"Little consideration... to preparing Vietnamese forces for counterinsurgency warfare"? History, Organization, Training, and Combat Capability of the RVNAF, 1955-1963

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Abstract

This dissertation is a focused analysis of the origins, organization, training, politics, and combat capability of the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN) from 1954 to 1963, the leading military instrument in the national counterinsurgency plan of the government of the Republic of Viet Nam (RVN). Other military and paramilitary forces that complemented the army in the ground war included the Viet Nam Marine Corps (VNMC), the Civil Guard (CG), the Self-Defense Corps (SDC) and the Civil Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) which was composed mainly of the indigenous populations in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam. At sea and in the air, the Viet Nam Air Force (VNAF) and the Viet Nam Navy (VNN) provided additional layers of tactical, strategic and logistical support to the military and paramilitary forces. Together, these forces formed the Republic of Viet Nam Armed Forces (RVNAF) designed to counter the communist insurgency plaguing the RVN.

This thesis argues the following. First, the origin of the ARVN was rooted in the French Indochina War (1946-1954). Second, the ARVN was an amalgamation of political and military forces born from a revolution that encompassed three overlapping wars: a war of independence between the Vietnamese and the French; a civil war between the Vietnamese of diverse social and political backgrounds; and a proxy war as global superpowers and regional powers backed their own Vietnamese allies who, in turn, exploited their foreign supporters for their own purposes. Lastly, the ARVN failed not because it was organized, equipped, and trained for conventional instead of counterinsurgency warfare. Rather, it failed to assess, adjust, and adapt its strategy and tactics quickly enough to meet the war's changing circumstances. The ARVN's slowness to react resulted from its own institutional weaknesses, military and political problems that were beyond its control, and the powerful and dangerous enemies it faced. The People's Army of Viet Nam (PAVN) and the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF) were formidable adversaries. Not duplicated in any other post-colonial Third World country and led by an experienced and politically tested leadership, the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (DRVN) and the National Front for the Liberation of Southern Viet Nam (NFLSVN) exploited RVN failures effectively.

Hypothetically, there was no guarantee that had the US dispatched land forces into Cambodia and Laos or invaded North Vietnam that the DRVN and NFLSVN would have quit attacking the RVN. The French Far East Expeditionary Corps (FFEEC)' occupation of the Red River Delta did not bring peace to Cochinchina, only a military stalemate between it and the Vietnamese Liberation Army (VLA). Worse yet, a US invasion potentially would have unnerved the People's Republic of China (PRC) which might have sent the PLAF to fight the US in Vietnam as it had in Korea. Inevitably, such unilateral military action would certainly provoke fierce criticism and opposition amongst the American public at home and allies abroad. At best, the war's expansion might have bought a little more time for the RVN but it could never guarantee South Vietnam's survival. Ultimately, RVN's seemingly endless political, military, and social problems had to be resolved by South Vietnam's political leaders, military commanders, and people but only in the absence of constant PAVN and PLAF attempts to destroy whatever minimal progress RVN made politically, militarily, and socially. The RVN was plagued by many problems and the DRVN and NFLSVN, unquestionably, were amongst those problems.

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Abbreviations Used in Dissertation

ACP – Annam (central Vietnam) Communist Party

AATTV – Australian Army Training Team Vietnam

ARVN – Army of the Republic of Viet Nam

BRIAM – British Advisory Mission

BXPF – Binh Xuyen Paramilitary Force

CDPF – Cao Dai Paramilitary Force

CCP – Chinese Communist Party

CG – Civil Guard

CMAG – Chinese Military Advisory Group

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency

CIDG – Civilian Irregulars Defence Group

CIO – Central Intelligence Organization

COMINTERN – Communist International

COMINT – Communication Intelligence

CPI – Communist Party of Indochina

CSDF – Catholic Self-Defence Force

CUTE – Communist University of the Toilers of the East also known as "Stalin School"

DMZ – De-Militarized Zone

DOD – US Department of Defence

DVQDD – Dai Viet Quoc Dan Dang (Greater Viet Nationalist Party)

DGD – Directeur Général de la Documentation

DRVN – Democratic Republic of [Northern] Vietnam

DPRK – Democratic People's Republic of [North] Korea

NFLSVN – National Front for the Liberation of Southern Vietnam

FFEEC – French Far East Expeditionary Corps

FMI – French Military Intelligence

FSP – French Socialist Party

FWMAF – Free World Military Assistance Force

GCRE – Groupement des Contrôles Radio-électroniques

GMPC – General Military Party Committee

GNP – Gross National Product

HHPA – Hoa Hao Paramilitary Force

HUMINT – Human Intelligence

ICC – International Control Commission

ICP – Indochinese Communist Party

ILS – International Lenin School

JGS – Office of Chief of Staff of the Joint General Staff

JIA – Japanese Imperial Army

JIAF – Japanese Imperial Air Force

JIN – Japanese Imperial Navy

KMT – Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party)

LRRP – Long Ranger Reconnaissance Patrol

MAAGI – US Military Assistance and Advisory Group Indochina

MAAGV – US Military Assistance and Advisory Group Vietnam

MACV – US Military Assistance Command Vietnam

MSS – Military Security Service

NCO – Non-Commissioned Officers

NCOA – Non-Commissioned Officers Academy

NIE – US National Intelligence Estimate

OSS – American Office of Strategic Services

PAF – Personnel Auxiliaire Féminin

PAVN - People's Army of Viet Nam

PLAF – People's Liberation Armed Force

PLA – People's Liberation Army of China

POW – Prisoner of War

PRC – People's Republic of China

ROE – Rule of Engagement

ROK – Republic of Korea

RVN – Republic of [Southern] Vietnam

ROK – Republic of [South] Korea

ROKA – Republic of [South] Korea Army

RYLV – Revolutionary Youth League of Vietnam (Viet Nam Thanh Nien Cach Mang Dong Chi Hoi)

SDC – Self-Defence Corps

SDECE – Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre-espionnage

SFOD – Special Forces Operational Detachment teams of the United States Army

SHE – Service d'Etudes Historiques

SIGINT – Signal Intelligence

SOE – British Special Operations Executive

SEATO – Southeast Asia Treaty Organization

SSPS – Service of Social and Political Studies

SRO – Service de Renseignement Opérationnel

SRVN – Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

STR – Services Techniques de Recherches

Sûreté – French Colonial Police Force

TRIM – Franco-American Training Relations and Instructions Mission (TRIM)

UN – United Nations

US – United States

USN – United States Navy

USA – United States Army

USAF – United States Air Force

USMAAGI – United States Military Assistance Advisory Group Indochina

USSR - Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics

VNG – Vietnamese National Government of Emperor Bao Dai's Vietnam

VNA – Vietnamese National Army

VNAF – Viet Nam Air Force

VNN – Viet Nam Navy

VNMA – Vietnamese National Military Academy

VNMC – Viet Nam Marine Corps

VCP – Vietnamese Communist Party

Viet Minh – Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi (League for the Independence of Vietnam, which was a nationalist front consisted of various non-communist nationalist groups but led by the communist party)

VLA – Vietnamese Liberation Army

VNQDD - Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang (Vietnamese Nationalist Party)

VWAFC – Vietnam Women's Armed Forces Corps

WWI – World War I

WWII – World War II

Abbreviations Used In Footnotes

LOC – Library of Congress

NARA-II – National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland

THIWRP – The Hoover Institution for War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford University, Palo Alto, California

NAUK – National Archives of the United Kingdom

USAMHI – United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania

Chapter 1
Introduction

This dissertation analyzes the origins, organization, training, politics, and combat capability of the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN) from 1954 to 1963, the leading military instrument in the national counterinsurgency plan of the government of the Republic of Viet Nam (RVN). Other military and paramilitary forces that complemented the army in the ground war included the Viet Nam Marine Corps (VNMC), the Civil Guard (CG), the Self-Defense Corps (SDC) and the Civil Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) which was composed mainly of the indigenous populations in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam. The Viet Nam Air Force (VNAF) and the Viet Nam Navy (VNN) provided additional layers of tactical, strategic, and logistical support to the military and paramilitary forces. Together, these forces formed the Republic of Viet Nam Armed Forces (RVNAF) designed to counter the communist insurgency plaguing the RVN.

The communist insurgency, however, was defeatable only if the military option was accompanied by genuine long-term social, political, and economic reforms. But the RVN government failed to deliver promised reforms given difficult post-colonial social, political and economic problems inherited by the RVN government and military. Further, the RVN government and military failed to step up to the challenge due to their own institutional weaknesses. Finally, the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (DRVN) and the National Front for the Liberation of Southern Viet Nam (NFLSVN) were far more organized, experienced, and fierce in their prosecution of the war, militarily, politically and diplomatically, against the RVN. No other RVN governmental or military institution suffered more from these three chronic problems than the ARVN. To analyze the

ARVN's strengths and weaknesses is to understand both the successes and failures of the RVN war effort against the DRVN and NFLSVN. Thus, this study is primarily a military analysis of the ARVN but within the context of the RVN's history. The remainder of the introduction reviews the historiography of the Vietnam War to place the arguments and conclusions of this dissertation in the proper context. Finally, it will discuss how sources have been gathered and used in the dissertation.

The Historiography of the Vietnam War

The historiography of the Vietnam War began with an orthodox interpretation, moved to a revisionist challenge, and then shifted to a post-revisionist synthesis, which has attracted fewer followers than the two traditionally more entrenched schools of thought.[1] In every major conflict fought by American until the Vietnam War, there has been, Robert A. Divine has claimed, "a cycle of historical analysis that runs from contemporary [orthodox] support through a critical revision and finally culminates in a [post-revisionist] synthesis that incorporates elements of both earlier views."[2] The Vietnam War turned the dominant paradigm in the historiography of American foreign relations on its head, giving birth to "the new revisionist outlook" which suggested that "the primary villain in the origins of the Cold War" was the United States (US) rather than the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR).[3] Second, by putting America's past wars and diplomacy under a microscope, this group of scholars criticized US foreign

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[1] Robert J. McMahon, "The Cold War in Asia: Toward a New Synthesis?", *Diplomatic History*, vol. 12, no. 3 (Summer 1988), 307-327; Robert A. Divine, "Vietnam Reconsidered", *Diplomatic History*, vol. 12, no. 1 (Winter 1988), 79-93; Gary Hess, "Historians and the Vietnam War", *Diplomatic History*, vol. 18, no. 2 (Spring 1994), 239-264; David L. Anderson, "Why Vietnam? Postrevisionist Answers and a Neorealist Suggestion", *Diplomatic History*, vol. 13, no. 3 (Summer 1989), 419-429; Gary R. Hess, *Vietnam: Explaining America's Lost War* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 209; Marc Jason Gilbert, ed., *Why The North Won The Vietnam War* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 1-45

[2] Divine, "Vietnam Reconsidered", 79

[3] Jerald A. Combs, *American Diplomatic History: Two Centuries of Changing Interpretations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 322-346

policy for being driven by economic interests, territorial expansion, and cultural imperialism.[4] Most significantly, "the new revisionist outlook" strongly influenced the orthodox school-of-thought of the Vietnam War whose interpretations were more hostile towards US diplomacy and use of force in Southeast Asia. America's previous wars had been positively perceived, judged as noble causes or necessary evils. "The initial [orthodox] interpretation was anything but supportive of American policy," Divine has said, adding that, "to a greater or lesser degree, nearly all the early writers on Vietnam were highly critical of American intervention."[5]

While agreeing with Divine's thesis, Robert J. McMahon has cautioned that even though "most early analysts of the war in Vietnam found fault with U.S. policy," this fact should not "be allowed to obscure the profound differences that separated their various interpretative approaches."[6] Orthodox historians disagreed mostly over the causes of "America's failed intervention in Vietnam."[7] Their explanations for American action in Southeast Asia blamed an ill-conceived policy, a misguided strategy, a misunderstanding of the policy of containment, but also mainly economic expansionism and idealistic imperialism.[8] As to why the US lost in Vietnam, orthodox historians concluded that stringency of the civil-military bureaucracy, domestic political constraints, the misperceptions and ethnocentrism of America's regional enemies and local allies, plus ideological blinders and international power politics imperatives distracted the US from the social, political, and economic difficulties generally faced by post-colonial nation-

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[4] Combs, *American Diplomatic History*, 347-383
[5] Divine, "Vietnam Reconsidered", 80
[6] McMahon, "The Cold War in Asia", 3
[7] Warren I. Cohen, ed., *Pacific Passage: The Study of American-East Asian Relations on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 315
[8] Hess, *Vietnam: Explaining America's Lost War*, 37-45; Galbriel Kolko, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience* (New York: The New Press, 1994), ix-xiv, 3-10; Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), ix-x

states.[9] Whatever their differences, orthodox historians agreed that the war was a tragedy at best and immoral at worst.[10] Secondly, they contended that the war resulted less from Soviet and/or Chinese menace than from an ambitious design to replace Britain's White Man's Burden and France's Mission to Civilize with America's Manifest Destiny during a time of bitter anti-colonialism and rising nationalism throughout Europe's former empires.[11] The Domino Theory, therefore, was a façade to justify intervention to realize America's hegemonic goal. "While it [the Vietnam War] was being waged," Gary R. Hess maintained, "the predominant (orthodox) interpretation saw the United States, driven by mindless anticommunism and with disregard for Vietnamese politics and culture, being drawn into a conflict that it could not win."[12] Third, the war was either not winnable or defeat was inevitable due to a combination of politico-military factors. As Marc Jason Gilbert has explained:

> [The] asymmetrical relationships between the strengths and weaknesses of all combatants: the enemy was strongest in the very areas where forces allied to the United States were weakest and the enemy's weaknesses could not easily be exploited by allied strengths. Chief among the Vietnamese foe's strengths was its ability to project itself as

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[9] Cohen, *Pacific Passage*, 315; George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 4th ed., (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), xi-xiv, 323-368; Leslie H. Gelb with Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, D.C.: Brooking Institution, 1979), 14-23; Robert D. Schulzinger, *A Time For War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 328-336; David L. Anderson & John Ernst, ed., *The War That Never Ends: New Perspectives on the Vietnam War* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 1-9, 13-30

[10] Frances Fitzgerald, *Fire In The Lake: The Vietnamese and The Americans In Vietnam* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2002), 425-453; David Halberstam, *The Best and The Brightest* (New York: Pallantine Books, 1992), vii-xx, 667-672; Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 3-33; Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), xi-xiii, 2-59; David Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge: the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 1-9, 484-497; Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), xiii; Hess, *Vietnam: Explaining America's Lost War*, 3-9

[11] Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall, ed., *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1-15; Kathryn C. Statler, *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention In Vietnam* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 1-11; Robert J. McMahon, *The Limits of Empire: The United States and Southeast Asia Since World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), ix-xii, 1-42, 182-222

[12] Gary R. Hess, "The Unending Debate: Historians and the Vietnam War", *Diplomatic History*, vol. 18, no. 2 (Spring 1994), 240

> the champions of Vietnam's independence and its pursuit of a plan of campaign possessed of unity of direction and political cohesion that, while imperfect, survived the vicissitudes of war with the greatest power on earth.[13]

While some historians have claimed the revisionist school-of-thought emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s,[14] it began earlier with a small group of journalists and historians who were more sympathetic to US policy and the use of force to combat the DRVN's covert and overt attacks.[15] But the revisionist view really strengthened after the Cold War ended in the early 1990s. Revisionist historians, like orthodox scholars, approached the Vietnam War with the same question: Why did the US lose? The query led to explanations that calculated the strengths and weaknesses of America and its allies and the weaknesses and strengths of the DRVN, the USSR and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Secondly, revisionists wanted to understand what the DRVN and NFLSVN did right and what America and its allies did wrong in the war.[16] Beyond this point of departure, however, the difference between the two schools was fundamental. As Mark Moyar commented, "A small group of veterans and academic historians who rejected the fundamental tenets of the antiwar movement were, from the beginning, producing works that became known as 'revisionist.'"[17]

Contrary to the orthodox argument that US intervention in Vietnam resulted from a morally flawed hegemonic imperial ambition, revisionist scholars asserted that

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[13] Gilbert, *Why The North Won The Vietnam War*, 5
[14] Divine, "Vietnam Reconsidered", 80; Cohen, *Pacific Passage*, 315
[15] Denis Warner, *The Last Confucian: Vietnam, South-East Asia, and the West* (New York: Penguin Books, 1964), 9-15, 304-312; Marguerite Higgins, *Our Vietnam Nightmare: The story of U.S. involvement in the Vietnamese tragedy, with thoughts on a future policy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 1-15, 287-314; Edgar O'Ballance, *The Wars In Vietnam, 1954-1980* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1981), 7-8; Ellen J. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954), 3-7; Ellen Hammer, *Vietnam: Yesterday and Today* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 245-269
[16] See Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) and Phillip B. Davidson, *Vietnam At War: The History, 1946-1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Mark Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: The CIA's Secret Campaign to Destroy the Viet Cong* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997)
[17] Mark Moyar, "Vietnam: Historians at War", *Academic Question*, vol. 21, no. 1 (March 2008), 38

American involvement derived from real geopolitical, strategic, and security concerns. Their main contention was two-fold; first, if South Vietnam fell, the rest of Southeast Asia would collapse; second, if the latter survived, it likely would be dominated by the communist bloc. The revisionists contended that DRVN alliances with the USSR and the PRC were not meant to restrain US interference; instead, the DRVN leader, President Ho Chi Minh, was a doctrinaire practitioner of Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism. Revisionists, labeling Ho Chi Minh a puppet of the USSR and the PRC, argued that RVN President Ngo Dinh Diem, despite his numerous flaws, was a true Vietnamese patriot. "Ho generally showed greater deference toward his foreign patrons than did his nationalist rival in South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, who would ultimately suffer death for refusing to yield to the demands of his American allies," argued Mark Moyar.[18] The DRVN, with diplomatic and military support from the USSR and PRC, constituted a real threat to American security and credibility in Southeast Asia in particular and the world generally.[19] Thus, revisionist historians argued that while the US involvement in Southeast Asia was badly mismanaged, it had been necessary to win the confidence of allies and to deter the USSR, the PRC, and their friends from acting in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and Asia.[20] In the final analysis, the defeat of the RVN was not inevitable to revisionist historians.[21]

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[18] Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), xiii-xiv

[19] Ibid., xiv

[20] See Norman Podhoretz, *Why We Were In Viet Nam* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983); Timothy J. Lomperis, *The War Everyone Lost – and Won: America's Intervention in Viet Nam's Twin Struggles* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1987); Norman B. Hannah, *The Key to Failure: Laos & the Vietnam War* (New York: Madison Books, 1987); Timothy N. Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam: U.S. Military Aid to the Royal Lao Government, 1955-1975* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993)

[21] See C. Dale Walton, *The Myth of Inevitable U.S. Defeat In Vietnam* (London: Frank Cass, 2002)

The earliest explanation for why the US could not win the war claimed that the US military had been prevented from invading the DRVN due to rule of engagement (ROE) restrictions as dictated by civilian governments in Washington, DC and influenced by domestic anti-war movements later in the war.[22] Gary R. Hess has grouped these explanations into three broad categories: the Clausewitzians; the Hearts and Minds; and the Legitimacists.[23] The Clausewitzians, inspired by nineteenth century Prussian military thinker Carl von Clausewitz and his seminal work, *On War*,[24] asserted that victory had been possible. They claimed that "if only" the US military had invaded the DRVN or had extended the Geneva Demarcation Line from Vietnam to the Laos-Thailand border, communist forces in North and South Vietnam would have been divided, isolated, and destroyed.[25] Not so certain that victory was possible, the Hearts and Minds group argued that greater devotion to counterinsurgency warfare and pacification efforts earlier in the war might have staved off defeat.[26] "A different group," commented Mark Moyar, "led by a military officer with a Ph.D. named Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., concluded that the

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[22] Gilbert, *Why The North Won The War*, 22, 219-232; see also General William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (New York: A Dell Book, 1980) and Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1998)

[23] Hess, "Historians and the Vietnam War", 241

[24] See Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984)

[25] Hess, "Historians and the Vietnam War", 241-242; see also Colonel Dave Richard Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet: U.S.-Vietnam in Perspective* (San Rafael: Presidio Press, 1978); Colonel Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1995); General Bruce Palmer, Jr., *The 25-Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984); Shelby L. Stanton, *The Rise and Fall of An American Army: U.S. Ground Forces in Vietnam, 1965-1973* (New York: A Dell Book, 1985); Hess, *Vietnam: Explaining America's Lost War*, 91-98

[26] Hess, "Historians and The Vietnam War", 242-243; see also Colonel David H. Hackworth and Julie Sherman, *About Face: The Odyssey of an American Warrior* (New York: Touchstone, 1990); Major Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr. *The Army and Vietnam* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988); Larry E. Cable, *Conflict of Myths: The Development of Counterinsurgency Doctrine and the Vietnam War* (New York: New York University Press, 1988) and *Unholy Grail: The US and the Wars in Vietnam, 1965-1968* (London: Routledge, 1991); D. Michael Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms: The Failure of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Hess, *Vietnam: Explaining America's Lost War*, 112-132

war could have been won had the United States been more delicate, rather than more forceful."[27] Lastly, the Legitimacists were most skeptical that America and its allies could have prevailed. Reasoning that RVN's political and military capabilities were the decisive factors in determining victory or defeat, the Legitimacists perceived the turning point was the November 1st, 1963, coup d'état that unseated President Diem, not the Tet Offensive of 1968. "Legitimacists see the United States as headed in the right direction in the late 1950s and argue that it should have stood by Ngo Dinh Diem, who, as subsequent events would demonstrate, was the South's most effective leader," wrote Gary R. Hess.[28]

The irreconcilable differences between the orthodox and the revisionist schools left little room for a cogent post-revisionist synthesis interpretation of the Vietnam War. Still, some sought to study the Vietnam War more firmly in the context of Vietnamese history as opposed to examining it exclusively against the backdrop of American history. Despite the differences dividing orthodox and revisionist historians, their versions of the war were situated in the context of American historical experiences at home and abroad in mid-twentieth century.[29] But the placement of the Vietnam War in an American context ensured that the experience of those who suffered most, the Vietnamese people, was shunted to the obscured periphery. "Interestingly, although the war took place mainly

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[27] Moyar, "Vietnam: Historians at War", 44

[28] Hess, "Historians and the Vietnam War", 244; see also Cecil B. Currey, *Edward Lansdale: The Unquiet American* (London: Brassey's, 1998); Norman Podhoretz, *Why We Were In Viet Nam* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983); Timothy J. Lomperis, *The War Everyone Lost – and Won: America's Intervention in Viet Nam's Twin Struggles* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1987); Denis Warner, *The Last Confucian: Vietnam, South-East Asia, and the West* (New York: Penguin Books, 1964); Marguerite Higgins, *Our Vietnam Nightmare: The story of U.S. involvement in the Vietnamese tragedy, with thoughts on a future policy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965); Ellen Hammer, *Vietnam: Yesterday and Today* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966)

[29] Hess, "Historians and The Vietnam War", 246; see also Robert Mann, *A Grand Delusion: America's Descent Into Vietnam* (New York: Basic Books, 2001); Patrick J. Hearden, *The Tragedy of Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991); George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002); Paul M. Kattenburg, *The Vietnam Trauma in America Foreign Policy, 1945-75* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1980)

in South Vietnam, historians have written little about the South Vietnamese," wrote Robert J. Topmiller. "But to achieve an accurate and balanced analysis of the war, historians must move the Vietnamese from the periphery to the center of the story."[30] In addition, the Cold War's end allowed historians to research in the archives of America's former adversaries to see how the former USSR and the PRC perceived and responded to US diplomatic initiatives and use of force.[31] No longer could historians study the Vietnam War almost exclusively from the American viewpoint; they now had to consider the perspectives of the Vietnamese, the Soviets, and the Chinese.

Even though the Vietnam War is now studied in an American, Vietnamese, and Cold War context, these changes little influenced the views of other orthodox and revisionist scholars.[32] Rather than re-examining their earlier scholarship, members of both schools have only reinforced their traditional arguments and conclusions.[33] As Mark Moyar has argued, "not every historian of the war can be clearly identified with one school, but most historians generally side with one of the two groups on most of the basic issues."[34] "There is, as yet," Gary R. Hess has added, "scant evidence of a post-revisionist synthesis, as the orthodox-revisionist differences remain sharp."[35] However,

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[30] Robert J. Topmiller, *The Lotus Unleashed: The Buddhist Peace Movement in South Vietnam, 1964-1966* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), x

[31] See Ilya V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996); Ilya V. Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy toward the Indochina Conflict, 1954-1963* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2003); Qiang Zhai *China & The Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Chen Jian, *Mao's China & The Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001)

[32] Miller, "War Stories: The Taylor-Buzzanco Debate and How We Think about the Vietnam War", *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1-2 (February/August 2006), 455

[33] For the new orthodox history on the Vietnam War, see Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall, ed., *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Kathryn C. Statler, *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention In Vietnam* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007); for the new revisionist history of the Vietnam War, see Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*

[34] Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 419

[35] Hess, *Vietnam: Explaining America's Lost War*, 209

the fierce debate between the orthodox and the revisionist historians by keeping each other in check, have compelled historians to search for an alternative way to research, interpret, and teach the war. In summing up the orthodox-revisionist debate while introducing the arguments of the post-revisionist-synthesis scholars, Marc Jason Gilbert has noted:

> [Orthodox] critics of revisionists who believe that more effective counterinsurgency warfare could have altered the war's outcome have become much more sophisticated in their understanding of that subject.... The revisionist challenge has also helped keep the orthodox school's macro-historical approach from slipping into determinism... events on the battlefield and what Clausewitz called the "fog of war"... made victory or defeat for either side far from inevitable.... As a result, some advocates of the standard interpretation of the American defeat in Vietnam have shifted to what has been called a "postrevisionist" posture. They no longer dismiss out of hand the revisionist contention that the war was "winnable." They still maintain, however, that the means most likely required to secure such an end could not guarantee victory "in any meaningful sense of the term." These means included an invasion of the DRV... the possible occupation of much of Indochina... and the long-term maintenance of a repressive non-communist regime in the South.[36]

Edward Miller, an advocate of the post-revisionist-synthesis school-of-thought, has criticized the Vietnam War as a Cold War "morality tale" drummed up by the orthodox and revisionist historians who have resorted to finger pointing about heroes, victims, and villains. Ethical judgments of the war, Miller believed, should give way to an understanding of the Vietnam War as "a contest over modernization" in which there are multiple possibilities for interpreting the historical events in a more "nuanced" way.[37] The very first and best post-revisionist-synthesis account was Carlisle A. Thayer's *War By Other Means: National Liberation and Revolution in Viet-Nam, 1954-1960*. Thayer did not emphasize the successes of the DRVN, the USSR, and the PRC to explain why the DRVN prevailed. Nor did he play up failures by the RVN, the US, and the Free World Military Assistance Forces (FWMAF) to explain defeat in 1975. Rather, Thayer

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[36] Gilbert, *Why The North Won The Vietnam War*, 29-30
[37] Miller, "War Stories: The Taylor-Buzzanco Debate and How We Think about the Vietnam War", 475

explained the highly complex interactions between the DRVN government and military and the RVN government and military, noting how each re-evaluated policies, readjusted strategies, and implemented their plans accordingly.[38] Summing up the post-revisionist-synthesis, which calculated both friendly and enemy actions and inactions in a dual nature of war, Thayer asserted that:

> One of the most contentious issues of the war concerned the origins, causes and nature of the insurgency movement directed against the Diem government. The debate quickly became polarized [between orthodox and revisionist] as the protagonists simplified the facts of Vietnamese history and political development to fit their particular viewpoints. Supporters [revisionist] of Western intervention argued that the insurgency in South Viet-Nam was a war of aggression waged from without by Communist North Viet-Nam.... On the other hand, opponents [orthodox] of the war argued that the insurgency was essentially a civil war, a product of condition within South Viet-Nam, with only minimal support and direction from Communist North Vietnam.... A close examination of the historical record, based on material that has since become available, reveals that neither of the above views is entirely accurate and that the interplay of events was far more complex than portrayed.[39]

Thayer's views offer a juxtaposition to Edward Miller's explanations for how and why the Diem government declined from 1960 to 1963 after rising to dominance in the 1950s. Miller answered this question in the best post-revisionist-synthesis tradition:

> Indeed, I see Ngô Đình Diệm as being motivated by a distinctive vision of how South Vietnam could and should become a modern nation. Ngô Đình Diệm's determination to pursue this vision, I argue, made him much more independent of the United States than Buzzanco realizes; it also made Ngô Đình Diệm much more responsible for the ultimate failure of his government than Taylor acknowledges.[40]

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[38] Carlisle A. Thayer, *War By Other Means: National Liberation and Revolution in Viet-Nam, 1954-60* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), xiii-xiv, xvii-xxx, 190-196

[39] Thayer, *War By Other Means*, xviii-xix

[40] Miller, "War Stories: The Taylor-Buzzanco Debate and How We Think about the Vietnam War", 462-463; for the entire debate between Robert Buzzanco, Keith Weller Taylor and Edward Miller see "Forum: Fear and Loathing", *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1-2 (February/August 2006), 434-435; Edward Miller, "War Stories: The Taylor-Buzzanco Debate and How We Think about the Vietnam War", *The Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1-2 (February/August 2006), 453-484; Robert Buzzanco, "*Fear and (Self) Loathing in Lubbock:* How I Learned to Quit Worrying and Love Vietnam and Iraq", *Counterpunch*, Weekend Edition, April 16/17, 2005 <http:/www.counterpunch.org/buzzanco04162005.html>; Robert Buzzanco, "*Fear and (Self) Loathing in Lubbock:* How I Learned to Quit Worrying and Love Vietnam and Iraq", *Passport*, vol. 36, no. 3 (June 2005), 5-14; Keith Weller Taylor, "Robert Buzzanco's 'Fear and (Self) Loathing in Lubbock'", *The Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1-2 (February/August 2006), 436-452

The Buzzanco-Taylor symbolizes the orthodox-revisionist divides in the historiography of the Vietnam War. While Buzzanco opposed the US-backed Diem's regime and Taylor supported it, Miller, Thayer, and other post-revisionist-synthesis historians have labored to find alternative interpretations to the traditional orthodox versus revisionist views of the Vietnam War.

