PART THREE

THE VIETNAM EXPERIENCE

25 APRIL - 2 MAY 1983
UNIT V
US DEFENSE POLICY, MILITARY
STRATEGY AND FORCE PLANNING

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25 April – 2 May 1983

SYLLABUS AND READINGS
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MILITARY STRATEGY

THE VIETNAM EXPERIENCE
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Course Overview

In the next academic week we will examine the Vietnam War. This brief course of instruction serves two primary functions. First, it acts as a transition between higher and lower level conflict. In our study of military strategy to this point we have concentrated on strategic and conventional warfare. Among other things, we have noted the absence of military conflict between the superpowers that, in largest part, is brought about by the dangers of catastrophic destruction should superpower conflict escalate. One consequence of avoiding strategic and conventional warfare has been the pursuit of national objectives through lower levels of conflict, especially insurgency or counterinsurgency (although certainly not all insurgencies begin with superpower sponsorship or instigation). This trend shows no signs of abating, and has led many observers to believe that the most significant military threats to major power interests may be associated with internal conflicts. If such wars occur in areas of the world where vital interests of the major powers intersect there is always a danger of a greater involvement and direct confrontation between the major powers. In view of this probability, American national security planners have renewed their interest in low level conflict and internal warfare. Appropriately, we will formally study insurgency after finishing a case study of the Vietnam War, a conflict that manifested many insurgency elements.

That thirty-years war, however, yields not at all to generalizations. It was at one time or another a relatively pure insurgency (from 1945 to the early 1950s), later had elements of both an insurgency and conventional war (with the later predominating at the end of the period from the early 1950s to 1954), became again an insurgency during the initial attempts by North Vietnam to undermine the South (from about 1956 to 1961), combined both types of war during the long American involvement (again with conventional war predominating toward the end of the period from 1961 to 1973), and became an almost purely conventional war during the last months of United States involvement and after the United States left active combat from 1973 to 1975. One must beware, therefore, of sweeping statements regarding this long war.

The role of the United States in Vietnam-like lower level conflict, moreover, will be determined by an interplay of many domestic-political, international and military factors examined throughout the year in the core curriculum, and that highlights the second intended function of this historical study: all of the elements studied in the core curriculum are relevantly examined in exploring the Vietnam War. Policy analysis will be better understood by studying this seemingly endless conflict.
With the admonition in mind that we must beware of generalizations regarding the Vietnam War, we turn first to an overview of the Vietnam war which synthesizes much of the thinking on the subject by academicians and practitioners, and then turn to case studies of aspects of the American involvement in the war.
TOPIC 1

VIETNAM: AN OVERVIEW

Monday
25 April 1983
0830-1145
(DR)

A. General

Topic 1 establishes a backdrop for subsequent lessons that are devoted to particular dimensions of the Vietnam conflict. The reading assigned for the lesson addresses briefly the French experience as well as the entire American effort through 1975 as seen from Washington.

The French attempted to return to their previous Asian empire in 1945 as if World War II had not occurred, and as if they had not been humiliated by both Germany and Japan. But their control over the people had been severely weakened despite their pretensions. Not only was French prestige wounded, the French capacity to fight a protracted conflict half a world away was also sharply diminished by World War II. Worse, they found that their Vietnamese nationalist enemies had been toughened physically and strengthened materially by the war because of the Vietnamese anti-Japanese actions. The French, furthermore, fought the war they knew best, but this was inappropriate for the terrain in which they sought their enemy. The French were not on the European plains, but in the jungles of Asia: they were not at home, and their adversary knew the territory.

Almost as soon as the French acknowledged defeat and turned to another insurgency (Algeria) the U.S., seeing the Viet Minh victory in 1954 as a win for international Communism, invoked the doctrine of containment and became involved. Prior to the fall of the French, the U.S. supported their NATO ally with money, arms, advice (usually ignored) and moral encouragement. The U.S. having no desire to fight another land war on Asia, did precisely that, but it swallowed Vietnam in homeopathic doses. The readings deal with the inability of U.S. strategists to understand Vietnam's serpentine military-political situation in which they attempted to fit South Vietnam into their Western European strategic framework.

Upon completion of this lesson, we all should have acquired:

1. an overview of the Vietnam conflict.
2. hypotheses that explain events in that multifacted war.

