on our experience at that time, both the RVN and U.S. were expecting a major counteraction from the enemy to regain his lost initiative.

In due time North Vietnam indeed changed its strategy by striking at the heart of our cities. But when the Tet General Offensive finally materialized, it came as a big surprise for the GVN. We were surprised not because of the absence of telltale indications which our intelligence

had picked up but primarily because of our subjectivity and complacency which totally misled our estimates as to the enemy's intention and calculated boldness. It was indeed a risky venture for the enemy but he had accepted the inevitable heavy losses. It was a daring move because our enemy completely disregarded the traditional sanctity of the Tet and overly relied on theoretical popular uprising.

The Tet offensive did not help the enemy attain his strategic objectives. He temporarily regained some initiative but eventually lost it again and found himself in a military posture much worse than before. The RVNAF did not disintegrate; they became stronger and more aggressive. Popular uprisings, a key to quick victory, never materialized. U.S. forces did not bog down as expected, and finally the enemy's ploy of installing a coalition government was completely shattered.

The element of surprise had given the enemy an initial tactical advantage; his troops had easily penetrated into cities and occupied a few installations. But the price that this surprise exacted was high. The enemy lacked combat coordination and incurred the wrath and abhorrence of the people.

The enemy's subjectivity also brought him a big surprise. He had preconceived ideas about the weakness of the RVNAF and the people's hostile attitude toward the U.S. and the GVN. But the RVNAF had fought gallantly and with confidence; they had fully demonstrated their combat capabilities and aggressiveness. Despite their criticisms of the GVN and noncommittal attitude, the South Vietnamese people had resolutely refused to cooperate with the Communists. They were not deceived by such disguised strategems of Communist domination as "coalition," "neutrality," and "peace." No wonder some observers had humorously called the South Vietnamese people's attitude during the Tet Offensive "a vote by feet." No other expression could be more appropriate.

Although the enemy Tet Offensive solidified the determination and unity of the South Vietnamese people, armed forces, and government to fight against Communism, the event had shocked U.S. officials and politicians. It created dissension among U.S. policy makers in matters of strategy and current policy toward the Vietnam War. It dealt a serious

blow to the steadfast confrontation stance of the U.S. in this part of the world and put into question the U.S. commitments toward the Free World. President Johnson's statement in March 1968 partly reflected the state of U.S. divisiveness when he said: "Hanoi was seeking to win something in Washington that they can't win in Hue, in the I Corps or in Khe Sanh." Apparently, the anti-war bias of the U.S. media had imprisoned U.S. public opinion. Eventually the pressure exerted by some members of the U.S. Congress and the vocal anti-war segment had turned President Johnson's policy around. He made several fateful decisions, among them the cessation of U.S. bombings above the 20th parallel, the refusal to give General Westmoreland additional troops, and his non-candidacy for reelection, with a view to seek a negotiated settlement of the war and restore U.S. national unity.

The rapidity with which Hanoi accepted to negotiate surprised some U.S. politicians. Obviously, the Hanoi leaders would have never thought of negotiating if they had felt strong enough to win the war militarily. The fact was the enemy's military posture in South Vietnam was steadily deteriorating as a result of his Tet and subsequent defeats and the combined U.S.-RVN offensive efforts. But true to its war precepts, Hanoi took advantage of peace talks as a respite to redress his military posture and as a forum to push its political warfare through propaganda. Obviously, American policymakers had inaccurately assessed the enemy's situation in South and North Vietnam, thereby missing a golden opportunity to deal the death blow to an enemy in agony.

We believe that the final course of the war could have been determined at that time without additional U.S. troops. It could have turned to our advantage if the U.S. had been determined and patient enough to continue its military offensive strategy a little longer and accelerated the development of the RVNAF in the way we had suggested. It was most unfortunate for South Vietnam that this did not happen.

General Mobilization

Manpower was the most important contribution of the RVN to the common war effort. But the area of manpower was also the least affected by U.S. influence.