Analytical Framework, Thesis Questions and Arguments

This dissertation, while influenced by all of the historical methodologies and theories mentioned above, is most directly shaped by two books: Andrew Wiest's *Vietnam's Forgotten Army: Heroism and Betrayal in the ARVN*; and Robert K. Brigham's *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army*. In *Vietnam's Forgotten Army*, Weist has traced the lives and military careers of two controversial ARVN commanders, Tran Ngoc Hue, and Pham Van Dinh, who defected to the PAVN during the 1972 Easter Offensive. The analytical advantages in focusing on these two characters are threefold. First, their dual biographical sketches reflect the positive and negative influences at work in the ARVN's officer corps as their rise and demise illustrated the ARVN's institutional strengths and weaknesses. Secondly, because both ARVN officers worked closely with many American and Australian advisors who were both supportive and critical of their South Vietnamese counterparts, one can examine how the problematic advisor-counterpart relationship at the tactical level mirrored the difficult alliances between the RVN and its allies at the strategic level. Third, the evolution of Pham Van Dinh's and Tran Ngoc Hue's military experiences, from platoon leaders to battalion commanders, offers an insightful look into the complex nature of the Vietnam War that began with low-intensity operations between insurgents and counterinsurgents before escalating into full-blown conventional warfare between RVN and DRVN

mechanized divisions. Wiest has summed up the three premises of *Vietnam's Forgotten Army: Heroism and Betrayal in the ARVN*:

> *Vietnam's Forgotten Army*... is not only a dual biography of Dinh and Hue but also a study of the institutional strengths and weaknesses of the ARVN and its place in the wider Vietnam War.... At the confluence of the two wars in Vietnam stood the U.S. and Australian advisory efforts. Tasked with aiding ARVN units in becoming effective combat adjuncts to the American war, the advisers were both critical to the war effort as a whole and important observers of the reality that was the ARVN... the careers of Dinh and Hue provide a vantage point from which to view the successes and failures of the combined U.S.-ARVN war.... Both men were living testaments to the great strengths of the ARVN and of the American war in Vietnam. However, their lives also bore witness to how the weaknesses of the ARVN combined with the flawed symbiosis of the American war to doom South Vietnam to eventual defeat.[41]

Weist's book, with its top-down historical approach, is complemented by Robert K. Brigham's *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army*. Using a bottom-up historical approach to outline a socio-military history of the ARVN, Brigham claimed that:

> Because it explores the lives of ordinary men engaged in a commonplace pursuit through diaries, memoirs, letters, oral interviews, and novels, it is a social history. Unlike most recent social history, however, it focuses on the impact of a war on the lives of the peoples whom it affected most. Because this story focuses on war, it is also military history. Unlike most military histories, however, it is primarily concerned with the soldier's experience outside battle. This is not the story of men and maneuvers during the Vietnam war, or even the story of ARVN in battle. Rather, it is a glimpse into the lives of ARVN enlisted men.[42]

Analyzing why the US was defeated by the DRVN, Brigham has argued that US determination to modernize and nation-build the RVN government and military collided with an historic revolutionary force, led by the DRVN, which had the support of most Vietnamese. Therefore, by establishing the RVN government to stem the revolutionary tide, by forming the RVN military in its own image, and then by directly stepping into an un-winnable war when its local allies fared badly, the US sought to reverse the

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[41] Andrew Weist, *Vietnam's Forgotten Army: Heroism and Betrayal in the ARVN* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 1-10

[42] Robert K. Brigham, *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army* (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 2006), ix

progressive march of history of a subject people who yearned for independence. This powerful force of history alone made victory for the RVN and the US impossible. As Brigham stated:

> The ARVN was born in 1955, when the United States had great faith in modernization and nation-building as weapons of the cold war. U.S. officials argued that they could create a new army out of the remnants of the old Vietnamese National Army that the French had grudgingly organized in the late 1950s by Americans connected to the Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) who were helping the newly created Republic of Vietnam (RVN, or South Vietnam) established a counterrevolutionary alternative to Ho Chi Minh's Communists south of the seventeenth parallel. These Americans helped shape the ARVN in America's image and initially prepared the ARVN to battle a communist-led insurgency. MAAG's successor, the Military Assistance Command-Vietnam (MACV), led by General William Westmoreland, pushed the ARVN aside in 1965, believing that only American soldiers could properly defend South Vietnam. The ARVN was relegated to a static security force and became completely dependent upon the United States for supplies, aids, and orders of battles. During the last stage of the Vietnam war, 1969-1975, the ARVN was given more offensive military responsibilities, but by that time its weaknesses were apparent.[43]

According to Brigham, the righteousness of the DRVN cause only partially explained its victory. The other half of the explanation had to do with low morale among the RVN soldiers who, because they did not believe in the cause of anti-communism championed by their American-backed statesmen and commanders, were not ready to sacrifice wholeheartedly for the RVN. As Brigham has argued:

> Most ARVN soldiers, however, were ambivalent about service in the army because of the lack of proper ideological training and the recognition that the RVN was not a legitimate political entity with a cultural or historical precedent in Vietnam, two requirements for a viable future. Furthermore, because of their experiences in the service of the RVN, many ARVN troops distrusted their own government. Once this occurred, the ARVN created a subnational culture that redefined the meaning of the war. Believing fully that Saigon was no match for Hanoi and that the Americans had pushed the ARVN aside, ARVN troops focused on their families' survival.[44]

This dissertation, which accepts Weist's and Brigham's analytical frameworks for studying the ARVN, thus treats the ARVN as a means to explore the larger challenges and difficulties confronted by the RVN government and military as they built a new nation-state in southern Vietnam with US help. Second, this dissertation attempts to place

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[43] Brigham, *ARVN*, ix-x
[44] Ibid., xi

ARVN history at the crossroads of American and Vietnamese historical experiences, be they economic, social, cultural, political, and military.

Despite applying the historical methodologies used by Wiest and Brigham, this thesis has a different set of questions, alternative interpretations, arguments, and conclusions. What were the politico-military forces that became the ARVN? How did the ARVN reorganize and train to deal with the regular threat posed by the People's Army of Viet Nam (PAVN) and the irregular threat posed by the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF, the military organization of the NFLSVN)? Above all, how did the ARVN adjust itself to the intensified political and military activities of the DRVN and the NFLSVN from the late 1950s to the early 1960s?

To answer these intricate questions, this dissertation begins before 1954 and ends in 1963. Thus, it traces ARVN's political and military origins back to the Vietnamese National Army (VNA) and other paramilitary forces such as the Catholic Self-Defense Forces in the Red River Delta and the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai religious-military sects in the Mekong Delta. Secondly, unlike Brigham who has described ARVN as simply a continuation of the VNA and "a counterrevolutionary alternative to Ho Chi Minh's Communists south of the seventeenth parallel,"[45] this dissertation contends that the ARVN was an amalgam of various anti-communist political and military forces dating back to the French Indochina War (1946-1954). The anti-communist regular and irregular forces were born out of the Vietnamese revolution rather than counterrevolutionary forces formed by the French and the Americans.

Thirdly, while the dissertation accepts Wiest's thesis about the dual military nature of the Vietnam War—neither an insurgency nor a conventional conflict but rather

[45] Ibid., ix

a combination of both as the war evolved and escalated[46]—it rejects Brigham's argument that "Americans helped shaped the ARVN in America's image."[47] As Brigham has claimed:

> Another major problem, of course, was that what training programs did exist were almost exact copies of U.S. Army training course—unmistakable evidence of American doctrinal influence. Tactical training in the early years of the war, 1955-1959, was highly conventional, emphasizing technological resources and maximum use of firepower to win battles. In these early years the Korean War was the model for U.S. strategic and tactical military planners, which affected training programs. With the birth of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in December 1960, however, most U.S. military leaders in Vietnam began to see that the mission in Vietnam had changed. Instead of training for a conventional cross-border invasion, they introduced some innovations into tactical training programs in an effort to cope with the guerilla tactics of the Communist insurgency.[48]

If the Vietnam War is placed within the American historical context, then Brigham's argument has validity since the organization, training, and operational doctrines of the US Army in Vietnam were based on its military experiences in World War II (1939-1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953). However, if the Vietnam War is situated within the context of Vietnamese historical experience, which Brigham failed to do, then his argument is less valid as the Vietnamese had resisted the Japanese Imperial Army (JIA) and the French Far East Expeditionary Corps (FFEEC). Two styles of warfare, guerrilla and conventional, had been practiced by the Vietnamese against their enemies according to the geographic, military, and political conditions in which they found themselves. Brigham's thesis is even less valid when the Vietnam War is placed within an international context. While the US Military Assistance and Advisory Group-Vietnam (MAAGV) and later the U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam (MACV) constituted the largest foreign logistical and advisory support to the RVN ground forces, non-Americans also advised the RVN government and military. The British Advisory

[46] Wiest, *Vietnam's Forgotten Army*, 8
[47] Brigham, *ARVN*, x
[48] Ibid., 27

Mission (BRIAM) led by Sir Robert Thompson, and the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV) led by Colonel Francis Philip "Ted" Serong, possessed officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) who were veterans of the Malayan Emergency (1949-1960) and other post-Second World War counterinsurgency campaigns throughout the British Commonwealth. Therefore, the training that MAAGV/MACV, BRIAM, and AATTV transplanted into the ARVN was complementary: the ARVN was trained to fight both the PAVN and to counter the PLAF, this was necessary for neither the geo-military conditions in the Vietnamese countryside nor the combined PLAF-PAVN threats allowed the ARVN the luxury to deal with one danger while neglecting the other.

The ineffectiveness of the ARVN against the PLAF-PAVN, this dissertation asserts, was *not* a question of whether or not ARVN should have been prepared for counterinsurgency operations against the PLAF rather than countering a conventional PAVN's invasion. Rather, it is a question about the ARVN's ability to assess, adjust, and adapt its strategy and tactics to the military and political fluidity of Vietnam's battlefields. While the ARVN had no choice but to gear up, tactically and strategically, to fight both kinds of warfare, it failed to do either due to three factors. First, the ARVN was ordered to aid the RVN government in civic actions or civil affairs operations from 1954 to 1959. While the ARVN proved helpful in resettling refugees from northern and central Vietnam, restoring law and order in urban centers and rural areas, and rebuilding infrastructure and modes of communication, these vital tasks distracted from training and did little to improve the ARVN's combat readiness.

Second, when the ARVN managed to systematically reorganize itself for training, it failed to train properly at three levels. The ARVN endured inadequate training

facilities, exercised with outdated equipment, and suffered greatly from a lack of qualified non-commissioned officers and professional soldiers who could organize, discipline, train, inspire, and lead their men. ARVN's officer corps lacked professional leaders at the junior level due to the shortage of educated and trained officers. The ARVN officer corps also lacked professionalism as too many of its colonels and generals were political creatures. The politicization of the ARVN officer corps was caused both by the Diem administration and a power-hungry ARVN senior leadership. The consequences of this political radicalization led to disunity, a lack of discipline, a flawed chain of command, and distractions from ARVN's real mission and more important responsibility: to organize, equip, plan, train, and prepare ARVN officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers for war. The RVN government also failed to properly incorporate the ARVN in its overall counterinsurgency plan, which involved the coordinated efforts of all civilian agencies and other paramilitary forces to produce successful and long lasting military and political results in a counterinsurgency.

Lastly, the organization, experience, and determination of the DRVN and the NFLSVN created political, military, and even social problems to which the RVN government and military could not respond adequately. The leadership of the DRVN and NFLSVN, rather than being Marxist, Leninist, and Maoist doctrinaires, was realist, pragmatic, and flexible. Their revolutionary strategy involved the coordination of international diplomacy, grass-root political movements, united fronts in the cities and the countryside, and systematic armed struggle. Adding to previous arguments, this dissertation asserts that starting in 1954, while the DRVN and NFLSVN frequently

suffered short-term tactical setbacks, their combined military, political, and diplomatic efforts also gained them valuable strategic advantages that outweighed their weaknesses.

The successes of the Vietnamese communists against the JIA, the FFEEC and the combined RVN, US and FWMAF efforts were not solely a result of the communist leadership's ability to respond quickly to events. The other part of the answer involved the DRVN's and NFLSVN's 'institutionalized readiness' to respond to changes at all levels, including international diplomacy, national politics or ground-level military operations. This institutionalized readiness had emerged overnight but had resulted from trial and error going back to the 1930s. This institutionalized readiness forced the DRVN and the NFLSVN to prepare for all eventualities. Such institutionalized readiness is an expansion of Douglas Pike's use of "concept of force application" in his book, *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam*. As Pike has explained:

> Because this [PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam] is the first study of its kind, I have tried to keep the contents basic and to stick to such fundamentals as military heritage, organization, structure of the officer corps, strategic thinking, Communist Party influences on the military, and civilian-military relations... it is a straightforward explanation of PAVN's place and role in terms of Vietnamese national philosophy and governmental behavior—what war colleges call 'concept of force application.' If we can come to understand that concept, we can see more clearly PAVN's direct and indirect influences on policy formulation, and possibly we can more reliably anticipate Hanoi's future moves, something we failed to do in the past, and certainly it can be argued that America lost the war in Vietnam because of that failure.[49]

However, the DRVN and NFLSVN defeated the RVN and its allies, not through force alone, but also through political maneuvers at the national and international levels.

In the final analysis, this study makes the following arguments. First, the origin of the ARVN was rooted in the French Indochina War (1946-1954). Second, the ARVN was an amalgamation of political and military forces born from a revolution that encompassed three overlapping: a war of independence between Vietnamese and the French; a civil

[49] Douglas Pike, *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1986), 3-4

war between Vietnamese of diverse social and political backgrounds; and a proxy war as global superpowers and regional powers backed their own Vietnamese allies who exploited their foreign supporters for their own purposes. Lastly, the ARVN failed not because it was organized, equipped, and trained for conventional instead of counterinsurgency warfare, but rather because it failed to assess, adjust and adapt its strategy and tactics quickly enough to meet the war's changing circumstances. The ARVN's slowness to react derived from its institutional weaknesses, military and political problems beyond its control, and the powerful enemies it faced. The PAVN and PLAF were formidable adversaries. Not duplicated in any other post-colonial Third World country and commanded by an experienced and politically tested leadership, the DRVN and NFLSVN exploited RVN failures effectively.

Sources, Corroboration, Organization

This thesis uses declassified government and military documents found in American libraries and archives and Vietnamese language sources written by former government officials and military officers from the RVN, the DRVN and the NFLSVN. I have stumbled upon surprising evidence that altered previous interpretations and shaped the final writing. In the process, I have learned from the experiences of an historian and former teacher. "Theory shapes my questions, which determine the files I open in the archives," John Robert Ferris has reflected, "while the evidence I find there redefines my theories."[50] Another historian who influenced me is Professor Brian Loring Villa. He defined history as, "the search for the highest probability of truth about the past," a definition that is reminiscent of Douglas Porch's advice: "The task of the historian is to

[50] John Robert Ferris, *Intelligence and Strategy: Selected Essays* (London: Routledge, 2005), 1

get as close to the truth as his documentation and historical imagination will allow."[51] Like Porch, Villa emphasized two key lessons that pertain here. The first lesson is to collect as much evidence as one possibly can. The second has to do with how a historian should read, think, and write history. What Villa has passed on to his students is explained in his book, *Unauthorized Action: Mountbatten and the Dieppe Raid*:

> Langer was perhaps the most distinguished modern disciple of Rankean tradition in diplomatic history. What attracted me to him... was his extraordinary ability to pull startling revelations out of the most mundane-appearing documents.... Professor May... set very different goals before his students. Whereas Langer asked us to be able to account for every last grain of historical sand that passed between one's fingers, May stressed thinking imaginatively and creatively – about ways of assembling fragments of analysis and about how each piece fitted into a larger conceptual whole.[52]

In analyzing primary and secondary sources, I have sought to determine what the documents reveal, what they have not, and to ask why. I have treated autobiographies and memoirs with extra care, trying to corroborate them with other primary and secondary sources. To determine the appropriateness of ARVN's organization and training, one must understand the organization and training of its adversaries. Therefore, the first chapter critically analyzes the theory and practice of revolutionary warfare from the Viet Minh to the PAVN-PLAF. The second and third chapters trace the historical developments of the political parties and their military forces that were integrated into the ARVN. The fourth and fifth chapters focus on the re-organization and re-training of the ARVN, respectively. The sixth and final chapter evaluates the combat capability of the ARVN.

My doctoral dissertation reconstructs ARVN from 1954 to 1963 based on secondary sources, primary documents, and oral histories compiled by other scholars. I

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[51] Douglas Porch, *The French Foreign Legion: A Complete History of the Legendary Fighting Force* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), xxiii

[52] Brian Loring Villa, *Unauthorized Action: Mountbatten and the Dieppe Raid* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1989), ix

look for continuity and discontinuity in ARVN's early history and ask why this was so. I analyze long-term and short-term causes of certain events, focus on their short-term and long-term consequences, and try to explain how they all contributed to the failure of the RVN government and military and the success of the DRVN and the NFLSVN. The reasons for the final victory of the DRVN and NFLSVN in 1975 are complex. In writing his book, *The Conquest of Morocco*, Douglas Porch has asserted that Morocco's history was "a story of people, of chaos, villainy, glory, misery, violence, greed, avarice.... It is not a story of those who like their history neat."[53] These words echo the advice of an esteemed scholar in Vietnamese studies. Keith Weller Taylor, seeing history as a realm of complexity filled with nuances, cautions students and historians about the danger of repainting the canvas of the past in too orderly and too simplistically a fashion. "As I have written elsewhere," Taylor has stated, "the past belongs only to those who lived it, and anything more than that is the presumption and cruelty of making the past into a pretext weapon for our own choices: 'The past... is beautiful confusion, and it is beautiful precisely because it is confusion; when it stops confusing us, we can be sure that we have understood it into something dangerous.'"[54] The defeat of the ARVN was the result of the RVN nation-building problems beyond its control, of its chronic institutional weaknesses, of its determined enemies, the PAVN and PLAF.

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[53] Douglas Porch, *The Conquest of Morocco* (New York: Fromm International Publishing Corporation, 1982), xii

[54] Keith Weller Taylor, "Surface Orientations in Vietnam: Beyond Histories of Nation and Region", *The Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. XVIII, no. 1 (November, 1998), 974

Chapter 2
Vietnamese Communist Revolutionary Warfare

To judge the organization, training, and combat capability of the ARVN from 1955-1963, one must describe the political and military developments of the Vietnamese Communist Party and its theory and practice of revolutionary warfare. This chapter's primary purpose is to better our understanding of the revolutionary forces which the ARVN confronted. Therefore, the chapter assesses the history of the Viet Minh in the French Indochina War to the PAVN and PLAF in the early years of the Vietnam War. To adequately discern whether the organization and training that the ARVN received were appropriate to counter the PLAF and PAVN from 1955-1963, we must first understand the enemy that the ARVN had to combat.

The Viet Minh (Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi or League for the Independence of Vietnam) was formed at the Eight Plenum of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) convened in northern Vietnam in May 1941.[1] The ICP originated from the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) which was reportedly founded by Ho Chi Minh in January-February 1930 at a soccer stadium in a working-class district of Kowloon, Hong Kong. The VCP had emerged from a clash between the Annam (central Vietnam) Communist Party (ACP) and the Communist Party of Indochina (CPI) over "personal pique and regional sensitivities [rather] than on ideology"[2] and Ho Chi Minh's desire to maintain solidarity by merging both factions into one united party.[3] The historic rise of communism in Vietnam from the VCP to the Viet Minh, the latter led by Vietnamese communists but supported by Vietnamese nationalists who wanted an

[1] William J. Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*, 2nd ed., (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981, 1996), 71
[2] William J. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life* (New York: Hyperion, 2000), 163-164
[3] Pierre Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 48-49; Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*, 32

independent Vietnam, is replete with triumph and defeat. This record, however, often reflected the innovative ideas, organizational skills, and ruthless leadership of Ho Chi Minh, the VCP's political leader, and his most able military strategist, General Vo Nguyen Giap, who rose from a lowly ranking VCP political cadre to command the Viet Minh's revolutionary forces in the French Indochina War.[4] The VCP also benefited from the military expertise, revolutionary work and political advice offered by other talented lieutenants like Ton Duc Thang, Le Duan, Truong Chinh and more.

Ho Chi Minh lived a politically active, often adventurous, and always controversial life.[5] The young Ho was a moderate nationalist and idealist who believed that the rightful path towards Vietnam's independence was through progressive political reforms and peaceful social transformation rather than revolution. He was inspired less by the radical nationalist Phan Boi Chau's Dong Du ("Journey to the East) Movement and more by the Tay Du ("Journey to the West") Movement of the moderate nationalist Phan Chu Trinh.[6] Later in his life, Phan Boi Chau reminisced of his younger days when he lived a "venturesome and daring [life]."[7] While Phan Boi Chau lacked the "ideological sophistication" to offer a clear blueprint as to how Vietnam would be rebuilt after it had regained its independence, he was certainly more "action oriented" with respect to the means through which Vietnam could win back its freedom from France.[8] "When Phan

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[4] John Colvin, *Giap: Volcano Under Snow* (New York: Soho Press, 1996), 1-13; Cecil B. Currey, *Victory At Any Cost: The Genius of Viet Nam's Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap* (London: Brassey's, 1997), xv-xxii

[5] Jean Lacouture, *Ho Chi Minh: A Political Biography* (New York: Random House, 1968), 3-52; David Halberstamd, *Ho* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 3-62; Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years, 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 11-42; Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, 2-7; Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, ix-xv

[6] Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, 6

[7] Translated by Vinh Sinh and Nicholas Wickenden, *Overturned Chariot: The Autobiography of Phan-Bội-Châu* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 45

[8] Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,1992, 1996), 23

[Boi Chau] launched the Eastern Travel Movement in 1905," argued professor Hue-Tam Ho Tai, "it was to enable [Vietnamese] students to go to China and Japan to accumulate the knowledge necessary to eventually overthrow foreign rule. His first commitment" was towards independence by means of "political struggle" and "armed struggle."[9]

Phan Chu Trinh, a contemporary of Phan Boi Chau, was a moderate and reformist nationalist. Like Phan Boi Chau, Phan Chu Trinh believed in the independence of Vietnam, restoring a constitutional monarchy, and universal education for all Vietnamese. However, Phan Chau Trinh opposed political change and social transformation through violent means. "Believing that a gradualist path was the way to avoid bloodshed," historian Hue-Tam Ho Tai has suggested that "he [Phan Chau Trinh] was willing to defer independence until such time as the Vietnamese had undergone a thorough cultural and social transformation."[10] Phan Chu Trinh's distaste for violence was influenced in part by his father who, unjustly accused of disloyalty to the Vietnamese Royal Family, was executed without a fair trial by members of the Nghia Hoi Can Vuong (the King Movement or Righteous Loyalist Society).[11]

The fundamental shift from the moderate nationalist driven by idealism to a communist international which practiced *realpolitik* was neither inevitable nor drastic for Ho Chi Minh; rather, this radicalization happened gradually. Nevertheless, historians have identified three important events that led Ho toward the Communist International (COMINTERN) of the USSR, including, the failure of the Great Powers at Versailles to recognize the rights of non-European peoples to self-determination; the French Socialist

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[9] Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution*, 23
[10] Ibid., 23-24
[11] Edited and Translated by Vinh Sinh, *Phan Châu Trinh and His Political Writings* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2009), 10-11; Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution*, 23

Party's (FSP) disinterest in the grim social and economic conditions endured by French colonized subjects; and the colonial question raised by Soviet leader Vladimir Ilich Lenin and put into action by the COMINTERN.[12]

Partly inspired by Phan Chau Trinh's "Journey to the West" Movement, Ho left French-colonized Vietnam so as not to be "confined within the Asian universe."[13] The *Amiral Latouche-Tréville*, a ship belonging to the Chargeurs Réunis Company, which employed Ho, sailed to many port cities.[14] In France, the spirit of the French Revolution of 1789 seemed real; it was the only time Ho felt he was treated as a human being and not as an inferior colonial subject. However, at every colonized port in which the *Amiral Latouche-Tréville* anchored, Ho Chi Minh found those revolutionary ideas—*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*—did not apply to the indigenous dockworkers who endured exploitation, racism, and injustice daily at the hands of their European supervisors.[15] "The French in France are all good," Ho wrote, but "the colonialists are very cruel and inhumane. It is the same everywhere.... To the colonialists, the life of an Asian or an African is not worth a penny."[16] To Ho, there were important distinctions between colonial governments and metropolitan ideals. In the colonies, metropolitan ideals only applied to European colonialists but not to the indigenous population. According to historian Pierre Brocheaux, Ho "noticed the most flagrant contradictions between great idealistic principles and the actual condition of people of color, who were subjected to segregation, denied civil rights, and lived under the constant threat of lynching."[17]

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[12] Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years*, 11-51; Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, 46-86; Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, 7-29
[13] Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, 6
[14] Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, 44-49; Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, 8-11
[15] Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, 10
[16] Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, 50
[17] Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, 10

Ultimately, the negotiations for the Versailles Peace Treaty near Paris in 1919 prompted Ho to doubt that the liberal-democracies of the West would make good their promise of reform in their overseas territories.[18] There the leaders of Europe's great powers scuttled the right of nations to self-determination as proposed by US President Woodrow Wilson, who, while he recognized "the explosive potential of the issue [national self-determination]... refused to take it up with the Allies."[19] According to historian Sophie Quinn-Judge, "Ho Chi Minh and his compatriots were not among those who had cause to celebrate: it was the end of their hopes that the Western democracies would recognize their claim to independence."[20] However, Ho learned his first valuable "lesson in realpolitik" at Versailles; that "the 'powerful' were redesigning the map of the world and deciding the fate of other nations."[21]

By 1919, Ho was an active member of the FSP as the party embodied the ideals of the French Revolution.[22] However, the FSP championed the *Liberty, Equality* and *Fraternity* of Frenchmen in France, not for native populations exploited in France's overseas possessions. Ho grew disillusioned with the FSP when its members considered colonialism only "a peripheral aspect of a broader problem—the issue of world capitalism." On the colonial question, the colonies, historian William Duiker has said, "represented economic wealth to France, and jobs to her workers,"[23] who made up the majority of the FSP's members and supporters.

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[18] Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, 58-61
[19] George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 426
[20] Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years*, 28
[21] Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, 17
[22] Ibid., 14
[23] Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, 63

His formative years in Paris allowed Ho to cultivate his diplomatic skills, leadership potential, writing style and public speaking ability. As a voracious reader who enjoyed the works of William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, Victor Hugo, Emile Zola, and Leo Tolstoy, Ho found Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* dull and too theoretical. As his friends in Paris noted, "he knew nothing about theory."[24] While Ho later confessed to keeping a copy of *Das Kapital* under his head "as a pillow,"[25] he found Lenin's writings more practical.[26] Lenin's "Theses on the National and Colonial Questions", presented to the Second COMINTERN Congress, which criticized the Treaty of Versailles for failing to realize the national self-determination clause[27] and advised communist parties in Western Europe to actively cooperate with nationalist movements from colonized countries in their struggle to overthrow capitalism,[28] attracted Ho to the USSR and the COMINTERN. Disenchanted with the Treaty of Versailles for not to considering the self-determination of the colonized nations and with the FSP for not defending the national aspirations of colonized peoples, Ho seriously reconsidered whether the liberal-democratic-capitalistic system was appropriate for colonized and post-colonial Vietnam.[29] Thus, Lenin's argument revitalized his hope that the USSR and the COMINTERN could help to liberate his country.[30] "It was... Lenin's famous 'Theses on the National and Colonial Questions,'" Duiker has contended, "that set Nguyen Ai Quoc

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[24] Ibid., 56, 64
[25] Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, 14
[26] "Lenin and the Peoples of the East" by Ho Chi Minh in Bernard B. Fall, ed., *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution: Selected Writings, 1920-66* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), 49-50
[27] Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, 17;Charles B. McLane, *Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia: An Exploration of Eastern Policy under Lenin and Stalin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 12-14
[28] Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, 65; McLane, *Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia*, 13
[29] Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, 184
[30] Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years*, 48

[one of Ho's many aliases] on a course that transformed him from a simple patriot with socialist leanings into a Marxist revolutionary."[31]

The former moderate nationalist, converted by the force of historical circumstances and his own reflections, became a studious Leninist, a disciplined COMINTERN agent and a committed revolutionary. Ho's idealism never left him but his approaches toward the colonial question and Vietnam's future were now directed by pragmatism and *realpolitik*. When Ho left Western Europe in the mid-1920s for the Far East, his aims were twofold.[32] First, he wanted to meet the only world leader paying attention to the plight of the colonized peoples, but Lenin died shortly after Ho's arrival in Moscow.[33] Secondly, he wanted to move closer to Vietnam.

Through the help of the COMINTERN, a revolutionary organization founded in 1919 by Soviet leaders to export Marxist-Leninist ideas and support revolutionary activities abroad,[34] Ho relocated to Moscow. There he registered for courses at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (CUTE), founded by Lenin in 1921 but run by Joseph Stalin (the notorious "Stalin School"), and the International Lenin School (ILS). Both institutes trained revolutionary cadres but most ILS students came from Western Europe while the majority of the CUTE students were Asian. Both schools used the same teaching materials, notably Lenin's *The State and Revolution*, Stalin's *October Revolution and the Tactics of Russian Communism Russian*, and I.M. Yaroslavskii's *History: A Short Course*. Both schools offered courses in the natural and social sciences, mathematics, the history of revolution and the workers' movement, Marx's theory of

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[31] Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, 64
[32] Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, 23
[33] Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, 98; Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, 24
[34] Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-73*, 2nd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), 111-121

historical materialism, the political aspect of revolutionary warfare (how to instigate strikes and disseminate propaganda) and the military aspect of revolutionary warfare which involved military training and live weapon exercises. With the exception of military training, all the courses offered at the CUTE and ILS were taught in a seminar style. Inside and outside of the class-room, students learned to be disciplined and secretive but also to be socially and politically active through participation in political discussions, rallies, and conferences. Students vacationed at two summer camps in the Crimea where they learned how to breed cattle, cultivate land to provide food for the camps' occupants, help local peasants with their harvests, and participate in community services.[35] Peng Shuzhi, a Chinese student who may have known Ho at CUTE, provided an insightful look at the quality of teaching students received at the CUTE:

> Those at the Stalin School do their best to instill in our group of hand-picked foreigners... some of the basic techniques of clandestine work, like writing in code, for example... The training is not very refined. It is often done too quickly and is oversimplified.... But it is also a very solid training, systematic, bearing the stamp of Leninism in the best sense of the term... in the end I found... the training that we receive at *Dongfang daxue* [CUTE in Chinese] is of inestimable value; it is very indispensable.[36]

Although Ho had a seven month stay at the CUTE and ILS (students had the option of either a three year or a seven month program), aside from a brief description of the two schools, he did not record his courses or any lessons he had drawn from his studies.[37] However, if one analyzes Ho's writings in combination with his political activities, particularly after he left Russia for China and then Vietnam, five cardinal principles always guided his revolutionary practices. First, there must be a revolutionary party. Second, the revolutionary party must have a military arm to confront external threats and internal enemies. Third, while there must be a united front strategy, the

[35] Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, 92-93
[36] Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, 26
[37] Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, 93

organization, strategic and tactical planning, politico-military training, and the majority of the leadership must be influenced, controlled, and commanded by the revolutionary party itself, not its temporary allies. Fourth, there must be favourable conditions inside and outside of the country to ensure revolutionary success. Finally, the revolutionary party and its leaders must have flexibility, a sense of timing, and the ability to detect "the right moment [that] only comes once in a thousand years."[38] Ho's five principles of revolutionary thoughts and practices revealed themselves in his founding of the Revolutionary Youth League of Vietnam in 1925, the Viet Minh in 1940, and finally his support for the creation of the FLSVN in 1960.

