

MEMORANDUM

October 23, 1964

Subject: Counter-Insurgency Terms, Objectives and Operations

I. Introduction:

This paper addresses itself to the subject of operational definitions of pacification and other related terms commonly used in Vietnam; and to the processes themselves. It has special reference to the provocative and stimulating paper, "Toward an Operational Definition of Pacification," dated 6 October 1964, by William N. Turpin, but it is hoped that it may be usefully read with or without reference to that paper.

II. Terminology:

More in keeping with civilian than military practice, counter-insurgency discussions frequently employ words or terms without clear reference to their definition, if indeed, an adequate definition exists. Too often, the user of a word assumes a definition for it based on plans or conditions he assumes to exist, with the result that there are almost as many meanings as users of the word. This condition is made understandable by the lack of accepted, acceptable counter-insurgency doctrine; but it means that any intelligent discussion must be ~~prefaced~~ by definitions of the words used. Following are suggested, hopefully operationally useful, definitions of some of the more often used, and abused, terms.

A. Pacification: This obviously refers to the processes, actions, and activities necessary, useful, or desirable in rendering an area (which need not be sharply delineated geographically) pacified. The question then becomes: When can an area be considered pacified? A definition of a pacified area useful to counter-insurgency discussion would be: An area in which there is adequate effective government representation, where there is neither any significant use of force, nor any present capability for its organized use, against the representatives of government. For this definition to be operationally useful, all three "legs" must be carefully observed, i.e.:

1. There must be adequate effective government representation. Obviously, unless this is insisted upon, an area wholly insurgent governed might well be considered pacified. Certainly it should be peaceful enough until, and unless, government forces arrived to break the peace. Equally significantly, only continuing government presence can assure that an area will remain pacified. "Adequate and effective government representation" might well be defined as: Resident, functioning, government personnel competent and sufficient to carry on the proper activities and services of government, including protection of the lives and property of the people, and detection of

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subversive efforts and actually doing these things.

2. There must be no significant use of force against the representatives of government. This is certainly self-explanatory; more, it is most easily recognizable--but only if there is adequate government presence. Clearly, it does not preclude occasional banditry, nor occasional acts of violence for non-political reasons against individual representatives of government; it does mean that government representatives, military or civilian, should be able to move, and should move, freely throughout the area at all hours without being offered violence.
3. There must be no present capability for the organized use of force against the representatives of government --or indeed against any individuals or groups. "Present" and "organized" are the operational words here, in a counter-insurgency situation. Wherever there are people, there is a capability for the use of force, as recent riots in the U.S. have demonstrated. Almost anywhere and any time, capable agitators can precipitate mob violence. In counter-insurgency one cannot consider an area pacified unless one is sure that there is not an organization of the insurgents existing, but lying low there, awaiting either the opportune moment to take the offensive, or a requirement to protect insurgent-used installations or facilities. The base areas most useful to insurgents are those which are at least well-populated (if not, indeed urban) and which appear totally peaceful.

B. Security, or Secure Area: As used in counter-insurgency, these terms may refer either to a peaceful or pacified area or a situation; or to one where government armed forces have such an actual or (more usually) apparent preponderance of numbers and capability as virtually to preclude acts of violence by the insurgents or their sympathizers. "Security" is always relative, but it is too often treated as an absolute, thus too often making its use misleading and ultimately disappointing; it would be well to eschew the word. Instead, an area might be called wholly, partially, or not at all pacified; lives and property, government or private, considered relatively safe or unsafe. Better still, if one must classify an area, is to use its relative safety or unsafety to the enemy.

There is another kind of security which must be considered, the safety of those who help or support the government. This

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cannot be achieved by protecting them from contact with the VC; it can be achieved by keeping their help or support secret. The general failure to achieve and maintain "secure" contact with such individuals is one of the most striking failures of the war. Only when a real, intelligent, effort is made to do this will the benefits of efforts to secure popular support be realized. Give friends a chance to help without "sticking their necks out" and the results will be most surprising.

C. Control, or Controlled: Whether used as nouns, verbs, adverbs or adjectives, these are the most vicious, most misleading, and, in fact, the most meaningless words in the counter-insurgency vocabulary in Vietnam today. As concepts applied to the government effort, they are counter-productive, for it is at best ludicrous, at worst self-deceiving, to conceive of a government of, by, and for, the people "controlling" the people. To speak as though this were its function is to deny basic American beliefs and give weight to the insurgent's propaganda. This is not to say that a government cannot legitimately seek to control some specified activities, some special small groups of people, or areas. It does mean that controls which directly affect large or majority elements of the population are useful, effective, or even possible only when the affected elements help to enforce the controls, or at least are almost completely in support of the government.