B. Required Reading

TOPIC 2
VIETNAM: ROOTS OF U.S. INVOLVEMENT

Monday
25 April 1983
1330-1700
(LD)

A. General

The U.S. experience in Vietnam was the greatest trial of our foreign policy and national will since World War II. The seeds of this involvement as noted in Topic 1 took root during the collapse of the French colonial empire in Indochina and grew deeper over the years until the U.S. found itself almost inextricably involved in combating a major revolutionary movement in Asia. How and why the U.S. decided to increase the scope and intensity of its operations in Vietnam is the subject of this lesson.

The authors' premise is that the political/bureaucratic decision making system worked as it was supposed to function during the long Vietnam experience. The authors argue that from 1945 to 1975 the "system" achieved its stated objective: preventing a Communist victory in Vietnam. Only when the Congress sworn into office in 1975 asserted what it saw as its electoral mandate did the system alter its direction and give up.

How did the system work? The basic consensual goal of postwar foreign policy--containment of communism--was consistently pursued, and differences of opinion within the bureaucracy were accommodated by compromise. Policy, thus, never strayed from the center. The authors show that U.S. involvement in Vietnam was not a story of "inadvertent descent into an unforeseen quicksand." Those making the decisions were usually pessimistic and painfully aware that victory would not be the result. They stayed the course because they considered it "vital not to lose Vietnam to Communism."

It was not that Vietnam was itself intrinsically vital, but that losing it would do harm to the U.S. government both domestically and internationally. The authors maintain that there was never a comprehensive or systematic examination of Vietnam's interest or importance to the U.S.

Five Presidents and their key advisers had faulty perceptions regarding Vietnam, the nature of the war there, and the character of America's interests. The result of these misperceptions was a flaccid strategy that never sought more than a stalemate.
Presidents tried to reason with their adversaries without realizing that they were engaged in a civil war unendable by negotiated political compromise. The real stake in the war—governance of Vietnam—was not negotiable.

What Washington saw as legitimate compromises, therefore, were much more basic to the Vietnamese. For Americans the "stakes were keeping their word and saving their political necks." For the Vietnamese the stakes were "their lives and lifelong aspirations." The Vietnam war could no more be settled by traditional diplomatic compromise than any other civil war. Given domestic and international politics as perceived by American decision makers, nothing sounder than a strategy of perseverance could be adopted, and the Communists "simply had more reason to persevere than did the United States."

B. Issues for Consideration

1. What motivated U.S. leaders to increase America's commitment to Vietnam?

2. What was the nature of the Communist insurgent threat to Vietnam as viewed by various U.S. administrations?

3. Why was the potential loss of Vietnam considered critical to U.S. national security interests? Did the conclusions reached at the time justify the actions taken?

C. Required Reading

Gelb and Betts, The Irony of Vietnam, pp. 1-6, 144-178 (R-1)

D. Supplemental Readings

Leslie Gelb and Richard K. Betts. The Irony of Vietnam, pp. 9-143. (S-1)

This supplemental reading will fill in the historical background of U.S. relations with both the French and the Indochinese before open American involvement in the war in Southeast Asia, as well as outline the responses to the perceived growing communist threat by the Kennedy and early Johnson administrations.


This reading highlights the views of the lecturer scheduled to speak on this topic. Professor Rostow was an adviser to three Presidents (Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson), and was intimately connected with U.S Vietnam policy for more than two decades. He believes that central U.S. interests were at risk in Southeast Asia and for that reason America was forced to expend blood and treasure. (on reserve)
A. General

This topic explores the strategy pursued by U.S., Vietnamese, and allied forces during the Vietnam War. That strategy was essentially one of attrition, wherein the major objective was to reduce the North Vietnamese regular army and the Viet Cong presence in South Vietnam by seeking out insurgent units wherever they existed (but preferably away from populated areas) and attacking them.

The reading comes furnished with what must be admittedly one of the most tentative Forewords ever to precede a book. The book's author, Colonel Harry G. Summers, sees Vietnam as a tactical victory and a strategic defeat in which the U.S. Army succeeded in everything it set out to do logistically and tactically. On the battlefield, he argues, the U.S. Army was unbeatable. In engagement after engagement, the forces of the Viet Cong and of the North Vietnamese were thrown back with terrible losses. Yet, in the end, it was North Vietnam that won. How could the U.S. Army do so well in battle and lose?