If his study in Russia transformed Ho from a moderate nationalist to a radical communist, China became the main laboratory where Ho tested his revolutionary thoughts before re-entering French Indochina. Consistent with the first principle of making revolution—needing a vanguard party to lead a revolution—Ho founded the Viet Nam Thanh Nien Cach Mang Dong Chi Hoi (Revolutionary Youth League of Vietnam or RYLV) in 1925 in Canton, China. RYLV membership was open to all Vietnamese *émigrés* living in China. Using his established social connections and political activities acquired in Western Europe and Russia, Ho recruited Vietnamese moderates and radical nationalists of various class backgrounds into the RYLV. With a tight budget provided by the COMINTERN's Far Eastern Bureau, Ho issued a journal, *Thanh Nien* (*Youth*), in June 1925. *Youth*, the RYLV's official publication, was dedicated "to the eventual realization of a Communist society was not disguised, but neither was it given maximum publicity."[39] Aside from expressing official RYLV's ideology, *Youth* served to inform

[38] Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, 68
[39] Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*, 18

RYLV members, coordinate their actions, and united them in a common cause.[40] The RYLV marked not only one of Ho's earliest attempts to reconcile class struggle with national struggle[41] but it was also his first successful venture in creating "a mass political party."[42] The RYLV's formation was made possible by Ho's "organizational skills" which historian Douglas Pike has argued, were already "in an advanced stage of development."[43]

The RYLV's successful establishment was aided by three additional factors. First, the major nationalist parties were hardly organized.[44] Second, the leaders of those parties were discredited thanks to their failed strategies and because moderates had either been imprisoned, exiled, or executed by France.[45] Third, the moderate, reasonable and reformed path to a de-colonized Vietnam was no longer acceptable—even less justifiable—to many Vietnamese. Many, having worked as low wage labourers in France and having fought in the French national and colonial armies in the Great War,[46] perceived communist calls for a revolutionary path to regain Vietnam's independence as synonymous with nationalism and patriotism.[47]

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[40] Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 69
[41] Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, 122
[42] Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*, 18
[43] Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam*, (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1966), 21
[44] John T. McAlister, Jr., *Viet Nam: The Origins of Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 62-64; Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945*, 377-378
[45] Peter Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 108-111
[46] Kim Loan Hill, "Strangers in a Foreign Land: *Vietnamese Soldiers and Workers in France during World War I*", Chapter 9 of Nhung Tuyet Tran & Anthony Reid, ed., *Việt Nam: Borderless Histories* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 256-289; Erica J. Peters, "Resistance, Rivalries, and Restaurants: Vietnamese Workers in Interwar France", *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Winter 2007), 109-143
[47] Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1945*, 19-34; See Chapter 2 on "The Vietnamese Perception of Colonialism" of Truong Buu Lam, *Colonialism Experienced: Vietnamese Writings on Colonialism, 1900-1931*(Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 39-68

The RYLV and its *Youth* journal were eventually torn apart by internal division and destroyed by the Chinese Nationalist Party or Kuomintang (KMT) as part of the latter's struggle against the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1927.[48] However, the RYLV's dissolution symbolized the direction of nationalism for the Vietnamese *émigrés* and their compatriots inside a French-dominated Vietnam. Professor Huynh Kim Khanh has aptly summed up the aforementioned social and political conditions that were beyond Ho's control. At the same time, these historical circumstances created a pre-revolutionary condition favourable to the rising popularity of Ho's ideas and party, the growth of his followers, the birth of the ICP in the 1930s and, above all, the formation of the Viet Minh in the 1940s. As Khanh noted:

> The destruction of Thanh Nien's Canton headquarters notwithstanding, Vietnamese revolutionary patriotism had taken a giant step.... 1925 Phan Boi Chau and Phan Chu Trinh were venerated as national heroes; by the end of 1927, their names were still referred to respectfully, but only as symbols of heroic but futile efforts. In 1925 anyone who spoke up for Vietnamese interests... was looked up to as a leader; by the end of 1927 reformism alone was no longer considered adequate. In 1925 Marxism-Leninism was only one of many political theories, including those of Gandhi, Sun Yat-sen, and Pilsudski, introduced to Vietnam; by the end of 1927 it had become a leading ideology with an organizational home. From that time on, communism remained an integral part of Vietnamese nationalism.[49]

The Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP), which was founded in February 1930,[50] placed the national struggle above the class struggle. For the VCP, communism could only be achieved once Vietnam had regained its independence from France. Furthermore, the advantage in championing the nationalist cause outweighed the communist cause. The national struggle was not only more appealing to the exploited rural peasants and the overworked urban proletariats, it also attracted alienated French-edudcated Vietnamese elites. The national struggle potentially could draw a larger number of supporters from all

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[48] Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power*, 29-30
[49] Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 89
[50] Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*, 31

political beliefs, economic standing, regional ties, and religious groups in Vietnamese society to the VCP. The strategy of class struggle, on the other hand, appealed only to a specific class while it risked alienating others, hence, pitching one Vietnamese class against another and only further strengthening French rule over Vietnam.[51] The VCP's official policy, drafted at its "Unification Conference" of February 1930, reminded the VCP to:

> do its best to maintain relationships with the petit-bourgeois, intellectual, and the middle peasant groups... to attract them to follow the proletariat. As concerns the rich peasants, medium and small landowners, and Vietnamese capitalists who have not shown themselves to be clearly counterrevolutionary, we must make use of them, or at least neutralize them. Whichever organization has demonstrated its counterrevolutionary character (such as the Constitutionalist party, etc.) must be overthrown.[52]

The document concluded by strongly emphasizing the final objective that the VCP must achieve: "While making propaganda for the slogan 'an independent Vietnam,' we must make propaganda for an established contact with the oppressed peoples and the world proletariat."[53] Therefore, class struggle and communism were the ends while nationalism and the struggle for independence remained the means for VCP strategy.

In October 1930, the VCP, at COMINTERN's insistence, became the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP).[54] While the VCP sought the support of the largest numbers of Vietnamese, the ICP aimed to mobilize the majority of the population in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia to revolt jointly against the French.[55] When the RYLV had gone underground in 1927, the French *Sûreté* (the colonial police) believed it had one thousand sympathizers and members.[56] By 1930, the French estimated that the VCP had three

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[51] Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*, 33
[52] Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 126
[53] Ibid., 126
[54] Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, 187
[55] Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 128-129; Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*, 40
[56] Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina*, 80

hundred active members in the provinces of Nghe An and Ha Tinh in Central Vietnam, a figure that rose to eighteen hundred despite a French crack-down.[57] From June to October 1940, ICP membership rose sixty-percent.[58] Although the ICP's size cannot be determined exactly, the evolution of the RVYL to the VCP and then the ICP reflected the emergence of Vietnamese communism as a social, political, and revolutionary force to be reckoned with by other nationalist parties and French authorities.

But the 1930s started badly for the ICP. While Ho had seen the materialization of his first principle of making revolution, that "there must be a revolutionary party to mobilize and organize the people at home, and to link up with oppressed people and the proletarian classes abroad,"[59] there were failures. A series of ICP-led strikes by urban labourers and demonstrations by rural peasants which started on May Day 1930 and lasted until 1931 in the Nghe An and Ha Tinh provinces of Central Vietnam were severely suppressed. Over one thousand suspected communists were rounded up, four hundred received long prison terms, and eight ICP leaders were executed. The ICP estimated its losses in Saigon alone at two thousand dead while fifty-one thousand members and supporters were arrested. Thus, ninety percent of the ICP leadership was either imprisoned or executed. Moreover, co-operating with British, Dutch, and Japanese authorities, the French went after ICP and COMINTERN members beyond Indochina's borders. While the ICP added fifteen hundred new members and an additional one hundred thousand sympathizers by the end of 1931,[60] still "the price of failure was

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[57] Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*, 36
[58] Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 256, no. 3
[59] Quoted in Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution*, 225
[60] Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*, 42-43; Pike, *Viet Cong*, 23; Huỳnh Kim Khánh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 161

severe" for the newborn ICP which by the end of 1932 showed "few signs" that it "was still functioning."[61]

Given French suppression, it is unsurprising that the ICP's "Action Program" of 1932 saw armed insurrection as an integral part of making revolution.[62] However, it was not until the last half of the 1930s that the ICP's "Action Program" could be put into action. The reasons for this delay were threefold. First, most ICP members were arrested by 1932 and did not get amnesty until the mid-1930s. Pham Van Dong, a rising star who had joined the party when it was still the RYLV, for example, had been arrested in Saigon in 1931 and was not released from the infamous "tiger cages" prison on Poulo Condore Island until 1937.[63] Still, Pham Van Dong had been more fortunate. Ton Duc Thang, Pham Hung, Le Van Luong, and Nguyen Duy Trinh who remained imprisoned until the Viet Minh liberated Poulo Condore in 1945.[64]

Second, many ICP members who had escaped the French reign of terror lacked political and military skills. Thus, they received instructions by the COMINTERN and imprisoned ICP leaders to rebuild a more disciplined ICP at the grassroots. They also had to reorganize individual ICP cells and re-establish ties with rural peasants, the urban proletariat, and the intelligentsia. They had to implement cautious political struggles for limited political goals—for example, to raise the conscience of the suppressed Vietnamese mass and planned, coordinated and controlled their political actions—to avoid venturesome political actions for unspecified political objectives that would surely invite another heavy-handed and perhaps fatal French response. If the ICP was to recover

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[61] Huỳnh Kim Khánh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 160
[62] Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 390
[63] Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, 240
[64] Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastile*, 258-259

and grow, COMINTERN and ICP leaders realized that the political and military struggle against the French would not occur in one thunderous strike. Instead, a series of battles in a long "protracted" revolutionary war would incite a nationalist-socialist revolution that the ICP was determined to win.[65]

Lastly, the release of the ICP members and other nationalists from prisons quickened the ICP's "Action Program." In any modern armed force, be it revolutionary or counterrevolutionary, every recruit must go through formal or informal boot camps before he or she becomes a soldier, a guerrilla, an officer, or a revolutionary cadre. The French colonial prison system was the boot camp where ICP members toughened themselves for the protracted revolutionary political and military struggle that awaited them. As a French *Sûreté* report revealed:

> Far from reforming the political prisoners, the detention seems to exalt their revolutionary spirit and every one of them makes the best use of his time in prison to refine his own education or to educate the other prisoners, including common-law detainees. All of them have the firm will to resume agitation as soon as they are released, and every day the prisons open their gates to free numerous prisoners whose own experiences have now been reinforced with techniques learned from the "returnees from Moscow".... We ought to dread the months to come, since the new Communist organization will be stronger and better tested.[66]

The report, of course, failed to factor the ways in which the prison's forced labour system better prepared members of the ICP for the physical demand required in all forms of warfare, whether revolutionary or conventional. In his groundbreaking analysis of Indochina's colonial prison system, Peter Zinoman has correctly concluded that far more than the theoretical and semi-practical teachings on underground political struggles and subversive clandestine warfare taught at the CUTE and ILS in Moscow:

> the colonial prison provided a perfect training ground for mastering the Leninist arts of underground organization. Since the consequences of negligence, recklessness, or disloyalty in prison might entail torture, solitary confinement, or death, political agitation

[65] Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*, 43-44
[66] Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 163

> behind bars reinforced the importance of the Leninist principles of secrecy, centralization, obedience, and discipline. Indeed, if the Party's emergence in the repressive political environment of colonial Indochina encouraged its commitment to Leninist revolutionary strategy, its rebirth within the coercive institutional atmosphere of the Indochinese prison served to radically intensify this tendency.[67]

By the end of 1930s, Ho's second principle on making revolution—that a military arm must protect the party from external and internal enemies—was put into practice by General Vo Nguyen Giap.[68] However, the ICP cadre who instructed Giap to leave Vietnam to link up with Ho Chi Minh in Indochina was Hoang Van Thu, a member of the Tho ethnic minority in northern Vietnam. Hoang Van Thu told Giap to cross the Vietnamese border into China because Giap's radical politics, first with the nationalist Tan Viet Party and then the ICP since the mid-1920s, had made the French *Deuxième Bureau* (the intelligence service) regret having released him from prison in 1933. Hence, it followed him closely, seeking a pretext to re-imprison him.[69] Most importantly, given Giap's fascination with military affairs, Hoang Van Thu had discussed military matters with him often. These two reasons made Giap the perfect candidate to send to China with the instruction "to consider carefully the potential of guerrilla warfare in a future struggle against the French (this was no great surprise to Giap who was already familiar with Maoist tactics in China and the use of similar forms of warfare during the traditional era in Vietnam)."[70]

Hoang Van Thu could not have selected a better suited party member to build the ICP's military wing. Nor could Ho have entrusted the command of that military wing to a brighter, more determined, and absolutely fierce commander. Giap was born on August

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[67] Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastile*, 238-239
[68] Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, 240
[69] Cecil B. Currey, *Victory At Any Cost: The Genius of Viet Nam's Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap* (London: Brassey's, 1997), 21
[70] Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, 241

25, 1910, in An Xa village in Quang Binh province, Central Vietnam.[71] At an early age Giap had been exposed to natural science, arithmetic, literature, history, and geography. He excelled in geography and history, particularly Vietnamese military history, and read the military campaigns of great captains of Vietnam's past: Ly Thuong Kiet who defended Dai Viet (modern day northern Vietnam) from Imperial China and then invaded the Kingdom of Champa (modern day central Vietnam) in 1069; Tran Hung Dao, the only Asian general to defeat the Mongols in 1283; Le Loi who had regained Vietnam's independence from China in 1428; and Phan Dinh Phung who had withdrawn to central Vietnam's Annamite mountains to resist the French in the nineteenth century.[72] Giap's passion for history led him to quit a temporary job as a journalist for *Youth* in the mid-1920s and then to withdraw from law school in France. He graduated from the University of Hanoi in 1937 with a degree in Law and Political Economy before becoming a history teacher at the *lycée* Thang Long.[73] Giap was supposed to teach French history from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, but most of his lessons focused on the French Revolution of 1789 and Napoleonic warfare. Bui Diem, the RVN's longest serving Ambassador to America, was Giap's student at Thang Long. Bui Diem recalled the passion and energy that Giap generated in the class each time he lectured on Napoleonic Warfare:

> Even more remarkable were Giap's lecture on Napoleon. Nervously prowling the floor, he recounted in minute detail each of Napoleon's campaigns – the separate battles and even individual skirmishes, every action that demonstrated the development of Napoleon's tactics and strategy. Giap knew all of it by heart.... And Giap's excitement was contagious; the whole class sat still, riveted by his accounts.[74]

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[71] John Colvin, *Giap, Volcano Under Snow: Vietnam's Celebrated General Giap, Victor at Dien Bien Phu and Mastermind of the Tet Offensive* (New York: SOHO Press, 1996), 24-25
[72] Currey, *Victory At Any Cost*, 12
[73] Colvin, *Giap, Volcano Under Snow*, 31; Currey, *Victory At Any Cost*, 33
[74] Bui Diem with David Chanoff, *In The Jaws of History* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 13

The ancient Chinese military philosopher, Sun Tzu, and his timeless book, *The Art of War*, also strongly influenced Giap's thoughts on the theory and practice of warfare.[75] Furthermore, Giap saw history as a living past whose lessons must be learned and applied in the present and future. As Bui Diem recalled, "Giap spoke not as a mere historian but as a passionate advocate"[76] and always treated the past with critical eyes. For example, historian Cecil B. Currey asked Giap about Sun Tzu. "Sun Tzu has interesting ideas," the General replied, "I once studied him and found that he said that... if enemy forces are ten times larger, then we should not fight. If I had followed him we would still be in the jungle. We would never have gained victory over the French or Americans. Sun Tzu by himself would never be enough to show us how to do what we did." In 1946, when French General Raoul Salan met Giap, he found a copy of T.E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* on a coffee table. Giap told him that is "[my] fighting gospel... I am never without it." However, Giap only found the chapter on *The Evolution of Revolt* to be relevant in French-occupied Vietnam.[77]

Nor did Mao Zedong's writings on revolutionary warfare escape Giap's critical eye. Giap accepted Mao's protracted revolutionary warfare theory, notably its three phases: (1) "strategic defensive" (building and securing friendly politico-military bases); (2) "strategic stalemate" (harassing and challenging the enemy's bases, turned those areas into contested territories and wearing down the enemy's physical and moral strengths); and (3) "strategic counter-offensive" (taking the war to the enemy in order to finish him

[75] Colvin, *Giap, Volcano Under Snow*, 7; Currey, *Victory At Any Cost*, 153-154
[76] Bui Diem, *In The Jaws of History*, 13
[77] Currey, *Victory At Any Cost*, 154

off once and for all).[78] In his *People's War, People's Army: The Viet Công Insurrection Manual for Underdeveloped Countries*, Giap reiterated Mao's main points but in his own words:

> *... our strategy and tactics had to be those of a people's war and of a long war of resistance....* A war of this nature in general entails several phases; in principle, starting from a stage of contention, it goes through a period of equilibrium before arriving at a general counter-offensive.[79]

However, Giap rejected two of Mao's premises; firstly, that revolutionary warfare could only occur in three stages; and secondly, that these three phases of revolutionary warfare were clearly defined. Rather, Giap asserted that history demonstrated that revolutionary warfare could occur and be prolonged in many unclearly defined but intricate phases depending on the political and military conditions of enemy and friendly forces. "In effect," Giap argued, "the way in which it [revolutionary warfare] is carried on can be more subtle and more complex, depending on the particular conditions obtaining on both sides during the course of operations."[80] For Giap, revolutionary warfare was but one style of combat. Fighting could require many styles of warfare and, above all, could demand the passive and active assistance of the entire population. "The war of liberation of the Vietnamese people proves that, in the face of an enemy as powerful as he is cruel," Giap reasoned, "victory is possible only by uniting the whole people with the bosom of a firm and wide national united front based on the worker-peasant alliance."[81]

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[78] Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Military Writing of Mao Tse-tung*, 2nd (Peking, China: Foreign Language Press, 1967), 208-219

[79] Minister of Defence and Commander in Chief of the People's Army of Viet Nam, General Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War, People's Army: The Viet Cộng Insurrection Manual for Underdeveloped Countries* (New York: Praeger, 1962), 23

[80] Giap, *People's War, People's Army*, 23-24

[81] Ibid., 27

True to the post-Nghe An and Ha-Tinh principles of the ICP—the need to reorganize Communist political cells and re-establish a social and political relationship with the rural peasants and the urban masses before any cautious political agitations for limited political gains could occur—Giap understood the primacy of politics in war. If the war's goal was to secure Vietnam's independence from a more powerful France, Giap clearly understood that his political objective could only be attained through a long political and military struggle in which the support of the mobilized masses was absolutely indispensable. "In a seeming paradox," George K. Tanham, one of the foremost scholars on communist revolutionary warfare, has contended that, "although the Vietminh always spoke of a war of movement and of the importance of avoiding pitched battles, the war was essentially one of attrition, in the sense that all efforts, military or nonmilitary, were aimed at wearing down the French."[82]

Reappraising the French Indochina War some years later, Giap's conclusion not only confirmed Tanham's assessments, it demonstrated he was a doctrinaire of revolutionary warfare. Instead, Giap was a true student of war who understood the need to have a political objective in war, to assess one's own strengths against one's enemy in order to adopt the appropriate strategy and tactics, to hurt the enemy militarily, economically, psychologically and politically, and above all, to mobilize the masses who were indispensable in long war. As Giap argued, the "*strategy of a long-term war*":

> does not mean that all revolutionary wars, all people's wars must necessarily be long-term wars. If from the outset, the conditions are favourable to the people and the balance of forces turn in favour of the revolution, the revolutionary war can end victoriously in a short time. But the war of liberation of the Vietnamese people started in quite different conditions: we had to deal with a much stronger enemy... it was impossible for us to defeat the enemy swifly.... It was only by a long and hard resistance that we could wear

[82]George K. Tanham, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare from the Vietminh to the Viet Cong* (London: Praeger Security International, 1961, 2006), 4

> out the enemy forces little by little while strengthening ours, progressively turn the balance of forces in our favour and finally win victory. We did not have any other way.[83]

For Giap, wearing "out the enemy forces little by little" meant more than just harassing the enemy on the frontline. One also had to deliver psychological blows that would convince the enemy's home population that they could not possibly win.[84] To further demoralize the enemy, Giap understood the importance of logistical and political support. Ultimately, "organization, leadership, and violence—outside aid,"[85] contributed to prolonging the conflict inside Vietnam and frustrated French officials who saw no end in sight. What caused the demoralization of the French military in colonized Vietnam and Frenchmen in France was Giap's unique protracted war strategy. It called the entire Vietnamese population to arms and employed various styles of warfare—political violence, small-scale guerrilla warfare, and conventional warfare—to strike at the enemy everywhere and to hurt his morale, economy, and politics. The military forces responsible for the aforementioned factors consisted of three different types of forces operating jointly with one another: the popular troops, guerrillas operated at village levels; the regional troops larger mobile guerrilla forces supporting village guerrillas; and the regular units larger conventional force supporting both mobile guerrilla forces and village guerrilla forces.

The popular troops organized themselves into platoons of twenty men led by a military officer and a political cadre. The military officer organized and trained the soldiers while the political cadre oversaw political education and morale. In secured villages, assisted by soldiers, the political cadre carried out a variety of non-military tasks

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[83] Giap, *People's War, People's Army*, 41
[84] Currey, *Victory At Any Cost*, 320; Colvin, *Giap, Volcano Under Snow*, 9-11
[85] Pike, *Viet Cong* , 40

such as the political education of the local inhabitants, collecting taxes, food, clothes, medicine, and other donations, recruiting local men and women for military service, soliciting information and intelligence from the local population, and punishing of collaborators and traitors. Planning and conducting operations were decided by both the military officer and the political cadre to ensure that every military initiative served a political purpose.[86]

Regional troops operated at company-size strength of around one to two hundred men strong while the regular units carried out missions at battalion-size strength, roughly three to five hundred men strong. Though they often cooperated in joint operations, the mission of the popular troops, regional troops, and regular units varied. On offensive operations, popular troop platoons prepared the battlefield for regional troop companies or/and regular troop battalions. Popular troops were local recruiters who knew their areas best whereas troops of the regional and regular units, drawn from all over the country, might be ignorant of local terrain, political problems, and military conditions. Preparing to fight required popular platoons to reconnoiter in detail anything from the likely routes of enemy's convoys, patrols and reinforcements to the location, troop strength and heavy weapon emplacements of enemy's stationary bases, outposts and mobile command posts.[87] Once popular troop platoons had gathered such information, regional and regular units would either launch or abort operations depending on the shifting political objectives and changing military circumstances. Furthermore, they would decide if regular battalions were needed to bolster regional companies in upcoming operations. Every offensive operation usually followed by a defensive operation whereby regional

[86] Tanham, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare*, 16, 22
[87] Michael Lee Lanning and Dan Cragg, *Inside the VC and the NVA: The Real Story of North Vietnam's Armed Forces* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1992), 84

and regular units would withdraw into the jungles and mountains to avoid being destroyed by the enemy ground forces or/and aerial bombardments. Meanwhile popular platoons resorted to classic guerrilla tactics—raids, ambushes, sniping, booby-traps, hit-and-run skirmishes, diversionary attacks—to delay enemy advancement while screening the retreat of friendly regional and regular units. After regional and regular units escaped, guerrillas of popular platoons would disperse and move into their prepared hideouts to protect themselves before rejoining local inhabitants after the enemy had withdrawn from their home villages and hamlets.

Unlike the popular platoons who mastered the art of guerrilla tactics, regular units specialized in conventional warfare. Unlike the popular platoons who needed the protection and support of the people, the regular units retreated to safe-havens in the jungles and mountains where supply caches and prepared rest areas ensured their subsistence. Unlike the popular platoons whose targets were both military (i.e., ambushing French or American patrols) and political (i.e., eliminating a French colonial officer, an American advisor, or a Vietnamese provincial chief), the regular units perfected their organization and training in order to destroy large enemy formations who were shielding smaller counterinsurgency forces or guarding border outposts. Regional units, which specialized in both guerrilla and conventional warfare, were important reserves who supported operations conducted by both the popular platoons and the regular units. Regional units, therefore, were highly mobile with their bases-of-operation being set up where they could relieve hunted popular platoons or reinforce attacking regular units.[88]

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[88] Tanham, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare*, 19-21

Discussing why weaker guerrilla forces had prevailed over stronger counter-guerrilla forces in history, Jeffrey Record, a post-revisionist scholar of the Vietnam War, has pointed to three intricate factors. First, a guerrilla force must have a sound strategy that gains the support of the people who will see the conflict through to victory. Second, it must convince the government and society that they had neither the military strength nor the political will to win a protracted war. Third, like conventional warfare, guerrilla warfare has been as much a contest of military strength as it has been a contest of political will. Therefore, to win, the guerrilla force needs arms as much as it needs to gain the support of the local population. Record argued that, the "weaker side's possession of superior will and strategy is hardly a guarantee of success. Even the weaker side needs material resources. Substantial external assistance may be required to convert superior will and strategy into victory. A rebellion must have arms."[89] Record has stressed that it is "difficult to see how an *unarmed* North Vietnam [DRVN] could have translated its superior will and strategy into victory over the United States and its South Vietnamese [RVN] allies."[90] It is also hard to imagine how the Viet Minh military, no matter how coherent its strategy and how appealing its political, social and economic promises were to Vietnamese peasants, could have frustrated the French army from 1946-1952 or beaten it at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 without wielding substantial military power.

To properly arm the popular, regional, and regular units was no easy task. In southern Vietnam, for example, various political and military factors directly prevented the Viet Minh from establishing a permanent foothold in the Mekong River Delta throughout the French Indochina War. While the Viet Minh's problems in southern

[89] Jeffrey Record, *Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 2007), 24
[90] Ibid., 23

Vietnam shall be explored in greater detail in a subsequent chapter, it is sufficient to mention three important factors that effectively checked its influence in the Mekong River Delta. First, other nationalist political and military factions competed against the Viet Minh to lead the Vietnamese Revolution in southern Vietnam. While fighting against the French colonists, they also struggled amongst themselves and against the Viet Minh over the right to rule postcolonial-Vietnam. Second, the French military re-established a stronger presence in southern Vietnam due to British help in 1945. After repatriating Japanese personnel, Britain's occupation force allowed the French military to secure its strategic bases in Indochina. Meanwhile, British commanders suppressed political agitation and military activities by Vietnamese nationalist and communist groups which opposed France's return. Third, once the French army consolidated its strategic positions in southern Vietnam before marching northward, the task of procuring arms, ammunition, and equipment became more difficult and dangerous for the Viet Minh.

Many former European colonies in Africa condemned France's return to Indochina and offered support to the Viet Minh government. One example was India's Vietnam policy in the decade after it gained its independence from Great Britain in 1947. According to political scientist Ramesh Thakur, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru sympathized with the Vietnamese revolution but distrusted "the communist character of the Vietminh leadership." Longing to secure India's hegemony over the region, they also feared "the emergence of a communist China that bordered on the communist-led part of Vietnam."[91] Nehru's government opposed the support provided by the USSR and the PRC for the Viet Minh and US aid to the French for fear such indirect military actions

[91] Ramesh Thakur, "India's Vietnam Policy, 1946-1979", *Asian Survey*, vol. 19, no. 10 (Oct., 1979), 959-560

could transform the colonial war into a proxy conflict of the Cold War. However, Nehru and his Cabinet did not directly criticize British and French colonial policies for "at the time France was with Britain the chief source of weapon supply to India."[92]

Therefore, while these Asian nations objected to France's foreign policy and recognized the Viet Minh government diplomatically, they failed to provide the military support they had promised the Viet Minh.[93] Thus, from 1946 to 1954, "Indian support for the Vietminh never went much beyond the verbal."[94] Even when Viet Minh political leaders obtained arms, and other military equipment from neighbouring countries, these purchases were done covertly through a clandestine network of traffickers. The process was time-consuming and dangerous. The French air force and navy kept a tight surveillance over numerous sea, coastal, and river routes and intercepted many Viet Minh's weapons. Nevertheless, military supplies trickled into southern Vietnam. Combining captured weapons from the Japanese and French armies with those produced by primitive local armament factories in jungle-bases, the Viet Minh military survived in southern Vietnam from 1946 to 1949.[95]

However, when the PRC, formed in late 1949, diplomatically recognized the Viet Minh government in 1950, the Viet Minh received aid from the two most powerful communist countries in the world, the USSR and the PRC. Ilya V. Gaiduk has argued that the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 "opened Stalin's eyes to the importance of the war in Indochina, which had now become a part of the common struggle against U.S.

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[92] Ibid., 960
[93] Mark Philip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam & America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 151-153
[94] Thakur, "India's Vietnam Policy, 1946-1975", 959
[95] Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam & America*, 160; Lanning and Cragg, *Inside the VC and the NVA*, 100

imperialism and U.S. satellites."[96] Distracted by events in Europe and disturbed by the Viet Minh leadership—Moscow perceived them as more nationalist than communist because there were non-ICP members in the Viet Minh front—the USSR finally recognized the Viet Minh government diplomatically on January 31, 1950.[97] As the USSR and Vietnam shared no border, Moscow secured promises from Beijing "to offer every assistance needed by Vietnam in its struggle against France."[98] However, once "the demands of the Korean War ended, Soviet war materiel but not *Soviet-labeled* war materiel began arriving in volume in Indochina."[99]

After Ho requested PLA officers to advise the Viet Minh military at the divisional, regimental, and battalion levels, the PRC formed the Chinese Military Advisory Group (CMAG) in April 17, 1950. The CMAG, some two hundred and eighty-one PLA personnel, supplied the Viet Minh with military materials and "nonmilitary goods such as clothes, medicine, and equipment."[100] These military and nonmilitary goods came from Russia, China, and Korea where captured US and UN arms were put into good use by the Viet Minh against the French in Indochina. Selected Viet Minh non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and officer candidates went to Soviet and Chinese military academies for military training. Once their studies were complete, they were sent back to their original units to become instructors who would pass on the military lessons they had learned to their troops. "By 1954, the Chinese had provided military and

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[96] Ilya V. Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy toward the Indochina Conflict, 1954-1963* (Washington, D.C. and Stanford: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press, 2003), 6
[97] Douglas Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union: Anatomy of an Alliance* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 28-32
[98] Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, 5
[99] Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union*, 33
[100] Qiang Zhai, *China & The Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 19

technological training for fifteen thousand Vietnamese officers and soldiers in China."[101] From 1950 to 1954, CMAG advised and supplied the Viet Minh as the latter launched regimental to divisional-size operations, first against French outposts on the Sino-Vietnamese frontier, known as the Border Campaign, and finishing with the siege of Dien Bien Phu in 1954.[102] To the PRC and the USSR, Vietnam had become a proxy war in a larger Cold War confrontation against America and its allies who had supported the Chinese Nationalists in the Chinese Civil War and then had intervened in the Korean War. As Chen Jian has concluded, the PRC "continued to view the Vietnamese Communist struggle against the French as part of the overall anti-imperialist struggle in the Far East. Thus, from Beijing's perspective, providing support to Vietnamese Communists was designed to enhance the PRC's vital security interests."[103]

As Viet Minh political leaders gained diplomatic recognition and military aid from the USSR and the PRC in 1950, Viet Minh military commanders continued organizing, training, and arming their units. From 1946 to 1949, Viet Minh popular, regional, and regular units employed whatever equipment was available, including homemade hand-grenades and bombs plus stolen, captured, and abondoned JIA and French military arsenals. Therefore, the weapons used by popular, regional, and regular units were neither universally issued nor standardized. However, starting in 1950, Viet Minh military units began receiving larger quantities and a better quality of armaments. PLA's logistical records indicate that between 1950 and 1956 its General Logistics Department delivered 155,000 small arms, 58 million rounds of ammunition, 3,600

[101] Xiaobing Li, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 212
[102] Chen Jian, *Mao's China & the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 124-138; Zhai, *China & The Vietnam Wars*, 26-38, 43-49
[103] Jian, *Mao's China & the Cold War*, 123

artillery pieces, 1.08 million artillery shells, 840,000 hand grenades, 1,200 vehicles, 1.4 million uniforms, 14,000 tons of food, and 26,000 tons of fuel. During the siege of Dien Bien Phu, which lasted from August 1953 to March 1954, CMAG issued $14.4 billion US dollars of goods, materials, medicine, and fuel to Vietnam. By the end of 1954, CMAG had armed five infantry divisions, one artillery division, one antiaircraft division, and one security regiment for the Viet Minh.[104]

The quantity and quality of the supplies coming from Russia and China enhanced Viet Minh commanders' ability to arm regular units with standardized weaponry. But from 1946 to 1954, the armory of the popular platoons did not change much. Because their missions were a mixture of reconnaissance, sabotage, and small-scale ambushes, all of which relied on speed, mobility, and stealth for success, popular platoons were lightly armed with pistols, sniping and assault rifles, some submachine guns, and grenades to hasten movement in and out of the combat zones. Regional companies and regular battalions, however, underwent a drastic rearmament from 1950 to 1954. As a strategic reserve to augment both the popular units and regular battalions in operations from 1946 to 1949, the regional units also relied on speed, mobility, and stealth for success. However, to effectively support the popular platoons and regular battalions in combat, more automatic rifles, submachine and heavy machine guns, bazookas or rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) launchers, and mortars were found in each regional company by 1950. From 1950 to 1954, regional companies played a more supportive role of the popular platoons since the regular battalions were increased in numbers, reorganized into regiments, trained to operate independently, and become capable of operating at a divisional-level.