In contrast to North Vietnam's ability to control a larger population through police-state methods, South Vietnam had met with serious difficulties in controlling its manpower resources. The fact that many villages and hamlets changed hands frequently, the flow of refugees displaced by the war, and the uncontrolled crowdedness of urban areas combined to make the management of manpower resources inefficient. The effective yearly control and inventory of military manpower resources had been suspended since 1961 because of rural insecurity. All statistics used by the GVN for demographic control purposes were inaccurate since they were only estimates. Also the Communists had pre-empted an undetermined quantity of our manpower. Therefore, manpower had become a big problem for South Vietnam and perhaps a decisive factor of the protracted conflict for both sides. Experience indicated that North Vietnam had preceded South Vietnam in making full use of its manpower. Youths between 16 and 18 were commonly found in NVA units operating in South Vietnam.

The draft service which had been instituted in 1957 sought to create a reserve force for the RVN, but ineffective management and control had made it difficult for the GVN to recall into immediate service those discharged between 1957 and 1968. Not until 1973 was this control of reservists subjected to comprehensive study for effective management.

Under the First Republic, RVNAF manpower requirements were not adequately met because of the GVN inefficacy in enforcing induction, growing political dissension and stepped up insurgency. President Diem failed to make new decisions concerning manpower, fearing perhaps that they would aggrevate his problems and force some youths into insurgency ranks. The decision in 1963 to increase the duration of the draft to two and three years for EM and reserve officers respectively was necessary to alleviate the RVNAF strength problems, but it was rather belated. We think that in the face of deteriorating security, 1961 was the year when

the GVN should have taken new measures concerning manpower procurement because it coincided with the introduction of the U.S. advisory system and the U.S. effort to improve the SDC and CG. Increasing the terms of the draft even temporarily, calling up reserves and partial mobilization at that juncture were the minimum measures we should have taken.

Our effort to improve the management and control of manpower resources in 1964 through the activation of the Mobilization Directorate was a necessary step but its effectiveness was greatly reduced when the GVN placed this organization under the Ministry of Defense. Since manpower was a major problem of national importance, we think that it should have been directly controlled by the Prime Minister's office for maximum efficiency and best coordination. Although an interministerial committee was formed under the chairmanship of the Director of Cabinet, Minister of Defense to review and recommend the distribution of manpower resources among national activities, including the private sector, this committee suffered from lack of authority and its measures were seldom strictly enforced.

Successive governments after 1964 did make serious efforts to procure manpower for the RVNAF through partial mobilization and gradual extension of the draft age, but we feel that these measures were not radical enough to face the stepped-up war situation. They failed to help the RVNAF solve its manpower problems and develop a proper force structure. They still allowed the automatic discharge of draftees at the end of their terms of duty while in the field U.S. youths were risking their lives for South Vietnam. This was totally unacceptable, especially in view of the sizable number of young people these measures had overlooked and left free to stroll city streets. We believe that South Vietnamese and the youths in particular, should have had the moral obligation to save their own country first and foremost. Only when nothing else could be done should we have relied on foreign assistance. This was the only way we could have enhanced our national cause and self-respect.

1965 was the year when general mobilization should have been decreed after a declaration of national emergency and appeals for U.S. help. This could have been done if South Vietnam had been politically stable, but

unfortunately it was not. Since our condition precluded such a law, we think that at least the GVN should have taken other lesser measures, for example, doubling the time of service requirements and lowering the draft age to 19. Both measures were necessary to retain experienced combatants and revitalize our ranks with younger personnel. Naturally, there would have been some psychological impact, but we think that this impact would have worked to our advantage. The U.S. for instance would have been encouraged or urged to step up military assistance in order to arm and make full use of the extra manpower available. If this had been achieved, we think that the U.S. force buildup could have been kept at a lower level, which in the long run would have saved the U.S. President a lot of difficulties. He would not have been compelled to tell General Westmoreland in 1967: "We should make certain we are getting value received from the South Vietnamese troops - check the discharges to determine whether we could make use of them by forming additional units." President Johnson was right. A strong and well-developed RVNAF would have been the best deterrent weapon in the Vietnam war especially as far as North Vietnam was concerned.