Colonel Summers' main thesis is that the lack of understanding of the relationship between military strategy and national policy caused the U.S. to exhaust its will and endurance against a secondary enemy--the guerillas in South Vietnam--instead of focussing military efforts to defeat the North Vietnamese in support of containment.

The two broad divisions of the book deal with, first, the American political environment that provided an especially polluted atmosphere in which the military had to operate. The second, and more germane part of the book, deals with the military strategy in Vietnam. Here the author explores our failure to employ armed force properly to secure national objectives. Much of the discussion in both segments is done in Clausewitzian terms. Colonel Summers believes that the U.S. government and the U.S. Army not only did not live up to the hallowed Clausewitzian principles, it also failed to live up to its own doctrine. We will read the second part of Summers's book as required and the first as supplementary.

B. Issues for Consideration

1. What were the consequences of restricting the ground war to the South?
2. What were the effects of the government's failure to win popular support?

3. What role did external support play?

4. What was the effect of the use of non-discriminatory explosives on the counterinsurgency effort in South Vietnam?

C. Required Reading


D. Supplementary Reading

Summers, On Strategy, pp. 7-50 (S-1)

In this section of the book the author describes domestic political and military doctrinal factors that crippled coherent national and military strategy regarding the Vietnam War.
Another element in the strategy for the Vietnam conflict was pacification, and even as brief a treatment of that war as is this course would be incomplete without dealing with that aspect of the war, especially given the fact that at its core it was an insurgency. While The Irony of Vietnam, and On Strategy treat pacification, the subject deserves more attention.

The pacification program was designed to sustain protection of the rural population from the insurgents while depriving the guerillas their rural popular base, and also to generate rural support for the government of the Republic of Vietnam by providing programs that met the needs of the people in the hopes of welding them politically to the central government. The program had military overtones in that it was to also assist in neutralizing active insurgent forces in the countryside, but the overwhelming emphasis was non-martial.

The reading by Robert W. Komer deals with pacification constrained by institutional bureaucracy. Komer understands why the initial U.S. response to the Vietnamese conflict was ill-suited to the novel problems we faced there. He is perplexed, however, that the response changed so little over the years when the war was obviously not going well. Komer condemns the U.S. effort for its conventionality in a non-conventional war, diffuse and fragmented management structures, and the institutional bureaucratic constraints and inertia that barred innovation and true cooperation. The largest scale innovation to the author was the pacification program. It failed for the reasons cited above.

B. Issues for Consideration

1. What was pacification? How did U.S. military and civilians responsible for the counterinsurgency view it? How did the Vietnamese government regard it?

2. How did pacification fit into the overall strategic priorities?

3. Should a pacification-counterinsurgency population protection strategy have been the predominant aim of U.S. response in South Vietnam rather than mobile, high technology warfare?
C. Required Readings

TOPIC 5

EFFECT OF DOMESTIC FACTORS ON POLITICAL/MILITARY STRATEGY

Thursday
28 April 1983
0830-1145
(LD)

A. General

This topic will consider some of the forces at work within American society during the Vietnam conflict. Emphasis will be on examining ways in which these forces affected the prosecution of the war. Consideration will also be given to actions which, if taken, might have attenuated some of those negative effects.

The reading traces domestic political activities that affected the war effort from the Truman to the Nixon administrations. The authors, Les Gelb and Richard Betts, divide domestic considerations into two broad periods. From 1950 until 1965 the country, by and large, and certainly the liberal press (defined by the authors as the New York Times, the Washington Post, Newsweek, and Time), were overwhelmingly on the side of administrations involved in containing communism. (Although Harry Truman certainly suffered in the polls when he failed to prosecute the Korean war as vigorously as the public thought he should in the 1951 and 1952 period.) Certainly Vietnam was, according to Time magazine, the right war at the right place at the right time, and General William Westmoreland was Time's "Man of the Year" in 1965.