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[104] Li, *History of the Modern Chinese Army*, 213

The regular units boasted an impressive arsenal of firepower including recoilless rifles, Browning automatic rifles, submachine guns, heavy machine guns, bazookas, mortars, antitank personnel mines, artillery pieces, and antiaircraft guns. When confronted by large French army formations in 1946-1949, Viet Minh regular battalions often withdrew, leaving regional companies and popular platoons to screen their retreats. From 1950 to 1954, Viet Minh regular battalions, regiments, and divisions sought to destroy the French army outposts on the Sino-Vietnamese border, forward bases of operations, large patrols, and heavy convoys. If attacked, Viet Minh regulars could stand their ground, fight in the open, and finish their enemies. If one compares the weapons a French infantry battalion had to that carried by a Viet Minh's battalion on operations in 1951-1952, it is unsurprising why Viet Minh regular units were more confident about fighting in the open. In 1951-1952, a French infantry battalion had 640 men while a Viet Minh battalion fielded 573 men. There were 324 rifles in each French battalion, 200 rifles per Viet Minh battalion. Forty-one automatic rifles existed in each French battalion, 54 in each Viet Minh battalion. French battalions had eight 60 mm and four 81 mm mortars as opposed to eight 60 mm mortars per Viet Minh battalion. French battalion had twenty machine guns while thirty to fifty machine guns were found in a Viet Minh battalion.[105]

The relatively evenly match in manpower and firepower between the Viet Minh and the French in 1951-1952 did not guarantee that Viet Minh regular units would prevail against French army units. In 1949 and 1950, Viet Minh military leaders successfully unraveled the French system of outposts on the Sino-Vietnamese border due to a combination of manpower, firepower, and sound strategy and tactics. By attacking isolated French jungle outposts which were difficult to reinforce, Viet Minh commanders

[105] J.W. McCoy, *Secrets of the Viet Cong* (New York: Hippocrene Books, Inc., 1992), 28-29

chose the right time and place to strike at their enemies with massive manpower and firepower. But as the French army withdrew from the Sino-Vietnamese border towards the Red River Delta in 1951-1952, Viet Minh commanders opted to pursue, a huge strategic and tactical mistake that no amount of manpower and firepower could remedy. As Viet Minh regulars moved out of their jungle bastions into the Red River Delta, their exposed lines of communication and supply lengthened as they were marched further away from natural cover, headquarters, and fire support bases. In the Red River Delta, the French army had more men to defend a smaller area. It was operating closer to its headquarters, logistical centers, and fire support bases made up of stationary artillery units and mobile tank squadrons. Reinforcement by land was relatively easier, less time consuming, and safer for the French army. Above all, French army units could be effectively covered by tactical air support. French army units were also operating within the effective range of offshore naval guns. Assaulting such a formidable French defensive perimeter in the Red River Delta, the manpower and firepower of Viet Minh regular units did not compensate for unsound strategy and tactics; the result was a disaster which will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter.

Together, the popular, regional, and regular units made up the Vietnamese Liberation Army (VLA), which was officially created in 1944. VLA soldiers and officers began their military career as a guerrilla in a popular unit. If they proved their military competence and loyalty, they joined a regional unit and received advanced military training. Transitioning from the regional units to the regular outfits depended on political loyalty and combat experience. Therefore, VLA regular soldiers, NCOs, and officers

were usually hardened veterans familiar with guerrilla warfare thanks to service in popular units.

The ICP and the Viet Minh, with the birth of the VLA, finally had its military wing to wage war as well as to protect itself. However, the National Military Council, composed of the Office of the President, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Defence, formed only in 1953-1954 to coordinate and direct the Viet Minh's overall war effort. The political and military activities of the VLA would eventually be overseen and controlled by the Ministry of Defence and the Political Bureau within it. From 1947 to 1953, the VLA's High Command undertook many organizational changes to match the war's escalation. As the VLA's manpower rose, so too did its intake of USSR and PRC supplies. Combined, the influx of manpower and material resources complicated the VLA's logistical system, making it less capable of absorbing and disseminating supplies effectively. From 1947 to 1950, for example, before it became the High Command, the VLA's Supreme Command consisted of five subdivisions: the Intelligence Service, Political Service, Bureau for Popular Troops, Inspector General and General Staff.[106]

Until 1950, the General Staff was responsible for operational planning and training. The CMAG pushed the General Staff to produce staff officers specially trained in personnel, intelligence, and logistics to support the training regimen and operational planning of the growing VLA. In 1953 and 1954, the VLA's General Staff was enlarged once more to include directorates of Intelligence, Training, Administration, Armed Forces (which soon included a small navy and air force), Popular Troops, Military

[106] Lanning and Cragg, *Inside the VC and the NVA*, 117-119; Tanham, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare*, 34-37

Affairs, Communications and Liaison, Engineer, Artillery (including strategic and tactical air defensive systems) and Coded Bureau. Nevertheless, throughout the French Indochina War, the General Staff's "strongest point was probably intelligence" while "its weakest [point]" continued to be its "supply" or logistical system.[107]

The ability of Giap and the General Staff to mobilize the Vietnamese masses was made possible by two important factors. First, Giap's desire to organize, train, and lead the VLA was wholeheartedly supported by Ho. Historians and biographers have highlighted Ho's contributions toward the theory and practice of revolutionary politics, they overlooked the importance of Ho's military experiences and reflections on his service with the Chinese 8th Route Army, the backbone of the future People's Liberation Army (PLA) of the PRC, in the Chinese Theatre of World War II (WWII).

Like his studies on the theory of revolution at ILS and CUTE, Ho's role in the Chinese 8th Route Army broadened his knowledge about the practice of revolutionary warfare. Furthermore, Ho's military experience made him more appreciative of Giap's initiatives and the General Staff in organizing, training, commanding, and disciplining the VLA. For example, the VLA's military disciplinary code of conduct—how officers should treat their subordinates, how soldiers should deal with their comrades in arms, how political cadres and military personnel should behave when operating in hamlets—was directly drawn from Ho's first hand observation of how the Chinese 8th Route Army's disciplinary code regulated the relationship between political cadres and military commanders, officers and soldiers, and guerrillas and peasants. Based on "the Chinese experience," as Brocheux has argued, "and by the recent failures of the ICP" uprisings in northern and central Vietnam, Ho wrote two important booklets, *Guerrilla Tactics* and

[107] Tanham, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare*, 18

The Instruction of Military Cadres, to be used by future VLA soldiers, officers, and political cadres to prepare them for an eventual insurrection.[108] The Chinese 8th Route Army's disciplinary code was passed on to its successor, the PLA. In September 19, 1962, John F. Brohm, consultant of the Bureau for the Far East of the Agency for International Development, pointed out the following factors which attracted the Chinese masses toward the PLA, integrated the PLA to into Chinese society, and placed the PLA under rather than above the authority of the CCP:

> Perhaps the most outstanding characteristic of the PLA, and fundamental to its appeal for the Chinese masses, was its discipline.... The concept of discipline included not only carrying out orders from superiors, but personal restraint in relations with others. The techniques of instilling this high degree of discipline took account of basic peasant attitudes and conditions, which was one reason for their success. Military discipline was based on equality of treatment for officers and men.... Education played a primary role in the PLA, in creating "political," or more accurately, "social consciousness" in the soldiers.... However, it was the indoctrination aspect of PLA education that had the greatest social significance since it made the army a cadre for the proselytization of non-Communist society. The indoctrination program deliberately attempted to reinforce the soldier's self-image as a peasant. It sought to avoid the development of any type of military professionalism—which serves to separate the military from the rest of society. The PLA was successful because it achieved a sense of identity with the Chinese people. The attitude, shared by a whole army, that the people and the army are on and the same thing was basic to the whole program.[109]

Ho and other civilian communist leaders who supported Giap from 1947 to 1949 continued to do so between 1950 and 1954 as they imposed a similar iron code of discipline to regulate every aspect of the relationship between senior officers and statesmen, officers and troops, and soldiers and the Vietnamese masses in the VLA.

Second, from 1947 to 1949, before Soviet and Chinese assistance arrived, Giap and the General Staff proved capable of organizing and training the VLA. Between 1950 and 1954, after the PRC sent supplies and advisors, PLA advisors themselves had successfully applied the theory of revolutionary warfare to defeat the KMT in the

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[108] Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, 65-68, 75

[109] Prepared Paper/Summary: "Lessons for Civic Action: The Experience of the People's Liberation Army", September 19, 1962; File: #339 China, Brohm, John F.; Box: 9; Collection: Edward Geary Lansdale Papers, The Hoover Institute for War, Revolution and Peace (THIWRP)

Chinese Civil War. Hence, Giap and the General Staff, together with PLA commanders, knew how effective mobile guerrilla warfare could be against a conventionally organized army. Therefore, Giap's General Staff and the PLA advisors fundamentally agreed about the organization and training of the VLA as its popular, regional, and regular units were to attack French military and political targets using various styles of warfare. Disagreements between VLA commanders and PLA advisors were unavoidable. While VLA commanders and PLA advisors disagreed over tactical questions, they agreed on how the VLA ought to be organized and trained since Giap's General Staff and PLA advisors knew well that the conventional French army could only be defeated through unconventional means. A historical event that highlighted the fundamental understanding between the VLA and CMAG dated back to their first meeting in 1950. As Qiang Zhai, an expert on Sino-Vietnamese relationship during the Vietnam War era, summed up, PLA senior advisors re-familiarized VLA generals with Mao's military thoughts, specifically his ten military principles of revolutionary warfare:

(1) Attack dispersed and isolated enemy forces first and attack concentrated, strong enemy forces later
(2) Take small and medium cities and extensive rural areas first before occupying large cities
(3) Make the elimination of the enemy's effective strength rather than the holding or seizing a city the main objective
(4) In every battle, concentrate an absolutely superior force to wipe out the enemy forces
(5) Fight no battle unprepared
(6) Maintain high morale among the soldiers
(7) Strive to wipe out the enemy when it is on the move
(8) When attacking cities, resolutely seize all enemy fortified points and cities that are weakly defended
(9) Obtain weapons and new recruits from the enemy
(10) Make good use of the intervals between campaigns to rest, train, and consolidate troops[110]

PLA senior advisors only reiterated in 1950 what VLA commanding generals, Giap, Ho and other ICP members had already known and practiced since 1946.

[110] Zhai, *China & The Vietnam Wars*, 18-19

The VLA survived from 1950 to 1954 with CMAG's help precisely because from 1946 to 1949, when the VLA was militarily weaker than the French army, the VLA chose to fight for stalemate rather than to defeat its enemy in order to preserve its manpower and limited resources. In 1961, for example, Giap reminisced that, in 1946 and 1947, the VLA was "growing in the struggle." But it was not until "the end of 1948 and the beginning of 1949" that the VLA was able to launch "for the first time... small campaigns which inflicted considerable losses on our adversary."[111] Writing in 1951, Ho summed up the VLA's three stages of revolutionary warfare strategy in 1946-1949 even more succinctly than Giap:

> At the beginning, the enemy was the stronger and we the weaker. However, we doggedly waged the Resistance War. Our Party and Government foresaw that our Resistance War has three stages. In the first stage, from September 23, 1945, to the closing of the Viet Bac campaign, autumn-winter, 1947, all we did was to preserve and increase our main forces. In the second stage, running from the end of the Viet Bac campaign 1947 up to the present, we have actively contended with the enemy and prepared for the general counteroffensive. The third stage [1950-1954] is the general counteroffensive."[112]

In the final analysis, PLA advisors and their VLA counterparts worked well on military matters because of their shared understanding of and strong belief in the theory and practice of revolutionary warfare as an effective political tool and military measure to defend the weak to against the strong and, eventually, to defeat the strong.

In his study on why the weak sometimes defeated the strong in war, Jeffrey Record concluded:

> *Weaker-side victories are exceptional and almost always rest on some combination of stronger political will, superior strategy and foreign help.* Single-factor explanations of asymmetric war outcomes are rarely satisfactory. There are simply too many variables at play in war—the most complex of all human enterprises... the Vietnamese Communists prevailed because... [they] had a stronger will *and* better strategy *and* massive foreign help.[113]

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[111] Russell Stetler, ed., *The Military Art of People's War: Selected Writings of General Vo Nguyen Giap* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 88
[112] Fall, *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 198
[113] Record, *Beating Goliath*, 132

Before 1950, while the VLA was materially weaker, it was more politically determined and had a sound strategy. From 1951 to 1954, the VLA had all three of Record's prescribed ingredients that would *almost* guarantee its victory against France. Why *almost* rather than *certainly*, because arguably the *decision makers* and the *timing* of their decisions matter in war. Insightful as Record's conclusions were, he left out the role of the decision makers and their sense of timing which, when combined, could make or break a revolution.

In the 1930s, for example, even though the ICP was more organized and far more disciplined than all the other Vietnamese nationalist parties, ICP-led uprisings in central Vietnam had been mercilessly crushed by the French. That disaster was unsurprising as ICP leaders had yet to gain the three political and military necessities required for victory. Also, their sense of timing was undeniably poor. Indochina in the 1930s was still effectively dominated by France despite the social unrest caused by the Great Depression. In the 1940s, as they witnessed France's subjugation by Germany, Japan's occupation of Indochina, the Viet Minh's successful August Revolution of 1945, and the VLA's survival from 1946 to 1949 in the face of France's military re-conquest, ICP decision makers' sense of timing proved impeccable. However, from 1950 to 1951 when the ICP began to enjoy all the political and military ingredients required for the weak to defeat the strong, ICP decision makers ordered the VLA to undertake disastrous frontal attacks against the strong French defensive perimeter surrounding the Red River Delta. Political will, the right strategy, and external assistance matter in war. Record's conclusions were incomplete. The decision-makers and the timing of their decisions also matter.

The roles of the decision-makers and the timing of their decisions constituted the third revolutionary principle of Ho, Giap, and the ICP. In order for revolutionaries to have a chance to succeed, the revolutionary conditions inside and outside of the country had to favour the revolutionaries. France's defeat and occupation from 1940 to 1944 and Japan's takeover of French Indochina broke France's domination of Indochina. These historic events opened up the power vacuum which the Viet Minh filled in 1945.

Finally, the fourth revolutionary principle of the Vietnamese communists comprised the need for a united front strategy. The united front strategy was officially announced on July 25th, 1935, at the Seventh Congress of the Communist International held in Moscow. Because of the growing threats of Adolf Hitler's National Socialist (Nazi) Party in Germany, ultranationalist militarism in Japan, and the Spanish Civil War which became a proxy war between Fascism and Communism, the USSR needed to break out of the Axis (Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, militarist Japan) powers' political and military encirclement. Therefore, strategic alliances must be forged between Communist and non-Communist parties and governments throughout the world to counter the immediate dangers posed by the Axis powers.

However, almost a decade before the COMINTERN insisted that the Communist parties around the globe adopted the united front strategy, Ho and his closest confidants already had advocated an alliance between communist and nationalist parties throughout Vietnam to overthrow French colonialism.[114] The COMINTERN crafted the united front strategy out of its concerns for the external threats against the USSR. But for Ho and his lieutenants, the threats to Vietnam's sovereignty had not always been coming from without. It was true that France ruled Vietnam through a combination of military

[114] Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, 223

repression, police surveillance, and political manipulation. However, France could not have dominated the country had Vietnam not been divided itself. Ho and his lieutenants believed the nationalist parties were disorganized, undisciplined, and lacking unity. Political infighting within and amongst nationalist parties allowed French spies and agent provocateurs to penetrate and destroy them from within while French colonial authorities played one faction against another from without. Early communist leaders fought hard to prevent divisions within the ICP. But they also realized, long before the COMINTERN did, that in colonized countries, anti-imperialism, patriotism, and nationalism were powerful and primers of revolt. The Bolsheviks could focus on the question of class struggle for the Tsar's family and royalists were still Russian and symbolized the domination of an aristocratic class over the bourgeois and proletarian classes in Russia. The ICP could not have possibly concentrated on the question of class struggle without dealing with the question of national independence first. As French colonialists were not Vietnamese, they did not represent the domination of one class over another in Vietnam. Rather, they embodied the subjugation of a foreign power over Vietnam and symbolized the repression of the Vietnamese peoples regardless of their classes. In fact, for the ICP to place class above the national struggle was to risk dividing the Vietnamese political parties and peoples further to the benefit of the French colonial authority. The class question had to wait until the colonial and national question had been resolved in Vietnam.

The united front strategy aimed at mobilizing the greatest numbers of Vietnamese to fight for the independence of their country. But the organization, strategic and tactical planning, political education and military training, and the majority of the leadership of

the united front must be influenced and controlled by the revolutionary party itself, not by its temporary allies. The ICP's reorganization after 1935 and the formation of its military wing, the VLA, allowed the ICP to apply its new united front strategy with more confidence. "The revolution would be achieved through armed struggle led by the party.... To lead this struggle, the Communist Party would have to broaden its influence and multiply its organization," argued Pierre Brocheux.[115] As a result, the Viet Minh was founded. The Viet Minh was a loose communist-nationalist alliance, led by the ICP, to fight Japan's occupational forces and to prevent France's military re-conquest of post-WWII Vietnam. The Viet Minh was made possible, not simply by the ICP's desire, but also due to the willingness of remnants of the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang (VNQDD) or Vietnamese Nationalist Party, Dai Viet Quoc Dan Dang (DVQDD) or Greater Viet Nationalist Party, the Catholic, the Monarchist, the Hoa Hao, the Cao Dai, and the Binh Xuyen to fight for Vietnam's independence.

In conclusion, the ICP formed the Viet Minh coalition of communists and nationalists to fight the French due to a combination of factors. The Viet Minh's successful rise to power was partly due to the harsh colonial conditions created by the French, but also by the willingness of nationalist parties to ally with the Communists in a common cause. However, it is questionable if there would have been a Viet Minh front without ICP organization, planning, and leadership. If the ICP treated other nationalist parties as its temporary allies, nationalist parties also accepted the ICP as their convenient friends. The exception was that while the ICP was united, organized, and experienced, the nationalist parties were not; hence, they had little chance competing against the ICP to lead the Vietnamese revolution.

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[115] Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, 73-74

The ICP's rise as a political party from 1930s to 1940s and the strengthening of the VLA as a military force from 1940s to 1950s were responsible by many complicated and intricate historical factors. But the ICP's ability to survive the repressions of the 1930s, to create the Viet Minh alliance in the 1940s, and to develop the VLA during the French Indochina War was due to Ho and Giap. Their intelligence, organizational skill, and determination was reflected in the physical endurance and moral strength of ICP cadres. Many ICP cadres were arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and killed. However, surviving ICP members once released from colonial prisons, re-organized, re-planned and strengthened the Vietnamese revolutionary that would overtake France's Indochina. In 1954, the VLA became the People's Army of Viet Nam (PAVN), which was created after the Geneva Agreement divided Vietnam in half with the southern half became the RVN and northern part became the DRVN, whose external security was entrusted upon the PAVN.[116] Secretly, the DRVN supported the FNLSVN when it officially formed in 1960 while the PAVN reinforced the PLAF, the military wing of the FNLSVN, as both the DRVN and the FNLSVN struggled to complete the unfinished Vietnamese revolution. "Neither the French nor the Americans could stem the social forces that the war and the Revolution had deeply rooted throughout the south by 1954. Unless there was an international intervention," as Gabriel Kolko has concluded, "the Revolution would quickly attain total victory."[117] With one Western power defeated, another entered Vietnam. Like the external assistance the VLA received from the USSR and the PRC to

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[116] Douglas Pike, *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1986), 39-41; translated by Merle L. Pribbenow and foreword by William J. Duiker, *The Military History Institute of Vietnam's Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), x, 3-5

[117] Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience* (New York: The New Press, 1994), 107

defeat the French army, the PAVN and the PLAF continued to receive support from their patrons. Recalling the four revolutionary principles—organization, armed struggle, united front and timing—that the Viet Minh relied on to defeat France, the DRVN and the NFLSVN also would challenge the US and the RVN.

Chapter 3
Counterrevolutionary Warfare in the French Indochina War, 1946-1953

In recent scholarly studies, the origins of the South Vietnamese army are traced back to 1955, the year South Vietnam became a republic and to the earlier creation Vietnamese National Army (VNA). The VNA was organized, trained, and commanded by the French Far East Expeditionary Corps (FFEEC) while financial aid, equipment, and logistical support was provided by the United States Military Assistance Advisory Group Indochina (USMAAGI)[1] in the second phase of the French Indochina War, 1950-1954.[2] As Robert K. Brigham has averred, "The ARVN was born in 1955, when the United States had great faith in modernization and nation-building as weapons of the cold war. U.S. officials argued that they could create a new army out of the remnants of the old Vietnamese National Army [VNA] that the French had grudgingly organized to help put down the Communist revolution."[3] Historian Andrew Wiest has traced ARVN roots to 1950 when the VNA, the predecessor and the backbone of the South Vietnamese army, was officially created. However, like Brigham, Wiest has maintained that ARVN was an extension of the VNA which was "the precursor of the ARVN."[4]

The claim that ARVN origins began with the VNA's formation is incomplete as such analyses focusing exclusively on the VNA, have overlooked the organization, training, and combat potential of each of the additional paramilitary forces—the Catholic Self-Defence Forces (CSDF), the militant Hoa Hao and Cao Dai religious sects, and the Binh Xuyen organized crime

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[1] Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941-1960,* United Sates Army in Vietnam series (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1985), 115-121

[2] Scholars of the French Indochina War, 1946-1954, have usually divided the conflict into either two or three phases: The first, 1946-1950; second, 1950-1953; third and final, 1953-1954. See actual references from Pierre Brocheux et Daniel Hémery, *Indochine la Colonisation Ambigue, 1858-1954* (Paris, Éditions la Découverte & Syros, 2001), 351, 354; Douglas Porch, "French Imperial Warfare, 1945-1962", Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian, ed., *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare* (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2008), 92-100

[3] Robert K. Brigham, *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army* (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 2006), ix

[4] Andrew Weist, *Vietnam's Forgotten Army: Heroism and Betrayal in the ARVN* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 20

syndicates. All of these, from 1950-1954, played an important political and military role in assisting the FFEEC to counter the VLA. Furthermore, all of them, from 1954 to 1956, were disintegrated by the VNA and reintegrated into the ARVN to counter the new dual threat of the PLAF and PAVN. The ARVN, arguably, was an amalgamation of all these counterrevolutionary fighting forces of the French Indochina War: The VNA, the CSDF, the Hoa Hao paramilitary forces (HHPF), the Cao Dai paramilitary forces (CDPF), and the Binh Xuyen paramilitary forces (BXPF).

To determine the appropriateness in the organization, training, and combat capability of the ARVN from 1955 to 1963, this chapter examines the organization and training for each of the aforementioned counterrevolutionary forces. Further, the strengths and weaknesses of each of the counterrevolutionary forces will be critically analyzed. Ultimately, this chapter studies the ways in which the strategy and tactics of the French counterrevolutionary forces were theoretically conceived and practically applied. By examining the strengths and weaknesses of each of these counterrevolutionary forces, we have an excellent litmus test to forecast the difficulties and challenges that awaited the ARVN in the first phase of the Vietnam War (1954-1963).

The French Indochina War had two phases: 1946 to 1949; and 1950 to 1954.[5] In the war's first phase, the FFEEC and the VLA were locked in a strategic stalemate but the VLA strengthened tactically during this period.[6] The defeat of the KMT by Mao Zedong's CCP in 1949, which created the PRC, further weakened the FFEEC's strategic position as the VLA

[5] Pierre Brocheux et Daniel Hémery, *Indochine La Colonisation Ambigue 1858-1954* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte & Syros, 2001), 351, 354
[6] Daniel Moran, *Wars of National Liberation* (London: Cassell & Co, 2001), 93-94

found safe-havens in the PRC where it recuperated and trained for conventional warfare.[7] But even with substantive US financial and military aid, France was fighting a distant, seemingly endless, and unpopular war while France's already weak strategic position only worsened as the war dragged on. On the ground, the FFEEC was dangerously spread out or completely isolated as VLA attacks grew more intense.[8] French families no longer understood why France was fighting a colonial war while there were pressing social problems, economic hardship, and political instability at home. There was an urgent need for manpower in the FFEEC by 1949 when a new phase of the war was set to begin.[9] This factor directly led to the formation of the counterrevolutionary forces.

In late 1946, the first commander of the FFEEC, General Etienne Valluy, thought that he had "[taught] the Vietminh a good lesson," recalled his *aide-de-camp*,[10] when he cleared the VLA out of Haiphong and Hanoi.[11] As it turned out, the embattled VLA, stretched thinly from the harbour of Haiphong to the city of Hanoi, was a mixture of company-size regional and platoon-size popular units. Having been dislodged from Haiphong and Hanoi after bitter urban fire fights,[12] VLA regional and popular units carried out guerrilla actions to delay advancing FFEEC reinforcements. VLA regional and popular units provided security screens for retreating VLA battalion-size regular units, allowing them to evade the FFEEC's onslaught and to

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[7] Jacques Dalloz, *La guerre d'Indochine 1945-1954* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987), 157-158; Harold M. Vinacke, *Far Eastern Politics in the Postwar Period* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1956), 279; Philippe Masson, *Histoire de l'armee française de 1914 à nos jours* (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 2002), 396

[8] Georges Fleury, *La guerre en Indochine* (Paris: Éditions Perrin, 2003), 386

[9] Fleury, *La guerre en Indochine*, 460; Masson, *Histoire de l'armee française de 1914 à nos jours*, 396-397

[10] Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 44; Ellen J. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), 183

[11] Robert D. Schulzinger, *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 29-30

[12] Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 171-172; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 82

reorganize themselves into "small conventional forces."[13] The uprising in Haiphong-Hanoi in 1945 to 1946, historian Anthony James Joes has stated, represented "the Leninist phase of the Viet Minh revolution." Its strategic withdrawal into the rural areas to conduct small but lightning attacks on FFEEC's isolated outposts and vulnerable patrols with speed, surprise and overwhelming numbers reflected the VLA's ability to adopt "quickly and easily... the time-tested guerrilla tactics of Mao."[14] However, the VLA was not simply waging a guerrilla war that mirrored the Chinese Civil War. Rather, it sought to fight a total war of prolonged attrition against the French with all available means—military, political, diplomatic, economic, and psychological—with guerrilla warfare being just one of its tactics.

By the summer of 1947, the FFEEC held the coastal areas, had recaptured the cities, and had secured the major roads. But the countryside, canopy jungles, and remote mountains became temporary political and military bases for the VLA to recuperate, reorganize, recruit, retrain, and re-plan.[15] Valluy's next move to re-conquer and pacify the contested rural areas was driven by his belief that VLA strength would only grow if its rural bases were left intact. Valluy also feared, especially as the CCP gained the upper hand in China, that the Sino-Vietnamese border region soon would support the VLA's strategic rear bases. Once the VLA withdrew into Chinese territory, the FFEEC lacked the authority to enter its enemy's sanctuary. Valluy also faced intense political pressure from Paris to deliver spectacular military victories against the elusive VLA.[16] However, the FFEEC was, in journalist Bernard B. Fall's words, "too strong for France

[13] Anthony James Joes, *The War for South Viet Nam, 1954-1975* (Westport: Praeger, 2001), 22
[14] Joes, *The War for South Viet Nam*, 22
[15] Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 45; Schulzinger, *A Time for War*, 37
[16] Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 47

to resist the temptation of using them; yet not strong enough to keep the Viet-Minh from trying to solve the whole political problem by throwing the French into the sea."[17]

By 1954 the FFEEC had between 438,000 and 450,000 men—including 300,000 Vietnamese soldiers from the VNA, CSDF, CDPF, HHPF and BXPF, 70,000 non-conscripted French regulars, and roughly 68,000 French Foreign Legionnaires and African colonial troops—facing 400,000 VLA troops.[18] However, at the time of *Operation Lea* in 1947 which marked the beginning of the FFEEC push into the countryside, domestic political pressures and a need to fight another insurgency in Madagascar compelled Paris to reduce the FFEEC from 115,000 to 90,000 while promising to send 11,000 reinforcements once Madagascar was stabilized.[19] FFEEC Colonel David Galula had theorized that to defeat a guerrilla force, the counter-guerrilla force would need to have "a ratio of force" of at least ten or twenty times more than what its enemy has.[20] If true, the FFEEC to VLA force ratio was far below that recipe for victory, approximately 2.3 to 1 or 3 to 2 in 1947. Still, the force ratio, by itself, represented just one of the aspects that hampered FFEEC tactics and strategy.

