questioned whether this intervening bureaucratic layer was a net help or hindrance when Vietnam was our only war. Apparently, "serious consideration had been given during 1964 to eliminating CINCPAC from the chain of command between Washington and Saigon."28

All the civilian agencies dealt directly with their missions in Vietnam. Overcentralized management and unwieldy procedures requiring constant reference to Washington inhibited flexible responses, especially in AID programs.29 Forrestal and Hilsman reported to President Kennedy, in an "Eyes Only" annex to their early 1962 trip report, that "the real trouble . . . is that the rather large U.S. effort in South Vietnam is managed by a multitude of independent U.S. agencies and people with little or no overall direction."30 It remains today a conventional "country team" operation, with the Ambassador the acknowledged senior, and usually able to veto or modify those policies or proposals of other agencies to which he objects. He keeps abreast of developing problems and deals with interagency disputes through weekly meetings of a Mission Council composed of the top U.S. officials in Vietnam. (The Council was established by Ambassador Taylor.) But, in general, no American Ambassador has imposed positive, consistent unified control on U.S. agency operation in Vietnam. As Thompson remarks, "Americans are averse to the appointment of pro-consuls but that is what the situation demanded."31

During 1958-1961, Ambassador Durbrow was several times unable to overcome disagreements with the MAAG. His successor, Nolting, apparently sought greater authority to pull together the growing U.S. civilian and military efforts, but was "rebuffed."32 By late 1963, when Lodge took over as Ambassador, the U.S. Mission in Saigon was already one of our biggest, and the problems of pulling it together loomed even larger. It is regrettable that Lodge was no manager, as he understood the Vietnam problem better than most. By 1964 the President, more concerned over the Saigon management problem, urged on Lodge "a top ranking officer who is wholly acceptable to you as chief of staff for country team operations. My own impression is that this should be either a newly appointed civilian of wide governmental experience and high standing, or General Westmoreland. . . ."33 But Lodge resisted.
When Lodge left in mid-1964, the need for stronger management played a role in the President's selection of the then Chairman of the JCS, Maxwell Taylor, to replace him. Apparently McNamara had much to do with recommending Taylor and in successfully urging that the nation's foremost soldier be put in unquestioned charge of the entire U.S. effort. That President Johnson agreed is clear from the unprecedented authority he gave Taylor in a special letter. Having reaffirmed the Ambassador's overall responsibility to oversee and coordinate all U.S. activities in-country, the President added: "I wish it clearly understood that this overall responsibility includes the whole U.S. military effort in South Vietnam and authorize the degree of command and control that you consider appropriate." Taylor also was given a strong deputy, U. Alexis Johnson, to assist him in the newly created post of Deputy Ambassador.

But they apparently became far too preoccupied with the chaotic succession of coups in Saigon to make much use of these unprecedented powers. In fact, General Taylor's comments in retrospect as well as his actions in Saigon make clear that he saw little need for major changes in the U.S. organization in Vietnam. Rather, as a professional military man, he was more concerned over whether his new mandate "could be interpreted to conflict with the responsibility of ... CINCPAC ... and the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the conduct of military operations, and thus would ... put General Westmoreland in the unhappy position of having two military masters." So, rather than exploit his unique directive, he took pains to assure these military ex-colleagues that he did not intend to disturb the existing arrangements.

When Lodge returned in August 1965, he was given a mandate similar to Taylor's but never used it either. Lodge did bring out General Lansdale again, with a small but talented team designated the Mission Liaison Group, to work with the GVN on pacification and political action. But a combination of bureaucratic hassles undercut Lansdale's role, and he left in frustration in 1968.

The need for stronger management kept being raised in Washington and was usually resisted by the Mission. For example, in March 1965, when General Johnson visited Saigon, putting U.S. civilian pacification support under MACV was considered but rejected by Ambassador Taylor.
and General Westmoreland. The Army staff's PROVN study of March 1966 also recommended that the U.S. Ambassador be designated a "single manager" with operational control over the entire U.S. effort in Vietnam, and that he be provided a supraagency planning staff to help him.

In the event, divided responsibility in the U.S. Mission in Saigon persists to this day, with only two significant exceptions. The *Pentagon Papers* aptly describe the problem:

Skeptics have said that whenever things are going poorly "Americans reorganize." But the opponents of various reorganization schemes have been unable to defend the existing Mission Council system, which must definitely be rated one of Vietnam's casualties. Not since the beginning of the "country team" concept in the 1950s (Mission Council being another name for the same structure) had the concept been tested the way it was to be tested in Vietnam. The pressure of events, the tension, the unprecedented size of the agencies, and a host of other factors made the system shaky even under the strong manager Maxwell Taylor. Under the man who didn't want to manage, Lodge, it began to crumble. Each agency had its own ideas on what had to be done, its own communication channels with Washington, its own personnel and administrative structure -- and starting in 1964-65, each agency began to have its own field personnel operating under separate and parallel chains of command. This latter event was ultimately to prove the one which gave reorganization efforts such force, since it began to become clear to people in Washington and Saigon alike that the Americans in the provinces were not always working on the same team, and that they were receiving conflicting or overlapping instructions from a variety of sources in Saigon and Washington.

After many fits and starts, Washington did finally force a consolidation of all U.S. pacification support efforts in mid-1967 (see Chapter VII), which also resulted in unifying all U.S. field advisers -- civil and military -- under MACV. Earlier, a small Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO) was created in 1965 to pull together U.S. civil/military psychological operations at the Saigon level (though MACV retained responsibility for tactical psyops). Interestingly, Barry Zorthian, the first civilian director of JUSPAO, is an outspoken critic of the lack of unified management structure:
Some of the most astute observers in Vietnam insist that the greatest contribution made by the Viet Cong to the art of insurgency has been organization -- and there is much to be said for the theory. Conversely, it might be argued with considerable validity that the greatest American weakness in Vietnam was organization. In effect, we sought to conduct our portion of the effort for many years through the mechanism of a bureaucratic structure designed for normal government operations in Washington. We worked closely with a military that, like the military in all underdeveloped countries, was intensely political -- and told our own military to stay out of the political aspects, a restriction our own military accepted much too willingly. Similarly, our civilian agencies -- State, AID, and USIA -- avoided the military aspects of the effort for too long. Only the CIA tried to bridge the gap but it was too inhibited by its very nature to serve the purpose. It was not until the late stages of the war that some of these artificial barriers began to break down -- and in truth, we must recognize that the essential erasing of agency distinctions was never complete, nor was command and responsibility in Vietnam ever truly unified under one chief.

WEAKNESS OF GVN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

The same attempt to cope with the unconventional via a conventionally organized management structure typified the GVN as well. Basically, the GVN attempts to this day to deal with a life-and-death struggle through a traditional array of French-style ministries only loosely pulled together at the top. Diem inherited a fledgling French-style army and civil administration, centralized in character. He and Nhu centralized it even further, and otherwise perverted it for their own political ends. Archaic civil service procedures, mostly inherited from the French, have been another impediment to timely, flexible responses. The military war is run by the Joint General Staff, which really reports to no one but the President. The civilian ministries deal mostly with the Prime Minister.

Throughout U.S. reports and critiques from the late Fifties on run criticisms of this inadequate GVN organization and administration. But over fifteen years the U.S. has made little sustained effort to press for changes that were repeatedly seen as essential -- except in the regular military establishment and, belatedly, in pacification. As early as September 1960, a JCS-approved CINCPAC study had called
for encouraging the GVN "to adopt a national emergency organization to integrate civil and military resources under centralized direction for the conduct of counterinsurgency operations." A detailed draft plan was sent to MAAG stressing the need to appoint a National Emergency Council and a Director of Operations for this purpose, and to formulate a National C-I Plan. The GVN complied on paper, but little happened.

Then the Rusk-McNamara Memorandum of November 11, 1961, recommending action on the Taylor Report, proposed that in return for more U.S. support the GVN be required to undertake "establishment of appropriate governmental wartime agencies with adequate authority to perform their functions effectively" and "overhaul of the military establishment and command structure so as to create an effective military organization for the prosecution of the war." This was never done by Diem in any meaningful way. Galbraith saw such reforms as decisive, and in the event he proved right:

We have just proposed to help Diem in various ways in return for a promise of administrative and political reforms. Since the administrative (and possibly political) ineffectuality are the strategic factors for success, the ability to get reforms is decisive. With them the new aid and gadgetry will be useful. Without them the helicopters, planes and advisers won't make appreciable difference.

Like the U.S. the GVN has attempted few organizational innovations in conflict management. True, from the Interministerial Committee on Strategic Hamlets created by Diem in February 1962, through Khanh's making Hoan his Vice Premier for Pacification and creating a shadow National Security Council in 1964, there have been recurrent efforts to create a GVN supervisory machinery. But until recently this existed more on paper than in practice. At various times interagency provincial, regional, and central pacification committees were created or revived. But not until 1969 did a GVN Central Pacification and Development Council acquire shape and substance, and meet regularly under the personal aegis of the President and Prime Minister. Equally important, it has been given a full-time staff (57 at end-1971) under
a competent Secretary General (Lt. Gen. Hôn), which prepares plans and monitors performance. Another notable departure was the creation of a Ministry of Revolutionary Development in late 1965 (a much expanded version of Diem's old Civic Action Directorate) to spark a revived pacification effort. It is discussed in Chapter VII.

WHY SUCH FRAGMENTED CONFLICT MANAGEMENT?

Why did both the U.S. and the GVN settle for such conventional, diffuse, and fragmented management structures -- in contrast to an enemy who practiced so high a degree of centralized control over all of his activities? Here was one more example of perceptions outrunning performance. The truism that a complex politico-military insurgency conflict like that in Vietnam required a multifaceted response was early recognized. Thus it is surprising that, when we saw this need so clearly, and so many advocated at various times management changes to help generate better GVN and U.S. performance, we did so little to create the necessary machinery. As the Pentagon Papers demonstrate, senior officials did recurrently focus on this problem. However, we didn't ever do much about it.

In part, especially in the period before U.S. intervention, this was a consequence of the gradualism inherent in the U.S. approach to Vietnam. We slid into Vietnam by stages, in contrast to World War II or Korea. Not until late in the day did our Vietnam problems appear so overwhelming as to demand exceptional efforts to deal with them. But even then we remained reluctant to take the obvious managerial steps which some advocated. Cooper attributes this reluctance to a persistent belief that the war was likely to be over soon, once the U.S. intervened. In this case, "why wrench the system?" However, long after we realized that this hope was an illusion, the same reluctance persisted. So we must search further for the reasons why.

In part, as the Pentagon Papers show, it is because we simply did not focus enough on how best to translate policy into performance in Vietnam. The structuring of adequate conflict management was not given much priority among the many critical issues we confronted. Somehow neither the U.S. nor the GVN at various levels seemed to stress sufficiently the need for management reorganization to optimize the
multifaceted response which their perceptions told them was essential to an effective counterinsurgency effort. As Thompson points out, the sheer wealth of available resources also lowered the premium on their optimum use. "In Vietnam resources were constantly substituted for efficiency and organization."