In that year, however, the liberals became concerned about the veracity of the rhetoric coming from the Johnson administration, and conservatives, who had been previously skeptical now appeared to rally around the flag. Gelb and Betts point out that it is an American myth that politics stops at the water's edge. The Democrats were quite sensitive to charges that they had been "soft on communism" and had an overwhelming desire to not be tagged with "losing" Vietnam after they "lost" China. Both John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson saw their domestic legislative programs hostage to their activities in Vietnam, and also feared that they might undercut the U.S. position in other regions of the world should they back out. Kennedy apparently believed his reelection in 1964 was in part dependent on a firm stand in Vietnam. The two democrats appear to the authors to be inside a dilemma from which there was no easy escape. Liberal misgivings were vastly heightened by the 1968 Tet offensive and the way it was treated in the American press, and Johnson was driven from the presidential campaign.
B. Issues for Consideration

1. What role did American partisan politics play in hamstringing policy during the Vietnam era?

2. What were the constraints on the Presidents as they tried to assert their policies?

3. What was the effect on the U.S. war effort of the anti-war movement?

4. What was the effect of the draft laws and the way they were administered?

5. What was the effect of the failure to mobilize the reserves?

6. Did the media affect the overall effort?

7. How did congressional initiatives to end the war affect the outcome?

8. What was the effect of optimistic estimates by military and civilian leaders on the way American citizens viewed the war effort?

C. Required Reading

Gelb and Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam*. pp. 201-226, 272-296 (R-1)
Vietnam: Implications for U.S. Strategy

Monday
2 May 1983
0830-1030
(IS)

A. General

Vietnam was an American disaster. The war killed more than 57,000 young Americans, inflated the currency, depressed politics, and undermined American prestige and worth in the eyes of many in the world. How and why? This seminar is designed to pull together all of the threads in the previous eight lessons in this block of instruction to conduct an autopsy.

Obviously the political/military strategy was wrong and force was misapplied. The most powerful country in the world was defeated by an insignificant nation smaller and less populous than many of its states. Where did we go wrong militarily, politically, ideologically? What lessons are to be learned from a look back at all of the aspects of the war--politics, strategy, and tactics.

The readings demonstrate the difficulties of drawing lessons from this war. Gelb and Betts, for example, provide a superior dissection of the policy failures but their prescription for cure is inferior despite their brilliant pathology. Diagnosing a disease correctly does not necessarily mean that a cure follows. To avoid future endless wars that terminate in defeat the authors advocate multilateralism in exchange for bilateralism, invigorating domestic political checks and balances to widen decision making and sharing of responsibility, and leaving the door open for dissent.

None of these cures is developed in any depth, and all of them were present to a greater or lesser extent during the war. The authors argue that the U.S. should eschew "ambitious" doctrine because, after all, the doctrine of containment got us into the mess in the first place. They, however, agree that doctrine is necessary to bring order to a multifaceted bureaucracy, but they demand doctrine "with escape hatches", which is, in other words, undoctrinelike doctrine. We offer this criticism not because Gelb and Betts have not given us a solid treatise on the failed war, but to show that arriving at workable answers is not going to be easy. Yet the attempt must be made.

Colonel Summers calls for military leaders to become acutely aware of political, economic and social issues, while civilian government leaders delve deeply into the imperatives of military operations. Each need to understand that national policy affects not only selection of the military goal, but also the very way that war is
conducted. (Sounds like an advertisement for the National War College curriculum.) Robert Komer's essay attacks the institutional problems calling for an adaptive approach to unique problems, knowing well that bureaucracies have difficulty being adaptive. The cry of "no more Vietnams" (unless the criers mean no more failures) is self-defeating if America expects to live in this world of reality. Tensions burgeon on a globe on which America has critical interests. Lower level conflict is endemic in the Third World, and rapid population growth will further exacerbate the tensions that lead to conflict through the first quarter of the next century and probably beyond. It is now time to draw from our brief study of one failed counterinsurgency to establish principles for future conflicts (realizing, of course, the hazards of generalizing from one war, albeit a long one).

B. Issues for Consideration

1. Given the decision to intervene in Vietnam, what should have been the U.S. political-strategic objectives in that war?

2. Once involved, what political-military strategies and tactics should we have used?

3. Given the skill and resilience of the enemy, was "victory" achievable at a price acceptable to the American body politic?