The FFEEC operated over eleven thousand kilometers away from its military industrial base in France. The French officer corps was divided between those who had followed General Charles de Gaulle's government-in-exile in WWII and those who had serve the Vichy government in occupied France. Postwar morale in the French army was low. The French army's command-and-control systems and organizational structure were left in a stage of disarray after WWII. Logistically, the French army was poorly designed to absorb any new military

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[17] Bernard B. Fall, *Street Without Joy* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1989), 27

[18] Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 28; George K. Tanham, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare from the Viet Minh to the Viet Cong* (London: Praeger Security International, 2006), 1; John T. McAlister, Jr., *Viet Nam: The Origins of Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 8-9; David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 1

[19] Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support*, 85

[20] David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare Theory and Practice* (London: Praeger Security International, 2006), 21

hardware.[21] Before the FFEEC was deployed to Indochina, "the rehabilitation of a logistical and support structure had been neglected in favor of raising combat units to strengthen French muscle in Allied councils of war. Consequently, the French in Indochina were short of mechanics and logisticians."[22] As a result, FFEEC units relied on an assortment of surplus weaponry, equipment, and spare parts to be more effective at on the battlefield. But they had to do so without a complex logistical and supporting system to absorb and disseminate military supplies. The French air force suffered most from the inadequate logistic-support system at a time when FFEEC units, especially those operating far from their artillery-support-bases, depended on flexible air mobility, logistical air support, and close air-to-ground fire to survive.[23]

Being able to collect, assess, and disseminate intelligence effectively and quickly manner is vital to policy-makers and tactical commanders when an enemy systematically uses guerrilla tactics to nibble at its opponent's manpower, material, and morale while preserving its main forces for a crushing blow to rout its opponents. Thus, gathering, analyzing and distributing intelligence became an integral part in finding and destroying enemy's forces as well as protecting friendly forces from annihilation.[24] In Indochina, the Deuxième Bureau, French Military Intelligence section (FMI), compiled, evaluated and circulated intelligence for FFEEC's staff officers and field commanders. The FMI acted as a nucleus organization which coordinated intelligence and covert actions conducted by the Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre-espionnage (SDECE), the Services Techniques de Reserches (STR), the Goupement des

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[21] Douglas Porch, *The French Foreign Legion: A Complete History of the Legendary Fighting Force* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 513
[22] Porch, "French Imperial Warfare 1945-62", 93
[23] Joes, *The War for South Vietnam 1954-1975*, 33; Porch, "French Imperial Warfare 1945-62", 95
[24] General Sir Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, and Peacekeeping* (St. Petersburg, Florida: Hailer: 1971), 91-92

Contrôles Radio-électroniques (GCRE), the Directeur Général de la Documentation (DGD), and the Service d'Etudes Historique (SHE).[25]

From 1946 to 1949, the FMI in Indochina did well obtaining information but had difficulties examining, delivering, and acting upon intelligence. Since FFEEC units on operations were thinly stretched and often undermanned, the best FFEEC officers were assigned to combat duties while their mediocre or incompetent colleagues went to intelligence desks.[26] Furthermore, Germany's occupation of France and Japan's occupation of French Indochina effectively had ended any attempts to form a "native affairs" branch of the FMI staffed by both Indochinese and Frenchmen who shared a keen interest and an intimate knowledge of Indochina's peoples, cultures, and histories. From 1946 to 1949, the FMI's Signal Intelligence (SIGINT), which intercepted radio-transmitted and other electronic-based communicative messages, was rendered completely ineffective against the technologically unsophisticated VLA.[27] The FMI's Human Intelligence (HUMINT) assets in Indochina were greatly reduced because the indigenous population, fearing VLA retribution if they collaborated, were indifferent, uncooperative, or hostile towards the French.[28] Since frontline FFEEC officers and soldiers saw themselves as combatants, not deskbound intelligence analysts, they felt no incentive to comprehend their enemy's language, traditions, and customs. The little intelligence that FFEEC's field officers gathered was purely for tactical use. Tactical intelligence allowed FFEEC commanders to identify where the enemy was, what had been his last location, where was he heading to, how many men were with him, what types of weapons his men had, and if reinforcements were on their way. By failing to appreciate their enemy's languages, rituals, and ways of life, FFEEC

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[25] Douglas Porch, *The French Secret Services: A History of French Intelligence from the Dreyfus Affair to the Gulf War* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 299-300
[26] Porch, *The French Secret Services*, 301
[27] Porch, "French Imperial Warfare 1945-62", 95
[28] Porch, *The French Secret Services*, 302

troops grew more dependent on Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese interpreters. However, the understaffed and financially constrained FMI could not guarantee that interpreters were not VLA spies.[29]

In 1952, for example, the FMI reorganized two reconnaissance companies for the FFEEC. Known as the Service de Renseignement Opérationel (SRO), the two companies consisted of smaller teams of combat-tested and highly motivated commandos. SRO commandos undertook deep reconnaissance into VLA-held territories and even the PRC. This experiment, which cost the FFEEC three hundred million francs annually, while it alerted remote FFEEC outposts to imminent attacks, did nothing to determine the enemy's strategy, tactics, morale, logistics, or finances. The quality of the tactical intelligence gathered by the SRO was dubious. To infiltrate enemy territory SRO commandos were landed by the navy or parachuted in by the air force. However, SRO commandos then had to march home on foot despite hazardous terrain and daunting battle circumstances. Thus, the intelligence that SRO commandos risked their lives to collect quickly became stale, often rendering future operations both futile and dangerous. VLA units could have relocated to different locations or have better prepared their current positions by the time FFEEC units went into action.[30] Despite the large investment, the SRO offered an unprofitable return that mirrored France's larger war effort in Indochina: The military price that France paid brought neither the VLA closer to defeat nor the FFEEC closer to victory. The FMI's operational budget could not have been resolved quickly. While FFEEC commanding generals in Hanoi and Saigon were responsible for allocating military funds to operational units, political leaders in Paris authorized how much funds should go into the war effort in Indochina. However, the shortage of expert personnel in the intelligence section could have been alleviated

[29] Ibid., 303
[30] Ibid., 303

had experienced military officers and civilian intelligence analysts not been removed "because they were considered too pro-Vichy."[31] Between 1945 and 1954, there was neither unity of administration nor continuity of command in Paris's civil-military relations. The FFEEC was commanded by no less than eight commanders-in-chief who sought to implement the policies of no less than sixteen government Cabinets.[32]

Despite its strategic disadvantage, the FFEEC enjoyed a superior tactical position over the VLA in 1946. If FFEEC armaments fell below the standard of western armies, by contrast the VLA was primitively armed. Junior and senior VLA commanders, Giap included, also lacked practical military experience in 1946 even though they had theoretical knowledge regarding conventional and non-conventional/partisan warfare.[33] In addition, there was no armour, artillery, air support, logistical system, signal communication, and field hospitals "worthy of the name" in the VLA arsenal, while VLA regular units lacked training in battalion-size operations.[34] "Strong in popular support," historian Marilyn B. Young has claimed, "the [Viet Minh/DRVN] government lacked everything else: military supplies, economic strength, [and] international allies."[35] Nevertheless, VLA tactical weaknesses were complemented by some strategic strengths. The varied geography and topography of the Red River Delta, considered to be "the main area of contention"[36] and "the key pawn of the whole Indochina War—the Red River Delta,"[37] where the VLA and the FFEEC clashed for the control of northern Vietnam, favoured the defence and infantry-based/guerrilla-type operations conducted by the VLA over the combined arms/maneuver-type offensive operations waged by the FFEEC. The ability of Viet

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[31] Ibid., 302
[32] Joes, *The War for South Viet Nam*, 26
[33] Porch, *The French Foreign Legion*, 514
[34] Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 43
[35] Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars 1945-199* (New York: Harper-Perennial, 1991), 19
[36] Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 43-44; Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 28
[37] Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 33

Minh leaders to unify communist and nationalist factions, at least from 1946 to 1949, and to mobilize the Vietnamese masses to fight a protracted war for Vietnam's independence virtually guaranteed the VLA continuous food supplies, money donations, and manpower. As China's Civil War intensified, VLA strategic rear bases along the Sino-Vietnamese border were not patrolled by the KMT which had to reallocate its resources to central China to halt the advancing CCP. But the FFEEC lacked the manpower to seal off the seven hundred kilometer long Sino-Vietnamese border. Nor could it have attacked VLA's sanctuaries in southern China as Paris feared that such incursions would anger the KMT or incite a full-blown war with the PRC once the CCP defeated the KMT in 1949.[38]

The aforementioned tactical strengths and strategic weaknesses were not obvious to FFEEC commanders in 1947. As officers in "a professional army who knew how to use its tanks, artillery, paratroops and fighter-bombers,"[39] With "no inkling of the reverses awaiting him," a confident General Valluy was the first of many FFEEC commanders who sought to destroy the VLA to compel Viet Minh leaders to accept French political will.[40] Located north of Hanoi, Viet Bac village and its region was known to the FMI as the VLA's main headquarters. It thus became the target of Valluy's first operation, coded-name LEA, part of a larger FFEEC's campaign to re-conquer the Red River Delta. Viet Bac, more than a hundred and sixty square kilometers of rugged terrain, was defended by fifty thousand VLA regular troops.[41] But the FMI did not know this and Valluy doubted the enemy could muster such a force.[42] Operation LEA, which began on October 7, 1947, involved thirty thousand FFEEC troops[43] converging on Viet

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[38] Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 43
[39] Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 29
[40] Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 47
[41] Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 28
[42] Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 51
[43] Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 28; Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Political History* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968), 320

Bac from three different directions to encircle and obliterate the enemy using aerial firepower. Lieutenant Colonel Sauvagnac's "Group S" paratroopers, an airborne half-brigade, would surprise VLA regular units and continuously engage them until ground reinforcements would smash them in a concentric pincer movement. Lieutenant Colonel Communal's "Group C", three marine battalions, was to advance northward using landing craft to block the enemy's escape routes. From the north, three armour battalions, three infantry battalions, plus artillery, engineers and transports units, Colonel Beauffre's "Group B", would block the enemy's escape routes.[44]

Operation LEA began at the break of dawn on October 7, 1947 with 1,137 "Group S" paratroopers descended on the VLA network of underground headquarters in Viet Bac. The paratroopers found VLA arm caches, radios, food, and medical supplies, as well as the papers of Ho, Giap, and other senior leaders who barely escaped the FFEEC's best soldiers. But the confiscation of VLA supplies and near capture of its top commanders marked the LEA's only high point.[45] By October 8, having recovered from the shock of the airborne assault, Ho and Giap reorganized VLA regular units to engage the paratroopers on even terms. By October 10, VLA regular units in Viet Bac surrounded "Group S" which survived over the next nine days thanks to close-air-support and supplies dropped from above as ground reinforcements were slowed by natural obstacles and VLA actions.

Colonel Beauffre's "Group B" advanced southward as quickly as it could to relieve the besieged paratroopers. "Group B" was a heavy—hence slow moving—column of armour, infantry, artillery, engineering, and transport units. It also had to negotiate almost two hundred and fifty kilometers of bombed roads, ill-maintained bridges, and canopy jungle. Moreover, VLA regional and popular units blew up bridges, felled trees, booby-trapped trails, and set up sniping

[44] Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 28; Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 47-48
[45] Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 49; Porch, "French Imperial Warfare 1945-162", 96

and ambush positions to bog down "Group B" to buy time for VLA regulars to finish off "Group S". From the south, "Group C" LCTs could not advance into Viet Bac through the Clear River thanks to natural obstacles and artificial obstructions erected in the river by the VLA. To prevent "Group S" from being overrun, Lieutenant Colonel Communal ordered his marines to advance on foot. "Group S" was partially relieved on October 13 when "Group B" broke through the VLA's line on the northern flank and linked up with "Group S" on October 16. The paratroopers were fully relieved by "Group C" on October 19.[46] By this date, however, VLA units had disengaged from the fight. Once the three FFEEC columns left Viet Bac on November 8, however, VLA regional and popular units re-infiltrated to re-build their political and military infrastructure. Financially, Operation LEA had cost about thirty-four million dollars a month.[47]

Operation LEA was followed by Operation CEINTURE, launched from November 20 to December 22, 1947, to wipe out the VLA's stronghold in Thai Nguyen and Tuyen Quang, northwest of Hanoi. But Operation CEINTURE dispersed rather than destroyed VLA regular units, and regional and popular units re-infiltrated the area once FFEEC units departed. The last operation in Valluy's campaign to re-establish a French presence in the Red River Delta countryside commenced in late 1947 and terminated in early 1948. It involved French special force units organizing, training, and leading the T'ai ethnic minority group who inhabited the mountains along the Red and Black Rivers against the VLA. Valluy's last operation before his return to Paris scored a noticeable success. The T'ai highland warriors, historically distrustful of Vietnamese lowlanders, were far more familiar with their territories than the VLA. Together,

[46] Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 29; Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 49-50
[47] Spector, *Advice and Support*, 90

T'ai warriors and French advisors prevented the VLA from operating in the area for several years.[48]

Bernard B. Fall considered LEA and CEINTURE inappropriate for countering the VLA. Instead, the correct operational model should have been the small-scale operation on the Laotian-Vietnamese border jointly conducted by FFEEC special force advisors and T'ai warriors. Fall argued that the combined FFEEC special force advisors and T'ai warriors task force was "a lesson that, unfortunately, was forgotten in the roar of tank engines and 'Spitfire' fighters with which the FFEEC regulars preferred to fight their offensives."[49] Furthermore, counter-guerrilla operations had to be followed up by pacification campaigns designed to win the hearts and minds of the rural population who would assist the FFEEC to defeat the VLA once and for all. Fall's analysis of Valluy's 1947 Campaign was incorrect on two counts, but first the terms *counter-guerilla* and *pacification* need to be clarified.

The term *counter-guerrilla* denotes offensive—i.e., destroying enemy guerrilla force—and defensive—i.e., protecting friendly pacification force—military actions taken by the conventional or the regular forces against the unconventional or irregular forces which are waging guerrilla warfare. *Pacification* encapsulates all the social, political and economic measures taken by the military command in cooperation with the civilian authority of the state to prevent the population from supporting the guerrillas while soliciting their assistance in defeating the enemy. Pacification campaigns usually take place during or after counter-guerrilla operations. Counter-guerrilla operations are meant to provide *short-term* solutions such as restoring law-and-order or preventing an immediate collapse of an authority. Pacification campaigns are designed to provide *long-term* solutions such as political reform, the release of

[48] Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 30; Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 50
[49] Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 31

political prisoners, protection of human rights, free speech, fair elections, and social changes. Now, let us explain the two shortcomings of Fall's critiques of Valluy's 1947 Campaign.

Given the FFEEC's strategic weaknesses in 1946-1947, notably its poor intelligence about the VLA's dispositions, there were few options available to Valluy who found himself caught in one of the classic dilemmas of counter-guerrilla warfare.[50] In planning the campaign to wrest control of the countryside from the VLA, Valluy faced two unfavourable operational choices. He could either spread out the FFEEC units, which risked their defeats "in small detachments," to challenge the VLA for the control of the countryside. Or he could concentrate FFEEC units "around the key population centers" and surrender "the rural areas" to the VLA without a fight.[51] According to Douglas Porch, "The French had to be strong everywhere, or at the very least maintain the flexibility to intervene anywhere a serious threat materialized, while Giap could conserve and concentrate his forces in those areas where the greatest military or political advantage could be achieved."[52] LEA and CEINTURE plus the combined operation of FFEEC advisors and T'ai warriors revealed Valluy's willingness to contest the VLA's hold in the Red River Delta and the Laotian-Vietnamese border. Valluy's campaign of 1947 exposed his lack of more appropriate operational means to fight the VLA unconventionally rather than his desire to fight it conventionally.

Secondly, Fall also overlooked the fact that from 1948 to 1949, General Marcel Maurice Carpentier and his Deputy Commander, General Marcel Alessandri, systematically conducted large- and small-scale operations in which their field commanders relied on highland ethnic minority groups and anti-communist Vietnamese to pacify the Red River Delta with limited

[50] Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 51
[51] Ibid., 43
[52] Porch, *The French Foreign Legion*, 515

success.[53] If the survival, growth, and freedom-of-movement of the VLA in the Red River Delta prior to the establishment of its strategic rear bases inside the PRC starting in 1949-1950, depended on the sympathy and support of the Vietnamese peoples,[54] who, according to Mao, were the "vast sea in which to drown the enemy"[55] and the water whereby the fish, the VLA, inhabited,[56] then Alessandri attempted to catch the fish by emptying the water. "Tactically," US Army Lieutenant General Phillip B. Davidson has noted, "Alessandri proceeded like a man draining a flooded field. He moved into a small area, built a cofferdam, pumped out the water, and moved to an adjoining area, repeating the process. The French troops would be his dam and local non-Communist Vietnamese would pump out of the Vietminh guerrillas and infrastructure."[57] The willingness of Carpentier and Alessandri to employ combined units of the FFEEC, anti-communist Vietnamese, and ethnic minority groups in pacification operations throughout the Red River Delta demonstrated their ability to adapt to VLA's tactics.[58] Furthermore, their pacification campaign was only possible after Valluy's indecisive military actions had loosened the VLA's political and military grip on the Red River Delta. The negative effect that Valluy's Operations LEA and CEINTURE had on the morale of the VLA in 1947 was revealed after the war by Giap who bluntly stated:

> A collapsing front [1947] is entirely different from circumstances where our forces decided to retreat [1946].... Many units lose contact. Vacillation invades the thinking of cadres and soldiers. Some cadres run far, some soldiers suddenly desert. The people also become irresolute, believing the enemy is too strong. This phenomenon certainly will not cease if there is no standpoint, no method to cope with it in time.[59]

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[53] Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 69
[54] Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War, People's Army: The Viet Cộng Insurrection Manual for Underdeveloped Countries* (New York: Praeger, 1962), 42-43
[55] Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Military Writing of Mao Tse-tung*, 2nd ed. (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1967), 228
[56] Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1988), 9
[57] Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 69
[58] Porch, "French Imperial Warfare, 1945-62", 91-92
[59] David G. Marr, "Creating Defense Capacity in Vietnam, 1945-1947", Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall, ed., *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 103

Valluy's heavy-handed campaign to wrest control of the countryside had softened the VLA political and military positions, but it had failed to uproot the VLA from the Red River Delta altogether. Weakened but undefeated, the VLA recovered, reorganized, and fought the FFEEC differently after 1948.

The French pacification campaign did not go unchallenged. The VLA stepped up its operations in northern Vietnam by deploying battalion-size, sometime even regiment-size, regular formations. However, the VLA's plan also required the cooperation and coordination of its company-size regional and platoon-size popular units in central and southern Vietnam. From 1948 to 1949, three operational principles guided the political and military actions of VLA regional and popular units as revealed in Ho's *Twelve Recommendations* (April 5, 1948) and *Appeal For Patriotic Emulation* (August 1, 1949).[60] First, they were to carry out small-scale guerrilla actions throughout Vietnam's three regions to stretch the FFEEC and hamper French attempts to protect more vulnerable French-Vietnamese pacification companies and platoons. Furthermore, a dispersed FFEEC would be unable to concentrate against VLA regular units that needed time to recuperate for a future strategic offensive against the FFEEC. Second, local populations were to gather detailed intelligence on the dispositions of French army units, collect contributions—money, food, new recruits—mobilize the masses for political struggle and eliminate French pacification officers and their Vietnamese collaborators. Third, they would cautiously re-establish clandestine VLA political and military cells to protect and assist underground Viet Minh government officials with their political, psychological and propaganda work in villages, towns and cities. Reapprasising the three operational principles of the VLA in 1948-1949, Giap argued:

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[60] Bernard B. Fall, ed., *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution: Selected Writings, 1920-66* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), 176-181

> The enemy [French army] having altered their strategy, we then advocated the wide development of guerilla warfare, transforming former rear into our frontline. Our units operated in small pockets, with independent companies penetrating deeply into the enemy-controlled zone to launch guerilla warfare, establish bases and protect local people's power.... The enemy mopped-up [pacification], we fought against mopping-up. They organized supplementary local Vietnamese troops and installed puppet authorities; we firmly upheld local people's power, overthrew men of straw, eliminated traitors and carried out active propaganda to bring about the disintegration of the supplementary forces. We gradually formed a network of guerilla bases... which ceaselessly spread and multiplied, began to appear right in the heart of the [French army] occupied areas.... There was no clearly-defined front in this war.... The front was nowhere, it was everywhere.[61]

If we corroborate Ho's directives and Giap's postwar assessments in 1948-1949 with intelligence assessments and post-operational reports or debriefings of the FFEEC, VLA regional and popular units indeed were more active in small-scale political and military operations than the regular units which began improving their organization, command-and-control structures, training and operational planning in southern China. From captured VLA documents, including VLA intelligence assessments of the FFEEC and VLA battle directives, FMI came to the following conclusions about the VLA in 1948-1949. VLA commanders in regular, regional, and popular units were ordered to gather intelligence, procure weapons and ammunition, and plan their operations more carefully. To ensure optimum success, their troops needed time to organize, train, and rehearse specific mission roles. Commanders needed to devise deceptive and withdrawal plans and incorporate them into their overall operational planning. Officers had to camouflage their men and materials and must not assemble their troops and equipment too early before operations commenced to prevent early detection by the enemy who might strike preemptively. Whether the operations went according to plan or not, VLA commanders and units must prepare to either disperse or defend against enemy's reinforcement and possible full-scale counterattack.[62]

The small skirmishes—platoon to company-size—and larger clashes—company to battalion-size—between VLA popular and regional units and the FFEEC confirmed the

[61] Giap, *People's War, People's Army*, 16-17
[62] Porch, *The French Secret Services*, 301

assessments of the FMI about the VLA's expansion. While operating in the countryside in 1948-1949, FFEEC units found VLA political and military cells had grown more, not less, active. The influence of the Viet Minh underground government was pervasive in the villages, hamlets and towns of Tonkin. The landing of the FFEEC in the south and its march to the north between 1945 and 1946 had temporarily prevented VLA units in Cochinchina and Annam from coordinating their political and military efforts with VLA units fighting in Tonkin. However, this situation changed between 1948 and 1949. While concentrating their military efforts in Tonkin, VLA units began reforming the disrupted political and military links in the chain-of-command, lines of communication, and logistic system between Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina. This proliferation of VLA regular units throughout Vietnam alarmed FFEEC commanders. Having operated at the company level in 1946 and 1947, VLA regional units became battalions, regiments, and divisions by 1949. Meanwhile, regular units, organized into battalions in 1946, could carry out operations at the regimental and even the divisional level by 1949. Cochinchina, but to just five regular units in April 1949, had eighteen regular units by June 1951. Having seven regular units in April 1949, Annam had twenty-one by June 1951. Tonkin's twenty regular units rose to seventy-eight.[63]

The military revival in the three regions did not mean that VLA commanders could now launch more coordinated, simultaneous, and effective operations at will throughout Vietnam. With the exception of bomb threats, explosions, and assassinations conducted by VLA urban political and military cells, Vietnam's major cities remained relatively safe. The same cannot be said of the countryside. While large-scale guerilla actions were more common in 1946 and 1947,

[63] Tanham, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare*, 23

small but nevertheless dangerous guerrilla attacks on units and convoys of the FFEEC became more frequent in 1948-1949.[64]

The VLA's counter-pacification campaign in 1948-1949 provided the first explanation for the failure of the French pacification campaign despite the ability of French commanders to reassess and replace ineffective strategies. Two additional factors further limited what the French pacification campaign could achieve. FFEEC's pacification units lacked a psychological warfare program to compete against the VLA's more effective political and psychological warfare program. Political and psychological warfare can be defined as all non-military measures—social, political and economic—that are used by both guerrilla and counter-guerrilla forces to convince the population of their political legitimacy and the benefits to be gained by supporting them against their enemies. Furthermore, Paris's continuous refusals to grant meaningful political, social, economic, and military concessions, at least not before 1950, undercut the ability of FFEEC generals to recruit non-communist Vietnamese nationalists to fight with them.[65] Still, Vietnamese were encouraged to join or were conscripted into the FFEEC. Vietnamese units began to form slowly within the FFEEC. The lack of organization, training, and a shortage of experienced non-commissioned and commissioned Vietnamese officers, combined with the need for coordination between French and indigenous units during operations, meant that Vietnamese units had to be commanded by French officers until conditions improved. The fact that French commanders questioned the loyalty of their Vietnamese troops, the fear of defections at the individual and unit levels, and the loss of weapons and equipments to the enemy delayed the transfer of command from French to Vietnamese commanders.

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[64] Michael Carver, *War Since 1945* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1980), 110; Porch, "French Imperial Warfare 1945-62," 96; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 90

[65] Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 70-71; Carver, *War Since 1945*, 110-111; Porch, "French Imperial Warfare 1945-62", 96

What French commanders had feared the most at the outbreak of the French Indochina War in 1946 had materialized between 1949 and 1950: The VLA had acquired the ability to prolong the war indefinitely from its safe-havens on Chinese soil. The French pacification campaign of 1948-1949 did wreak havoc on VLA political and military bases inside French Indochina. However, once the VLA retreated into the PRC, French commanders in Indochina or French statesmen in Paris could do little. For example, Paris charged Moscow and Beijing for violating international laws for Vietnam was "part of the French Union, and it is to the government of Bao Dai that France has just transferred the sovereignty she possessed in this Union."[66] But France did not authorize air strikes or land attacks to eradicate VLA bases inside the PRC as that would have brought France to the brink of war with the PRC and the USSR. The war's indecisive first phase had closed while its decisive second phase had begun.

Valluy's 1946-1947 military campaign to wrest control of the countryside from the VLA had given Paris the impression that the war would soon end. While LEA and CEINTURE had achieved limited successes, Paris remained confident that the 1948-1949 pacification campaign would at last terminate. But VLA determination to resist plus increased diplomatic and military support from the USSR and the PRC troubled Paris. Martin Thomas, an historian of the French Empire, has argued that from 1947 to 1950 "French governments divided more sharply over colonial problems. But all insisted publicly that France would soldier on in Indochina.... Only in 1950 did a dispassionate cost-benefit analysis begin of the economic and international price of colonial commitments."[67] As Viet Minh leaders sought USSR and PRC aid, France turned to the

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[66] Zhai, *China & The Vietnam Wars*, 16

[67] Martin Thomas "French Imperial Reconstruction and the Development of the Indochina War, 1945-1950", in Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall, ed., *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 132

US for help while the FFEEC mobilized non-communist Vietnamese into various fighting forces which were organized, trained, and led by French advisors and Vietnamese officers.

The war's internationalization and escalation took place under pressing military circumstances for France. Some FFEEC's anti-infiltration outposts—Cao Bang, Nam Nang, Dong Khe, That Khe and Lang Son—which dotted Colonial Routes 4 and 3 that ran parallel to the Sino-Vietnamese border northeast of Hanoi, were either attacked or overran by VLA regulars in 1950-1951.[68] From October 1950 to January 1951, the FFEEC lost 6,000 troops, 13 artillery pieces, 125 mortars, 450 trucks, 3 armored platoons, and thousands of small arms, enough equipment to equip a VLA regular division.[69] As the VLA soon re-established bases on the Vietnamese side of the Sino-Vietnamese border, the FFEEC effectively lost control of the upper Red River Delta.[70] "When the smoke cleared," Bernard B. Fall commented, "the French had suffered their greatest colonial defeat since Montcalm had died at Quebec."[71] France's pacification effort of 1948-1949, already undermined by Giap's counter-pacification campaign, verged on being washed away by the waves of Giap's first offensive in 1950 when Paris procured conditional diplomatic and military support from Washington.

The origins of the US involvement in French Indochina dated back to WWII in the Asia-Pacific theatre of operations. Japan's imperial design, rhetorically referred to as "the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," promised the colonized peoples of East and Southeast Asia a prosperous future free of Western influence and domination. Japan's foreign policy reflected its opposition to Western expansionism in the Far East. Japan wanted to end the domination of "the yellow and black races" by "the white race" and propagated that its rule would bring about the

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[68] Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 75-92; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 125
[69] Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 33
[70] Spector, *Advice and Support*, 126
[71] Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 33

"harmony of all races" whereby the subjugated peoples of Asia would be liberated and, together with the Japanese, helped rebuild an "Asia for the Asian people."[72]

However, Japan wanted to turn the Far East into "a post nation-state system of regional sphere of domination" with "Japan leading Asia; the United States with its Monroe Doctrine dominating the Americas; Germany over Europe; the USSR supremacy in the Eurasian heartland – or maybe split between Germany and Japan."[73] As historian Marius B. Jansen pointed out, Japan demanded that America "would have to learn to respect Japan's sphere as it expected Japan to respect its own; all other paths would lead to confrontation."[74] When war began out between Japan and the US in 1941, the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere soon expanded from the Aleutian Islands in the North Pacific to island chains in the South Pacific and from Manchuria in Northeast Asia to the China-Burma-India border areas in Southeast Asia.[75]

The JIA controlled a large part of China and almost all of Southeast Asia. At sea, the Japanese Imperial Navy (JIN) established its defensive perimeter on islands in the South Pacific in anticipating of the coming onslaught of the United States Navy (USN). In the China-India-Burma-Malaya theatre of operations, Allied forces fought the JIA to a standstill. While the USN engaged the JIN in the South Pacific, the United States Army, in a series of amphibious operations popularly known as "island-hopping", overwhelmed and bypassed isolated JIA positions in the South Pacific. Additionally, the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) and the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) carried out clandestine operations inside occupied China and Southeast Asia. These top secret missions included intelligence gathering, reconnaissance, sabotage, raiding, rescuing hostages, and organizing, training, and leading

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[72] James L. McClain, *Japan: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 494
[73] Conrad Totman, *A History of Japan,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 441
[74] Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: The Belknap Pres of Harvard University Press, 2000), 633
[75] McClain, *Japan*, 500

Southeast Asians willing to fight the JIA. The aims of these covert actions were to divert Japanese material resources and manpower from the Asia-Pacific theatre of operations and to undermine Japan's military prestige and political power throughout Asia. Furthermore, the success of these daring operations also enhanced Allied morale and encouraged Southeast Asians who were waging guerrilla wars against the JIA.[76]

French Indochina was among the Japanese-occupied countries where special operations had a direct impact on the overall planning and operational conduct of Allied forces in the Far East. France's defeat by Germany in 1940 effectively ended metropolitan France's control over its Indochinese colonies. France's small colonial army, organized and trained for internal security duties, could not oppose the JIA.[77] The signing of the Tripartite Pact in 1940 formalized the Axis alliance between Germany, Italy, and Japan. In agreeing to the Pact, Japan acknowledged "the leadership of Germany and Italy in the establishment of a new order in Europe" in return for Germany and Italy's recognition of Japan's own new order for "Greater East Asia."[78] Japan was allowed to occupy northern Indochina unopposed by the colonial authority whose orders came from the French Vichy regime, a regime that existed only because it collaborated with Germany. The Vichy regime collaborated with Japan because it perceived Indochina's nationalism as a greater threat to France's colonial interests than Japanese fascism.[79] Japan promised Vichy France that its "sovereignty" over Indochina would be respected. In truth, Vichy France was powerless to prevent Indochina's occupation by 50,000 JIA troops, the JIN used Cam Ranh Bay, a natural harbor in central Vietnam, and the launching of Japanese Imperial

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[76] Derek Leebaert, *To Dare & To Conquer: Special Operations and the Destiny of Nations, from Achilles to Al Qaeda* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2006), 466-470, 487-495

[77] Eric T. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 138

[78] Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against The Sun: The American War With Japan* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 64

[79] Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858-1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 336

Air Force (JIAF) planes from airfields in southern Indochina.[80] Japan's military, as historian Ronald H. Spector has claimed, "were now within easy striking distance of Malaya, the Philippines, and the Netherlands Indies."[81] On December 7/8, 1941, while part of the JIN fleet struck the US military base at Pearl Harbor, the JIA, supported by the JIAF and JIN from southern Indochina, simultaneously launched amphibious operations to capture Western bases and impose Japanese rule over Southeast Asia.

Between 1941 and 1945, when Japan overthrew the Vichy colonial authority and installed a pro-Japanese Vietnamese government, Indochina was a military "backwater" in the Asia-Pacific theatre-of-operations.[82] Japan's military moved freely about the country but the policing, tax levying, banking, and other governmental decision-making in the colony "remained in Vichy's hands."[83] However, as Allied forces penetrated the Japanese defensive perimeter, Indochina became a strategic military centre for disrupting the movements of men and materials through Indochina would sever the lifelines of Japanese forces operating in Burma, the Philippines, Malaya, and Indonesia, divide Japanese forces in half, and prevent Japanese commanders from coordinating their offensive and defensive efforts throughout Southeast Asia. Furthermore, as Allied air forces began bombing Japanese military installations in Indochina from bases in southern China, pilots requested more up-to-date intelligence on weather conditions, air defense systems, targets, and enemy troop movements. The importance of interfering with Japanese troop movements between northern Vietnam and southern China meant that Allied positions in the Burma-southern China front would be secured since the JIA would

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[80] Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina*, 337-338
[81] Spector, *Eagle Against The Sun*, 68
[82] Ronald H. Spector, *In The Ruins of Empire: The Japanese Surrender and the Battle for Postwar Asia* (New York: Random House, 2007), 98
[83] Jennings, *Vichy in The Tropic*, 133

not be able to push Allied forces back to the Burma-India border.[84] Allied commanders were also concerned with retrieving downed pilots. Therefore, receiving reliable intelligence on the enemy, rescuing battle-hardened pilots, and disrupting Japanese troop movements between northern Vietnam and southern China, constituted "good military reasons" for Allied commanders to "conduct clandestine intelligence and guerilla operations in Indochina" beginning in 1943.[85]

The aforementioned military purposes for conducting special operations behind enemy lines led to the insertion of numerous OSS detachments into northern Vietnam. Members of these small teams established contact with the Viet Minh and began organizing, training, and conducting joint operations against Japan's occupational forces in northern Vietnam.[86] The Vietnamese witnessed the dark side of Japanese imperialism.[87] By 1945, "nearly 200,000 Vietnamese reportedly starved to death" when Japanese occupational forces "stored for contingency use" the entire rice crop. Therefore, as Professor Saburo Ienaga has pointed out, "the Vietnamese resistance to French colonialism regarded the Japanese as a new wave of oppressors."[88] The terrible consequences of the Japanese occupation produced a golden opportunity for the Americans and Viet Minh to combine against a common foe. One of the OSS detachments parachuted into northern Vietnam, codenamed "The Deer Team", was commanded by OSS officer Archimedes L.A. Patti. In his memoir, Patti recalled that in June 1945 that Ho "let me know that he was prepared to make available up to one thousand 'well trained' [Viet Minh] guerrillas for any plan I might have against the Japanese." While Patti did not discuss how

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[84] Dixee R. Bartholomew-Feis, *The OSS and Ho Chi Minh: Unexpected Allies In The War Against Japan* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 61; Ronald H. Spector, *The United States Army In Vietnam: Advice and Support The Early Years* (Washington, D.C.: The United States Army Center of Military History, 1985), 24

[85] Spector, *In The Ruins of Empire*, 98-99

[86] Bartholomew-Feis, *The OSS and Ho Chi Minh*, 63-94, 142-215

[87] Takashi Shiraishi and Motoo Furuta, ed., *Indochina in the 1940s and 1950s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1992), 55-85,87-104; Bui Minh Dung, "Japan's Role in the Vietnamese Starvation of 1944-45", *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 29, no. 31 (Jul., 1995), 573-618

[88] Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War, 1931-1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 178-179

the one thousand Viet Minh guerrillas were used against the Japanese, he remembered that he and his men "could not ignore the quality of the intelligence produced by the Viet Minh or the effectiveness of the several Vietnamese agents I used in sabotage operations against the Japanese targets." Patti was so impressed with the operational know-how of the Viet Minh guerrillas in gathering intelligence and striking at Japanese military that, against the advice of KMT generals who distrusted the Viet Minh because of their association with the CCP plus French commanders who disliked the Viet Minh for their anti-colonialism, "we in the OSS agreed to continue our unofficial cooperation [with the Viet Minh]."[89]

As the Axis powers crumbled, Allied leaders began making plans for postwar Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, including French Indochina. Political scientist George McTurnan Kahin once argued insightfully that the US foreign policies "that so heavily shaped the course of Vietnamese history for three full decades after World War II were never intrinsically Vietnamese in orientation: they were always primarily directed by considerations transcending that country."[90] US statesmen, commanders, and the public could not know then that America's relationship with Vietnam would span three turbulent decades and occupy the foreign relation agendas of seven presidential administrations—Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, and Ford. In the context of the Cold War showdown between the US and the USSR after 1945, each presidential administration drafted its Vietnam policy based on the premise that success or failure in Vietnam would have repercussions for US foreign relations with its allies and enemies globally.