The Americans at any rate were conscious from early on of the need to restructure the GVN to confront more effectively the challenges it faced. Why they failed for so long to have much impact is discussed in Chapter III, along with the reasons for the U.S. failure to use its leverage very effectively. Also at play was the reluctance of leadership groups at various times to risk redistributing power, notably in the case of Diem. Moreover, it must be granted that the GVN faced the dual task of governing and fighting, whereas the enemy could gear his whole organization in the South to defeating the GVN.

But again institutional constraints help provide at least partial explanations as to why neither the U.S. nor the GVN optimally structured itself for the task it faced. Bureaucratic inertia -- sheer reluctance to change accepted ways of doing business except slowly and incrementally -- appears to have been a major factor. The organizational politics involved in shifting the distribution of power also played a role, each proposal for change arousing the protective instincts of the various departments, agencies, and ministries concerned. These institutions had long since carved out their respective operational areas, and were generally careful not to violate the conventional dividing lines between their responsibilities.

Such a dividing line was especially noticeable between military and civilian agencies. By and large, the civilian agencies steered clear of the military's business and did not exert much influence on the conduct of military operations. In turn, the military long eschewed involvement in police and pacification matters, which they regarded as civilian business. When jurisdictional issues arose, as in the case of CIA use of U.S. Special Forces personnel, these were usually resolved by a return to the traditional relationships.

Reluctance to change the traditional relationship of civilian versus military leadership, even in a highly atypical conflict, was
also a powerful institutional constraint. This is not a question of ultimate military responsiveness to civilian authority, which was rarely at issue in Vietnam, but rather one of relative spheres of responsibility. The British have a long tradition of subordinating the military to the local civil authorities in less than all-out conflict situations. In contrast, the U.S. military have had little such experience, and they have always been insistent on an independent role, especially in wartime.

The President and Secretary of Defense made the final decisions on overall personnel ceilings and on the political constraints within which the military should operate outside South Vietnam (e.g., choosing eligible bombing targets in North Vietnam or deciding to suspend, and then to halt, bombing the North). However, they never infringed on the traditional military control over the conduct of the war inside South Vietnam. Nor did our ambassadors in Saigon. Many senior civilian officials in Saigon and Washington had distinct views on how to fight the war and often expressed their views, raised questions, requested studies, and the like. But by and large they left it to the military to decide how the war would be fought, even though they realized the political risks involved. The author at least cannot recall any major instances in which senior civilian officials (the President and White House staff, the State Department, the civilian leadership in DOD, or ambassadors in the field) directly intervened in the way the U.S. military ran its in-country war after 1965 (except in such admittedly civil/military fields as pacification). In commenting on McNamara's ambiguous role in the 1965 strategy debates (see Chapter VIII), the Pentagon Papers state that "From the records, the Secretary comes out much more clearly for good management than he does for any particular strategy."48

Also at work was an institutional constraint inherent in the traditional relationship between Washington and its commanders in the field. It is part of the operational code of U.S. military institutions, in particular, to give great latitude to the commander in the field so long as he stays within the broad strategic or policy guidance given him. Traditionally, one either backs up one's field commander
or changes him; hence, in the case of Vietnam, the JCS generally supported the field commander even when various individual JCS members had reservations. Thus the military tended to present a united front to the civilian leadership.

In effect, the military war inside South Vietnam was accorded "full autonomy," without much supervision from Washington. "Westmoreland was the field commander and, in accordance with the traditional dictates of professional courtesy, Washington would not attempt to second-guess him." During 1966-1968 at any rate, Washington did not issue COMUSMACV any new strategic guidance nor question the annual campaign plans which he submitted, despite the recommendations of General Taylor (who notes that COMUSMACV was thereby entitled to assume that his conduct of the war was wholly acceptable to Washington). In late 1966, the author pointed out the lack of any overall Washington directive to the field, and proposed a National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM). But the draft NSAM was pigeonholed because of agency efforts to insert too much special pleading.

As to the lack of management structure in Washington for dealing with Vietnam, Hoopes sees the problem as arising largely from the decline of the NSC machinery under Kennedy and then Johnson, and a parallel decline of longer-range policy planning. General Taylor similarly finds that the 1961 abolition of the NSC machinery led to a "lack of order" in addressing key security issues. But the NSC Planning Board, NSC Staff, and Operations Coordination Board had never been engaged in operational planning or follow-through. They were simply interagency coordinating bodies for broad policy papers or progress reports on their implementation. The author, who served in the NSC machinery under Eisenhower, believes that it would have proved wholly unsuited to the sort of conflict management under discussion here.

Cooper, another critic of how Washington ran the war, focuses on President Johnson's "compulsive secrecy" and his preference for "tight personal control and loosely structured organization." The personal style of presidents naturally affects the organizational machinery they prefer to utilize, but Washington's failure to organize war management was the result of far deeper factors than this. Moreover,
the record shows President Johnson and Secretary McNamara to have been far more sensitive to management problems than most other senior personalities involved. They proposed several major initiatives, which usually were either rebuffed or frustrated by more conventional-minded key officials in Washington and Saigon. The author also found President Johnson most receptive to the various proposals he made on both Washington and Saigon management.

U.S. AND GVN FIGHT TWO SEPARATE WARS

Yet another major organizational constraint affecting the way the U.S. and GVN fought the war was the lack of any interallied conflict management. Despite America's massive contribution to the combined effort, its relationship to the GVN has remained -- from top to bottom -- almost wholly advisory. While there were many proposals for and a few abortive experiments in combined machinery, the linkage between the U.S. and GVN has remained informal and ad hoc from the outset. This was more understandable in the days of Diem. But after 1965 and the U.S. buildup, we still fought what often seem in many respects -- especially militarily -- two separate wars. Generals Westmoreland and Abrams both rightly favored what they termed the "one war" concept. This applied more to integrating the various facets of the U.S. effort, however, than to unification of allied war management, which neither advocated.

Instead of the U.S. being too conventional in this instance, it was -- in the light of its Korean and World War II experience -- perhaps not conventional enough. The analogy to the Korean War comes quickly to mind. As the feebly South Korean (ROK) forces collapsed under the initial North Korean onslaught, a U.N. (really U.S.) command was created, and the ROK forces remained thereafter under unified command. A variant of this was the incorporation of Korean contingents directly into U.S. units (the KATUSA concept). General Ridgway has pointed out how, as CINCUNC, he was also able to secure the relief of unsatisfactory ROK unit commanders as a recognized command function.
The frustrating experience of General Stilwell in wartime China is also apposite. When Stilwell was chosen to become Chief of Staff to Chiang in the latter's capacity as Supreme Commander China Theater, he told Secretary of War Stimson that the whole success of his mission would depend on whether Chiang would turn over any part of his army to American command. Though Stilwell and the War Department kept pressing this issue, never more than a few Chinese divisions in Burma came under his command. Instead there ensued a frustrating struggle, in which Stilwell's pleas to let him use Lend-Lease as leverage to force the Chiang regime to perform were repeatedly denied by Washington. Not until mid-1944 did Roosevelt finally urge the Generalissimo to put Stilwell directly in command of all Chinese and U.S. forces. What he got instead, after much Chinese evasion, was Chiang's insistence on Stilwell's recall.

That the U.S. made no effort to develop full-scale machinery for interallied management before its direct intervention in 1965 is unsurprising. Our whole policy rationale was that this was the GVN's war. But various means of securing a greater U.S. role in GVN war management were recurrently considered, even before 1965. When in 1961 Diem was thinking about forming a National Emergency Council patterned on our NSC, State asked Nolting whether Diem would consider including on it "a mature and hard-headed American ... to participate in all decisions." Both the Taylor Report of October 1961 and the subsequent Rusk-McNamara Memorandum to the President called for individual U.S. administrators and advisers to be inserted "into the governmental machinery of SVN in types and numbers to be agreed upon by the two Governments." President Kennedy accepted Taylor's concept that the United States should move beyond an advisory effort to a limited partnership with the GVN, in which "we would expect to share in the decisionmaking process in the political, economic, and military fields as they affect the security situation." But Diem proved highly reluctant to risk looking like a U.S. puppet, and the U.S. backed away from enforcing that bargain. As Ambassador J. K. Galbraith, who was in Saigon at the time, prophetically cabled the President, there was no chance that Diem
would accept the reforms we were pressing on him, and no chance that we could achieve our aims unless we got rid of him.63

In the early Sixties Sir Robert Thompson proposed a Joint Operations Center on the Malayan model, to issue joint operational directives.64 By early 1964, U.S. realization of how badly the situation had deteriorated, and the demise of the xenophobic Diem, led to a suggestion that the United States go even further and assume command. Sir Robert Thompson recalls suggesting such a "proconsul" on the Malayan model to top Pentagon leaders, shortly before Maxwell Taylor became Ambassador. But McNamara, probably the man who raised the issue, retreated in the face of opposition from U.S. officials in Saigon. In a memorandum to the President, which in March 1964 became NSAM 288, he stated:

U.S. Taking Over Command. It has been suggested that the U.S. move from its present advisory role to a role that would amount in practice to effective command. Again, the judgment of all senior people in Saigon, with which we concur, is that the possible military advantages of such action would be far out-weighed by its adverse psychological impact. It would cut across the whole basic picture of the Vietnamese winning their own war [sic] and lay us wide open to hostile propaganda both within South Vietnam and outside. Moreover, the present responsiveness of the GVN to our advice -- although it has not yet reduced military reaction time -- makes it less urgent [sic]. At the same time, MACV is steadily taking actions to bring U.S. and GVN operating staffs closer together at all levels, including joint operating rooms at key command levels.65

A more modest variant raised during the dark days of 1964-1965 was to infuse Americans directly into the GVN and RVNAF structure to jack up performance. As U.S. frustration over poor Vietnamese performance grew after 1963, civilian officials in Washington began urging this expedient, usually against field reluctance. In May 1964 State argued that, since the Khanh regime was failing to translate its "good" plans into effective action, the U.S. should abandon its passive advisory role. It suggested a Joint GVN/U.S. Pacification Operations Committee to spur implementation of these plans, interlarding key GVN ministries
with U.S. officials, putting about ten American civil officials in each of seven lagging provinces, adding U.S. advisers to paramilitary units, and even putting some Americans down at district. Washington put on the agenda for the May 1964 Honolulu Conference such encadrement of U.S. civil and military personnel in the seven provinces; they were to be called "assistants" to GVN officials but would in fact "carry a major share of the burden of decision and action." At highest-level request, the JCS also studied encadrement of U.S. teams with the Civil Guard (GG) and Self Defense Corps (SDC) along the lines of the earlier ill-fated White Star Teams in Laos. But MACV poured cold water on this too.

Washington kept pressing such expedients, especially in connection with the feeble pacification effort. They were raised again with Ambassador Taylor in early April 1965 and included in NSAM 328. Soon thereafter Taylor was told that "the President has repeatedly emphasized his personal desire for a strong experiment in the encadrement of U.S. troops with the Vietnamese." Again MACV rejected the idea.