An area can be described as controlled only when one has an objective definition of "control" and objective, meaningful standards of measurement and comparison. One could establish arbitrary criteria, e.g.: "x" number of patrols, each of "y" strength in area of "z" square kilometers and "z" population over a period of "t" duration produce "n" encounters. Probably one experienced in the field could work out tables of values for "x", "y", and "z" which would permit meaningful objective analysis, if one could also set a standard for measuring the ability, discipline, and aggressiveness of the troops involved; if proper counter-insurgency patrol techniques suited to the terrain and population patterns were uniformly employed; and if one knew the insurgent's intentions and capabilities. Many other comparably meaningless quantifying criteria are possible, according to the degree of control desired to establish, reaching to extremes of self-degradation automatically practiced by civilians encountered, but they would not measure progress toward the ultimate objective, the establishment of useful, responsible self-government.

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There is, perhaps, more justification for speaking of areas as controlled by the insurgents, and seeking thus to measure government ineffectiveness. Even here the term is likely to be counter-productive, for the tendency is to equate insurgent control with voluntary support for the insurgents. The people are then seen as enemies, or, at best, as people to whom the benefits of government must be denied lest they benefit also the insurgents.

To sum up; efforts at control, applied generally to the people against their will, represent a concept generally as incompatible with U.S. policy and U.S. objectives as it is with successful counter-insurgency. Control by the insurgents is meaningful only as evidence of government failure, and use of the term is likely to engender the mistaken belief that those controlled should be treated as enemies.

D. Enemy: Too little thought has been given to the question of who should be regarded as enemy. It seems generally taken for granted by most Westerners, and by too many unthinking indigenous leaders, that the insurgents and all who support them are "enemy" to be killed or captured. This is dangerously wrong. A government which the U.S., or those who share or seek to emulate our ideals, can support is a government which can seek to kill its citizens without trial only to prevent imminent, willful injury to life or property.

A supportable government can, and must, seek only to take custody of (and, if possible, to convert), those who actively seek its overthrow. Beyond these limits it cannot go without risking its claim to represent, and to the support of, the governed. In practice, it seems that government forces, unable to effect capture, may safely seek to kill or wound those armed men who try to flee from an actual encounter. Beyond this due legal procedure is usually essential. Insurgents and their supporters not killed in combat are misguided citizens, subject to punishment only after trial and conviction,--and better converted than condemned.

E. Dominated: A useful, if too often loosely used term. An area might appropriately be said to be dominated by government, or by the insurgents, when the residents can openly support the dominant party without much fear of prompt reprisals from the other. An area not so "dominated" must be considered contested.

F. Clear and Hold: A concept, seemingly attractive, once defined as a "military operation" by COPROR (the U.S. Committee on Provincial Rehabilitation), generally considered by those using the term to refer to military defense of an area from

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which active Viet Cong units have been driven. In the past, so-called "clear-and-hold" operations have tied down large troop elements to a virtually static defense, or worse, to the forcible detention in "strategic hamlets" of the families of active Viet Cong.

Clearing an area of organized insurgent elements is certainly desirable; it may properly be spoken of as glowingly and meaningfully as eulogies of home and early motherhood--accomplishing it is rather more difficult. "Clearing" an area can be defined as driving out of it, or destroying, all operational armed guerrilla forces. The effect is transitory--they cannot be expected to stay out. Nevertheless the effort, if so conducted as to avoid harassment of civilians, is valuable, for it not only adds to the discomforts and dangers of guerrilla life, it also gains time which can be used for positive action to render return more hazardous for the guerrilla. Clearing should be attempted wherever and wherever personnel are available.

"Holding" is another matter. Too often it is thought of as a static defense, virtually the establishment of a perimeter, to keep the guerrilla out, and the residents in. This is, at best, a waste of troops; at worst, (and too often, it turns out worst) it invites destruction of troops and cooperating civilians at an occasion of the guerrilla's choosing.

Undeniably, government has the duty of protecting the governed, especially if a substantial percentage support the government, (or, if, as in the Philippines, even in the combat areas, the administration wants their votes.) Accordingly, areas must increasingly be made too dangerous for the guerrilla's operations. To achieve this involves three major activities.

1. Civilian support of government by civilian participation in their own defense. This means civilians providing timely information on guerrillas and their supporters, and participating actively in semi-military defense units (e.g., hamlet militia) and in contraband control efforts.
2. Government presence and activity in the area, to provide government services, collect and use information, and, above all, to reinforce any points under guerrilla attack.

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3. Active military patrol operations outside the area, to make approach to it, or escape from it, unacceptably hazardous to the guerrilla.

The provision of effective protection to a partially pacified area can be called "holding" it. However, the term "clear-and-hold" is so susceptible to misinterpretation, so conducive to "Maginot Line mentality" that it would be better to abandon the phrase altogether.