4. Southeast Asia is still conflict ridden. Vietnam is extending its hegemony over nations that traditionally fear and despise her. What lessons from our thirty years involvement in the region can be applied to protecting what remains of American interest in that troubled part of the world?

5. While many (probably) erroneously defined American geopolitical interests in Southeast Asia during the 1950's and 1960's as "vital," conflict is rife in all of the states that compose our immediate southern flank, which, with no exaggeration is certainly vital, and insurgencies are boiling in several of the countries. What lessons can be derived from our political and military failure in Vietnam so that we do not repeat history in Central America?

6. Insurgencies are ongoing in the strategic Middle East/Persian Gulf region. America's interests there are longstanding. The economic well being of this country (and even more so the alliance we lead) depends upon relative harmony in that area. America's prestige, moreover, is involved since we have pledged our fidelity for decades to certain states in the region. Are there lessons from the tragedy in Vietnam that have applicability in this oil-soaked region?
7. Africa south of the Sahara is a cockpit of crises and will remain so for generations to come. Many U.S. strategic imports come from this region and many of these come to us from nowhere else. What have we learned from the past that might be applied to this continent?

C. **Required Reading**

*The Irony of Vietnam*, pp. 347-369 (R-1)

*On Strategy*, pp. 111-121, (R-2)

*Bureaucracy Does Its Thing*, pp. 151-161, (R-3) (in syllabus)
In analyzing the long and costly U.S. entanglement in Vietnam, with its many tragic consequences, it is important to look at performance as well as policy. Whatever the wisdom of U.S. intervention on the side of South Vietnam, the resulting immense disparity in strength and resources between the two sides would have suggested a different outcome -- as indeed it did to successive U.S. administrations. Yet why has a cumulatively enormous U.S. contribution -- on top of South Vietnam's own great effort -- had such limited impact for so long? Why, almost regardless of the ultimate outcome, has U.S. intervention entailed such disproportionate costs and tragic side effects?

The reasons are many, complex, and interrelated. They include the unique and unfamiliar -- at least in U.S. experience -- conflict environment in which we became enmeshed. Particularly constraining was the sharp contrast between the adversary we faced and the ally we were supporting -- a highly motivated and ideologically disciplined regime in Hanoi and revolutionary Viet Cong apparatus versus a weak, half-formed, traditionalist regime in Saigon. We repeatedly misjudged the enemy, especially his ability to frustrate our aims by his tactics and to counterescalate at every stage -- right up to 1972. Another constraint was implicit in the incremental nature of our response, doing only what we believed minimally necessary at each stage.

But even these reasons are insufficient to explain why we did so poorly for so long. The Pentagon Papers show that, to a greater extent than is often realized, we recognized the nature of the operational problems we confronted in Vietnam, and that our policy was designed to overcome them. And whatever the gradualism of our response, we ended up making a cumulatively massive investment of U.S. blood and treasure in the attempt to achieve a satisfactory outcome. Yet the U.S. grossly misjudged what it could actually accomplish with the huge effort it eventually made, and thus became more and more wound up in a war it couldn't "win" the way it fought it. In this sense at least, the U.S. did stumble into a "quagmire" in Vietnam.
What must be added is how another set of real-life constraints -- largely inherent in the typical behavior patterns of the GVN and U.S. institutions involved in the conflict -- made it difficult for them to cope with an unfamiliar conflict environment and greatly influenced what they could and could not, or would and would not, do. Though by no means the whole answer, these institutional constraints helped render the U.S./GVN response to an atypical insurgency conflict unduly conventional, expensive, and slow to adapt. This added perspective -- so often missing from critical analyses of our Vietnam experience -- is essential to an understanding of why we fought the war the way we did in Vietnam. It is what is primarily addressed in this study.

The GVN's performance was even more constrained by its built-in limitations than that of the U.S. In the last analysis, perhaps the most important single reason why the U.S. achieved so little for so long in Vietnam was that it could not sufficiently revamp, or adequately substitute for, a South Vietnamese leadership, administration, and armed forces inadequate to the task. The sheer incapacity of the regimes we backed, which largely frittered away the enormous resources we gave them, may well have been the greatest single constraint on our ability to achieve the aims we set ourselves at acceptable cost.