Washington also proposed integrating U.S. Army Civil Affairs teams experimentally into two province administrations, but Ambassador Taylor stepped on this as both destabilizing and duplicatory of what U.S. civilians were already doing. In the end, all that took place was a modest increase in U.S. advisers.

It is more surprising that joint command as well as encadrement (which would have forced some form of joint command) continued to get short shrift even after direct U.S. intervention in mid-1965, especially when it was the approaching collapse of ARVN forces that precipitated this fateful decision. Nighswonger cites a former MAAG chief who stated in 1965 that "he believed United States command in Vietnam was essential for victory." Even the new COMUSMACV, General Westmoreland, considered some form of U.S. command over ARVN units in his "Commander's Estimate" of March 1965, though he never actually proposed it.

Interestingly, combined command was also proposed by a Vietnamese, Prime Minister Quat, to Army Chief of Staff General H. K. Johnson during a Vietnam visit. General Johnson followed this up, when urging U.S. troop deployment in March 1965, by also recommending creation of
a joint command. Ambassador Taylor found Quat's ideas of how to do this hazy but his purpose "very clear."

He hopes by some joint command device to bring his maverick generals under the steadying influence of General Westmoreland. Taylor told him he sympathized with motive but had never hit upon a command arrangement which offered much hope of accomplishing this end. Although Quat's ideas are hard to disentangle, he seems to have in mind a mixed US/ARVN staff element reporting to General Westmoreland and a VN/C[ommand] Staff. He visualizes the staff element as a clearing house for joint studies which would pass recommendations on to the senior officers. By implication General Westmoreland would have the power of ultimate decision based upon an unofficial understanding which Quat hopes generals would accept. Quat concedes their acceptance far from certain. 73

Westmoreland promptly opposed this, preferring informal cooperation and coordination. 74 He thought full command integration should be deferred until some later time, when the GVN might be better disposed. He suggested instead a limited joint staff under a U.S. Brigadier General with a Vietnamese deputy, but Generals Thieu and Minh opposed even this. 75 Nonetheless, in mid-May McNamara authorized a formal combined command and staff. Since Ky and Thieu had just publicly condemned any such idea in press interviews, Taylor, Westmoreland, and CINCPAC again recommended against it on essentially local "political" grounds. As the Pentagon Papers put it,

It is relevant to ask why COMUSMACV (backed up without exception by the Ambassador and CINCPAC) uniformly opposed integrative measures designed to provide that which was and is almost an article of faith in the military profession — unity of command. U.S. troops in both World Wars and in Korea had fought under at least nominal command unity. There had been reservations for national integrity, to be sure, but the principle of unified command was both established and generally accepted. Why then did the U.S. military commander in Vietnam recommend against its adoption? The answer to this question is not to be found by an examination of military factors. The issue, rather, was a political one, as CINCPAC's message quoted above makes clear. The U.S. military leaders feared the exacerbations of US-SVN differences which they thought would accompany an overt Americanization of the war. They wished to increase U.S. influence in the conduct of the war but only
as a result of persuasion and example. They tended to eschew the use of leverage. A unified command arrangement would have provided — assuming that a U.S. officer would have been the overall commander — an open-and-obvious means by which to exercise leverage. The U.S. leaders in Saigon rejected its adoption for this reason.

The rejection of a unified military command is only one example of the tendency in 1965 to renounce leverage-oriented mechanisms at the very time that the U.S. was committing major land forces to the war. It was as though the U.S. increased its determination to avoid arrangements which smacked of direct, open leverage at the same time that the inadequacy of earlier, indirect measures was made obvious by the deployment to South Vietnam of U.S. ground combat forces.76

McNamara returned to the attack on July 20, 1965, in a memorandum to the President, calling this time for "a veto on major GVN commanders."77 According to General Taylor, "Many leading American officials, including some senior military officers" favored from the beginning of the U.S. troop buildup giving Westmoreland operational control over ARVN forces on the Korean War model. But Westmoreland and Taylor were opposed, and their view prevailed.78

Despite the growing U.S. commitment and the continuing frustrations over trying to get better Vietnamese performance, the combined command idea was rarely officially raised again. Even the PROVN study, which urged unified control of the U.S. effort in Washington and Saigon, played down this idea. When the author suggested it informally in 1966, McNamara reiterated Westmoreland's objections. The author again fruitlessly suggested it in his final report in April 1967 "as a means of getting more out of RVNAF. . . ."79 Under Secretary of State Katzenbach also raised it separately at the same time for the same reason, and repeated it in June.80 He apparently struck no spark either.

Various forms of encadrement were occasionally suggested again, usually by Washington. For example, in July 1967 Washington pushed for a Korean War-type augmentation of U.S. squads with two or three ARVN soldiers. This was rejected by MACV as unsound, as was a proposal to put U.S. officers in command of ARVN units.81

In the aftermath of the Tet Offensive and the felt need to galvanize ARVN in lieu of sending 200,000 more troops, OSD included in its
recommendations to the President a proposal that MACV be required to devise alternative arrangements short of joint command to give the U.S. "a greater role in ARVN employment." But again it was not highlighted and apparently got lost in the shuffle. The only experiments in encadrement were a few carried out by subordinate U.S. commanders in the field, notably the U.S. Marine Combined Action Platoons of 1965-1971.

The late John Paul Vann, who served longer in Vietnam than any other senior U.S. official, also believed that an integrated GVN/U.S. command structure could have produced major gains in effectiveness. He saw continuing poor ARVN performance as stemming primarily from failure in leadership rather than failures in organization, training, or logistics, and argued that the only short-term way to rectify this crucial shortcoming was a joint command structure. In November 1967 he actually proposed a detailed scheme, based on his field experience.

Why, if improving RVNAF performance was such a critical variable and RVNAF leadership so spotty, did neither the U.S. nor the GVN ever take more than a few minor steps in the direction of a unified command? The most frequent explanation is an essentially political one, such as that given by General Westmoreland:

I consistently resisted suggestions that a single, combined command could more efficiently prosecute the war. I believed that subordinating the Vietnamese forces to U.S. control would stifle the growth of leadership and acceptance of responsibility essential to the development of Vietnamese Armed Forces capable eventually of defending their country. Moreover, such a step would be counter to our basic objective of assisting Vietnam in a time of emergency and of leaving a strong, independent country at the time of our withdrawal. Subordination also might have given credence to the enemy's absurd claim that the United States was no more than a colonial power. I was also fully aware of the practical problems of forming and operating a headquarters with an international staff.83

Westmoreland also felt that MACV's close relationship with the JCS, his own intimate association with his Vietnamese opposite number, and the fact that the U.S. provided the bulk of RVNAF's equipment and logistic support plus much of its budget gave him so much informal
influence over RVNAF as to provide most of the advantages of joint command without its disadvantages. Among the latter were the extent to which U.S. forces might be robbed of independence of action because of participation in a combined command, and the pressures which could be generated through such a command for even greater U.S. commitments. There was also consistent U.S. concern lest the intensely nationalistic Vietnamese leaders reject any proposals for U.S. command over their forces. Rightly or wrongly, we remained highly sensitive to Vietnamese sensibilities regardless of the fact that the coup-installed leaders of 1963-1967 had no legitimized base.

But an institutional characteristic doubtless was also operative here: the preference of any organization (other things being equal) to operate as an autonomous homogeneous unit. Throughout U.S. participation in modern coalition warfare, this preference has been marked. Pershing in World War I insisted that U.S. forces should operate as soon as possible as a homogeneous field army instead of being brigaded with other allied formations. The same general practice was followed in World War II. Did American generals in Vietnam feel that to integrate RVNAF and U.S. forces on any scale would impair U.S. organizational integrity and effectiveness? Thompson similarly sees as one "great appeal" of the U.S. attrition strategy that "it did not involve the South Vietnamese [sic]. American military operations only required perfunctory co-ordination with corresponding South Vietnamese commands. In this way the war could be fought as an American war without the previous frustrations of co-operating with the Vietnamese."84

Whether some form of real combined command would have so materially improved RVNAF effectiveness as to have justified risking the disadvantages is legitimately debatable. COMUSMACV, his staff, and U.S. advisers at all levels unquestionably did exert great influence over RVNAF, especially on force structure, training, and tactics. There are also many examples of genuinely combined operations, though compared to the overall total they were the exception rather than the rule.

On the other hand, the evidence is overwhelming that RVNAF's often poor leadership and planning were critical weaknesses hampering its optimum employment, weaknesses that have persisted over the years.
Moreover, RVNAF has always formed the bulk of the overall allied order of battle (at all times larger than the allied total). Thus bringing the Vietnamese forces under vigorous U.S. leadership in a combined command at least at theater level might have greatly improved their effectiveness. Above all, it would have given the U.S. a greater say in the assignment and removal of senior RVNAF commanders, whose often indifferent quality was one of RVNAF's gravest weaknesses. The author for one believes that the post-Diem GVN, by then led by generals, would have accepted overall U.S. command -- especially in the dark days of 1965-1966. John Vann has stated that in informal soundings he also found a surprising consensus among Vietnamese that a combined command under U.S. leadership would be desirable.

A related issue was U.S. or combined command over the other allied forces, particularly the two plus South Korean divisions. COMUSMACV would have preferred to have them placed under his command, but Seoul was unwilling to do so, apparently for its own domestic political reasons.

LACK OF ADEQUATE OVERALL PLANS

Another consequence of the lack of either unified U.S. management or combined command was the corollary reduction of institutional incentive to develop comprehensive politico-military strategic plans for coping with the atypical problem of Vietnam. In January 1963, in their report to President Kennedy after a long trip to Vietnam, Forrestal and Hillsman singled this out as "the most serious lack."85 The continuing absence of much in the way of overall U.S. politico-military strategic planning in Washington or in the field is largely traceable to the sheer lack of any single locus of responsibility for preparing such plans.

It is not that this problem was neglected, but rather that most of the many plans which evolved were neither sufficiently comprehensive nor an adequate blueprint for operations. As early as 1954 the JCS had noted that U.S. aid to Vietnam should be based on an adequate overall strategic plan for its effective use. But little had been agreed upon (or even produced) by the time the U.S. decided, in late 1961, to increase aid under the "limited partnership" concept advocated by the
In 1960 Washington and CINCPAC had begun stressing the need for a comprehensive national-level plan along lines which make considerable sense in retrospect. By the end of the year, the U.S. country team in Saigon had produced a "C-I Plan for Vietnam" which called mainly for an integrated effort that would overcome the two "bilineal" command chains via both province chiefs and military channels, and also for GVN machinery for coordinated national planning. MAAG was eager to remove the divided chain of command whereby the CG and SDC were under province chiefs who (even though mostly military) reported directly to Diem. In the MAAG and ARVN view, this inhibited effective C-I operations, because the CG and SDC were seen as freeing ARVN from static missions to go after the VC.