G. Protected Area: This term is suggested to be used to refer to a "cleared" area, when there is a real and continuing effort to make it unacceptably dangerous for the guerrilla to enter. It should be understood that this effort can be useful and successful only when there is aggressive patrolling outside the area, and effective government exploitation of civilian support inside the area.

H. Oil Spot: An antique French term (apparently dating from the last century,) currently undergoing revival. It refers to the expansion of pacified areas, (and, in current usage in Vietnam, to intensive pacification efforts within them.) In itself the term is not objectionable, especially if the extension of such areas is thought of as a gradual process, rather than as extension of the perimeter by thrusting out salients. In practice, the term connotes defensive, perimeter concepts, and too often denotes ill-advised efforts at "controlling" the population, and "rooting out the VC infrastructure with a fine-tooth comb." Like these concepts (and the efforts to put them into practice) the term should be dropped.

I. "Root our the VC infrastructure": An appealing, pictorial, and popular phrase well-suited to press reporting of anti-criminal political (and police) promises - and with a nice suggestion of AID programmers' phraseology - but a concept unsuited to realistic counter-insurgency thinking, and one certain to be largely counter-productive if seriously attempted.

Only unabashedly totalitarian governments, Communist or colonialist, with relatively unlimited resources, can seriously think of, or attempt, killing or capturing most of the insurgents and their supporters. Efforts in this direction which are less than wholesale extermination or incarceration inevitably strengthen the insurgent's cause,

since the damage (or at best, the irritation) they cause to the "innocent" rapidly converts them into opponents. As said before, government can legitimately act only against those who seek its overthrow (or violate laws clearly approved by the people). Even then, especially in political matters, and especially in Southeast Asia, forgiveness for those who repent is usually the wiser justice. Former VC supporters in an area under pacification should not be punished for past offenses, (unless these are common crimes where proof of guilt satisfactory to the community is available) nor should they be deprived of the protection and benefits of the government. If government appears to accept pledged loyalty, if government presence remains, and government intelligence efforts are adequate, ninety percent of the infrastructure will rot away. The remaining ten percent will be exposed by intelligence actions, and legally (or, occasionally, covertly and extra-legally) eliminated.

Mass arrests, wholesale searches, and other seemingly easy methods of "population control" can only strengthen opposition to the government. Forget this term, and all that it implies.

J. Build: A new term, broader and psychologically more sound than "rehabilitation," which it should replace. Building a strong nation and a stable popular government, responsive to the legitimate aspirations of the governed, effective in protecting the rights of all, is the very essence of effective counter-insurgency, a prerequisite to its progress.

Building, in this sense is of primary importance. In terms of the present situation in Vietnam this means the creation of new institutions, new facilities, and new opportunities; always with priority on those having maximum political value. It can, and should, include new industries and urban housing, as well as roads, bridges, and canals. It must especially emphasize the building of political and social institutions; the expansion of self-government as rapidly as its responsibilities are understood and accepted; the extension of government services, agricultural, medical, financial, etc., as far as possible.

The only acceptable limitation to building efforts is an absolute shortage of human and material resources. Priorities will be necessary to insure effective accomplishment, but the goal should be to do everything possible everywhere. This may

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called, and is, indeed, a "shotgun" approach - quite properly so, for there is no target more suited to the shotgun than the insurgent. Obviously, "pacified" areas must receive adequate continuing service or they will not remain pacified. To insure this, priority of attention must be given them; priority for new action should usually be given to unpacified areas. Desirably, building should precede, not follow, the troops unless the safety of the builders makes troop presence imperative.

III. Objective:

Military theory, and politicians' practice alike stress "the importance of the objective." Too often in much too close an element - the capture of the next hill, or winning the next election, is seen as the objective. Establishing a workable peace, or sound government, the proper objectives, are scarcely considered. This may be good tactics, but it is catastrophic strategy.

Nowhere is such short-sightedness more prevalent or more pernicious than in counter-insurgency. There is a tendency to see pacifying an area, killing VC, building schools, or any of an hundred disparate activities not merely as a worthwhile minor objective (which it may be) but, according to the bias or assignment of the beholder, as the objective.

The objective of counter-insurgency policies and programs of all US agencies must be to serve the US interest by furthering the establishment of stable popular government responsive to the legitimate and feasible aspirations of the governed. Measures directed solely at a lesser goal will not be effective against a well-established insurgency; measures not compatible with this ultimate goal constitute a betrayal of American beliefs.