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[89] Archimedes L.A. Patti, *Why Vietnam: Prelude To America's Albatross* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1980), 125

[90] George McTurnan Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1987), 3

The collapse of the European and Japanese empires left a power vacuum in many third world countries, a vacuum that US leaders feared would be filled by communists. Therefore, the application of US foreign policy, which incorporated political support, military alliances, and economic integration had to go beyond Europe and Japan to their former colonies in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia in order to pull new countries into the US sphere-of-influence. This struggle to influence what types of governing models post-colonial countries should adopt, how they should industrialize their pre-industrial economies, and whether their societies ought to adhere to one of the competing ideologies dangerously led to the indirect military clashes between the superpowers in the third world. This struggle created what historian John Lewis Gaddis has called "the potential for an imperial rivalry on a global scale, extending well beyond the Cold War in Europe and Northeast Asia." Furthermore, the USSR, PRC and US, "would at times use their power to impose their will on 'third world' peoples, in ways not greatly different from the pre-World War II behavior of the British, French, Dutch, Germans, Italians, and Portuguese."[91] We could argue further that although the former Western European colonial powers were declining, their military, political, and economic assets remained absolutely critical to counter Soviet political influence and military might in Europe. Therefore, US foreign policy placed higher priority on pleasing Western European colonial powers than satisfying emergent post-colonial nation-states.

As the superpowers, particularly the US in Vietnam and later the USSR in Afghanistan, would discover at their own peril, third world peoples and leaders sought their own unique social, political, and economic solutions. Though conflict was not inevitable, social and economic concerns of the third world countries clashed with the economic, political and military

[91] John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 152-154

interests of the superpowers who, unable to confront each other in Europe for fear of nuclear war, confronted each other indirectly through their client states in the third world. "The radical nature of many of the local political forces aspiring to replace the colonial powers especially disturbed American leaders," argued Gabriel Kolko, "and particularly after 1945 they increasingly feared local Left parties that might presumably be friendlier to the Soviet Union or even aligned with it."[92]

As the Cold War intensified, emergent political and military crises outside of Europe, starting with China's fall to the CCP in 1949 and the onset of the Korean War in 1950, globalized the Cold War. To overcome the political and military stalemate in Europe where a shooting war could ignite a nuclear war, the US and USSR waged proxy-wars through their respective allies in the third world regardless of what the leaders and peoples of the third world wanted. Therefore, to both contain and outmaneuver the USSR, US leaders turned to the indigenous forces of "the traditional conservative Right" throughout the Third World who would cooperate with the US in containing the spread of communism.[93] A professor turned diplomat in the US State Department, George F. Kennan, penned the US strategy of containment which first appeared in a *Foreign Affairs* article. According to Kennan, the strategy's first aim was to protect "the security of the nation" and secondly to advance "the peaceful and orderly development of other nations" whereby the US could "derive maximum benefit from their experiences and abilities."[94] Kennan envisioned that an economically viable and a militarily strong US, coupled with an economically prosperous and politically stabilized world inspired by the US democratic

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[92] Gabriel Kolko, *Confronting The Third World: United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 13

[93] Gabriel Kolko, *Century of War: Politics, Conflicts, and Society since 1914* (New York: The New Press, 1994), 337-369

[94] John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 27

system and the capitalistic model, would allow America and its allies to carry out "long term… firm and vigilant containment of Russia expansive tendencies." In his memoirs, Kennan stressed the need "to contain them [the Russians] both militarily and politically for a long time to come" but also wisely and non-provocatively.[95] The US strategy of containment in the Third World was consistent with its containment strategy in Europe and the Far East. "For the sake of its own future in the world," concluded Kolko, "Washington had to resolve whether it wished to aid in the restoration of the traditional ruling classes of Germany and Japan—the very elements who had conducted wars against America in the past."[96] However, it must be stressed that as the priority of US foreign policy was the containment of communism globally, American administrations tasked with defending US homeland and securing US interests abroad allied their country not just with "the traditional conservative Right" or "the traditional ruling classes." They also sided with old and new ruling elites if they were pro-American and pro-capitalism and anti-Russian or/and anti-Chinese and anti-communism.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration had to deal with the Indochina question in WWII. Like all aspects of the US involvement in Vietnam, the Indochina policy of the Roosevelt administration has incited heated debates. As Gary R. Hess has argued, "French Indochina received the greatest American attention because President Franklin D. Roosevelt was determined to prevent resumption of French rule and to establish instead an international trusteeship which would lead to eventual independence." Roosevelt's decision to prevent the French from retaking Indochina was based on the President's belief that France's fall in 1940 had clearly proven that France had become "a decadent nation, which no longer deserved the status of a major power." Furthermore, Roosevelt perceived Vichy France's decision to allow

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[95] Ibid., 4

[96] Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 3

Japanese bases in Indochina as an act of betrayal. Above all else, Roosevelt condemned France's colonial policy for putting Indochina in a "worse condition after 100 years of French rule than it had been before the French arrived."[97] Taking these arguments to their logical conclusions, Hess has suggested that while the Roosevelt administration "trusteeship plan" would guarantee neither "a conclusive solution to the Indochina problem" nor "a strong native power group more acceptable in the long run to the United States than the Viet Minh," an Indochina trusteeship policy might have prevented the bloodletting between America and Vietnam in the subsequent three decades.[98]

Some historians, notably Walter LaFeber has said Hess and others had wrongly concluded that "perhaps Indochina's post-1945 history would have been happier had Harry S. Truman not reversed Franklin D. Roosevelt's plan of replacing French colonial rule with a United Nations trusteeship." As LaFeber has charged, "Roosevelt, not Truman, discarded the trusteeship plan and allowed the French to return to Indochina." Contrary to the premise shared amongst historians that the Roosevelt administration sought to place Indochina under United Nations' trusteeship, LaFeber boldly contended that the Roosevelt administration had intended Indochina to fall under US and China's trusteeship. LaFeber argued further that when Jiang Jeshi challenged Roosevelt over political and military issues in mid-1944 and Prime Minister Winston Churchill deemed Roosevelt's Indochina trusteeship as undermining not just France but Britain's imperial policy, seeking harmony among the allies in order to defeat the Axis powers, "Roosevelt slowly retreated from his trusteeship plan."[99] More than any other historians, LaFeber has emphasized that Roosevelt gave in to the French and the British, not out of any fear that the

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[97] Gary R. Hess, "Franklin Roosevelt and Indochina", *The Journal of American History*, vol. 59, no. 2 (Sep., 1972), 353-354

[98] Ibid., 367-368

[99] Walter La Feber, "Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina: 1942-45", *The American Historical Review*, vol. 80, no. 5 (Dec., 1975), 1277

Allies would collapse, but from his belief that "the 'brown people in the East' would someday be independent, and that the United States must help them work for this goal, [but] the president never expressed any hope that Indochina's population could be trusted with immediate independence."[100]

The debate between Hess and LaFeber about the sincerity of Roosevelt's Indochina trusteeship continues. Long time scholars of the President have shared Hess's insightful comment that recent studies on "Roosevelt's wartime diplomacy have underscored his lack of a systematic and realistic plan for the postwar world."[101] Ultimately, Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945, has left historians pondering a "what if" question of American-Vietnamese relation had Roosevelt survived. If Hess and other scholars have pointed out the problems of pinpointing President Roosevelt's views while he was alive, how could historians envision what he might have done had he lived? Roosevelt's death was the first but not the last time that a presidential discontinuity disrupted US policy regarding Vietnam, leaving historians to ponder "what if." Whether one disagrees with Hess's argument that Roosevelt's Indochina trusteeship plan "might have prevented the clash between the French and the [Vietnamese] nationalists that triggered the long and bitter struggle which culminated in Dien Bien Phu"[102] or accepts LaFeber's thesis that, in "this [Indochina policy] as in other foreign affairs, Truman's policies formed a continuum, not a break, with Roosevelt's,"[103] one cannot deny that President Truman had to deal with the Indochina question in a wholly different strategic context. It seems, therefore, that a more profitable methodology to critically analyze the Indochina policy of the Truman administration is

[100] Ibid., 1295
[101] Hess, "Franklin Roosevelt and Indochina", 354
[102] Ibid., 365
[103] LaFeber, "Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina, 1942-45", 1277

to examine that policy against the post-1945 global historical context rather than trying to plumb Roosevelt's intentions and actions.

Roosevelt's demise also doomed the trusteeship plan for Indochina under United Nations (UN) supervision. Truman's administration was very well aware, as Truman said, that "without American participation [in world affairs] there was no power capable of meeting Russia as an equal." "If we were to turn our back on the world," wrote Truman, "areas such as Greece, weakened and divided as a result of the war, would fall into the Soviet orbit without much effort on the part of the Russians. The success of Russia in such areas and our avowed lack of interest would lead to the growth of domestic Communist parties in such European countries as France and Italy, where they were significant threats."[104] While the threat posed by the USSR to Europe and the Mediterranean was worrying, Truman and his advisors also realized that decolonization of European colonies was an irreversible force. To deny the USSR influence in the third world, as Truman put it, "we could encourage stabilized governments in underdeveloped countries in Africa, South America, and Asia, we could encourage the use for the development of those areas some of the capital which had accumulated in the United States... and if we could persuade the capitalists [Western Europeans] that they were not working in foreign countries to exploit them but to develop them, it would be to the mutual benefit of everybody concerned."[105] Truman's view reflected the fundamental premise of the US foreign policy: Capitalism would allow other nation-states to prosper, and with capitalist countries involved in international commerce and fair, and free trade, the chance of war could be reduced.

The Truman administration formulated its Indochina policy, nevertheless, based on contemporary Cold War events and US strategic interests in an uncertain world. Truman was

[104] Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman, Volume Two: Years of Trial and Hope* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1956), 102
[105] Ibid., 231

critical of France's imperial and colonial policies since WWII and at the start of the French Indochina War.[106] However, because the main theatre of the Cold War remained in Europe, Truman's administration needed the cooperation of France and other Western European countries to pursue the socio-economic reconstruction policy through the Economic Cooperation Act of 1948 (the Marshall Plan), and the politico-military strategy of mutual security and defence through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), created in 1949.[107] If Truman had reservations about supporting France in Indochina, the loss of China in 1949 and the invasion of the Republic of (South) Korea (ROK) by the Democratic People's Republic of (North) Korea (DPRK) in 1950, strengthening his resolve to combat communism. Dean Acheson, President Truman's Secretary of State, recalled that one of "the first decisions announced by President Truman after the attack on South Korea was that military aid to the Philippines and Indochina would have to be intensified."[108] However, before the Korean War started, Truman had already linked Cold War developments in Europe to Asia, concluding that how US actions against communism elsewhere globally would significantly affect the US strategic position vis-à-vis the USSR in Europe. "Our policy was to maintain our position in Asia, promote the defense and unity of Europe, and prepare America. As I saw it then, and as I see it now," the President bluntly concluded, "these three purposes depended upon each other, and one could not be attained without all three parts of our policy being vigorously pursued."[109] The march of the communism in Europe and the Far East reinforced fears that the USSR was an expansionist

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[106] Kathryn C. Statler, *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam* (Lexington: the University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 17

[107] Herring, *America's Longest War*, 11; Dennis Merrill and Thomas G. Paterson, *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations, Volume II: Since 1914*, 5th ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 223; Andrew Rotter, "Chronicle of a War Foretold: The United States and Vietnam", in Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall, ed., *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis*, 294

[108] Dean Acheson, *Present At The Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1969), 673

[109] Truman, *Memoirs*, 437

power that encouraged its communist surrogates to annex, subvert, and invade non-communist states. "From the very beginning of the Korean action I [Truman] had always looked at it as a Russian maneuver," reflected Truman, "as part of the Kremlin's plan to destroy the unity of the free world."[110] To counter every strategic move that the USSR made on the Cold War chessboard, President Truman concluded:

> It was our policy to strengthen the weak spots in the defense of the free world. Iran, Greece, Berlin, and NATO all stand as landmarks in the fight against Communism. In the same way, our increased aid to Indo-China and the Philippines and our move for the defense of Formosa by the Seventh Fleet were designed to reinforce areas exposed to Communist pressure.[111]

To effectively resist Soviet influence in the third world, the Truman administration actively sought the cooperation of postcolonial leaders who, while being anti-colonialist nationalists, were also anti-communist and pro-US. The reasons behind seeking such leaders were threefold. First and foremost, the Truman administration did not want to be seen by the communist and non-communist world as supporting Western European imperialists against the indigenous third world nationalists. Secondly, realizing that communism and nationalism were intertwined in the postcolonial political setting—communist parties could use nationalist slogans to mobilize the masses against the colonial regimes in order to gain power before unveiling their true communist ideologies—the Truman administration supported third world anti-colonial nationalists in their fights against local communist parties. Lastly, the Truman administration was conscious that colonialism was dying and that nationalism was the wave of the future. If the containment strategy had any chance of succeeding in postcolonial Indochina, the US must side with, not against, the forces of nationalism. This last point was reflected in Acheson's comment regarding the importance of helping indigenous leaders and peoples to realize their nationalist aspirations as the best hope to prevent the spread of communism in the Third World: "We

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[110] Ibid., 437
[111] Ibid., 346

believed that France could help more in preventing Communist domination by moving quickly to satisfy nationalist aspirations."[112]

To win public support, indigenous nationalist leaders had to offer something more than empty anti-communist slogans. In this particular domain, the Truman administration averred that postcolonial countries must make the transformation from "the level of colonialism to self-support and ultimate prosperity." The nationalist parties had to offer their peoples enriching social programs, economic plans, capital investments and technical "know-how" that the communist parties could not, and the US could aid them as a long term policy to combat the spread of communism in the third world. The social programs, capital investments, economic plans and technical "know-how" that the US could offer to decolonized countries, in Truman's words, were "a practical expression of our attitude toward the countries threatened by Communist domination. It was consistent with our policies of preventing the expansion of Communism in the free world by helping to ensure the proper development of those countries with adequate food, clothing, and living facilities."[113]

As the Truman administration sought a third force in Vietnamese politics—"authentic nationalists, neither communist nor puppets of France"[114]—to prevent the spread of communism in Asia, Washington's diplomatic pressure on Paris to grant genuine political and military concessions for non-communist Vietnamese nationalists achieved limited results and the war continued. As long as France was willing to fight communism in its former Southeast Asian colony, Acheson wrote, the US would support France with "aid [which] was to be limited to economic and military supplies, stopping short of our [US] own military intervention."[115] The

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[112] Acheson, *Present At The Creation*, 327
[113] Truman, *Memoirs*, 232
[114] Schulzinger, *A Time for War*, 31
[115] Acheson, *Present At The Creation*, 672

Truman administration continued its limited financial and military support to France, giving the FFEEC $160 million in direct credit in 1946.[116]

From 1946 to 1948, the Truman administration policy toward the French Indochina War could be characterized as "resolve in Europe and indecision in East Asia."[117] Starting in 1949-1950, however, US policy toward the conflict fundamentally changed as a result of a chain of events in the formative years of the Cold War.[118] In 1945-1949, the Cold War in Europe and the Mediterranean Sea, thanks to fundamental ideological differences between the two opposing superpowers, led to a series crises: the question of postwar Germany and Eastern Europe; the successful detonation of a Soviet atomic bomb that ignited the nuclear arms race; US containment of the USSR expansionism in Greece, Turkey, and Iran and other strategic allies in Western Europe; and Soviet determination to break that strategic encirclement.[119] The KMT's defeat in 1949 surprised the USSR and shocked the US as the globe's two largest countries were now communist. Washington was determined not to let another strategically important area fall to the communists. "The loss of Western Europe or of important parts of Asia or the Middle East," warned Acheson, "would be a transfer of potential from West to East, which, depending on the area, might have the gravest consequences in the long run."[120]

With communist guerillas active in the Philippines, Malaya, Indonesia, Thailand, and Burma, and with Moscow and Beijing backing the DPRK while the UN and Washington

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[116] Young, *The Vietnam War*, 22
[117] Mark Philip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam & America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 162
[118] Robert J. McMahon, *The Limits of Empire: the United States and Southeast Asia since World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 36-37
[119] Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 22-34; Melvyn P. Leffler, *For The Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang), 48-83
[120] Quoted in McMahon, *The Limits of Empire*, 38

supported the ROK in the Korean War, the Cold War had spread to the Far East.[121] Such events gave Paris more persuasive power as French statesmen and generals sold their dubious colonial war to Washington as a legitimate Cold War effort to halt the expansion of "red colonialism" in the words of the FFEEC's new commander, General Jean-Marie Gabriel de Lattre de Tassigny.[122] Paris's request for more aid did not fall on deaf ears as Truman's administration already feared "red colonialism." Thus, it did not take much effort for French leaders to convince American decision-makers that Paris was fighting Moscow and Beijing-controlled communists, not indigenous nationalists, in Indochina. US foreign aid usually came with strings attached but not so in the case of its economic and military assistance to the French in Indochina. For example, Acheson complained:

> General de Lattre came twice to Washington to demand more aid and faster delivery and to urge us to declare that loss of Indochina would be catastrophic blow to the free world; yet he resented inquiries about his military plans and his intentions regarding transfer of authority to the three states [Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam]. Too little seemed to be happening in Vietnam in developing military power and local government responsibility and popular support.[123]

Yet Acheson also admitted that while the Truman administration's aid to the French military in Indochina in 1951 alone exceeded "over half a billion dollars,"[124] Paris did not inform Washington about its plans for Indochina.

While the US opposed imperialism and colonialism in theory, in practice, *realpolitik*, defined here as a policy planned and undertaken to protect first and foremost one's national interest, dominated US foreign policy planning and implementation. The Truman administration backed France in Indochina in return for France's support of the US in Cold War Europe.

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[121] Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 36-46; Walter Lafeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1966* (New York, London and Sydney: John Wiley and Sons, 1967), 95-122

[122] Marilyn B. Young, "'The Same Struggle for Liberty': Korea and Vietnam", in Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall, ed., *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis*, 196; Statler, *Replacing France*, 17, 25-28

[123] Acheson, *Present At The Creation*, 675

[124] Ibid., 674

President Truman and his staff perceived USSR and PRC expansionism was real in Southeast Asia where rich raw materials and other natural resources—rubber, tin, iron ore, onshore and offshore oil reserves—were important to the US and its allies and where teeming markets promised profitable returns for investments and trades.[125] Like other regions, the importance of Southeast Asia to the US was not purely strategic but also economic. "The resources of such areas as Mesopotamia, Iran, India, North Africa, and huge sections of South America have hardly been touched," concluded Truman, "and their development would be as beneficial to American trade as to the areas themselves. It would enable the peoples of many areas to subsist on trade and not aid."[126]

As American and French statesmen strategized about how to check Soviet and Chinese global ambitions, the conflict in Indochina raged on. The flamboyant General Jean-Marie Gabriel de Lattre de Tassigny succeeded General Carpentier and General Alessandri. De Lattre had three tasks. First, he was to restore French army morale. Second, he must halt the VLA by consolidating areas of the Red River Delta where the French army could still holdout against the VLA threatening from the upper Red River Delta. Third, and most importantly, he was to mobilize, organize, train, and advise indigenous forces as the pre-condition for his country and army to receive US aid. The French army's manpower was depleting, making de Lattre's task of raising indigenous troops more urgent.

In the political arena, France had been searching for alternative Vietnamese leadership since 1947.[127] By 1949, it had found the answer: the Bao Dai solution.[128] The former Emperor

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[125] George McTurnan Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1987), 31; Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 634; Marianna P. Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy: A Study In French-American Relations* (Wesport: Greenwood Press, 1978), 41-43; Kolko, *Anatomy of a War*, 81

[126] Truman, *Memoirs*, 232-233

[127] Bernard B. Fall, *Two Viet-Nams: A Political and Military Analysis* (New York and London: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), 209

Bao Dai returned to lead the non-communist Vietnamese National Government (VNG) as the head of state of one of the Associated States, which included Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, in the larger French Union made up of recently decolonized countries which maintained close diplomatic, cultural and economic ties with France.[129] While France allowed the governments of the Associated States to handle internal affairs, the treasury, military and foreign affairs of the VNG, like the financial, military and diplomatic affairs of Laos and Cambodia, remained under French control.[130] But the newfound independence of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam was a French ploy to mobilize nationalist factions to win the war against the communist parties in Indochina rather than a genuine policy to advance the independence of the three Associated States. Whether France could have made progress toward victory and peace in Indochina had its colonial regime granted more political, military, and economic concessions to the VNG is debatable. What is incontestable is that France's reluctance to make political concessions to the VNG doomed French plans. France remained the *de facto* ruler of all of Vietnam even as Vietnamese increasingly replaced French positions in colonial Vietnam's military and government bureaucracy. "Helpless and frustrated," in Stanley Karnow's words, Emperor Bao Dai bitterly remarked that at the Elysée Agreement what "they called a Bao Dai solution turns out to be just a French solution."[131] The VNG's ability to exercise its authority depended on how much power the French were willing to give. On 5 June 1948, the French High Commissioner of Indochina, Emile Bollaert, received VNG delegates to sign the Ha Long Bay Agreement. For the first time in eighty-six years, the word "independence" appeared in a Franco-Vietnamese accord

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[128] Robert Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution: The Story of Twenty Years of Neglected Opportunities in Vietnam and of America's Failure to Foster Democracy There* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 57-63

[129] Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled, Volume II: Vietnam at War* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1967), 667-734

[130] George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill), 23; Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience* (New York: The New Press, 1994), 81

[131] Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 190

as France "solemnly recognized the independence of Viet Nam which is now free to realize its unity" as an Associated State within the French Union.[132] To facilitate decolonization while maintaining friendly diplomatic relationship between France and the Associated States, the Ha Long Bay Agreement also encapsulated separate accords on cultural, diplomatic, military, economic, and financial matters binding France to Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.

In theory, the Ha Long Bay Agreement was to be implemented by representatives of the French, Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese national governments. In practice, however, the deal was strongly opposed by *les colons*, settlers of mainly French descent who had lived in Indochina for many decades. *Les colons* called the Agreement as an act of betrayal by Paris which sold out their political, military, and economic interests to the indigenous governments of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Pressured by *les colons*, Paris failed to implement the Ha Long Bay Agreement, thus undercutting the VNG's base of support as non-communist Vietnamese nationalists lost faith in France and the VNG.[133]

A year later, at the Elysée Accords of 8 March 1949 in Paris, France continued to "promise" Vietnam its unity and independence within the French Union.[134] The Elysée Agreement, despite French demands to preserve its political, military, cultural, and economic interests, was a positive gain for non-communist Vietnamese nationalists. Vietnam finally gained its independence but with restrictions sanctioned by the French, restrictions that became major obstacles[135] mainly because France and the VNG remained at war with the Viet Minh. The French were not ready to hand over the entire war effort to the VNG whose army, police, finance, and foreign affairs continued to operate under the authority of the French colonial

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[132] Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina*, 225
[133] Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 188-189; Schulzinger, *A Time for War*, 33-37
[134] Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina*, 234-240
[135] William J. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life* (New York: Hyperion, 2000), 413

regime.[136] In spite of these restrictions and interference by French political leaders and military commanders, VNG forces registered some successes against the VLA, especially in southern Vietnam.[137] Meanwhile, and mostly by default, France's political and military weaknesses allowed non-communist Vietnamese nationalists to gain more political and military control of the VNG. Increasingly, Vietnamese soldiers, NCOs, and officers were in the field, replacing French military personnel while French-trained Vietnamese bureaucrats administered the VNG. When the French left, these employees and officers remained to serve the RVN government.

Meanwhile, the FFEEC concentrated its military efforts in the main Indochina battlegrounds: the Red River Delta and the Central Highlands. Unable to control all of Cochinchina, the FFEEC let its Vietnamese allies run the south as Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Binh Xuyen "had the power to keep their own territories free of them [the Viet Minh]."[138] Tied down in North Vietnam, the French army could send just a few military advisors to each sect. The actual fighting remained in the hands of sects' followers. Under VNG directions, the VNA, HHPF, CDPF, and BXPF gained autonomy over their military operations against the VLA. French colonialism was never re-established on the ground in Cochinchina after 1945, and Vietnamese dominated the administration there. Externally, the VNG and its military forces, the VNA, HHPF, CDPF, and BXPF, were still fragile in the face of the VLA military attacks. Internally, the VNG and its military forces were fragmented by political and military divisions between rivals. Problems coming from without and within decreased the ability of the VNG and its military forces to gain and maintain the support of the Vietnamese peoples.

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[136] Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina*, 228
[137] Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, 411
[138] Frances Fitzgerald, *Fire In The Lake: The Vietnamese and The Americans in Vietnam* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2002), 69

After the Ha Long Bay Agreement, some prominent non-communist nationalists, notably Prince Ung Uy, head of the Imperial Family and a great-grandson of Emperor Minh Mang, joined Ho Chi Minh.[139] Their disappointment with France and the VNG led some non-communist nationalists to conclude that the Viet Minh offered the only avenue left to finally rid Vietnam of the French.[140] But other non-communist Vietnamese nationalists did not join the Viet Minh or the French. "In the end we decided that with the French on one side and the Communists on the other," wrote Bui Diem, the future RVN Ambassador to the US, "a successful Bao Dai solution was the only chance we had."[141] A future province chief of the RVN, Nguyen Tran scorned the VNG for signing the Ha Long Bay Agreement without pressuring France to give Vietnam dominion status as India had gained from Britain.[142] But Nguyen Tran stayed in the RVN after Geneva and entered politics.[143] A career VNA and ARVN officer who joined the military at this time, Lam Quang Thi disliked the French and "its puppet *Gouvernement de Cochinchine*" but thought that the Viet Minh "was not a viable alternative."[144]

Meanwhile ordinary Vietnamese, as a traveler in rural Vietnam observed in 1948, were "very tired of the war. They don't care whether Ho Chi Minh or Bao Dai governs the country if peace can be restored."[145] The HHPF allied with the VNG government after the VLA assassinated its leader.[146] So too did the CDPF as its leaders, lacking influence within the Viet

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[139] Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina*, 228
[140] Schulzinger, *A Time for War*, 37
[141] Bui Diem with David Chanoff, *In The Jaws of History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 67
[142] Nguyen Tran, *Cong va Toi: Nhung Su That Lich Su, Hoi Ky Lich Su Chinh Tri Mien Nam Viet Nam 1945-1975, (Actions and Crimes: Historical Truth, Memoir of the Political History of South Vietnam, 1945-1975)* (Los Alamitos, California: Xuan Thu, 1992), 61
[143] Ibid., 253-322
[144] Lieutenant General Lam Quang Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century: A South Vietnamese General Remembers the Indochina War to the Fall of Saigon* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2001), 25
[145] Quoted in Schulzinger's *A Time for War*, 37
[146] John T. McAlister, Jr., *Viet Nam: The Origins of Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), pp. 206-208

Minh, thought they could gain more power with the VNG.[147] Members of the BXPF sold their skill as "hit-men" to the highest bidder, in this case the French and the VNG. These sects stood with the VNG partly because of what they thought the VNG represented, and because the VNG was the only alternative to having Vietnam ruled by the French or the Viet Minh.

VNA Once the ARVN attracted interest of Vietnam War scholars, the VNA—the predecessor and backbone of the ARVN—receded into obscurity, receiving attention only when historians have discussed France's strategy in 1949-1950 to draw more anti-communist Vietnamese nationalists into its war effort in Indochina[148] and the siege of Dien Bien Phu in 1953-1954. In 1946 Admiral Georges Thierry D'Argenlieu, the High Commissioner, had proposed the "organization of local armies in the Indochina states."[149] France, under President Vincent Auriol, together with Emperor Bao Dai and his Prime Minister Tran Van Huu, turned this proposal into a policy for different reasons.[150] France badly needed men and a legitimate political reason to sustain the war, while non-communist Vietnamese nationalists were being shredded by the Viet Minh.[151] So they made a desperate joint attempt to organize a political-military force. The VNG fought beside France hoping to gain full independence and to defeat the Viet Minh once the French left. As the VNA Chief-of-Staff from 1951-1955, General Nguyen Van Hinh, later noted:

> Vietnam was an independent state but it did not enjoy all the privileges of an independent state. France again remained an indispensable support in certain domains.... There were a lot of good "natives" in French troops. Vietnamese served in diverse organizations of the army. But all that did not constitute a national army. The Vietnamese combatants served as "auxiliary" to

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[147] William J. Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), 121-122, 132
[148] Herring, *America's Longest War*, 26; Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990*, 29; Arthur J. Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans: Nationalism and Communism in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 195-196
[149] Dalloz, *La guerre d'Indochine*, 194
[150] Pham Phong Dinh, *Chien Su Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa* (*History of the Republic of Viet Nam Armed Forces*) (Winnipeg: Tu Sach Vinh Dan, 2001), 16; Nguyen Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 59-68
[151] Pham Phong Dinh, *Chien Su Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa*, 17; Bui Diem, *In The Jaw of History*, 45-50, 51-61

> French troops. In these conditions, the Vietminh, "rebels," against the Vietnamese legal authority, skillfully denounced the colonial war and stigmatized the population against French aggression.[152]

In theory, France was to assist and advise the VNA "on the basis of equality and respect for Vietnam's independence and sovereignty."[153] In reality, the FFEEC commanded the VNA. It also armed and supplied Vietnamese Catholic Self-Defence Forces (CSDF) at Phat Diem and Bui Chu and other enclaves east of the Red River Delta which became National Guard units.[154] These units, consisting mostly of northern Vietnamese Catholics, natural allies of France against the communists who had taken their lands and were persecuting their faith,[155] numbered 9,000 men by 1954.[156] The backbone of the VNA was the elite Vietnamese parachute battalions which became the ARVN's Strategic Reserve after 1955, popularly known as "Thien Than Mu Do" or "Angels In Red Berets."[157] At its peak, the VNA had 54,000 regulars, 58,000 *supplétifs* (auxiliary troops) and 15,000 conscripted members.[158]

In 1950, the VNG ordered a nation-wide general mobilization[159] of Vietnamese males of military service age. By 1953, all physically fit adult males had to undergo a sixty day training period. Vietnamese troops were sent to recruit training centers, specialist and technical schools, and NCO and officer schools for their training throughout Vietnam. Selected officer candidates were trained in France's military academies. After completion, they either returned to civilian life while remaining in the reserve or re-enlisted in the regular army for one to five years.