MAAG produced a complementary and more substantive C-I operations plan in September 1961. But the U.S. Mission had little success in getting Diem to buy it, least of all the idea of a unified chain of command through ARVN to both unit commanders and province chiefs. When MAAG Chief McGarr pressed General "Big" Minh, the ARVN chief of staff, on the need for an overall plan, the latter pessimistically cited his inability to get cooperation either from province chiefs or other GVN agencies on developing comprehensive C-I plans.

The next attempt at overall planning was the so-called "Delta Plan" prepared in November 1961 by Sir Robert Thompson, head of a small British Advisory Mission newly arrived in Saigon. (This Mission was to give the GVN the best counterinsurgency-oriented advice, based on Malayan experience, that it received during 1961-1965). In mid-February 1962, Diem approved the Delta Plan, which, though perverted in practice, was the progenitor of the Strategic Hamlet Program. Washington was impressed with Thompson's emphasis on clear-and-hold, improved administration, better and more unified police-type intelligence, and gradual "oil-spot" expansion of pacified areas. But the plan was less well received by the MAAG advisers and the JCS, who quite naturally feared deemphasis of military means or offensive operations against the VC (see p. 42 for General Lemnitzer's comments).

What emerged as Diem's Strategic Hamlet Program was only loosely dovetailed to the RVNAF buildup being pursued by MACV. In any case it cannot be called a detailed plan so much as a statement of goals, which
may be one reason for its failure. In 1962 MACV prepared a proposed
GVN National Campaign Plan for offensive military operations and sup­
port of the Strategic Hamlet effort. In November of that year it was
accepted by the GVN, and a short-lived GVN/U.S. Joint Operations Center
was created "to centralize control over current operations." But
MACV's stress remained on buildup and reorganization of the regular
forces, as opposed to counterinsurgency-type activities. The Khanh
regime developed an elaborate National Pacification Plan for 1964 (see
Chapter VII), but it proved mostly a paper exercise.93 A master plan
for "Rural Reconstruction" in 1965 was not even approved by the RVNAF
high command until after the first quarter of the year.94 It too
proved mostly a dead letter.

As U.S. ground troops were committed piecemeal during 1965, the
Pentagon Papers show that there was no overall strategic plan agreed on
between the U.S. authorities in Washington and those in Saigon for
their employment, nor any agreed plan between the U.S. and GVN. Rather,
these were emergency deployments used on what was called a "fire bri­
gade" basis to avert collapse. Even thereafter, the absence of com­
bined machinery resulted in a dearth of combined GVN/U.S. planning,
except to the limited extent cited below. Beginning with 1966 a series
of annual Combined Campaign Plans (the AB series) were prepared. But
these were more a set of broad goals and guidelines for all the allied
forces than operational plans.

The most detailed U.S./GVN operational plans worked out systema­
tically at regional, province, and lower levels were the annual and
special pacification campaign plans developed for 1968 and after by
CORDS and the GVN pacification authorities. They were originally pre­
pared mostly by CORDS advisers and then reworked by the GVN, but gradu­
ally the GVN took over this function with U.S. help. Developed at prov­
ince level on the basis of fiscal and operational guidelines laid down
by Saigon, these plans were quite comprehensive and detailed during
1968-1972. The culmination of this planning effort has been the com­
prehensive four-year Community Defense and Local Development Plan for
1972-1975, prepared by the GVN's own central pacification staff. Pro­
mulgated in early 1972, it sets goals and guidelines for all significant
pacification-related programs, and provides the framework within which
detailed annual plans are prepared.

Granted that integrated plans and programs can turn out to be a
curse as well as a blessing. If overdone, they can become a strait-
jacket. In a situation like that in Vietnam, they could well have con-
firmed error rather than corrected it. They could also have inhibited
flexibility. On balance, however, their relative absence seems in re-
trospect to have been a serious lack. Not only did this lack facili-
tate an overly militarized war effort, but it deprived the U.S. of one
form of leverage to move the GVN in desired directions.
VII. ATTEMPTS AT ADAPTIVE RESPONSE

While U.S. performance in Vietnam is most notable for sheer conventionality and slowness to adapt, it would be misleading to ignore the many examples of adaptive change designed to meet felt needs. Naturally, most of these were the sort of relatively modest, evolutionary, and frequently technological changes that the institutions involved could fit into their existing repertoires without much destabilizing impact. There were far fewer major innovations involving real discontinuities with existing institutional repertoires, and as will be seen, these almost invariably required outside intervention to induce them. Moreover, far more was proposed, from both within and outside the Establishment, than was ever adopted— at least on a scale commensurate with the need.

On the military side, such innovation as occurred tended to be either technological or in the realm of modifying organization and tactics to utilize new technology. This often improved military performance, but it contributed to the overmilitarization of the war by reinforcing the tendency to seek military solutions. It also enhanced the Americanization of the war, since only technically qualified U.S. personnel could handle many of the new devices and equipment introduced. These caveats call into question the ultimate relevance of many such technological innovations to the achievement of U.S. aims in Vietnam. Moreover, as previously noted, the use of advanced technology often had major side effects which proved counterproductive to the achievement of these aims.

We have seen in Chapter VI how many proposals were advanced for adapting GVN or U.S. organization to the particular needs of the situation but how few were accepted -- even over time. Yet in those instances where adaptive solutions tailored to specific problems were tried, they far more often than not proved to be substantial improvements. In fact, they proved sufficiently so to suggest that much more could and should have been done -- and would have resulted in much better U.S./GVN performance. One example was the unique civil/military organization that the U.S. finally set up for pacification support, which sparked a
similar GVN reorganization. Another example, which incorporated the first, was the unprecedented expansion of the U.S. advisory effort to the GVN. Both are discussed below.

TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION

Unsurprisingly, such innovation as occurred was far more notable on the technological than on the tactical or organizational plane. In the best American tradition, we spent heavily on advanced technology for coping with an elusive enemy. Among the examples were the first widespread tactical as well as logistic use of helicopters (including several new models) in a major conflict, development of "gunships" (both planes and helicopters), a variety of new ordnance, various small naval craft for riverine warfare and offshore blockade, extensive use of herbicides, "Rome plows" for jungle clearing, new sensors and detection devices, and the like. USAF use of B-52s, designed for strategic nuclear delivery, for conventional bombing of enemy base areas was a major adaptation of existing capabilities (though its real cost effectiveness has yet to be measured).

A push was given to technological innovation by several sensible organizational devices. As early as 1961 the Advanced Research Projects Agency of the Defense Department began a special program (Project AGILE) aimed at counterinsurgency research and development with special reference to Southeast Asia. It was quite productive of new ideas and insights, though few were fully exploited by the military services. In 1966 the Director of Research and Development in the Pentagon created a Deputy Director for Southeast Asia matters to work full-time on expediting relevant research and development. This dynamic deputy (Leonard Sullivan) and his staff did much to promote new equipment and devices. So too did their counterpart in Saigon, a Science Adviser and staff set up by General Westmoreland in 1966 to report directly to him.

Perhaps the most striking single case of technological and managerial innovation was stimulated by the 1966 Jason Summer Study Group proposal for what came to be called the "McNamara line." Though its potential was hotly debated and it was overtaken by events before it could be fully installed, this concept for a barrier system along South
Vietnam's northern border was designed to inhibit infiltration while reducing the need for costly and politically risky air operations against the North. Its most innovative feature was a variety of small sensors linked to central receiving stations which could direct the desired responses. In September 1966 Secretary McNamara established a Defense Communications Planning Group (DCPG) under a lieutenant general to implement the anti-infiltration systems called for in the McNamara line. Its second director, describing DCPG's "unique and unprecedented" management authority over all aspects of system implementation, recently testified that "by providing the requisite authority, responsibility, funds, and organizational arrangements to a centralized sole manager, we have been able to reduce the normal five- to seven-year defense development cycle by a factor of four."²

As noted, however, the use of new technology may well have been seriously counterproductive in many respects. For example, Sir Robert Thompson believes that without the helicopter the "search-and-destroy" attrition strategy which he decries would not have been possible.³ Extensive use of defoliants, though often of real military value, drew adverse psychological reactions from the civilian population -- aside from causing possibly serious ecological damage. Crop destruction agents, though used far less extensively, probably did little to cut off enemy food supplies, while entailing even more adverse psychological repercussions in both Vietnam and the United States.

INSTITUTIONAL ADAPTATION

Though the U.S. approach to Vietnam was distinguished more by its conventionality than by its adaptiveness, there were some organizational modifications too. They were required, for example, for full utilization of helicopter assets. Another large-scale example was the CIA and Army Special Forces design and support of the 50,000-man Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG), a particularly cost-effective use of indigenous manpower. The only sustained experiment with encadrement in our entire Vietnam experience was the Combined Action Platoons (CAPs), each composed of twelve U.S. Marines and twenty-four Popular Force militia-men. They made a real contribution to hamlet security, though unfortunately on a very small scale.⁴ They were begun informally in mid-1965,
and were made a formal program in November. But by 1967 there were only some 70 CAPs, and at peak only 114. The Army's 353 Mobile Advisory Teams (MATs), which gave on-the-job training to the Regional and Popular Forces, were another innovative approach begun on a countrywide scale in 1967. The Army and Marines also made several imaginative efforts to use long-range combat and reconnaissance patrols.

Also deserving of mention is the Navy's use of small craft on the Delta inland waterways and Army/Navy development of a brigade-sized joint riverine force. However, probably the Navy's greatest single contribution in the Vietnam war is one seldom even mentioned -- the classic and traditional use of naval blockade to cut off North Vietnam's main logistic and reinforcement routes to the South, forcing development of the Ho Chi Minh Trail complex as the alternative.

Perhaps the most successful U.S. military adaptation to the special needs of Vietnam lay in the logistic field, usually an American strong suit. Though the so-called Besson Board report reviewing this experience is critical of the tight control over fiscal and manpower allocations imposed by the Secretary of Defense "to minimize the effect on the national economy," the military showed considerable flexibility in adapting to these constraints. Through a variety of expedients and specially tailored procedures too numerous and complex to mention here, the U.S. military logistic system sufficed to support not only the U.S. forces but most needs of the Vietnamese and allied forces, aside from providing major support to pacification and a variety of civil programs. As the Besson Board concluded, "Overall ... logistic support provided the combat forces in Southeast Asia was adequate and responsive to the needs of the combat commanders." However, "the many critical problems associated with the rapid expansion of force levels and combat operations in this distant underdeveloped area led to a number of inefficient and costly actions."6

There also are some important cases of adaptive responses by U.S. civilian agencies, particularly by CIA. Suffice it to say that CIA proved far more imaginative and flexible than the military in encouraging and supporting various types of counterinsurgency-oriented para-military forces, notably the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (taken
over by MACV in 1964) and the Revolutionary Development Cadre started in late 1965 (see below). The Census Grievance Cadre program is another case in point; most of the other CIA activities remain classified.