These are strong words, but they are borne out by American experience from the days of our Revolution to the happenings of the last three years in Vietnam. When the emphasis was on constructive building toward this goal (however poorly it was implemented) we began to win the war; when emphasis shifted in mid-1963 to repression, we began to lose it again - although it took the Viet Cong longer to realize this than it did the few experienced American observers. (Parenthetically, it should be noted that another major contributing factor in the reverses of late 1963 and 1964 was the relinquishment to GVN of substantial control over pacification funds indirectly derived from US aid.) Highly qualified observers believe that the relatively unsupported provincial "building" efforts which have continued since the Nov. coup have been the major factor in preventing complete collapse of organized government there.

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IV. Counter-Insurgency Operations:

Counter-insurgency operations should be targeted at the ultimate objective; but they must also take into account the threat which the insurgents pose. The situation of the counter-insurgency planner has been likened to that of a construction supervisor who must complete, by a too-close date, his half-finished building, and at the same time, with little additional help, fight a fire which threatens to consume it.

Insurgents, who profess primary concern for the welfare of the people, appeal to, and seek to magnify, dissatisfaction with the existing government, and/or conditions which they blame on it. At the same time, but secondarily, they seek by every possible means to eliminate or render ineffective the instruments and constructive efforts of that government. Whether it be in China or Cuba, Vietnam or Venezuela, the principal effort is to win the minds of the uncommitted, and to destroy the will to resist of their opponents.

Counter-insurgents must meet, not evade, the challenges of the insurgents, using our techniques, not theirs. The free world has far greater resources, if it recognizes and uses them. As the insurgents fight with ideas, so must we; they can only promise good government, more schools, we can help the people achieve them; they must operate secretly, we can operate openly as well as covertly and with infinitely superior technology. We must act constructively, not destructively. This means meeting (and defeating) false promises with actual accomplishment, not with empty boasts. They can use terror; we cannot - but we can meet it with justice and mercy, which are far more effective.

The first action of a government faced by a developed insurgency should be the establishment of a credo, a declaration of government's purpose, which should at least cast doubt on the validity of the insurgents' announced causes. Such a declaration must be followed immediately by actions compatible with and effectual toward, the declared purpose.

Action against the insurgents is only one of the operations necessary to establish confidence in the intentions and abilities of government. This military action, protecting the builders and the structure being built, is essential, but its counter-insurgency value is far less than that of actions remedying the ills which the insurgents allege to be the *casus belli*. Constructive action, "building," is especially important in Vietnam where the responsibility of government for the welfare of the governed has been so long (10 years!) proclaimed by government itself; and where the principal appeal of the insurgent Viet Cong has been for the elimination of the alleged inefficiency, corruption, and abusiveness, of government officials.

Necessary counter-insurgency operations, planned with due regard for reality and for the ultimate objective, fall into four principal categories. Efforts must be made, simultaneously, over as broad a front (preferably over the whole insurgency - infected area) as resources will permit to:

- A. Improve, at all echelons, government efficiency, services, and responsiveness to the people and their needs. Essential to this is the early, wide-spread initiation of effective local self-government.
- B. Fight the armed guerrilla whenever and wherever they may be found (while avoiding damage to lives and property of non-combatants.)
- C. Disseminate information about the purposes and accomplishments of government. (There is need also for dissemination of information about the anti-people activities of the insurgents, but this is secondary.)
- D. Establish, protect, and use the product of intelligence nets.

These are the imperatives, the sine qua non of successful counter-insurgency. Each of the four can have some material effect alone, but all are necessary to success. (It is amazing, seen in retrospect, the degree of success which was achieved in Vietnam in 1962-63 when the first of these four types of operations was being indifferently well done, and the others generally accomplished poorly, if at all.) Progress in one facilitates progress in the others; when real progress is made in each the self-accelerating spiral to victory is established.

To attempt to delineate the activities necessary and appropriate in the four stated operational fields, in Vietnam, is obviously far beyond the scope of this memorandum.

Indeed, the reader concerned with jurisdictional questions may feel that this paper already goes too far afield from AID interests. However even as anthropology has been defined as "the study of man, embracing woman," so too must the study of insurgency and counter-insurgency be recognized as study of a total effort, in which all elements must be considered at once.

In the area of operations with which AID is most concerned much as been learned and accomplished, and some effective programs still exist. The appropriate program for rural operations was established in USOM-Vietnam in late 1962, and now needs only support and the restoration of confidence and facilities, notably complete control of some of the pacification funds. The need for increased attention to urban centers and industrial development has been seen, and plans to meet these needs are understood to be in preparation. An effective program for assistance at top echelons in improving government strength and effectiveness was operational 1954-56; the requirements and appropriate actions to meet current conditions and requirements have been outlined recently in two limited-circulation papers, "Concept for Victory in Vietnam." and "Building a Political Base for Government in Vietnam."

This war in Vietnam can and must be won - to do so seems to pose no problems of substance. The techniques have been tested and proven in more countries than one, the requirement is their intelligent selection and application.

CTRBohannan
Consultant