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[152] General Nguyen Van Hinh, "Les forces armée vietnamiennes," in Philippe Héduy, *La Guerre d'Indochine 1945-1954* (Paris: Société de Production Littéraire, 1981), 238
[153] Lieutenant General Dong Van Khuyen, *The RVNAF, Indochina Monographs* (College Park, M.D.: NARA II Library, 1983), 2
[154] Ibid., 3
[155] Colonel Broizat, "La recontre de Phat Diem," in Philippe Héduy, ed., *La Guerre d'Indochine 1945-1954* (Paris: Société de Production Littéraire, 1981), 58-61
[156] Frances Fitzgerald, *Fire In The Lake*, 84
[157] U.S. Army Airborne (Retired) Command Sergeant Major Michael Martin, ed., *Angels In Red Hats: Paratroopers of the Second Indochina War, Mu Do: Elite Vietnamese Paratroopers and their American Advisors* (New York: Harmony House, 1995), 14-43
[158] Douglas Porch, *The French Foreign Legion*, 550
[159] Masson, *Histoire de l'armee française de 1914 à nos jours*, 398

Vietnamese officers replaced French officers once their military training and education were completed. But many Vietnamese officers resented the French. As a US Military Assistance Advisory Group Vietnam (MAAGV) report of 3 February 1953 stated, "the Vietnamese are eager to assume more of the responsibility of command, especially in the higher levels. The French do not feel the Vietnamese officers are sufficiently trained to take over these assignments, as a result there is some friction over this point."[160]

In fact, VNA soldiers' willingness to fight and die depended less on what they thought of the VNG and more on the leadership skills of their immediate Vietnamese or French officers. In the heat of battle they fought for the men next to them, not for some figurehead they had never met and an abstract ideal they never fully understood.[161] On 3 February 1953, American observers noticed the Cambodian and Laotian national armies faced different problems than did the VNA. While Laos and Cambodia were secondary fronts, all principal efforts "of the communist Vietminh is confined to Vietnam. Consequently, the armies of Laos and Cambodia do not face the same test as those of the native Vietnamese army." The VLA was trying to break the VNA's will but the latter stood its ground, MAAGV concluded, because "military units commanded in part by their own native officers have done much to develop 'esprit' among the Vietnamese units."[162] However, while these reports were insightful, they did not say how the VNA would fare without its French advisors and logistical support.

The VNA's morale and fighting ability varied not only with leadership, but also with training and missions. It divided into two groups, garrison troops with some expertise in counter-guerrilla warfare, and a minority with much experience in hard battles. The VNA's finest hours,

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[160] File: MAAGV 370.2 Operations and Report, 3 February 1953, Section V to VII: Morale, pp. 8-12; Box 1; RG 472; Archive: NARA II

[161] Howard R. Simpson, *Dien Bien Phu: The Epic Battle America Forgot* (London: Brassey's Inc., 1996), 129-130.

[162] File: MAAGV 370.2 Operations and Reports, 3 February 1953, Section VII: Morale, pp. 12; Box 1; RG 472; Archive: NARA II

like those of the FFEEC and the VLA, came in the valley of Dien Bien Phu. Between 21 November 1953 to 5 May 1954, 8,220 VNA soldiers became casualties at Dien Bien Phu,[163] most coming from the VNA's parachute battalions. Disgruntled French Air Force officer Jules Roy thought little of the VNA compared to the VLA, writing that if "the Vietnamese Army looked impressive on the parade grounds, it was less than partial to a fight."[164] Yet, when recording combat between communist and non-communist Vietnamese during the siege of Dien Bien Phu, particularly on May 6/7, 1954, the last night before the Viet Minh overwhelmed the garrison, Roy praised fallen Vietnamese paratroopers whom "when they had good officers and NCO's, fought as fiercely as their brothers on the other side."[165]

After 1954, the VNA formed the framework of ARVN and its officer corps played a critical role in South Vietnamese politics. They shared responsibility for the stability but also for the disorders of the RVN. Its senior officers led the ARVN under President Ngo Dinh Diem, while its NCOs and junior officers became the politicians and statesmen of the RVN and ARVN's colonels and generals during the Tet Offensive of 1968, the Easter Offensive of 1972 and the fall of Saigon in 1975. However, the VNA was not the only fighting force integrated into the ARVN.

HHPF The Hoa Hao Paramilitary Force (HHPF) was one of the three counter-revolutionary forces responsible for the French army pacification endeavor in Cochinchina.[166] Originally founded on the basis of spirituality in circumstances of revolution and war, the Hoa Hao Buddhist Sect became a powerful social, political, and military movement.[167] Its founder

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[163] Bernard B. Fall, *Hell In A Very Small Place: The Seige of Dien Bien Phu* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1966), Appendix B: French Losses, 483
[164] Jules Roy, *The Battle of Dien Bien Phu* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2002), 15-16
[165] Ibid., 266
[166] General Henri Jacquin, "Hoa Hao, Caodaïstes et Binh Xuyen," in Philippe Héduy, *La Guerre d'Indochine 1945-1954*, 248-251
[167] Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochine,* 238

and holy master, a young illiterate peasant and faith healer, Huynh Phu So, was anti-colonialist but culturally conservative.[168] Huynh demanded an end to lavish idol worship in Buddhist temples and a return to simple sacrifices which required neither food nor money. Lesser materialistic rituals, inexpensive wedding and burial ceremonies for example, would lead to blessings from heaven.[169] Huynh's peasant upbringing and charisma swayed thousands of peasants, particularly in the Mekong Delta, to join the sect.[170] But religious fervor did not prevent the Hoa Hao from cooperating with the atheistic Viet Minh against the French.[171] Should social and economic principles, such as greater equality between tenants and landlords over matters of landownership, shared rice production, fair payment, and communal wealth, demonstrated that the Hoa Hao and the Viet Minh were not incompatible. Historian Hue-Tam Ho Tai has argued insightfully that Huynh wanted to restore a "communitarian world" where "harmony, rather than competition for scarce resources, would be the key to social interaction. Cooperatives, the modern version of the sectarian mutual-help societies, were encouraged. The redistribution of wealth would be achieved peacefully, although where the money for this would come from and what constituted excess land, were not specified."[172] Above all, both groups wanted an independent Vietnam, but independence to the Hoa Hao equaled freedom of worship while the Viet Minh wanted to destroy traditional feudalistic beliefs, including religious ones.

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[168] Nguyen Long Thanh Nam, *Phat Giao Hoa Hao Trong Dong Lich Su Dan Toc* (Hoa Hao Buddhism in the History of the Nation) (Santa Fe Springs, California: Duoc Tu Bi, 1991), 167-171;Dalloz, *La guerre d'Indochine*, 27; Alexander Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), 188

[169] Nguyen Long Thanh Nam, *Phat Giao Hoa Hao*, 180-189; Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam*, 188; Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 159; Robert J. Topmiller, *Lotus Unleashed: The Buddhist Peace Movement In South Vietnam 1964-1966* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 15

[170] Nguyen Long Thanh Nam, *Phat Giao Hoa Hao*, 189-192; Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 159; Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans*, 194

[171] Dalloz, *La guerre d'Indochine*, 149; Jacquin, "Hoa Hao, Caodaïstes et Binh Xuyen", 249

[172] Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics In Vietnam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1983), 159

The alliance collapsed when the Viet Minh began to fear the Hoa Hao. The Hoa Hao shared some social and economic principles with the Viet Minh, but it also attracted more peasant followers to its cause and away from the Viet Minh's national revolutionary drive. To the Viet Minh, as Hue-Tam Ho Tai has pointed out, Huynh's word "was law for his one million adepts… he embodied the revolutionary spirit which was part of the millenarian tradition." Hoa Hao Budhism and Huynh "threatened the Communist monopoly of the revolutionary ideal."[173] As it had done to the Trotskyists and other non-communist allies, the Viet Minh's security squads, manned by die-hard communist cadres, killed Huynh. As Alexander Woodside has concluded, unable to "conquer Cochin China politically as long as such a formidable adversary stood in their path, in 1947 the communists apparently murdered Huynh Phu So, who disappeared without a trace."[174] The Viet Minh committed a grave political and military error in making a martyr out of Huynh. Worse yet, by killing Huynh, "the Communists also removed the one person capable of exerting a moderating influence on the military adventurers and civilian opportunists who remained in control of the sect."[175] Huynh was replaced by his less moderate lieutenants who were uncompromisingly anti-communist and bitter about their master's death. "The strength of the Hoa Hao lay, above all, in the single-minded devotion of its members to their young leader and the founder of their movement, Huynh Phu So."[176]

The fact that the Viet Minh had assassinated their leader did not make the decision of Huynh's lieutenants to ally with the French any less easy. Indeed, the dilemma faced by the Hoa Hao after Huynh's death was the same conundrum confronting other non-communist nationalist leaders and supporters: they opposed the French for their present colonial and imperial policy but

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[173] Ibid., 160
[174] Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam*, 189; Topmiller, *Lotus Unleashed*, 15
[175] Ho Tai, *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics In Vietnam*, 160
[176] Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina*, 210-211

feared the Viet Minh's future political design for an independent Vietnam be. "Here was the most difficult choice of all," wrote Nguyen Long Thanh Nam, a Hoa Hao Buddhist faithful and scholar, "for they were being pushed into an impossible situation: (1) [The Hoa Hao leaders and followers] could not oppose at the same time two opponents: the French in the front, the Viet Minh in the back; (2) to continue cooperating with the Viet Minh was to risk being destroyed by them, but to cooperate with the French [Hoa Hao leaders and followers] would be denounced as collaborators of the colonialist invaders."[177] Tran Van Soai, the Hoa Hao military chief of 3,000 guerrillas, subsequently joined with the French and the VNG, supported by most of Huynh's followers.[178] The Hoa Hao decision to fight with the VNG and the French against the Viet Minh was based on two conditions. First, France would grant the VNG more autonomy in Saigon and the Hoa Hao more autonomy in the countryside. Second, all HHPF platoons would be commanded by Hoa Hao commanders free of interference from FFEEC officers who instead would act as observers, liaison officers, and logistical specialists when HHPF platoons required arms, ammunitions and close fire support.[179] Pressured by Truman's administration to grant more political and military concessions to the VNG in return for US economic aid and military materials, confronted by a shortage of manpower and distracted by larger VLA attacks in central and northern Vietnam, Paris allowed the VNG more power and influence over its internal affairs while the French army dispatched advisors to HHPF platoons only at the request of Hoa Hao commanders.

Cao Dai Originally founded in 1926 by prefect Ngo Van Chieu, Cao Dai was led by its prophets Le Van Trung and "Pope" Pham Cong Tac. "Caodaism" integrated Buddhism,

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[177] Nguyen Long Thanh Nam, *Phat Giao Hoa Hao*, 487
[178] Jacquin, "Hoa Hao, Caodaïstes et Binh Xuyen", 249; Neil L. Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 210
[179] Nguyen Long Thanh Nam, *Phat Giao Hoa Hao*, 488

Confucianism, and Taoism with Western philosophies, searching for social, political and economic advancements through Western means without losing its Eastern cultural heritage. On the Cao Dai altar rested its saints, Victor Hugo, Jeanne d'Arc, and Jesus Christ.[180] Cao Dai followers also found wisdom in the teachings of Buddha and Jesus Christ about order and harmony in the universe, selflessness and forgiveness, and happiness and love as spiritual means to reach the supreme state of being in life.[181] "Caodaism" returned elites, mostly living in the urban centers of the Mekong Delta and Saigon, to their traditions while reaffirming their equal status with French settlers in colonial Vietnam.[182] According to Jayne Susan Werner, Cao Dai's leaders taught elites and non-elites that "Caodaism was the path of union and reconciliation between the East and West – that Christianity and the wisdom the Orient could meet under the umbrella of Caodaism... [which] had come on earth to unite the world's race, save humanity, and regenerate mankind."[183] Cao Dai's teachings appealed to peasant farmers who dreamt of a new social order where landowners treated their cultivators with respect.[184] In 1938 it had 500,000 disciples, a number that quintupled during World War II.[185]

On 8 February 1938, Cao Dai's "Pope" Pham Cong Tac, together with Prince Cuong De, were exiled to Madagascar by Admiral Decoux.[186] Both were charged with conspiring against the French colonial regime by contacting the Association for Greater Asia about pushing France out of Vietnam. Indeed, this communication might have been initiated by the president of the

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[180] Jayne Susan Werner, *Peasant Politics and Religious Sectarianism: Peasant and Priest in the Cao Dai in Vietnam*, Monograph Series No. 23 (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1981), 6-7; Fitzgerald, *Fire In The Lake*, 56-57
[181] Jacquin, "Hoa Hao, Caodaïstes et Binh Xuyen", 249
[182] Werner, *Peasant Politics and Religious Sectarianism*, 14-16
[183] Ibid., 7
[184] Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochine,* 238
[185] Werner, *Peasant Politics and Religious Sectarianism*, 38; Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 159
[186] Jacquin, "Hoa Hao, Caodaïstes et Binh Xuyen", 250

Association in Tokyo to undermine France's authority in Indochina.[187] The French colonial authority had been closely monitoring Cao Dai activities. The French colonial authority knew that Pham Cong Tac supported Prince Cuong De and wanted to restore a monarchical government headed by the Prince if Japan overthrew the French in Indochina.[188] Thus, the connection between Pham Cong Tac, Cuong De, and the Japanese was another pretext for the French colonial authority to deal a decapitating blow against the Cao Dai in particular and the Vietnamese revolutionary movement in general. But France's actions incited Cao Dai's followers to become a militia led by Tran Quang Vinh,[189] and they took part in the 1945 Revolution that began with the Japanese coup against the French in Indochina. The Cao Dai, like the Hoa Hao, VNQDD, and DVQDD, rose up against the French with the Viet Minh.[190] "When the Viet Minh came to power in August 1945," Werner asserted, "the Cao Dai joined forces with them in a united front from above, as did virtually every other political group."[191]

The Viet Minh's relationship with the Cao Dai was like that with the Hoa Hao. While their immediate enemy was the French, their political goals were quite different. The Cao Dai sought to recover a lost social equilibrium produced by French colonialism through "means of spiritualism and reforms of personal habits in such matter as sex, business practices, methods of worship, and personal relations."[192] The Cao Dai path to an independent Vietnam was through peace, harmony, and reform. The Viet Minh was convinced that liberation could only come through diplomacy backed by war and revolution. The Viet Minh insistence that CDPF units fell under its command also disconcerted Cao Dai commanders. CDPF military leaders, many of

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[187] Dalloz, *La guerre d'Indochine*, 49
[188] Werner, *Peasant Politics and Religious Sectarianism*, 39-41
[189] Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans*, 126
[190] Ibid., 106
[191] Werner, *Peasant Politics and Religious Sectarianism*, 43
[192] Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam*, 186

whom were sworn enemies of the communists, did not trust VLA commanders. Cao Dai's leaders feared that Viet Minh decision-makers would undercut the base of their political support amongst Vietnamese urban elites and rural peasants if the Viet Minh gained too much influence. Interestingly, while Ho Chi Minh appeared radical to France, Vietnamese Trotskyists and Cao Dai followers thought that the Viet Minh had sold them and southern Vietnam to the French in 1945-1946 when, with Britain's help, France re-established its colonial authority in Saigon. "The Cao Dai and Trotskyists," observed Werner, "also finding their political fortunes revived by the move toward independence, lost no time in attacking the Viet Minh for being pro-French because Ho Chi Minh was attempting to negotiate a pact with the French."[193]

Cao Dai's motives for fighting first alongside the Viet Minh and then with VNG were complicated. The refusal of VLA officers to compromise with CDPF commanders about allowing CDPF units to conduct separate military operations against the French undermined the Cao Dai-Viet Minh alliance while opening an opportunity for FMI to exploit divisions among its enemy.[194] To exploit the grievances between communists, Trotskyists and non-communist nationalists, FMI kidnapped Cao Dai leader Trang Quang Vinh in order to bring him over to the French and the VNG. By 8 May 1946, he had been converted by General Valluy to fight with the FFEEC and the VNG. With Tran Quang Vinh arrested and Pham Cong Tac exiled, the Cao Dai fell into disarray. Some CDPF units stayed loyal to the Viet Minh, others rallied to the French, some went inactive.[195] As FMI succeeded in subverting the Cao Dai from within, the Viet Minh, determined to solidify its power in Cochinchina, used this opportunity to destroy the Cao Dai by executing 800 Cao Dai faithful in the Holy See of Tay Ninh province. Returning from exile in

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[193] Werner, *Peasant Politics and Religious Sectarianism*, 49
[194] Ibid., 50
[195] Jacquin, "Hoa Hao, Caodaïstes et Binh Xuyen", 250; Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans*, 193

1946, Pham Cong Tac renewed his allegiances to Emperor Bao Dai.[196] This switch in the VNG occurred largely because of the Viet Minh's attempts to kill Cao Dai's leaders and persecute the believers.[197] The political loyalty to the Bao Dai government and the military effectiveness of Catholic Self Defence Groups, Hoa Hao and Cao Dai counter-revolutionary forces against the Viet Minh were highly praised by an American journalist. As Frances Fitzgerald observed, "the Saigon government had been almost totally ineffective for good or ill; political opposition to the Viet Minh had been mounted almost exclusively by the local government and parties. The most obvious of these were the sects – the Catholics, the Cao Dai, and the Hoa Hao."[198]

BXPF The Binh Xuyen gang was the most secular of the three counter-revolutionary forces in Cochinchina. Its members, mainly condemned criminals and ex-convicts living beyond the law,[199] lived with neither discipline nor constraints, seeking pleasures of the flesh and living dangerously. The Binh Xuyen's gods were the Franc, the Dong (Vietnamese money), and the Dollar, which made Binh Xuyen gangsters dangerous but predictable too. Lacking political or religious loyalties, they served the highest bidders—be they French, American, non-communist or communist Vietnamese. As Stanley Karnow noted, the Binh Xuyen were "a gang of guns for hire, which, until its elimination by Ngo Dinh Diem in 1955, would serve the Vietminh and other factions—and even police the south for the French in exchange for the franchise to manage bordellos, casinos and opium dens."[200]

To the Viet Minh, the French, and the VNG, these mafias had political and military utility and their associations with the Binh Xuyen linked them into the underground world of gambling

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[196] Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans*, 193; Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina*, 211

[197] Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled, Volume I: From Colonialism to the Viet Minh* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1967), 411; Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution*, 15

[198] Fitzgerald, *Fire In The Lake*, 152-153

[199] Jacquin, "Hoa Hao, Caodaïstes et Binh Xuyen", 250

[200] Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 164

halls, the sex and opium trade, and the clandestine world of espionage and covert operations.[201] These black markets generated lucrative profits, allowing French special operational forces and secret services to attack the communists in the countryside and cities without requesting aid, hence authority, from Paris.[202] When General de Lattre asked why he could not sweep French prostitutes out of Saigon, his chief of intelligence replied "Because they're all on the intelligence payroll, as well!"[203]

The Binh Xuyen and its leader, Le Van Vien, better known as Bay Vien, were not without patriotic fervor. Historian Alfred W. McCoy, an expert on local governments, organized crime, intelligence services and their connections to the drug trade in Southeast Asia, and one of the few scholars who did personal research on the topic in 1970s, has suggested that "the majority of Binh Xuyen members were just ordinary Cho-lon [Saigon's Chinese suburb] street toughs, and the career of Le Van Vien was rather more typical."[204] The politicization of these Binh Xuyen gangsters, by which they became politically conscious of what French imperialism and colonialism had done to Vietnamese history, society and culture, occurred when they were imprisoned for non-political crimes. "Finding themselves sharing cells with political prisoners," concluded McCoy, "they participated in their heated political debates. Bay Vien himself escaped from Con Son [Puolo Condore island prison] in early 1945 and returned to Saigon politicized and embittered toward French colonialism."[205] When the Franco-Vietnamese war broke out on 23 September 1945 in the South, the communists gave Bay Vien command of VLA troops in the

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[201] Dalloz, *La guerre d' Indochine*, 151
[202] Peter Harclerode, *Fighting Dirty: The Inside Story of Covert Operations from Ho Chi Minh to Osama Bin Laden* (New York: Cassell & Co., 2001); see the chapter, "Indochina 1950-1954", 72-116; Alfred W. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity In The Global Drug Trade: Afghanistan, Southeast Asia, Central America, Columbia* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2003), 128-129, 132-133; Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 128
[203] Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 135
[204] McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, 148
[205] Ibid., 149

Cho-lon-Saigon section,[206] a position that allegedly allowed him to accept bribes, patronage, and promises of political influence and economic benefits.[207] Bay Vien, however, defected from the Viet Minh, and the Binh Xuyen rallied to the French and the VNG. They felt betrayed by the Viet Minh, consisting mostly of Tonkinese (Vietnamese of the North), who "detested the people of the South," especially when the South's communist chief, Nguyen Binh, threatened to assassinate Bay Vien. From the VLA perspective, the Binh Xuyen was an undisciplined group of bandits who lacked ideological sophistication, used violence excessively, and "could alienate the people and destroy the revolution."[208]

To win Binh Xuyen cooperation, the French and the VNG granted Bay Vien autonomy over the Grande-Monde gambling den and the Hall of Mirrors prostitution brothel in Cho-lon, the Chinese section of Saigon. The opium traffic, the sex trade, and Saigon's police force soon fell under Bay Vien's purview. Virtually overnight, the fortunes of war had turned the former street thug into the king of the black-market, the chief of the Saigon police, and a VNG politician. While the Binh Xuyen "profited in the many rackets spawned by the war."[209] Just how much profit the Binh Xuyen made from the French-Indochina War was revealed when the "tiny cut" of its profit that Bay Vien offered to Bao Dai enabled the Emperor to purchase "yachts, villas, and other comforts in France."[210] Journalist Arthur J. Dommen has suggested that while starting as "common thieves and murderers preying on the defenseless, the Binh Xuyen gradually transformed themselves into robbers of the rich to give to the poor, à la Robin

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[206] Jacquin, "Hoa Hao, Caodaïstes et Binh Xuyen", 250

[207] On the subject of the Binh Xuyen in the First and Second Indochina Wars, Ellen J. Hammer, Stanley Karnow and Arthur J. Dommen have only discussed the nature of this organized crime—who they were, what they did, at what time, for what, for whom and why—but not the relationship between the Viet Minh prior to Bay Vien's decision to rally to the French and Bao Dai.

[208] Jacquin, "Hoa Hao, Caodaïstes et Binh Xuyen", 250; McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, 151-152

[209] Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans*, 195

[210] McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, 154

Hood."[211] McCoy has also suggested that many poor Vietnamese southerners perceived Binh Xuyen gangsters as "the Robin Hood of Vietnam" for they were once "ordinary contract laborers who had fled from the rubber plantations" where they were provided with insufficient food, forced to work in harsh schedules and conditions, treated as slave laborers, and were often beaten to death.[212] Therefore, their enlistment into the Binh Xuyen was another path of resistance to colonial rule, to avoid hopeless destitution, and to make a living through crime. Whatever the case might be, Binh Xuyen's members—900 men in 1948, 2,400 in 1952, and over 3,000 in 1954[213]—were not forgotten for their crimes[214] but merely given a new mission: to destroy the VLA cadres and urban cells in Saigon-Cho-lon. In Ellen J. Hammer's words, "lacking the religious aspects of the other two sects, the unsavory qualities of the Binh Xuyen were even more obvious; however, it was actively and effectively anti-Communist."[215]

Conclusion The VLA's revolutionary warfare model had three distinct phases. In theory, its revolutionary war would originate with the use of terrorism or political violence, then advance to guerrilla warfare, and finally conclude with conventional warfare. Thus, Viet Minh political and military leaders organized and trained VLA formations for each of the three phases: VLA popular troops (guerrillas operating at village levels); VLA regional troops (larger mobile guerrilla forces supporting village guerrillas); and VLA regular units (larger conventional force supporting both mobile guerrilla forces and village guerrilla forces). The last of the three VLA formations benefited from the financial, material, and advisory support of the USSR and the PRC. In practice, however, revolutionary war has never advanced so predictably from one phase to the next. The VLA progressed through all three phases in northern Vietnam, advanced only to

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[211] Dommen, *The Indochina Experience of the French and the Americans*, 195
[212] McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, 148
[213] Jacquin, "Hoa Hao, Caodaïstes et Binh Xuyen", 250
[214] Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina*, 285
[215] Ibid., 349

the second phase in central Vietnam, and barely made out of the first phase in southern Vietnam. What the VLA did was to strike at the FFEEC throughout Vietnam in order to give France's commanders, statesmen, and its people the impression that the VLA held the initiative and could strike French targets at will. In fact, how VLA commanders conducted their revolutionary war against the FFEEC depended on a combination of local factors—political, military, geographic, strategic—and whether these conditions were deemed favorable to them or to their enemy. Realistically, therefore, the three phases revolutionary warfare theorized by Mao and practiced by Giap actually occurred in many overlapping phases depending on what part of Vietnam that the VLA was operating in. That Giap and his political colleagues and military commanders could wage such a complex war against France demonstrated their abilities to observe the politic-military conditions, assess the strengths and weaknesses of their foes, and adapt their own military forces to the constantly shifting political and military circumstances in Indochina.

To conduct counterrevolutionary warfare against an adaptable and competent enemy such as the VLA, French army commanders had to demonstrate strategic and tactical flexibility in their operational planning. From 1946 to 1950, the FFEEC tried various strategies and tactics including using a largely conventional force to implant small pacification units into rural northern Vietnam to break the VLA's hold there. These diverse operations succeeded in turning once firmly held VLA areas into new VLA-French army contested areas. However, the VLA's survival allowed it to prolong the war. Unable to resolve the war decisively, France faced criticism from abroad and domestic political pressure. International and domestic public opinion tarnished France's image but the CCP's victory in 1949 doomed the FFEEC in Indochina. For the first time in the war, the VLA received external support in the form of expertise, war materials and safe-havens inside Chinese territory. France could only continue the war until Dien

Bien Phu's fall in 1954 thanks to substantial American financial and military support. US backing, however, came with a political and military price. Politically, the US demanded that France grant more authority to the VNG and to prepare it to govern post-independent Vietnam. Militarily, the US forced France to grant more battlefield responsibility to Vietnamese soldiers. Due to the war's unpopularity in France, diplomatic pressures from allies such as the US and adversaries such as the USSR and the PRC, and a major shortage in manpower, France caved in.

The aforementioned reasons led the FFEEC to organize, train and advise the VNA, the CSDF, HHPF, CDPF, and BXPF, augmented with substantial US financial and material help. This second phase of the war, 1950-1953, can be understood as yet another set of "new strategy of counter-guerrilla, or counterinsurgency, warfare" that French commanders tried as they attempted to learn, assess and adapt to their enemies. Professor McCoy has summed up this point succinctly:

> By 1950-1951 younger, innovative French officers had abandoned the conventional war tactics that essentially visualized Indochina as a depopulated staging ground for fortified lines, massive sweeps, and flanking maneuvers. Instead Indochina became a vast chessboard where hill tribes, bandits, and religious minorities could be used as pawns to hold strategic territories and prevent Viet Minh infiltration. The French concluded formal alliances with a number of these ethnic or religious factions and supplied them with arms and money to keep the Viet Minh out of their area. The French hope was to atomize the Viet Minh's mobilized, unified mass into a mosaic of autonomous fiefs hostile to the revolutionary movement.[216]

This classic colonial strategy of divide and conquer, by default, had prompted the creation of French-supported militias, large and small, to challenge VLA's popular, regional and regular units. How are we to conclude of the individual military performance of the VNA, CSDF, HHPF, CDPF, and BXPF, and how these individual endeavors contributed to the overall war effort of France in Indochina?

When combined, the FFEEC, VNA, CSDF, HHPF, CDPF, and BXPF presented a formidable opponent to the VLA. The spiritual leadership of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai sects and

[216] McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, 132

the ambitions of the Binh Xuyen rallied their followers against the Viet Minh. Their deep hatred for the Viet Minh and loyalty toward their leaders gave them high morale while the VLA dreaded their ruthlessly effective counter-guerrilla warfare. They damaged the VLA in Cochinchina more than the French army and the VNA combined—indeed, they often prevented it from expanding its military control and political influence over the countryside. "Throughout the war," Douglas Porch concluded, "the Viet Minh had registered fewer successes in South Vietnam than they had in Tonkin—for several reasons. But a significant factor was that in Cochin China the French had shared power with a mosaic of quasi-independent and well-armed religious sects—the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao—as well as the Saigon underworld controlled by the Binh Xuyen. While these groups did not necessarily support French interests, they made it difficult for the Vietminh to establish firm roots in the areas they controlled."[217] Porch is not the only scholar to hold this view. "Despite the Viet Minh's large following," Jayne Suzan Werner concluded that, "the French prevented the Viet Minh from taking power in the south. This achievement was a result of the mobilization of the sects in the countryside and the support the sects lent to the French-sponsored Saigon government."[218] Pierre Brocheux also has claimed that while the French army "never wholly conquered Nam Bo [southern Vietnam]," neither the Mekong River Delta was controlled by the VLA. In fact, Brocheux continued, "the south was either steadily or temporarily shared between the French and their allies (the Caodaist, the Hoa Hao, the Catholics, and the Bin Xuyen mafia)."[219] Even the BXPF, the least popular of the sectarian paramilitary forces, "controlled the capital region and the sixty-mile strip between

[217] Porch, *The French Secret Services*, 354
[218] Werner, *Peasant Politics and Religious Sectarianism*, 50
[219] Pierre Brocheux, *The Mekong Delta: Ecology, Economy, and Revolution, 1860-1960* (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1995), 199

Saigon and Cap Saint Jacques [the beach town/resource of Vung Tao east of Saigon]."[220] Given that FFEEC units had trouble denying VLA's control over areas in much of central and northern Vietnam, the BXPF's achievement without popular support but money and arms was astonishing.

However, while these conclusions are accurate, they are incomplete. The VLA's neutralization in Cochinchina by the CSDF, HHPF, CDPF, and BXPF depended on the following politico-military conditions. Firstly, the Viet Minh principle theatre of operation in Indochina remained in the Red River Delta where it concentrated all its manpower and material resources. The Mekong River Delta was a secondary theatre of operation. The VLA's lack of success in the Mekong River Delta, by default, led to the region being used by the VLA to divert the manpower and military supplies of the French army away from Annam and Tonkin. Secondly, the VLA was neutralized in Cochinchina because the FFEEC, together with the VNA, concentrated on going after the VLA in the Red River Delta. But the FFEEC and the VNA still could not defeat the VLA in the Red River Delta although these efforts provided the conditions for the CSDF, HHPF, CDPF, and BXPF to attack smaller VLA units in Cochinchina. When the Sino-Vietnamese border was opened to the VLA, the FFEEC and the VNA lost their chance to defeat their common enemy. Nevertheless, it is questionable how these divided sectarian paramilitary forces could have survived against the onslaught of the more organized, disciplined and united communist forces in Cochinchina if the FFEEC and the VNA had not gone after the VLA in Annam and Tonkin. Historians long have debated whether a US invasion and occupation of the DRVN in the Vietnam War would have ended the war itself. The FFEEC and the VNA had the opportunity to operate freely in northern Vietnam from 1946 to 1954. Still, they could only fight the VLA to a stalemate before the PRC agreed to open its southern border to the Viet Minh.

[220] McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, 153

After the PLA dispatched its logistical experts, training instructors, and combat advisors to the VLA, France and the VNG feared that the PRC might opt for a joint PLA-VLA offensive to annihilate the FFEEC and the VNA in northern Vietnam as the PLA had done in northern Korea. Third and most importantly, while the VNA, CSDF, HHPF, CDPF, and BXPF registered military successes against the VLA, they did so with, not without, FFEEC tactical and strategic assistance and American aid too. How would these Vietnamese nationalist forces have fared against the onslaught of the Vietnamese communist forces if they were not properly organized, advised, and supported over unspecified period of time by external powers like France or the US?