AID experimented with rural programs on a small scale in the Sixties. Perhaps its most successful effort has been in helping to stimulate the rapid revival of agriculture output since 1967 through extensive use of new "miracle rice" varieties, fertilizer imports, improved agricultural credit, and the like. AID also played a major role in designing the GVN's revolutionary 1970 Land-to-the-Tiller program, and in developing unusually effective computerized procedures for its rapid implementation even under chaotic wartime conditions. The civil-military CORDS organization (see below) also played a role in carrying out these programs, along with pressing innovative village hamlet development programs and promoting revival of autonomous local administration. Indeed the cumulative impact of all these pacification-oriented measures might be said to add up to a GVN/U.S.-sponsored socioeconomic revolution in the countryside of South Vietnam. Over time this could conceivably have as much to do with the successful countering of Viet Cong insurgency as the restoration of physical security.

PACIFICATION 1967-1971: AN EXAMPLE OF INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION

Perhaps the chief example of large-scale institutional adaptation to the special needs of Vietnam, which contributed greatly to the rural socioeconomic revolution discussed above, was the so-called "new model" pacification program begun in 1967. It represented a major discontinuity with the more or less conventional way in which the GVN and U.S. organized to deal with insurgency, and had a major though belated impact on the way the U.S. and GVN have ended up fighting the war. Thus its brief history is instructive in any analysis of bureaucratic constraints on GVN/U.S. performance in Vietnam. It is also significant that the only part of the Pentagon Papers which focuses largely on organizational issues is the slim volume on "Re-emphasis on Pacification: 1965-1967." 7

The earlier history of GVN/U.S. pacification efforts helps to illustrate the point. It reflects the same contradiction that marked the overall GVN/U.S. approach to the Vietnam conflict: greater perception than generally realized of the need for some major pacification-type
effort to help cope with rural-based insurgency, but delayed and inadequate execution in practice owing mostly to the bureaucratic obstacles to generating such an atypical effort through existing institutions (see Chapter VIII). Both the Diem regime and U.S. experts quickly saw pacification-type programs as important to meeting the VC threat, even though the techniques Diem favored were often critically flawed. As early as 1954 Diem created Civic Action Teams totaling at different times 400-1,800 cadres. They did some good work in the provinces but were soon dissolved or absorbed into other GVN organizations. Diem's agroveille program begun in 1959, his Strategic Hamlet Program of 1962-1963, and his creation of a Civil Guard were other initiatives in this direction.

But whatever the perceived need, neither the GVN nor the U.S. invested much in such programs. This stemmed from several causes, including the lack of funding sources and organizational backing for such atypical programs, the general deterioration of the increasingly repressive Diem administrative apparatus as it gradually lost control of the countryside, and the fact that Diem and his U.S. advisers turned increasingly to conventional military means to combat the growing insurgency. This trend was powerfully reinforced in 1964-1965, when the Viet Cong turned more to military pressures and insurgency was supplemented by NVA infiltration. It was also reinforced by the advent of government by the military after the fall of Diem, and by the increasing militarization of GVN local administration as civilian officials fled the countryside. A similar trend took place on the U.S. side, where the more the U.S. turned to military solutions the less was its relative emphasis on politico-military pacification measures.

By this time, of course, thwarting the VC/NVA "main forces" had become indispensable to creating a climate in which pacification could get started again. After 1964 it was essential to fight both main-force and village wars. There was a symbiotic relationship, even though the balance of our military effort was tilted heavily against pacification and clear-and-hold. The political turmoil and frequent coups in 1963-1966 also contributed to the hiatus in major pacification efforts. Only after U.S. military intervention staved off GVN collapse and
regained the initiative in the big-unit war, and a measure of political stability returned; did greater attention again begin to be paid to reviving some form of pacification to complement the big-unit war.

Interestingly, the revival of pacification was mostly American-stimulated, though Vietnamese-executed. The most promising early pacification approaches after U.S. intervention were sponsored by that most flexible and least bureaucratic of U.S. agencies, the CIA, which played a major role in initiating the Revolutionary Development (RD) program. In August 1965 Prime Minister Ky established a Ministry of Rural Construction, which "absorbed functions and personnel from predecessor groups and other ministries for the announced purpose of providing centralized direction to the pacification effort." Fortunately, it soon became headed by an unusually talented and energetic officer, Major General Nguyen Duc Thang. A Central Rural Construction Council was also established to coordinate all the ministries, but it seldom functioned.

The new program was spearheaded by deployment of the first 59-man armed RD teams. AID participated in the corollary New Life Development Program under the RD Ministry. AID also actively supported the buildup of police forces as a counterinsurgency tool, especially the creation of a fledgling Police Field Force (PFF) as a start toward a rural paramilitary constabulary. Both the RD teams and the PFF represented civilian efforts to generate paramilitary forces for the rural security mission. But these efforts suffered from two major weaknesses: insufficient scale in relation to the needs of the countryside, and lack of a territorial security environment within which they could thrive.

Another important institutional constraint on pacification was the lack, until very late, of any management structure for it. Neither in Vietnam nor in Washington — in neither the GVN nor the U.S. Establishment — was there any agency charged with managing anything so atypical as a pacification program. However important, this aspect of counterinsurgency had no bureaucratic vested interest speaking for it. Not until this was created did pacification begin to acquire new shape and substance. For example, the Hop Tac scheme of 1964-1965 to pacify the area around Saigon failed largely because of GVN/U.S. differences which there was no unified management to resolve.
The issue of whether the U.S. should in effect take over responsibility for rural administration and pacification was raised on occasion. In spring 1965 the JCS proposed that, if the U.S. intervened, MACV not only assume responsibility for much of AID's rural programs but assign U.S. military civil affairs teams "as in World War II" to run GVN provincial administrations. This was apparently the result of a Presidential suggestion that U.S. civil affairs teams be integrated into provincial governments on an experimental basis. U.S. civilian agencies were strongly opposed, however, and Ambassador Taylor vetoed the idea. President Johnson also occasionally queried whether U.S. officials shouldn't take over such direct administrative tasks. However, the revived pacification effort was designed from the outset as a GVN responsibility, with the Americans playing essentially a supporting role.

Lodge had assigned General Lansdale, who came out with him in late 1965, to be the chief adviser to the new RD program then beginning under General Thang. But in practice Thang looked more to MACV. Lansdale was also hamstrung by more conventional-minded U.S. Mission officers, and his role atrophied amid growing bickering. Instead, the February 1966 Honolulu Conference, which laid stress on the "other war" in Vietnam, led to the designation of Deputy Ambassador Porter as field coordinator of U.S. support programs, and appointment of a new Special Assistant to the President to manage the Washington end of U.S. support to the "other war." Growing Washington dissatisfaction with the loose coordination of the still faltering GVN pacification effort next led to the creation in December 1966 of an Office of Civil Operations (OCO) in Saigon to pull together all pacification-type support by U.S. civilian agencies.

But all these were half-measures affecting mostly the civilian tail and not the military dog. The U.S. and GVN military, concerned mostly with the "main force" war, regarded pacification as primarily civilian business, to be handled by the vestiges of GVN civilian ministries backed by AID and CIA. Yet by this time the military controlled most of the available in-country forces and resources. Without them, territorial security could not be expanded rapidly enough to exploit whatever successes were being achieved in pushing back the enemy's main forces.
The solution was to require the U.S. and ARVN military to take on most of the pacification job. On the U.S. side Washington decreed a series of management changes which in May 1967 pulled together all U.S. civil and military pacification support and placed it under MACV. This led in turn to the extensive "new model" pacification program of 1967-1971. But the managerial key to U.S. ability to stimulate at long last a major GVN pacification effort was the creation of CORDS under COMUSMACV. It was a unique, hybrid civil-military structure which imposed unified single management on all the diffuse U.S. pacification support programs and provided a single channel of advice at each level to GVN counterparts. It is significant that not until an organization was created to focus specifically on pacification as its primary mission and to integrate all relevant military and civilian agency efforts did a major sustained pacification effort begin to take shape. The bureaucratic price that had to be paid for creating this military elephant and civilian rabbit stew was to put CORDS under the military. Paradoxically, this resulted in greater U.S. civilian influence over pacification than had ever existed before; it also powerfully reinforced pacification's claim on U.S. and GVN military resources, which have constituted the bulk of the inputs during 1967-1971.

How did so marked a departure as CORDS finally come about? The key stimulus was cumulative Washington frustration with the reluctance, even inability, of the fragmented U.S. Mission in Saigon to get a major pacification effort going. But at every point there were bureaucratic obstacles to overcome. For example, U.S. civilian agencies were opposed to unifying their pacification support activities under the military. It took a Presidential decision, plus the backing of Ellsworth Bunker, the strong new U.S. Ambassador in Saigon, to put it into effect. The U.S. military too were unenthusiastic about accepting a major added responsibility, but loyally acquiesced. In large measure, Washington finally insisted upon this experiment in unified field management precisely because it came to realize that if a major concerted pacification effort was to be successfully mounted, it would have to be free of

*CORDS, an acronym for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support, combined the names of its two predecessor organizations, OCO and the RD Support Directorate of MACV.
the institutional constraints (existing doctrine, techniques, organizational practice) of the old-line agencies or programs.

Unfortunately, unification in the field was not paralleled by a similar reorganization in Washington. The various agencies independently detailed personnel and allocated resources to CORDS. The initial scheme, designed primarily by the Special Assistant for the "other war" in the White House, called for his office to supervise and integrate the Washington back-up effort. But this office reverted to a secondary role after he was sent to Vietnam.

How was CORDS different? First, it was a field expedient tailored to the particular needs as perceived at the time. Second, it was a unique experiment in a unified civil/military field advisory and support organization, different in many respects from World War II civil affairs or military government. Soldiers served directly under civilians, and vice versa, at all levels. They even wrote each other's efficiency reports. Personnel were drawn from all the military services, and from State, AID, CIA, USIA, and the White House. But CORDS was fully integrated into the theater military structure. The Deputy for CORDS served directly under General Westmoreland and later General Abrams -- perhaps the first American of ambassadorial rank to serve directly under military command as an operational deputy, not just a political adviser. A MACV general staff section was created under a civilian assistant chief of staff with a general officer deputy. Four regional deputies for CORDS served under the U.S. corps level commanders. The cutting edge was unified civil-military advisory teams in all 250 districts and 44 provinces.

A third notable feature of CORDS was its relatively flexible and pragmatic approach to the problem of pacification. Less constrained by prior doctrine than other agencies, since it had little precedent to go by, CORDS in effect wrote the field manual as it went along. One key achievement was its initial stress on generating sustained local territorial security in the countryside as the indispensable prerequisite to effective pacification at that late date. Since this would take paramilitary forces far beyond those previously available, and time was of the essence, the primary instrument chosen was the long neglected
Regional and Popular Forces, which were upgraded and greatly expanded in 1967-1970. Building on this force-in-being was greatly facilitated by the fact that pacification support was now under military auspices. The RF/PF were later supplemented by the GVN's PHOENIX program, directed at dismantling the Viet Cong infrastructure, and by the People's Self-Defense Forces (PSDF) of part-time civilians.