But to a great extent the GVN's failure was a U.S. failure too. Even in hindsight it is difficult to evaluate how much our inability to move the GVN was owing to the intractable nature of the problem and how much to the way we went about it. The record shows that U.S. officials tried harder than is often realized to get Diem and his successors to deal more effectively with the threat they faced. But for many reasons we did not use vigorously the leverage over the Vietnamese leaders that our contributions gave us. We became their prisoners rather than they ours; the GVN used its weakness far more effectively as leverage on us than we used our strength to lever it.

Equally striking is the sharp discontinuity between the mixed counterinsurgency strategy which U.S. and GVN policy called for from the outset, and the overwhelmingly conventional and militarized nature of our actual response. The impact of institutional constraints is nowhere more evident than in the GVN and U.S. approach to Vietnam's
military aspects, both before and after 1965. From the outset the preponderant weight of the U.S. and GVN military in the Vietnam picture tended to dictate an overly militarized response. The institutional background of U.S. and GVN military leaders helped shape the nature of that response. Molding conventional Vietnamese armed forces in the "mirror image" of the U.S. forces which were supplying them was a natural institutional reaction. We organized, equipped, and trained the RVNAF to fight American style, the only way we knew how.

Then, when the GVN and ARVN buckled, the U.S. in effect took over the "anti-main-force war" and sought to do directly what the South Vietnamese had failed to do. In the process, as might be expected, it further Americanized the war -- on an even grander scale. Trained, equipped, and organized primarily to fight the Russians in Central Europe, U.S. forces played out this military repertoire. Instead of adapting our response to the unique circumstances of Vietnam, we fought the enemy our way -- at horrendous cost and with tragic side effects -- because we lacked the incentive and much existing capability to do otherwise.

Our costly "search-and-destroy" (or attrition) strategy -- ground and air -- was also an outgrowth of these factors. It was a natural response of American commanders deploying forces hugely superior in mobility and firepower against an elusive enemy who could not be brought to decisive battle. But his ability to control his own losses by such means as evading contact and using sanctuaries frustrated our aims, as did his ability to replace much of his losses by further recruitment and, increasingly, by infiltration from the North.

The 1965-1968 U.S. air campaign against North Vietnam, though the outgrowth of many factors, also reflects the way in which an institution will tend to play out its preferred repertoire. Airmen were eager to demonstrate that strategic bombing and interdiction would work even in a war of the Vietnam type. It was also a classic case of the availability of a capability driving us to use it -- even though we soon recognized this use as having less than optimum effect.

The critical intelligence inadequacies which have plagued the GVN/U.S. effort despite the huge resources invested in overcoming them
are another product largely of institutional factors. The massive U.S. and ARVN military intelligence empires focused mostly on that with which they were most familiar, the size and location of enemy main-force units, to the neglect of such other vital targets as the opponent's politico-military control structure. We tended to see the enemy in our own image, one reason why we repeatedly thought we were doing better than we actually were.

On the civilian side the same tendency existed for the chief U.S. agencies involved to focus primarily on that with which they were most familiar. The State Department did not often deviate from its concept of normal diplomatic dealings with a sovereign allied government, not even when that government was falling apart. Similarly, State clung to a traditionalist view of civil-military relationships, and made little effort to assert control over our military effort on political grounds -- except with respect to limits on out-of-country military operations. State's concept of institution-building in Vietnam turned largely on encouragement of American democratic forms, a kind of mirror-imaging which proved hard to apply to the conditions of Vietnam. As for the Agency for International Development, though its operations were for the most part also quite conventional, the bulk of its resources went properly into a largely successful effort to prevent the inflationary consequences of the conflict from getting out of hand.

If it is understandable why our initial Vietnam responses were ill-suited to the atypical problems we confronted, why have they changed so little over years of bitter experience? Again it seems that institutional factors play a major role. Especially significant has been institutional inertia -- the built-in reluctance of organizations to change preferred ways of functioning except slowly and incrementally. Another such factor has been the shocking lack of institutional memory, largely because of short tours for U.S. personnel. Skewed incentive patterns also increased the pressures for conformity and tended to penalize adaptive response. And there was a notable dearth of systematic analysis of performance, again mainly because of the inherent reluctance of organizations to indulge in self-examination.
the efforts of both the GVN and the U.S. (and their interrelationship) provide yet other major reasons why it proved so hard to translate policy into practice or to convert our overwhelming superiority in men and resources into the results we sought.