The much needed, ultimate measure - general mobilization - finally materialized under most favorable circumstances, but it had been dictated by the Tet General Offensive. General mobilization indeed helped the RVNAF procure enough manpower to replace losses and implement their force structure expansion plans ahead of schedule. Just four years later, however, the same problems began to surface again despite the fact that the GVN had taken all necessary measures to keep the RVNAF up to strength, such as banning discharges and recovering deserters and draft dodgers, and minimizing combat and other losses. Our problem was that the national manpower resources in the 18 - 38 draft age range were drying up. Each year, the aggregate total of all youth reaching 18 was not enough for replacement purposes. In the longer term perhaps a population of 18 million would not be able to support a one-million military force. Because of these prospects and in view of the protracted war, a long-range solution was desirable. Perhaps our force structure should have been trimmed down but made stronger and more effective. Perhaps our manpower

policy should have changed to give priority to defense but without obstructing development in other areas of national endeavor. Perhaps we should have decreed local defense a people's responsibility, developed and improved further our People's Self Defense Forces and National Police, and employed young female manpower resources for these organizations when appropriate.

Modernization and Improvement of the RVNAF

The new U.S. war and peace strategy consisted of turning over combat responsibilities to the RVNAF under the Vietnamization program in order to allow the incremental redeployment of U.S. troops and negotiating in Paris for a just and true peace in South Vietnam.

The term "Vietnamization" was perhaps improper as far as the South Vietnamese were concerned because of its controversial effect. Why Vietnamization? Had the Vietnamese nationalists not fought against the Communists well before the U.S. had any interest in Vietnam? Had the people and armed forces of the RVN not fought the war alongside U.S. forces since 1965? Why make it sound that only U.S. forces were fighting the Vietnam War? The amount of blood shed by the South Vietnamese was many times greater than that of gallant U.S. troops; the war itself was a matter of survival for the South Vietnamese people who did not want to submit to the cruelties of Communist domination. But they could not handle it by themselves and had to appeal to the U.S. for assistance. In an ideological conflict where propaganda and psychology proved to be effective weapons, the use of Vietnamization as a term deeply hurt the people and the armed forces of the RVN. We feel it unwittingly admitted the U.S. error in strategy and the failure of U.S. military efforts, a historical repeat of the French debacle years earlier.

Many questions arising from Vietnamization had been left unanswered, which ushered the RVN into complete darkness as to true U.S. motives. Was the U.S. bent on "tucking the tail and violating its commitments," as President Johnson had once vowed never to do? Was the U.S. initiating a new strategy which preserved U.S. honor and still protected South

Vietnam at less cost? Was the U.S. using Vietnamization as a bargaining chip in the peace talks to disengage itself from the war with honor and leave South Vietnam to its own fate? Only President Thieu perhaps knew the answers since he had discussed Vietnamization with President Nixon, but even he did not accept it as a term. This perhaps explained why he did not issue any directives or guidance on how the government and the RVNAF should proceed. South Vietnam only learned about the new American policy through piecemeal statements made by U.S. officials involved. In any event to South Vietnamese Vietnamization meant that in order to survive they had to shed more blood, that the RVNAF would be expanded and modernized to take over from U.S. forces, and that the U.S. would continue to provide military air until North Vietnam renounced its conquest design. This was enough to encourage and reassure the people and our armed forces of South Vietnam.

Our U.S. advisers seemed no better informed than their South Vietnamese counterparts. Therefore, MACV and the JGS did not develop any medium-range contingency plans to meet the new challenge. We simply proceeded with on-going yearly programs as usual, though at an accelerated pace, to keep up with political events in the U.S., the progress of peace talks, and the war situation. The most significant thing about RVNAF improvement and modernization programs was that they had been built on the premise that "U.S. forces would continue to stand behind the RVNAF with their support to fill in the gaps that the RVNAF were still unable or did not have enough time to do by themselves." All of these programs sought to improve and modernize the RVNAF in three major areas.

In force structure organization, during four consecutive years, the RVNAF had rapidly expanded with an objective to strike a balance among combat, combat support, and combat service and logistic capabilities and to reduce the void left behind by departing U.S. and FWMAF units. It was, we think, a sound and reasonable objective, and all programs proceeded well as scheduled. By the time of the Paris Agreement, however, the imbalance between combat and support forces still existed, though to a lesser extent, and the physical void had been reduced but still left large gaps.