But the pacification effort comprised much more than just restoration of local security. Restoring autonomous local administration, rural economic revival, refugee care and resettlement, rural education programs, rebuilding of roads and waterways, massive health and medical efforts, and the like were supported by CORDS in concert with the USAID Mission and the U.S. military. To utilize all available resources, the GVN and CORDS pushed multiple programs simultaneously -- the various program assets were not readily fungible -- but under unified management and with a firm set of priorities.

Generating an adequate management structure on the GVN side was much more difficult, since what needed to be pulled together was not just a modest U.S. advisory and support effort but major administrative and operational programs. Nevertheless, CORDS' efforts led, partly by example and partly by influence, to eventual reorganization and unification of the GVN pacification structure at all levels, culminating in the 1968 revival of a functioning ministerial-level Central Pacification Council, creation of a Deputy Prime Minister for Pacification in March 1969, and Thieu's own assumption of the chairmanship of the Central Council (and creation of a central staff) in July 1969. Thus, in just three years, GVN pacification management reached the status where its top policymaker on a regular basis was the President himself.

CORDS' efforts also led to the only sustained large-scale example of intimate combined U.S./GVN planning at every level, from national down to district, in the Vietnam war (see pp. 104-105).

Compared to other major GVN/U.S. programs, the level of innovation in the pacification field was relatively high. Aside from CORDS itself and the related GVN organs, some of the many examples are: (a) a series of new measurement systems designed primarily for management purposes, of which the Hamlet Evaluation System is the most widely known; (b) the imaginative "Chieu Hoi" defector program, which began in 1963 but only
hit its stride in 1966-1967; (c) the 59-man RD teams and the associated village self-development program; (d) the GVN National Training Center at Vung Tau; (e) a new Vietnam Training Center in Washington to train CORDS advisers; (f) the GVN Phung Hoang program designed to pull together and improve the efforts of a plethora of GVN agencies to neutralize the Viet Cong infrastructure; (g) the CORDS Evaluation Branch of field evaluators reporting directly to top management; and (h) the People's Self-Defense Forces, created in 1968 after the Tet Offensive.

The shifting emphases of the "new model" pacification program after the creation of CORDS are also suggestive of its adaptiveness. In general, the initial emphasis was on buildup of territorial forces and clarification of their role. Then, as the enemy's Tet and May 1968 offensives petered out, emphasis shifted to rapid if thin expansion of the area being pacified via two Accelerated Pacification Campaigns (APCs). In July 1969 Thieu shifted pacification priorities again, from expansion to consolidation. Instead of the APC emphasis on upgrading contested hamlets to a "C" rating, he ordered stress on upgrading "C" hamlets to "A" or "B" status. This, along with the 1969 Village Development Program and local elections, reflected a gradual shift from stress on the security aspects of pacification toward stress on its political and developmental aspects. This became even more marked in the GVN's 1970 Pacification and Development Plan. Then, in early 1971, the GVN decided that pacification had made such progress that the term itself had become outmoded and would be abandoned in favor of a 1971 Community Defense and Local Development Plan.16

The purpose here is not to laud pacification, even during 1969-1971, as an efficient, well-run program. On the contrary, its weaknesses and flaws are all too numerous; it has been at best only a qualified success to date.17 The point is rather that, in strong contrast to the sheer conventionality of most aspects of the GVN/U.S. response, it did eventually prove possible to set up and carry out a major GVN/U.S. wartime program specifically designed to meet many of the atypical problems of people's war in South Vietnam. Of all major U.S.-supported programs mounted during the Vietnam conflict, it stands out as perhaps the one most precisely tailored to the need.
Pacification 1967-1971 also shows how it was possible via unified management and close U.S./GVN collaboration to overcome many of the institutional constraints which so hampered other aspects of our Vietnam effort. And in notable contrast to the big-unit war, it has remained an essentially Vietnamese program, with the U.S. in only an advisory and supporting role. Lastly it has proved far more cost-effective than most other parts of the allied war effort, entailing only a modest fraction of the enormous costs of the Vietnam war. A "crude" Vietnam program budget developed by OSD/SA showed that "in fiscal 1968, almost $14 billion was spent for bombing and offensive operations, but only $850 million for pacification and programs designed to offset war damage and develop the economy and social infrastructure in South Vietnam."18

THE UNPRECEDENTED U.S. ADVISORY EFFORT

Though the substantive weaknesses of the U.S. advisory effort (see Chapters III and IV) limited its positive impact, its gradual expansion to the point where it was supporting almost every aspect of the GVN war effort represents another attempt at adaptive response. Compared with any previous U.S. advisory effort, that in Vietnam has been unprecedented in duration, extent, and the depth to which it went in the field. This is evident from comparison with the only three wartime U.S. advisory efforts of analogous size -- in China during World War II, in Greece during the 1947-1949 civil war, and in Korea during 1950-1953.

By 1945 the U.S. military forces in China included, as one of their many components, over 8,000 men19 advising the Chinese forces. Originally, they were under Stilwell; when Stilwell was recalled, General A. C. Wedemeyer filled a dual role, after October 1944 both commanding the new China theater and serving as one of Chiang's two chiefs of staff (in effect as his senior military adviser in the fight against the Japanese).20 Most major U.S. elements under Wedemeyer had advisory as well as other roles. At peak, in 1945, his Chinese Combat Command included 3,147 Americans in liaison/advisory teams with four Chinese Group Armies of some 500,000 men. Advisers often worked down to regimental level with about 36 divisions. A Chinese Training Center operated a General Staff School, Infantry Training Center, Field Artillery Training Center, Automotive School, and Ordnance Training Center, and later a
Heavy Mortar Training Center and a Signal School. A U.S. Service of Supply helped support the 36 divisions, and its commander also became in February 1945 the commander of the parallel Chinese Service of Supply for this purpose. By mid-1945 about 650 Americans were working in various parts of the Chinese Service of Supply. At that time a combined headquarters staff for the 36-division force was formed. The end of the war cut short what was gradually becoming both a major U.S. advisory effort and quasicommand of a major fraction of the Chinese forces.

In the Greek civil war a Joint U.S. Military Advisory and Planning Group was set up under Lieutenant General Van Fleet in early 1948. By mid-1949 an army section of about 350 "advised the Greek Army from the General Staff down to division level." Naval and air sections performed similar functions. Plans and operations remained a Greek responsibility, but in fact owed much to U.S. advice.

In Korea the small Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG) organized in 1948 was expanded to almost 500 by end-1949 to provide training and advice down to battalion level to the new Korean army, though it remained far too thinly spread to do so full time. KMAG also founded a school system. When invasion came, KMAG advisers often had to assume command. A strengthened KMAG then played a major role in rebuilding the ROK army. By September 1951 its strength had grown to 1,308 and it was advising ten ROK divisions, many still in process of formation. Still later, with almost 2,000 men, KMAG created a Field Training Command to train ROK forces. At one point in 1951 Washington suggested that U.S. officers be put in command of various ROK elements, but this was rejected in the field. On the other hand, all ROK forces during the Korean War were under the overall command of the U.S. theater commander.

During 1955-1960 the U.S. advisory effort in Vietnam was handled by a more or less conventional MAAG of under 700. Though initially charged to focus on internal security, the MAAG "came to be dominated by conventional military conceptions." Its advisory task was "concentrated in training centers and in Saigon. . . . It was essentially an attempt to give advice from the top." However, MAAG was later authorized to provide advisers at regimental level.
In 1961 the MAAG began to assume the role of operational adviser. As part of the Kennedy commitments, the U.S. decided to increase its military advisory effort by establishing teams at province and battalion level. Both Lansdale and MAAG chief McGarr favored using U.S. advisers in combat areas. In January 1962 McNamara approved battalion advisory teams for ARVN infantry and artillery battalions, and three U.S. advisers for each province, plus advisers for CG and SDC training. By April 1962 adviser strength had risen to about 3,150 (including 805 Special Forces personnel with CIA-supported programs), at which level it stabilized till mid-1964. Within this ceiling, the number of field advisers was increased from 1,351 in April 1961 to 2,028 by November 1963. The bulk of the effort went into improving ARVN capabilities, but it was not enough to forestall the growing threat of an ARVN collapse.

After the fall of Diem, the still deteriorating situation led in 1964 to another attempt to improve RVNAF performance by beefing up the field advisory effort. MACV, favoring a "gradualistic approach," created the first district teams of one captain and one NCO in thirteen key districts. The AID Mission also expanded its small rural affairs staff. Then the JCS suggested adding 70 training advisers -- mostly in mobile training teams -- in each of fourteen critical provinces to train the paramilitary CG and SDC. MACV preferred using this further increment to put the two-man operational adviser teams in every district in SVN, rather than create a new training establishment. JCS also studied the possibility of putting advisers down to company level in ARVN, but the field rejected this as likely to lead to greater U.S. casualties, requiring too much prior language training, and probably objectionable to ARVN. Under prodding from Washington, MACV finally decided to request 900 more advisers for five-man teams in 45 districts of eight priority provinces, plus 68 other districts, and an increase in ARVN infantry and artillery advisory teams. The naval and air advisory groups were also increased, for a net expansion of over one thousand. By end-1964 there were district advisory teams in half the 239 districts in South Vietnam.
Though in 1965 the advisory effort "sank into relative obscurity" as the U.S. introduced its own forces, in fact its greatest expansion took place after the U.S. entered the war. MACV made the commander of U.S. forces in each corps area the senior adviser to the ARVN corps commander, an added function which in most cases had to take second place to his handling of U.S. troops. As U.S. forces took over the brunt of the "main force" war, the concept developed that RVNAF should focus mostly on pacification support (see Chapters VII and VIII). Hence the chief issue with respect to U.S. advisory support during 1966-1968 became that of how best to organize and extend the advisory effort to the new pacification program which was emerging. The result was to add a whole new dimension to the U.S. advisory effort on a scale and to a depth never attempted before.

A related issue was how to pull together the military pacification advisers and the various civilian advisory teams from AID, CIA, and USIA also operating in the field. The growing number of civilian advisers at region and province level were placed under OCO in December 1966. Then, in May 1967, the entire pacification advisory effort —about 4,000 military and 830 civilian advisers— was integrated under CORDS. It is important to note that CORDS military advisers performed numerous nonmilitary functions, and vice versa. CORDS advisory staffs worked with each ministry involved in pacification matters, not just at the center but at every level down to province, district, and even hamlet.

CORDS also stimulated the most far-reaching attempt yet to improve the performance of the neglected paramilitary forces. In mid-1967 MACV requested 2,577 more military advisers, some 2,331 of them asked for by CORDS to beef up the RF/PF advisory effort in the field. The plan was to create 353 five-man Mobile Advisory Teams (MATs) to give on-the-job training to RF/PF units. Mobile Advisory Logistics Teams (MALUs) also were created in 1967 to jack up logistic support to the RF/PF from the provincial depot system. Later 400 military Phung Hoang advisers were gradually added to provide administrative help to the accounting system. Thus, total U.S. military advisers had risen from only 335 actually assigned in 1954 to 10,251 by end-1967 —including almost one thousand naval and air advisers. To these must be added another thousand civilian advisers under CORDS' operational control.
At probably the peak of the overall U.S. advisory effort, in 1969, it numbered over 16,000 Americans, including several hundred civilians in AID, CIA, and USIA besides those in CORDS. By mid-1969 army advisory strength alone had risen to over 13,500 -- of which CORDS had about 6,500. Of the latter, a striking 95 percent were in the field rather than Saigon -- the great bulk at province or district and with the mobile advisory teams. This was no doubt the largest foreign advisory effort in U.S. history.° During 1967-1970 it provided technical and operational advice to just about every GVN governmental organ and training installation both at the national level and in the field. In addition, several thousand Vietnamese military men and civilian officials were sent to various training courses in the U.S. or other countries.