Why did the U.S. and GVN settle for such conventional, diffuse, and fragmented management structures -- in strong contrast to an enemy who exerted centralized control over every facet of his activities? Institutional constraints again bulk large, including bureaucratic inertia, agency reluctance to violate the conventional dividing lines between their responsibilities, and hesitation to change the traditional relationship of civilian to military leadership. Whenever combined command was considered, the chief argument against it was essentially political -- that it would smack of colonialism. But also at issue was the natural preference of any institution to operate as an autonomous, homogeneous unit.

While U.S. performance in Vietnam is most notable for its sheer conventionality, some adaptive solutions tailored to specific problems were attempted -- and proved their utility more often than not. Unsurprisingly, such military adaptation as occurred tended to be either technological or in tactical means of utilizing new technology, e.g., helicopters or the sensors for the so-called "McNamara barrier."

Perhaps the chief example of large-scale institutional innovation has been the major GVN pacification program begun belatedly in 1967. To back it, the U.S. created an integrated civil-military advisory and support organization, almost unique in the Vietnam war. The gradual expansion of the overall U.S. advisory effort was another attempt at adaptive response. Compared to any previous such U.S. effort, that in Vietnam has been unprecedented in duration, extent, and comprehensiveness.

In assessing U.S. performance in Vietnam, it is also useful to pose the question of whether there was, within the political constraints imposed by the decisionmakers, a viable alternative approach to what we actually did. One such alternative approach -- which might be termed primary emphasis on a counterinsurgency strategy -- was repeatedly advocated, and indeed was given prominence in our Vietnam policy as early as 1955. Moreover, every program that might logically be regarded
In sum, in an atypical situation that cried out for innovation and adaptation, a series of institutional constraints militated against them. For the most part, as Herman Kahn has aptly put it, Vietnam has reflected a "business as usual" approach. Bureaucratic inertia and other factors powerfully inhibited the learning process. In true bureaucratic fashion, each U.S. and GVN agency preferred doing more of what it was already used to doing, rather than change accepted patterns of organization or operation. All this contributed to the failure of the huge U.S. support and advisory effort to generate an adequate GVN and RVNAF response to the challenges faced. It also helps explain why the enormous direct U.S. contribution to the war -- almost 550,000 troops at peak, thousands of aircraft, and over $150 billion -- had such limited impact for so long.

Nor was there any integrated conflict management to pull together all the disparate aspects of the GVN/U.S. effort. By and large, the U.S. and the GVN each ran their share of the war with essentially a peacetime management structure -- in largely separate bureaucratic compartments. This had a significantly adverse impact on the prosecution of the war. Lack of any overall management structure contributed to its overmilitarization by facilitating the predominance of the GVN and U.S. military. It also contributed to the proliferation of overlapping GVN and U.S. programs -- to the point where they competed excessively for scarce resources and even got in each other's way. Meanwhile, counterinsurgency -- or pacification -- fell between stools; it was everybody's business and nobody's. Though many correctly analyzed the need for it, and it was from the outset a major component of GVN/U.S. declaratory strategy, the absence of a single agency or directing body charged with it contributed greatly to the prolonged failure to carry it out on any commensurate scale.

Last but not least, the lack of any combined command or management machinery seriously limited the ability of the Americans to exact better performance from the South Vietnamese. It deprived the U.S. of an institutional framework for exerting influence toward the solution of problems which it recognized as critical from the outset. In retrospect, the diffusion of authority and fragmentation of command that characterized
as part of a counterinsurgency-oriented strategy was experimented with at one time or another.

But there was an immense gap between this policy emphasis and what was actually done in Vietnam. Counterinsurgency (or pacification) did not fail in Vietnam. Whatever policy called for, it simply was never tried on any major scale until 1967-1971. Before 1967 the U.S. and GVN devoted very little effort and resources to pacification-type programs; these were always dwarfed by the conventional military effort. For example, the U.S. input to the highly publicized Strategic Hamlet Program was farcically small. Even after 1967, pacification remained a small tail to the very large conventional military dog.