In combat forces it was planned that the gaps left behind by ten U.S. and FWMAF combat divisions would be filled by the expansion of the RF/PF who would eventually replace ARVN infantry divisions in the maintenance of territorial security and support of pacification. In practice, however, not only were ARVN divisions unable to extract themselves from their functional responsibilities, they also found themselves excessively overextended. The explanation was that "territorial forces were still weak," a line that had been repeated over and over again since 1959.

From 1969 to 1972, priority of expansion was given to the RF which grew from 197,917 to 244,571 men. This was a correct move since it sought to meet pacification requirements. However, the company continued to remain the RF basic organization which made command and control from sector headquarters ineffective. Efforts to upgrade the RF into larger tactical formations such as the company group or a streamlined battalion were laudable but slow and not very responsive. The PF force expansion, which was concomitant with the development of the PSDF and rural police, to our thinking, was a duplication which wasted valuable manpower.

The nominal abolition of DTA's in the territorial command system, which was decreed in 1970 with the express purpose of returning ARVN infantry divisions to their mobile defense tasks, was simply not feasible in practice. If these divisions had all been extracted, we believe that this would have created a big void in security control and coordination which, in view of the dual aspect of the conflict, would have been detrimental to the conduct of the war. This real physical and psychological void could not be filled by the overextension of corps/MR control because the territory was too large and corps headquarters too burdened. The fact that ARVN divisions could not be extracted from territorial responsibilities deprived corps and MRs of adequate tactical reserves and the JGS of additional strategic reserves. To counteract the enemy's tactic of "high points" and multiple activity, both ARVN corps and the JGS found their courses of action seriously limited; they could not maintain the initiative for any long periods. As a result, all the ARVN could do was to protect the populated "national priority" areas, which left the enemy almost entirely free to use his base areas. When on occasions,

an infantry division was redeployed from its area of responsibility, this area quickly relapsed into deterioration in terms of security and popular confidence because there was no other acceptable organization or force capable of replacing it.

For this reason, we believe that there should have been a strong, manageable territorial control organization built on more than the actual four military regions and the development of regional forces in the manner suggested in the previous chapter. Only then could we hope to recover infantry divisions as mobile defense forces and enhance our tactical and strategic posture, a most vital necessity to our thinking, without impeding pacification and impairing the people's safety and confidence.

The most appropriate time to accomplish this major organizational change would have been 1970 when the VCI was on the decline and major NVA units had withdrawn into sanctuaries over the border. This change was mandatory because enemy local forces had already initiated their upgrading into battalions and regiments and over 150,000 U.S. troops had been withdrawn.

In terms of direct support firepower, the ARVN artillery had achieved a proper balance within combat forces. However, it was still deficient in long-range guns and counterbattery capabilities. The deployment of 2-piece 105mm sections throughout the provinces to provide area coverage did reassure RF/PF units of firepower support, but this extended deployment was not truly effective against enemy forces.

The VNN had accomplished all of its expansion and improvement programs without difficulty. Using transferred assets it had taken over river and coastal patrol missions from the U.S. Navy effectively. This was made possible by the OJT and takeover process which gradually phased in VNN personnel as U.S. naval units became deactivated. There were two major shortcomings which contributed to future VNN operational problems; these were the delayed transfer of coastal patrol planes and the non-availability of additional LSTs. The control of enemy infiltration by sea, therefore, became less effective because fixed-station and shipborne radar could not provide adequate coverage. The shortage of LSTs also seriously limited the VNN sea transportation capabilities.

The development of the VNAF was subjected to very detailed planning and most appropriate for RVN capabilities at this juncture. We believe that the VNAF and the USAF accomplished everything possible during this period. The standardization of planes was economically sound since it reduced maintenance and supply problems although it required cross-training for flight and maintenance crews. With the number of helicopters made available, the VNAF was able to meet reasonable tactical requirements but the void in longer range mobility, tactical air, and air reconnaissance still curtailed VNAF capabilities. In these areas, obviously, the VNAF had to depend on the USAF for a long time to come.