What did all this massive effort accomplish? Clearly in 1955-1965 it failed to help create Vietnamese forces capable of stemming the insurgency. Since 1966 these forces have tended to perform better on the average, though performance still varies widely, as became painfully evident in their response to Hanoi's 1972 offensive. But without U.S. advisory support it is highly questionable whether RVNAF would have performed even as well as it has during the period of U.S. disengagement. Indeed, as RVNAF now undergoes its first major quasi-independent test since 1964, though still heavily backed by U.S. airpower, MACV has re-discovered that U.S. advisers still have a "critical role" to play. Reportedly, MACV decided to accelerate withdrawal of the two remaining U.S. infantry battalions in order to permit retaining more advisers.42

There is little question that the sixteen-year U.S. advisory effort at least improved RVNAF administration, training, and logistics. RVNAF today has all the appurtenances of a modern conventional military establishment -- an extensive logistic and school system, a modern personnel system, command and staff organization, and the like. Technical proficiency is notably higher than in the Fifties. On the civil side, the same holds true. U.S. advice and assistance are generally regarded as having significantly improved the average GVN administrative performance

* With U.S. disengagement overall army adviser strength declined to about 7,800 by end-1971, of whom fewer than 2,700 were in CORDS. (The naval and air advisory efforts had grown significantly, however.)
during 1966-1971. Perhaps even more important, the in-depth U.S. advisory network became, as General Abrams told the author, the "glue" that held the situation together in many respects at the critical local level. It provided a shadow channel of advice, communications, liaison, and support which was invaluable in knitting together various aspects of the GVN effort as well as coordinating the GVN and allied efforts in the field.

After 1963 the growing advisory network in the countryside, together with unit advisers, also began giving both the U.S. and GVN a far better picture of what was actually going on than had been the case before. This advisory role as "eyes and ears" has proved an important one. Even more important, the advisers have come to be the source of an indispensable management tool: periodic reports on RVNAF and GVN performance in all fields. These have increasingly been used by the GVN itself as more disinterested and accurate evaluations of the performance of its own subordinate echelons than the reporting from these echelons themselves. In effect the U.S. advisory network has provided the GVN with its best means of evaluating its own performance. Such "report cards" have served as an important instrument of U.S. leverage as well.

Nowhere were these advisory roles developed more fully than in U.S. pacification support during 1967-1971. Without a comprehensive advisory network, the pacification upsurge that began in late 1968 could not have been achieved. The improvement was particularly visible in terms of RF/PF expansion and performance, which would not have been possible without roughly a tripling of the adviser input after 1966 — including the Mobile Advisory Teams. If pacification 1967-1971 can be adjudged at least a partial success, it was largely owing to the expanded CORDS advisory effort. At its peak strength, around the end of 1969, CORDS had about 6,500 military and 1,100 civilians assigned to it (by January 1972 this had dropped to 2,670 military and 730 civilians). But the important thing is that they were advising over 900,000 Vietnamese in every district and province of Vietnam — over 500,000 RF/PF, 50,000 RD cadre, 80,000 police, and on the order of 300,000 civil servants — on a wide variety of civil and military matters. Their cumulative impact has been incalculable, yet their total cost only a tiny fraction of the total cost to the U.S. of the Vietnam war.
On the other hand, hindsight suggests that this long and eventually massive advisory effort was flawed in many respects. The *Pentagon Papers*, completed in the mood of pessimism following Tet 1968, are quite critical. They raise some fundamental questions as to its basic utility, especially with respect to the "U.S. unstated assumption . . . that more advisors somehow equate to better performance" and the belief that "leverage" should be eschewed. It is regrettable that the *Pentagon Papers* do not cover the years 1968-1971, because it was in this period that the U.S. advisory impact was greatest, especially in pacification.

In the author's view, fortified by field experience, the greatest weakness of the U.S. advisory effort was not that it was too large or omnipresent, but rather that it didn't go far enough. In retrospect, it was too technical-assistance-oriented and not sufficiently performance-oriented. We made an all-out effort to train, equip, and organize the GVN and RVNAF to *enable* them to perform better, but generally drew the line at measures aimed at *requiring* them to perform better. This was more than failure to use leverage. It was fundamental to our concept of how to advise -- persuasion but not pressure.

Perhaps the greatest flaw was the failure to come to grips directly with the gross inadequacies of GVN and RVNAF leadership at all levels, as discussed earlier in Chapter III. U.S. advisers early recognized that this was the critical problem, without a solution to which the massive structure the U.S. was subsidizing would not perform effectively. But we usually drew the line at direct intervention. Instead of pressing for removal of unsatisfactory commanders, and if necessary suspending aid as a lever to this end, MACV and U.S. civilian agencies confined themselves mostly to such indirect means as improved personnel selection procedures, schooling, and the like. These did not suffice; no matter how well trained, equipped, and organized the GVN and RVNAF became, poor leaders all too often remained its Achilles heel. Only CORDS developed systematic procedures for identifying poor province and district chiefs and other officials, and pressing consistently for their replacement. This system worked to a considerable degree, and the resultant upgrading of GVN pacification leadership certainly figured in the gains of 1968-1971. The author, who instituted this system, found
top GVN officials reasonably responsive, and believes that the U.S. could and should have insisted more vigorously on removal of unsatisfactory officials and commanders. It might have made more of a difference than anything else.

Other major advisory flaws, inherent in the institutional background of U.S. advisers, were the conventional warfare emphasis and the "mirror-imaging" discussed in Chapter IV. This helped create ARVN forces trained, equipped, and organized for American-style conventional warfare instead of for the actual threat in Vietnam. Among other things, ARVN became highly dependent on extensive U.S. air and artillery support, which the advisory structure then served as the liaison channel to provide.

U.S. personnel systems proved remarkably resistant to devising procedures for optimizing advisory quality and experience. Before 1965 the overall quality of advisers was considerably higher than after U.S. intervention, when most of the best officers were assigned instead to U.S. units. Moreover, the one-year tour, and the services' interest in rotating as many careerists as possible through Vietnam, seriously lowered the experience level. The phasing out of a separate MAAG in early 1964 was probably another mistake, especially when growing U.S. troop commitments meant that MACV inevitably focused chiefly on its role as a U.S. theater headquarters — to the neglect of its advisory role.

Even so, the advisory effort still nets out as a relatively inexpensive and useful employment of U.S. resources compared to the rest of the costly U.S. involvement in Vietnam. At its peak strength of around 16,000 it was still barely 3 percent of the over 550,000 American civilians and soldiers serving there. Those critics who argue nonetheless that the U.S. overwhelmed the Vietnamese with "huge" numbers of advisers also ignore that these were advising a GVN military, paramilitary, and civil establishment of well over 1.5 million, an adviser-to-advised ratio of only one to a hundred or so. And a large number of advisers was essential to the adaptive extension of the U.S. advisory presence down to the battalion, province, and district level, where so much of the Vietnam war was really fought. Lastly, it must be remembered that a high proportion of the 16,000 "advisers" were in fact
housekeeping or administrative personnel for the advisory teams, which after all had to be maintained American style. So rather than question the excessive number of U.S. advisers in 1967-1970, one might equally well ask whether much earlier and more rapid expansion -- plus greater stress on quality -- might not have achieved enough improvement in GVN/RVNAF performance to reduce the need for so massive a U.S. troop commitment as in the event occurred.
VIII. WAS THERE A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY?

To many, a key lesson (or "mislesson") of Vietnam is that the U.S. realistically never should have expected it to end up as other than a catastrophe. Certainly it has proved impossible to achieve our aims at acceptable cost the way we actually fought the war. Moreover, the range of environmental, policy, and institutional constraints already discussed in this study suggest how difficult it would have been for us to act differently. Yet our sixteen years of checkered experience in Vietnam also suggest that approaches other than those we adopted might have led to significantly different results. Indeed, developments during the four years since the Tet 1968 watershed suggest that, if much of what happened then had happened earlier, the 1955-1968 pattern of events might have been entirely different.

Many alternative strategic approaches have been proposed at various times since 1954. Those best known center around the advocacy of a larger and less restricted employment of conventional U.S. military power. "Victory through air power" has had its advocates, as have other means of applying U.S. military power more effectively (e.g., through attacking the sanctuaries in Cambodia and Laos) and even ground thrusts against North Vietnam. But Washington civilian decisionmakers usually opted against such forms of military escalation, though in the event the U.S. went a long way toward seeking a predominantly military solution to the war.

Yet there was also an alternative approach which lay well within the political constraints imposed by the decisionmakers. In fact, its advocates were partly stimulated by a desire to avoid raising the military threshold. These advocates were an unusual mix of soldiers and civilians, some of whom had ready access to high policymakers. In broad outline at any rate they favored with varying degrees of energy and persuasiveness from the outset what might be called a "counterinsurgency" strategy. Its intellectual antecedents lay as much in the Philippine experience against the Huks and British experience in Malaya in the 1950s as in the French experience in Vietnam.
What was this alternative approach? It is hard to define precisely, because it was never all put down in definitive form and varied in content and emphasis from time to time. Nor was there ever an open confrontation between this and other alternative approaches, with the policymaker forced to decide among them. To the author's knowledge, there was never a clear-cut case of either/or. Instead, all approaches were almost invariably intermingled, though with sharply varying emphases.

Nonetheless, a more or less clear unifying thread runs through the views of many advisers and officials up to the present day. First was their emphasis on the primacy of political over military aims in the Vietnam conflict. They saw the greatest need as being to protect and win over the population on which the insurgency fed, rather than to destroy the organized insurgent forces. This view often took the form of stressing the need to build a viable and responsive local government. It also underlay the stress on "winning hearts and minds" by providing a more attractive alternative to Viet Cong rule. Land reform, rural aid programs, anticorruption measures, administrative decentralization, and representative government were seen as tools to this end. In security terms, this school placed greater emphasis on clear-and-hold by police and paramilitary forces to provide sustained local protection to the population than on conventional offensive operations against VC units. Thus the counterinsurgency school laid greater stress on the CG/SDC (later RF/PF) and police than on constant buildup of the conventional military forces.

Perhaps the most articulate exposition of the views of the counterinsurgency school was Assistant Secretary Roger Hilsman's final memorandum to the Secretary of State on March 14, 1964. To Hilsman, the right strategic concept called for primary emphasis on giving security to the villagers. The tactics are the so-called oil-blot approach, starting with a secure area and extending it slowly. This calls for the use of military forces in a different way from that of orthodox, conventional war. Rather than chasing Viet Cong, the military must put primary emphasis on clear-and-hold operations and on rapid reinforcement of villages under
attack. It is also important, of course, to keep the Viet.
Cong regular units off balance by conventional offensive
operations, but these should be secondary to the major task
of extending security. . . .