It was never tried on a large enough scale mainly because it was not part of the institutional repertoire of the major GVN and U.S. agencies involved in Vietnam. In effect, the GVN and U.S. lacked an institutional capability to carry it out. Having no major vested interest speaking for them, pacification-type programs were overshadowed from the outset by more conventional approaches. Another constraint was the lack, for too long, of any GVN or U.S. management structure to pull together the many facets of counterinsurgency and give them proper stress.

A predominantly counterinsurgency-oriented effort would have had its best chance for success before 1964-1965, when the insurgency escalated into quasiconventional war. Paradoxically, however, a reasonably effective pacification effort did not get under way until 1967-1968, when it belatedly became a modest complement to the raging big-unit war. Indeed, it is on the role which pacification played in the Vietnam turnaround of 1969-1971 that the case for a counterinsurgency-oriented strategy must chiefly rest. Even allowing for many other contributory factors, it demonstrates that vigorous emphasis on pacification was feasible and might have led to a more satisfactory outcome -- especially if undertaken much earlier. At the least, it is hard to see how it would have worked less well, cost nearly as much, or had such tragic side effects. But in the last analysis this must remain a historical "if."
If the preceding analysis of how institutional constraints impeded adaptive response is broadly valid, then many useful lessons can be drawn from it. Among the most important is that atypical problems demand specially tailored solutions, not just the playing out of existing institutional repertoires. The policymaker must take fully into account the ability of the institutions carrying out the policy to execute it as intended. Adequate follow-through machinery at all levels is also needed, to force adaptation if necessary. Where the U.S. is supporting an enfeebled ally, effective means of stimulating optimum indigenous performance are essential.

But our Vietnam experience also shows how difficult it is to translate such general — and in hindsight obvious — lessons into the requisite performance. This demands a consistent, deliberate effort to offset the inevitable tendency of bureaucracies to keep doing the familiar and to adapt only slowly and incrementally. In particular, such an effort requires: (1) specially selecting flexible and imaginative conflict managers at all levels; (2) revising training and incentive systems to place a higher premium on adaptiveness instead of the "school solution"; (3) setting up autonomous ad hoc organizations to manage specially tailored programs which are not in conventional organizational repertoires; (4) creating unified management at each level where multidimensional conflict situations dictate integrated multifaceted responses; (5) assigning adequate staffs to single managers; and (6) providing them with a capability for thorough evaluation and analysis.

Vietnam also suggests a series of practical guidelines if the U.S. is to get better performance from allies it is supporting than it managed to get in Vietnam. The United States must: (1) realize that such support, however massive, cannot be effectively utilized without viable indigenous institutions capable of carrying out the programs supported; (2) avoid "mirror-imaging" as a routine response; (3) where necessary, use the leverage provided by this support to ensure that it is optimally used; (4) specially tailor any U.S. advisory effort to the needs of the situation; (5) press the local government to create whatever special interagency machinery is required to manage multifaceted programs that
cut across normal agency lines; and (6) insist on some suitable form of combined management in the event -- unlikely under the Nixon Doctrine -- that the U.S. intervenes directly in a military conflict.

If these rather generalized lessons seem like restating the obvious, one need only recall how little we actually practiced them in Vietnam. Though by no means the whole answer, our failure to take adequately into account the many institutional constraints discussed in this study helps explain why, despite such a massive effort, the U.S. and GVN achieved so little for so long. Overcoming these constraints will be no easy matter, but perhaps our bitter Vietnam experience will lead us to face up to the potential costs of failing to make the effort entailed.
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 militiamen. 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 paramilitary 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."

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 agrovillage 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 Hr Tíc 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 (MALTs) 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 10,254 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 rediscovered 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.\textsuperscript{43} 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 unsat-
sfactory officials and commanders. It might have made more of a dif-
fERENCE than anything else.

Other major advisory flaws, inherent in the institutional back-
ground 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 sup-
port, 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 low-
ered 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 inex-
ensive 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 nonethe-
less that the U.S. overwhelmed the Vietnamese with "huge" numbers of
advisers also ignore that these were advising a GVN military, paramili-
tary, 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 remem-
bered 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/RVNCF performance to reduce the need for so massive a U.S. troop commitment as in the event occurred.