During the expansion of our armed forces, the RVNAF training base had been timely and efficiently developed. Off-shore training programs and U.S. support organizations in South Vietnam also contributed significantly to the formation of middle and high level management cadre for the RVNAF. These combined training efforts made it possible for the RVNAF improvement and modernization programs to proceed smoothly. Combined operations and the employment of mobile training teams in prolonged assignments at ARVN combat units were the best and most effective approaches to improving combat capabilities and the quality of military professionalism. Most programs of instructions were comprehensive and responded to every level or type of training. However, tactical subjects had not been fully developed to place the students in the actual context of the war. They also were not adequately tailored to meet the flexible requirements of a double-faceted war which combined conventional large-unit operations with unconventional warfare at the small-unit level. More emphasis should have been placed on the variety of terrain configurations and the best tactics to be used in each. The nature of the war and the rules of warfare developed by the Communists were not always properly exploited to serve as instructional materials.

All of these shortcomings in training stemmed from the shortage of experienced instructors and the lack of a program management system at the Central Training Command. In-place training was almost nonexistent. The time between operations was therefore all used for rest, refitting, and routine maintenance. Although unit refresher training was scheduled

yearly to be conducted by schools and training centers, it was seldom strictly enforced because of unit understrength problems and operational requirements.

In general the improvement and modernization process brought about wide stimulation among the RVNAF ranks, making combat units feel more confident of their capabilities. However, the major shortcoming of these programs lay in the "express" speed with which they were implemented. It also seemed that our concern was primarily to keep up with modernization trends of Communist forces rather than stay ahead of them. Had these programs been initiated several years earlier, we believe that the RVNAF performance would have been much better.

The logistic improvement program in particular was comprehensive and realistic. It stimulated confidence in our troop units in the RVNAF logistic system which had been overshadowed by the gigantic U.S. logistic organization in South Vietnam and its propensity for lavish support. It also helped the RVNAF achieve self-sufficiency in the management of supply, maintenance, transportation, and construction functions, thereby reducing dependence on U.S. logistic units and advisers and the expenditures and delays of the offshore rebuild program. It was only regrettable that we had to wait eight years before embarking on this realistic and productive venture.

The achievements of the RVNAF improvement and modernization programs could be measured by challenges succesfully met after 1969. The greater these challenges were, the more self-assured the RVNAF felt of their combat capabilities which were effectively supported by U.S firepower and mobility. The Cambodian incursion, the Laos cross-border operation, and the successful confrontation with NVA units during the 1972 Easter Offensive were three major challenges which demonstrated the success of Vietnamization.

The Cambodian Incursion

The change of leadership in Cambodia during March 1970 provided a most welcome opportunity for both the RVN and U.S. to reduce the problem of Communist sanctuaries and infiltration in Cambodia. The new Cambodian government's policies were harsh against Communist encroachment. Not only did it demand the withdrawal of NVA-VC troops from its soil, the new government also denied the access of Kompong Som, a major Cambodian port, to Communist vessels which had been delivering war materials for enemy forces in the Mekong Delta, MR-3 and most of MR-2.

Whether separate or conducted in cooperation and coordination with U.S. forces, our cross-border operations into Cambodia were timely planned and well executed. In retrospect we can say that all of these operations were a tactical and strategic success. They had helped both the RVN and U.S. achieve two major objectives. First, our forces destroyed or seriously disrupted most enemy sanctuaries along the Cambodian border, which effectively brought the war further away from South Vietnam's populated areas. Second, these operations bought more time for the Vietnamization program to proceed. As his major units were driven deeper into Cambodia and his sanctuaries neutralized, the enemy lost a major source of support for his local and guerrilla forces. More favorable conditions were thereby created for our pacification and development efforts to succeed. This challenge also made the RVNAF feel more confident and allowed the uneventful redeployment of 150,000 U.S. troops.

Tactically speaking, most objectives contemplated were fully attained. Enemy base areas were seized and important supply caches discovered, evacuated or destroyed. The enemy's communication and logistic system in the Cambodian border area suffered such a beating that it required from six months to one year to rehabilitate. The amount of ammunition captured and destroyed in-place during two months of operations was equivalent to the enemy's consumption during 1969. Although there were no engagements with major enemy units, the casualties suffered by the enemy would take him from four to six months to replace.