Hilsman concluded by saying he believed we could win in Vietnam, but
only if we did not "overmilitarize the war" and if there was "politi-
cal stability in Saigon." 3

Also implicit in this approach was that the main burden of carry-
ing it out had to be borne by the Vietnamese; the Americans could
not do it for them. One corollary to this was that the U.S. had to
use all available means (including if necessary all the leverage at
its disposal) to ensure emergence of a GVN capable of executing the
strategy. Another corollary was that both Vietnamese and Americans
needed to organize sensibly to carry out such a strategy. As we have
seen in Chapter VI, some Americans (though not always the same who
pushed the C-I approach) also advocated these things, but without much
success, which is one reason why the alternative approach never got
far off the ground during 1955-1966.

As noted at the outset of this study, we early perceived these
needs. The Pentagon Papers make clear that they were part and parcel
of our Vietnam policy from the first. The U.S. policy documents cited
are replete with counterinsurgency-oriented strategic guidance -- whether
it was termed internal security, counterinsurgency, strategic hamlets,
revolutionary development, or pacification. The same held true of GVN
planning.

Moreover, almost every element which might logically be regarded
as part of a counterinsurgency-oriented strategy was called for repeat-
edly, and tried (often several times) on at least a small scale. Com-
pared to the conventional U.S./GVN military effort, however, they were
always "small potatoes." The weight of our effort was overwhelmingly
conventional military from the outset, and became even more so after 1960.
One weakness of the Pentagon Papers is that, being based so largely on
policy documents, they do not bring out the striking contrast between the
amount of policy stress on counterinsurgency, or pacification, and how
little was actually done -- up to 1967 at least. A look at the historical
record amply illustrates the case, and is repeated here in some detail to show the yawning gap between policy and performance.

**THE EISENHOWER PERIOD — 1954 TO 1960**

From the very time that the U.S. took over from France as chief supporter of newly created South Vietnam, its major policy focus was on building a viable nationalist regime via elections, administrative and land reform, and the like. But little was accomplished toward achieving these ambitious aims, for reasons discussed in Chapter III. For example, in 1956 Diem promulgated a land reform designed by Wolf Ladejinsky, but the program was delayed in starting and by 1959 was "virtually inoperative."4

A similar gap between policy and performance developed in our military assistance program, which initially was to be for "internal security" only.5 By the late Fifties it was official doctrine that externally supported "subversion" was a major threat; in fact, in 1957 SEATO's second Annual Report stated that "subversion which has always been a major problem is the main threat we now face."6 But, as seen in Chapter IV, this policy was converted in practice to overwhelming emphasis on building a conventional delaying force. Such internal security forces as CG, SDC, and police were neglected.7 In sum, little was done during 1954-1960 to develop an effective counterinsurgency capability, despite what policy called for. The *Pentagon Papers*, commenting on this failure, caution that

This is not to imply that had resources been diverted from the creation of a conventional army to that of an effective counterinsurgent force the problem of Vietnam would have been solved, for the enemy has demonstrated both versatility and flexibility that would render such a statement vacuous. . . . An effective counterinsurgent force, on the other hand, might have limited its choices; might well have prevented effective prosecution of the guerrilla alternative the Viet Cong and the DRV did elect to follow.8

Even during the late Eisenhower years there was much criticism from Washington and the U.S. Embassy over MAAG emphasis on preparing the Vietnamese forces primarily against an overt North Vietnamese attack when
indigenous insurgency was slowly growing in the South. By early 1960 U.S. recognition that the insurgency threat was reaching crisis proportions led DOD and JCS to approve a CINCPAC plan emphasizing counterinsurgency-type operations under a new GVN central directing body. The outgrowth was the Mission-prepared Counter-Insurgency Plan (CIP), which called for a comprehensive approach.

**THE KENNEDY YEARS — 1961 TO 1963**

With the arrival of the New Frontier, the debate over what to do about the growing crisis in Vietnam was aired at the highest levels. Moreover, President Kennedy and his brother Robert were ardent advocates of coping with "wars of national liberation" by imaginative C-I techniques. This effort received direct White House stimulus in such ways as creation of a high-level interagency Special Group-Counterinsurgency in 1961, upgrading of the Army Special Forces, and strengthening of police assistance programs abroad. Kennedy was also much taken with General Lansdale's report on Vietnam, which dissented vigorously from both MAAG's conventional-force emphasis and its complacency. Paradoxically, however, the Administration which most wanted a sophisticated C-I approach to Vietnam, and tried hardest to get one, was also the Administration which ended up putting the U.S. on an even more conventional military path.

One of the new President's first acts was to approve the CIP and allocate $42 million more in U.S. aid for ARVN and the Civil Guard. But Diem evaded the reforms which were supposed to accompany this. When Kennedy established an ad hoc Task Force on Vietnam under Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric, its first (April 1961) report called for no increase in Vietnamese forces, but emphasized the need "to focus the U.S. effort in Vietnam on the immediate internal security problem." Kennedy next approved a modest increase in MAAG and authorized it to support the paramilitary Civil Guard and SDC. The ad hoc Task Force Reports, the later Staley Report, and the Taylor-Rostow Report following their October 1961 visit to Vietnam all included elements of a comprehensive C-I strategy and program. Indeed, the President's October 13, 1961, letter of instructions to Taylor emphasized appraising the threat to
"internal security," noting that "while the military part of the problem is of great importance in South Vietnam, its political, social, and economic elements are equally significant. . . ." 17

However, Washington debate in late 1961 focused mainly on the abortive issue of whether U.S. troops should be sent. By this time the policy record as to what strategic emphasis the U.S. was pursuing in Vietnam becomes quite confused. A mixed strategy seems to have been called for, though never carried out in balanced fashion on the ground. There was also growing controversy over strategic emphasis during 1962-1964, with various counterinsurgency-oriented officials in the State Department pitted against the more conventional Pentagon backed by the U.S. Mission in Saigon. 18 In what Roger Hilsman describes as a "search for a strategic concept," he and Harriman and Forrestal appear to have strongly advocated more unified U.S. field management, granting primacy to political factors, more military emphasis on clear-and-hold instead of search-and-destroy, and large-scale efforts to separate the guerrilla fish from the rural sea in which they swam. 19

Indeed, the next stage in the attempt to devise an alternative or complementary C-I strategy was the abortive Strategic Hamlet Program of 1962-1963. Sold to Diem and the Americans by Sir Robert Thompson and the new British Advisory Mission which arrived in late 1961, it was based largely on Malayan experience. 20 Many U.S. civilian officials in Washington and Saigon were strongly sympathetic to Thompson's plan. They probably "were attracted by an argument which did suggest some hope for 'demilitarizing' the war, de-emphasizing U.S. operational participation, and increasing GVN's ability to solve its own internal problems using primarily its own human resources." 21 It received considerable high-level U.S. backing. 22 But, regrettably, it got all too little concrete U.S. support.

Thompson strongly advocated a carefully planned and gradual effort focused initially on the rich Delta provinces. But his Delta Plan was perverted from the outset; it was even begun in the wrong place and for the wrong reasons in the notorious Operation Sunrise. Again, a C-I program failed in practice, partly because Diem and Nhu conceived it too grandiosely and ran it poorly, partly because the CG/SDC were
never far enough upgraded to provide the indispensable local security, and partly because it was generally attempted on what in hindsight looks like a shoestring. The major direct U.S. aid contribution to it appears to have been $10 million in plasters, a very modest sum for so ambitious a program. In any case, what had been done collapsed with the fall of Diem. 23 In retrospect, both the U.S. and GVN missed a major opportunity in not following the Thompson program as originally conceived.

Meanwhile, the controversy over strategy continued. According to Stempel, "the State/Hilsman view pictured the war as going badly and advocated pressuring for political reform even at the risk of unseating Diem. The Defense/MACV position pictured the war as being successful, and suggested working for political reforms only if they would not promote governmental instability." 24 In March 1963, Harriman became Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, and Hilsman Assistant Secretary for the Far East, strengthening their roles. However, it is misleading to suggest either that there was a single State Department view or that Defense officials ignored political reform and pacification. Moreover, the whole controversy was soon submerged by the crisis leading to Diem's fall in November 1963.

Paradoxically, pacification became a constant preoccupation at the highest Washington levels only in late 1963 and after, when (as events were to show) there was no longer time to generate an adequate GVN effort. After learning during a September 1963 visit to Saigon how much the situation had deteriorated, McNamara and Taylor urged emphasis on clear-and-hold operations, consolidation of the Strategic Hamlet Program with emphasis on security, and better training and arms for the hamlet militia. 25 Right after the November 1963 coup, an emergency Honolulu Conference led to NSAM 273, which called for concentration of GVN and U.S. efforts in the key Delta area, where the guerrilla war was going badly. 26 Further disturbing reports from the field led to another McNamara visit to Saigon in December, which focused largely on pacification matters. It resulted in the first of McNamara's gloomy memoranda to the President. 27 More gloom was to follow.
In 1964 yet another attempt was made to stimulate a pacification program, this time under the auspices of the military junta led by General Khanh. His February 1964 Chien Thang plan, based on the "oil-spot" concept, was more modest than the nationwide Strategic Hamlet Program, being focused mostly on the eight key provinces around Saigon. It was realized that "The political control structure extending from Saigon down into the hamlets disappeared following the November coup." By March 1964, when McNamara again visited Saigon, Khanh had dressed this up into a nationwide National Pacification Plan, to be supplemented by national mobilization. Aside from an oil-spot expansion beginning in the key provinces around Saigon, stress was to be placed on land reform, higher rice prices to the farmers, and improved rural services and administration. Top-level U.S. support for this grandiose effort was approved in NSAM 288, which was replete with such pacification-oriented measures as strengthening and improving the paramilitary forces, increasing national police strength in the provinces, providing more U.S. advisers at district and province, and the like. The Americans also proposed a new GVN Civil Administrative Corps to work in rural areas.

But in reality, "Although VC successes in rural areas had been the prime feature of the downswing over the past half year or more, pacification was to receive less comparative emphasis, in fact, in the next year or so than it had before." While Washington policy documents and the U.S./GVN dialogue in 1964 and early 1965 stress U.S. efforts to revive some form of pacification effort, all too little was done in practice by the GVN. As the Pentagon Papers remark, the limited U.S. measures during the hectic period between Diem's death and the introduction of U.S. combat forces turned out to be mere palliatives, largely because of continued political instability in Saigon. "Declaratory policy raced far ahead of resource allocations and use decisions." The new team of Ambassadors Taylor and Alexis Johnson and General Westmoreland in Saigon was also preoccupied with the succession of post-Diem coups.

The last gasp of pacification was the modest Hop Tac scheme launched in September 1964 at U.S. initiative in three provinces around Saigon.