In 1954, far more armed Vietnamese opposed the Viet Minh in South Vietnam than fought for them. This fact fed the belief in Washington that a stand against communism could and should be made in Cochinchina otherwise one would be abandoning to communism a people who had demonstrated the will to resist. This conclusion made it very hard for the administration of President Dwight David Eisenhower, which replaced Truman's administration in 1953, to do anything other than commit itself to sustaining a non-communist South Vietnam. Unfortunately, these armed Vietnamese nationalists had little more in common with each other than opposition to the Viet Minh and temporary cooperation with the French. The French departure broke the political framework which held these forces together. A new one was needed if a non-communist national state was to emerge. The communists remained a dangerous enemy and a growing threat while President Ngo Dinh Diem's RVN replaced the French political and military administration in the south. America would have to try to save a South Vietnam, while these Vietnamese factions and two new ones, the Diem government and Catholic émigrés from the north, would have to work together. Given their success against the communists, the Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Binh Xuyen militias wanted their share of power in South Vietnam. Even before the First

Indochina War ended, Frances Fitzgerald warned about the unpredictable politics of the sects. "Though under obligation to the French," Fitzgerald wrote, "the sect factions directed their war efforts almost impartially against the French, the Viet Minh, and each other—depending upon who happened to cross the path directly in front of them."[221] Meanwhile, once the French left, the communists remained a dangerous enemy and a growing threat.

The sectarian paramilitary forces had proven in the French Indochina War that they could indirectly challenge French authority while fighting the VLA at the same time. They would do so too against President Diem and the newly-formed RVN after 1954 to obtain more power in South Vietnamese affairs. This presented a military and political problem. These forces were anti-communist, relatively efficient, but politically unreliable. Because of their lack of loyalty, the Diem government singled them out and crushed them in 1954. The BXPF was destroyed because the RVN government and military, still spearheaded by the VNA, considered its men undisciplined and its activities immoral. The HHPF and CDPF were neutralized but not destroyed for, unlike the BXPF, the HHPF and CDPF had more popular support in urban centers and rural areas and were led by men with moral authority. Only the CSDF survived the Diem government's crackdown of political dissidents in southern Vietnam from 1954-1956 intact because the RVN president and his family were devout Catholics. The HHPF, CDPF, and BXPF were neutralized militarily, but Diem integrated some elements which were willing to serve the RVN. The Diem government's decision to crush the sectarian paramilitary forces was a tragedy and the cost was significant. Militarily, no RVN forces, particularly the ARVN, could entirely replicate the quality of the HHPF, CDPF, and BXPF. The real loss was political, however. By destroying the sectarian paramilitary forces, Diem's government wrecked the strongest anti-communist organizations in South Vietnam and created a political power vacuum in Saigon

[221] Fitzgerald, *Fire In The Lake*, 69

which only the Viet Minh (renamed National Front for the Liberation of Southern Vietnam or NFLSVN in post-1954) filled. Only after the HHPF, CDPF and BXPF had been eliminated did the VLA—renamed the Peoples Liberation Armed Forces or PLFA in post-1954—have significant successes in the areas they had controlled. Even more, the only political-military element left capable of challenging Diem's government was the one he would not and could not destroy. As the war escalated, the army became just as politically dangerous to the Diem government as the rival sectarian paramilitary forces had been.

In any case, the VNA constituted the backbone of the ARVN but ex-members of HHPF, CDPF, and BXPF either volunteered or were made to join the ARVN as part of the Diem government policy to integrate these unpredictable political factions into the RVN government and military. "In theory," wrote ARVN General Lam Quang Thi, "the above disparate paramilitary forces and armed religious sects would be integrated into the newly created National Army; however, in reality, these forces remained under the tactical control of the French military authorities. It was not until the establishment of the First Republic under President Ngo Dinh Diem that Viet Nam was able to integrate these different factions into a truly coherent and disciplined army."[222]

[222] Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century*, 25

Chapter 4
Disintegration, Transition and Reintegration, 1954-1956

The historical debate about the organization, training, and combat capability of the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN) has endured. In the early 1960s, journalist Bernard B. Fall argued that unmindful of "the bloody lessons of the [First] Indochina War, the new South Vietnamese Army [ARVN] was trained to be a field force ready to face its North Vietnamese rivals [PAVN/PLAF] in the kind of set-piece battle they [the VLA] had refused to the French for eight long years."[1] Fall's thesis became the conventional wisdom about how the ARVN was organized and trained by the United State Military Assistance Advisory Group Vietnam (MAAGV). In the 1980s, for example, journalist Neil Sheehan uncritically adopted Fall's premise, asserting that MAAGV organized and trained the ARVN for high-intensity conflict rather than as a counter-guerrilla force in low-intensity warfare.[2] In 1989, political scientist D. Michael Shafer contended that, doctrinally, "the ARVN was taught the four classic functions of the US Army: 'find, fix, fight and finish.'" Furthermore, "the ARVN was prepared to refight the Korean War and defeat the "worst case" threat facing South Vietnam: an invasion by the North."[3] Shafer based his thesis on work by US Army Major Andrew F. Krepinevich, which declared that MAAGV organized and trained the ARVN for "conventional, or mid-intensity warfare,"[4] with little consideration "given to preparing Vietnamese forces for counterinsurgency [counter-guerrilla] warfare."[5] Krepinevich's argument was so influential that his book, *The Army and Vietnam*, was recommended by *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field*

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[1] Bernard B. Fall, *Street Without Joy* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1994), 343
[2] Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and American in Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Book, 1988), 49-55, 59, 106-108
[3] D. Michael Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms: The Failure of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 244-245
[4] Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 22
[5] Ibid., 24

Manual.[6] But Krepinevich's thesis also resonated in two important monographs on the ARVN. Robert Brigham has argued that ARVN's organization and training in 1955-1959 "was highly conventional, emphasizing technological resources and maximum use of firepower to win battles... these early years the Korea war was the model for U.S. strategic and tactical military planners, which affected training programs."[7] Andrew Wiest has claimed that "in 1955, the leadership of MAAG, initially Lieutenant General John O'Daniel and then Lieutenant General Samuel Williams, had to build the ARVN effectively from scratch using what little they had.... In their haste to ready for a war that many judged to be close at hand, MAAG based the construction of the ARVN on the recent experience of the Korean War and advocated a conventional force ready to face an invasion from North Vietnam."[8]

However, the conventional wisdom about the ARVN's organization and training by MAAGV for regular rather than counter-guerrilla warfare failed both to ask and to answer key questions. First, given the threat posed by the DRVN, could the ARVN have afforded to prepare solely to counter internal subversion alone without seeking to fend off attacks from without? Second, did those arguments reflect what the RVN political and military leaders had wanted to do or did they mirror instead what MAAGV wanted? Third, the scholars noted above did not question how the VLA was organized, trained, and how it fought from 1946 to 1954, or how its successors, the PAVN/PLAF, drew on lessons to become more operationally effective from the mid-1950s onward. Most significantly, the preceding arguments failed to calculate how actions by the VLA and the PAVN/PLAF influenced the joint efforts of MAAGV and the RVN

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[6] *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 393

[7] Robert K. Brigham, *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army* (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 2006), 27

[8] Andrew Wiest, *Vietnam's Forgotten Army: Heroism and Betrayal in the ARVN* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 22

government and military, plus the French in the mid-1950s and the British and Australians in the early 1960s, to prepare the ARVN.

Why scholars have failed to address these important questions has been partially answered by military historians Mark Moyar and Andrew J. Birtle. Moyar has argued that the study of guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare has become less historical as most scholars studied the subject from a theoretical perspective or were "political scientists and military officers trained in political science."[9] Birtle has contended too that many scholars "erred in judging the Vietnam War from the standpoint of theoretical models of insurgency and counterinsurgency."[10] Problematically, political science methodology simplifies the complexities of guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare as much as it simplifies the relationship between the individual, society, and the state, plus politics between nation-states. Political scientist John J. Mearsheimer has posited that "none of us could understand the world we live in or make intelligent decisions without theories. Indeed, all students and practitioners of international politics rely on theories to comprehend their surroundings. Some are aware of it and some are not, some admit it and some do not; but there is no escaping the fact that we could not make sense of the complex world around us without simplifying theories."[11]

Reflecting on the French-Moroccan War of 1903-1905 where "the first systematic application of a strategy, central to any modern counterinsurgency operation, which has more recently been termed 'the struggle for hearts and minds'" was used, Douglas Porch has stated that that the French conquest of Morocco and Moroccan resistance was "a story of people, of

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[9] Mark Moyar, *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq* (New Have & London: Yale University Press, 2009), 2

[10] Andrew J. Birtle, "PROVN, Westmoreland, and the Historians", *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 72, No. 4 (October 2008), 1247

[11] John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 8-9

chaos, villainy, glory, misery, violence, greed, avarice and maladministration. It is not a story of those who like their history neat."[12] Porch's assessments on the complexity of a small and obscure war that Mark Moyar shared. Contemplating the Vietnam War from 1968 to 1972, Moyar has concluded that each revolutionary war "differs from all others in many crucial respects, and the differences—although they often appear smaller than the similarities—can be crucial. The inability to perceive these differences has produced many incorrect theories and analogies, and consequently many disastrous war time decisions." Since it is theoretically driven, political science methodology also insists that a theory is universally applicable to any global conflict involving guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare. In fact, each case of guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare has its own unique set of characteristics that make one small war very different from another. "Some revolutionary wars, including the Vietnam War," Moyar has argued, "vary so greatly over time and space that they essentially consist of a variety of small wars that differ significantly from one another."[13]

Previous scholars also examined the organization and training of the ARVN based on the primary sources of MAAGV. However, MAAGV documents were not corroborated with other written materials from the RVN government and military or the British Advisory Mission (BRIAM) and the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV), the small civil-military advisory teams who shared the responsibility to organize, train, and advise the ARVN in the early 1960s. This and the following chapters will critically analyze the ARVN's organization, training and combat capability by tapping into primary sources and declassified documents previously unavailable to other scholars. The disintegration, transition, and reintegration of the Vietnamese counter-revolutionary forces into the ARVN and the organization, training, and

[12] Douglas Porch, *The Conquest of Morocco* (New York: Fromm International Publishing Corporation, 1982), xii
[13] Mark Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: The CIA's Secret Campaign to Destroy the Viet Cong* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 334

combat capability of the RVN military must be examined in the contemporary social, political and military events in Indochina. Thus, the early development of the RVN military will be examined against the historic disintegration of the FFEEC from 1953 to 1954, the Geneva Conference and Agreement in 1954, and the power struggles between the Diem faction, VNA, CSDF, CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF from 1954 to 1956.

The years 1953 to 1957 are vital for they witnessed the official creation of the RVN government and military. Further, the period allows us to see how the VLA was transformed into the People's Army of Viet Nam (PAVN). First, the PAVN was responsible for the defence of the DRVN. Second, the PAVN supported partisan warfare spearheaded by the National Front for the Liberation of Southern Vietnam (NFLSVN) and its military organization, the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF) in the RVN. The NFLSVN and the PLAF were referred by the RVN, the US, and their allies as the Viet Cong (Vietnamese Communist or VC). The NFLSVN and PLAF were formed in December 1960, and held their first congress in February-March 1962. The *Declaration of the First Congress of the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation* (Hereafter: *Declaration*), published in June 1962, stated that the NFLSVN and PLAF encouraged "all political parties, mass organizations and patriotic personalities in South Viet Nam, regardless of creed and nationality" to unite in "the present struggle for freedom, independence, and peace" for the reunification of a divided Vietnam. The *Declaration* emphasized that the NFLSVN and the PLAF were formed by "the South Vietnamese peoples" to "defend themselves" against the "oppression," "militarization," and "fascist terror" of the Diem regime which, backed by the US government, "has gone so far as to openly land its troops in Saigon to fight against the

population, in a clear attempt to settle themselves in South Vietnam for good and kindle a new war in Indo-China."[14]

The *Declaration* never acknowledged the NFLSVN's affiliation with the DRVN as the DRVN took great care to conceal its involvement in the RVN's political and military affairs. Indeed, the DRVN opened an embassy for the NFLSVN in Hanoi to show the world that the NFLSVN and PLAF were borne out of legitimate grievances Vietnamese southerners felt toward the RVN government and its US patron. Few scholars accept Hanoi's claims. "The [Vietnamese Communist] Party made the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam," as Gabriel Kolko has argued, as "the vehicle for realizing its southern strategy [the reunification of Vietnam]."[15] Carlyle A. Thayer has argued that the NFLSVN's origins dated back to the April 9-24, 1956, 9th Plenum meeting in Hanoi. When the DRVN recognized that a combination of political struggle and armed resistance to reunify the country was now inevitable. "The 9th Plenum marked a crucial moment of truth. The Party's line on reunification, set in September 1954," Thayer has stated, "had been a failure. The party's organisation in the south was now ordered to conduct a holding operation until new plans could be formulated."[16]

From the mid-1950s to the early 1960s, the NFLSVN's holding operation in the RVN became an offensive operation for three important political and military reasons. First, the success of the RVN government in crushing other nationalist factions alienated many political groups, leaders, and followers who chose to oppose the RVN government in a united front directed by the NFLSVN.[17] Second, the RVN's Anti-Communist Denunciation Campaign from

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[14] *Declaration of the First Congress of the South Viet Nam National Front for Liberation* (Hanoi, Foreign Language Publishing House, June 1962), 3

[15] Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience* (New York: The New Press, 1994), 105

[16] Carlisle A. Thayer, *War By Other Means: National Liberation and Revolution in Viet-Nam, 1954-1969* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin), 46-69

[17] Ibid., 48-53

1957 to 1959 killed and imprisoned thousands of Viet Minh political cadres and military personnel who had been ordered to remain in southern Vietnam after the country was divided to continue the political—not armed—struggle for reunification. Also, the Rural Resettlement and Land Reform of the RVN from 1957 to 1959, which neither improved the social and economic conditions in the countryside nor won the hearts and minds of the South Vietnamese peasants, allowed the RVN government and military to control more of the countryside. Third, US diplomatic commitment coupled with the influx of military and economic aid to the RVN prompted the DRVN and its allies to fear that the RVN government and military, with continual support from the US and its allies, would only grow stronger with time.[18]

The DRVN's aforementioned holding operation could be understood as defensive measures carried out by communist cadres in southern Vietnam to protect themselves and their followers against RVN systematic repression. The NFLSVN's transition from holding to offensive operations had two components. The NLFSVN would carry out the political struggle while simultaneously the PLAF would back the political struggle with armed resistance based on the VLA's revolutionary war experience in the French Indochina War. Together the PLAF and the PAVN represented the guerrilla warfare and the conventional warfare threats to the RVN. Therefore, the RVN not only faced a present threat from the PLAF guerrilla forces but also a real and unrealized threat from the PAVN conventional forces.

Since many RVN statesmen and soldiers fought either with or against the Viet Minh in the French Indochina War, they understood VLA's capabilities. Based on their political and military experiences, the RVN government and military could forecast with accuracy the strengths and weaknesses of their future enemies, the PAVN/PLAF, but also their future ally, the US. When the RVN political and military planners, counselled by their American, British, and

[18] Ibid., 123-129

Australian allies, designed the ARVN, they were strongly influenced by Vietnam's difficult geography and its complex political and military history. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the geographical, political, and military factors influenced the RVN statesmen and generals as they embarked on the mission to organize, train and prepare the ARVN to counter both the PLAF and the PAVN. The ARVN thus prepared for both counter-guerrilla warfare and conventional warfare which could occur separately or simultaneously. Hence, the RVN government and military insisted that the ARVN be organized and trained by the Americans, British, and Australians to carry out two missions. First, with assistance from the governments and militaries of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) countries, the ARVN was to defend the RVN against a potential PAVN attack. Second, the ARVN was to protect the RVN against internal subversion by the PLAF by acting as a shield for the Civil Guards (CG) and Self-Defense Corps (SDC) in the RVN's overall counter-guerrilla and pacification strategy. Unfortunately, the ARVN rarely fulfilled these two missions in practice.

This particular chapter addresses the following questions. How did the French Indochina War conclude? How did the war's end lead to the division of Vietnam? How did the DRVN and the RVN come into being? How did Diem's government use the VNA to politically neutralize and militarily integrate the HHPF, CDPF, and BXPF into the ARVN? This period of struggle shows the weakness and strength of both the ARVN and its enemies, from the sects to the communists. Arguably, the VNA defeated the paramilitary-religious sects less because of its political and military strength than their weaknesses. Subsequently, the ARVN confronted a more dangerous foe: an experienced, organized, and determined communist enemy with a two-strike capability—guerrilla and conventional warfare—operating from safe-havens in South Vietnam, North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

Disintegration, 1953-1954 The creation of the PRC gave the VLA a strategic advantage over the FFEEC. In addition to the distant USSR, the Viet Minh now had an important ally on the other side of the Sino-Vietnamese border. The PLA provided the VLA Main Forces with organizational advice, logistical support, and experienced advisors. Veterans of combat in Korea, many PLA advisors had gained invaluable experience planning and commanding divisional-size operations prior to arriving in Vietnam. The newly-formed VLA Main Force Divisions—304th, 308th, 312th and 320th—were responsible for overrunning the isolated FFEEC outposts on the Sino-Vietnamese border in early 1950. Giap's well planned and daring conventional operations led to the VLA controlling the Upper Red River Delta and precipitated the FFEEC's retreat into the Lower Red River Delta in late 1950. Between 1948 and 1949, the French pacification campaign in the Lower Red River Delta had kept the VLA Regional Forces and Popular Forces at bay. However, they could not check the VLA Main Forces from operating freely in the Upper Red River Delta and southern China. The fall of several FFEEC outposts along Colonial Routes 4 and 3 resulted from French indecisiveness about committing to or abandoning FFEEC positions in the Upper Red River Delta altogether. However, given the PRC's willingness to host the VLA on its territory, the war's unpopularity in France, and Paris's diplomatic isolation, French military options were quite limited. If they reinforced FFEEC outposts in the Upper Red River Delta, they risked exposing the Lower Red River Delta to re-infiltration by VLA Regional Forces and Popular Forces. If they abandoned the Upper Red River Delta, the Lower Red River Delta would be threatened by the VLA Main Forces from without and the Regional Forces and Popular Forces from within. The latter scenario was realized in late 1950 after the FFEEC withdrew safely into the Lower Red River Delta from the VLA-controlled Upper Red River Delta.

Carpentier and Alessandri were replaced in 1950 by General Jean-Marie Gabriel de Lattre de Tassigny. General de Lattre arrived in Indochina when the FFEEC desperately needed a sound strategy, men, money, equipment, plus morale boosting. To obtain more men, money, and equipment, de Lattre turned toward the US, selling France's conflict as a Cold War crusade against Vietnamese communists controlled by the USSR and the PRC. To raise FFEEC morale, de Lattre toured Vietnam from south to north, inspecting units, demoting inept commanders, promoting competent officers, and delivering numerous inspiring speeches.[19] As for a new strategy, de Lattre consolidated the FFEEC positions in the Lower Red River Delta before launching any offensive operations.

Before de Lattre could consolidate the FFEEC positions in the Lower Red River Delta, however, Giap followed up his victories in the Upper Red River Delta by launching guerrilla and conventional attacks on FFEEC positions. The VLA Regional Forces and Popular Forces operated behind the FFEEC defensive perimeter while the VLA Main Forces hit the FFEEC defensive perimeter hard, seeking to end the war quickly and decisively.[20] Giap's relentless pursuit of the nearly routed FFEEC units from the Upper to the Lower Red River Delta was a textbook military campaign. However, Giap overestimated the strength of his VLA Main Force while underestimating FFEEC endurance and firepower. In the Upper Red River Delta, Giap's Main Forces could hit the FFEEC outposts wherever he chose because widely dispersed FFEEC units could not reinforce each other quickly. In the Lower Red River Delta, Giap's Main Forces met a FFEEC that benefited from a shrinking defensive perimeter while Giap's offensive front expanded. FFEEC formations along the Lower Red River Delta defensive perimeter could draw

[19] Phillip B. Davidson, *Vietnam At War: The History, 1946-1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 101-102

[20] John Colvin, *Giap, Volcano Under Snow: Vietnam's Celebrated General Giap, Victor at Dien Bien Phu and Mastermind of the Tet Offensive* (New York: Soho Press, Inc., 1996), 81-87; Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 105-108

upon artillery fire, aerial support, plus naval bombardments and could move reinforcements quickly between garrisons. Meanwhile, Giap's Regional Forces and Popular Forces inside the Lower Red River Delta failed to coordinate their diversionary operations with his Main Forces attacking from without, turning their potentially dangerous rear and flank attacks into ineffective assaults. Fearing that FFEEC units could concentrate their manpower and firepower to defend one section of their defensive perimeter under attack, Giap ordered his Main Forces to spread out to attack the FFEEC defensive line simultaneously. Giap's change of tactics prevented FFEEC troops from reinforcing besieged units while forcing their firepower to disperse to support all positions under attack.[21] Had Giap possessed adequate artillery and aerial fire support as well as good communication equipment, the VLA Main Force might have overrun FFEEC units in the Lower Red River Delta. But as this was not the case, Giap's Main Forces, with inadequate firepower and even less coordination, could not break the FFEEC defensive perimeter. The result was tactical stalemate in 1951-1952.[22]

From this defensive position, which roughly followed the outline of the Lower Red River Delta, de Lattre built a defensive perimeter, the de Lattre Line, Indochina's version of France's Maginot Line, in 1951.[23] Giap, determined to win the war in 1951, and his Main Forces had the momentum but neither the numbers nor the firepower. Thus, Giap's determination to break the de Lattre line in 1951 and 1952 when the FFEEC positions were stronger than in 1950 proved disastrous. However, if Giap could not break the de Lattre Line, neither could de Lattre nor his successor, General Raoul Salan, pursue Giap's Main Force beyond the de Lattre Line. By 1953, the FFEEC lacked the offensive capability to attack and hold VLA's positions for fear the de

[21] Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 121-127
[22] Cecil B. Currey, *Victory At Any Cost: The Genius of Viet Nam's General Vo Nguyen Giap* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1997), 171-172
[23] Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 113-114

Lattre Line would be subverted by infiltration. Having learned painful lessons in 1952, Giap left the de Lattre Line alone and attacked FFEEC positions in central and southern Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Giap's new strategy forced FFEEC commanders either to respond or risk having their allies, particularly Laos and Cambodia, becoming encircling VLA safe-havens. Thus, Giap forced the FFEEC to operate farther from its bases and closer to VLA strongholds. Above all, always tying military operations to political objectives, Giap's 1952-1953 campaign sought to break France's morale by demonstrating to its people and allies that the VLA could expand the war at will and defeat France's allies in Laos and Cambodia while France was powerless to vanquish the Viet Minh.[24]

General Henri Navarre, who had succeeded Salan, came up with his own operational concept for the FFEEC for 1953-1954: building a self-sufficient forward base-of-operation that could check the VLA movements beyond the Lower Red River Delta but which could be reinforced by air and land if besieged by the enemy. By 1953, when French statesmen began to realize that the war was no longer winnable, they ordered Navarre to secure military advantages to strengthen France's diplomatic position at the Geneva Peace Talk. "The mission defined to Navarre when he was appointed to the Indochina command on 7 May 1953 by Prime Minister Rene Mayer was not to destroy the Viet Minh or to win the war," Martin Windrow has asserted. Instead, he was "to create the conditions for an 'honourable way out' – to achieve a position of military advantage that would allow France to negotiate a favourable peace."[25] However, Navarre's operational concept directly incited one of the most important sieges of the twentieth century.[26]

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[24] Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 137-159; Edgar O'Ballance, *The Indo-China War, 1945-1954: A Study in Guerilla Warfare* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), 169-193
[25] Martin Windrow, *The Last Valley: Dien Bien Phu and the French defeat in Vietnam* (London: Cassell, 2005), 205
[26]Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 161-191

Embedded with FFEEC/VNA paratroop units throughout the siege of Dien Bien Phu, which lasted from November 1953 to May 1954, the US war correspondent Howard R. Simpson wrote: "The parachutists preparing to take part in the largest airborne operation of the Indochina War, were the cream of the French Expeditionary Corps."[27] The descent of FFEEC/VNA paratroopers marked the first of the two hundred and nine days occupation of Dien Bien Phu with fifty-six of those days spent fighting for their lives as the VLA besieged the fortress.[28] Aside from the obvious tactical mistake of not occupying higher ground in a battle, the FFEEC/VNA defeat at Dien Bien Phu resulted from the FFEEC's inability to provide adequate logistical support to the besieged garrison.

Operation "Castor", the reoccupation of Dien Bien Phu, had its origin at the battle of Na-san in October to December of 1952. At Na-san, Salan turned a vulnerable outpost in northeast Vietnam into an impregnable fortress backed by artillery support and reinforced by airlifted troops and military supplies. Calling Na-san a "*Base- Aéro-Terrestre*" ("Air-Land Base"), Salan wanted his air-land base to protect the ethnic T'ai minority population who were assisting the FFEEC against the VLA. Militarily, Salan wanted to provoke Giap into ordering his VLA Main Force units to launch a frontal assault to overrun the air-land base. The bait worked as Giap ordered his Main Force units to take Na-san. Abandoning jungle cover to attack Na-san in daylight hours, VLA conventional troops were mauled by FFEEC firepower.[29]

Giap drew a stark conclusion from the disastrous Na-san experience. In the face of enemy's superior firepower, Main Force units, did not stand a chance. Therefore, to defeat the FFEEC air-land base, his troops required equal or superior firepower. Giap understood the need

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[27] Howard R. Simpson, *Dien Bien Phu: The Epic Battle American Forgot* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1994), 1
[28] Bernard B. Fall, *Hell In A Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1966), vii
[29] Howard R. Simpson, *Dien Bien Phu: The Epic Battle America Forgot* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's Inc., 1996), 6-7; Fall, *Hell In A Very Small Place*, 24; Windrow, *The Last Valley*, 55-64

to position Main Force units in "great natural advantages" like attacking an air-land base from higher grounds instead of across open fields in order compensated for the inferiority in firepower.[30] Reminiscing about his decision to attack at Dien Bien Phu, Giap reasoned:

> Dien Bien Phu was a very strongly fortified entrenched camp. But on the other hand, it was set up in a mountainous region, on ground which was advantageous to us, and decidedly disadvantageous to the enemy. Dien Bien Phu was, moreover, a completely isolated position, far away from all the enemy's bases. The only means of supplying Dien Bien Phu [was] by air. These circumstances could easily deprive the enemy of all initiative and force him on to the defensive if attacked.[31]

As Salan's successor did not ponder deeply why the FFEEC had held Na-san against the VLA offensive, he failed to grasp that the Na-san experience might not be replicable elsewhere in Indochina.

Salan's Na-san air-land base strategy and tactics strongly influenced Navarre's decision to reoccupy Dien Bien Phu. Dien Bien Phu would become what General René Cogny, FFEEC commander in northern Vietnam, called "a mooring point" for FFEEC special forces and local ethnic minority groups loyal to the French to harass VLA Main Forces in northern Vietnam and northern Laos.[32] However, if VLA Main Forces attacked Dien Bien Phu, the FFEEC garrison would smash them with its superior firepower.[33] Recognizing that Na-san was not surrounded by hills and mountains while Dien Bien Phu was, Navarre underestimated Giap and Main Force units.[34] At the same time, he had overwhelming confidence in the superior fighting skill of the paratroopers and foreign legionnaires, plus the firepower at their disposal. Furthermore, Navarre's senior staff officers assured him that the VLA could not quietly amass a tremendous amount of troops and firepower against fortress Dien Bien Phu. In fact, FMI convinced Navarre

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[30] Robert J. O'Neil, *General Giap: Politician and Strategist* (Sydney: Cassell, 1969), 115
[31] Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War, People's Army: The Viet Cộng Insurrectional Manual for Underdeveloped Countries* (New York: Praeger, 1962), 168
[32] Douglas Porch, "Dien Bien Phu Reconsidered", in David T. Zabecki, ed., *Vietnam: A Reader* (New York: ibooks, 2002), 19-20
[33] Fall, *Hell In A Very Small Place*, 24-31
[34] Ibid., 50

that the reoccupying Dien Bien Phu "carried little or no risk." Even if Giap dispatched its Main Force units there, he could not "maintain a two-division force" over an extended period of time or "bring large number of artillery pieces" to the surrounding hills and mountains due to the poor communication routes leading toward Dien Bien Phu.[35] "His [Navarre's] chief of staff, his operational deputy and the technicians and specialists on his team all repeatedly assured him," as Jules Roy has argued, "that at such a distance from its bases the Vietminh was incapable of maintaining itself for long... his Intelligence officers would inform him that in order to live Giap's divisions needed rice transported over great distances by coolies."[36] Visiting Colonel Christian de Castries, the garrison commander at Dien Bien Phu, Navarre was persuaded by Colonel Charles Piroth, de Castries's artillery commander, that "no Vietminh cannon would be able to fire more than three rounds without being located" and then knocked out either by artillery fired from inside the garrison or by French aircraft.[37]

"Navarre," observed historian John Keegan, "though a soldier with a respectable fighting record, had more recently become identified with the activities of French military intelligence; and it was as an intelligence officer of remarkable subtlety and perception that he was best known."[38] It is peculiar that a career military intelligence officer failed to even consider the slightly possibility that Giap and his General Staff could move men, food, heavy equipment, and other essential military supplies to sustain VLA Main Force units long enough to surround, isolated and overwhelm FFEEC and VNA paratroopers at Dien Bien Phu. What then was the real reason behind one of the greatest intelligence miscalculations in the history of warfare?

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[35] Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 189; Douglas Porch, *The French Secret Services: A History of French Intelligence from the Dreyfus Affair to the Gulf War* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 339-357
[36] Jules Roy, *The Battle of Dien Bien Phu* (New York: Caroll & Graf Publishers, 2002), 30
[37] Simpson, *Dien Bien Phu*, 40
[38] Quoted in John R. Nordell, Jr., *The Undetected Enemy: French and American Miscalculations at Dien Bien Phu, 1953* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1995), 114

Navarre appeared to comprehend FFEEC and VLA tactical strengths and weaknesses at Dien Bien Phu.[39] At a meeting in Paris on July 23rd, 1953, Navarre stated that he had "grave doubt about his ability to defend Laos"[40] as he lacked troops to defend key areas of Indochina, a problem experienced by all of Navarre's predecessors. At a November 17th, 1953, senior staff meeting in Hanoi, when Navarre asked for opinions about stationing elite troops at Dien Bien Phu, he received no shortage of criticism from his subordinates about Castor's tactical and technical weaknesses.[41] There is no doubt that Navarre understood the strategic and tactical dangers involved in holding Dien Bien Phu. However, once Giap committed his Main Force units at Dien Bien Phu, Navarre was convinced the base could be turned into another Na-san air-land fortress. Bernard B. Fall has argued convincingly that "what Navarre and his staff in Saigon planned was a repetition of the siege and attack on Na-san the year before, with each side operating on a somewhat larger scale but with the French eventually carrying the day because of their superiority in ground and air firepower."[42] "In fact," Edgar O'balance declared that "he [Navarre] and officers of the garrison at Dien Bien Phu rather hoped that the Viet Minh would make an assault, as they were confident, not only that it would be repulsed, but that crippling losses could be inflicted on the regular formation."[43]

Unlike Na-san, the FFEEC and VNA defensive outline, strong-points, artillery emplacements, and airstrips in the valley never escaped the watchful eyes of VLA Main Force units occupying the high ground surrounding Dien Bien Phu.[44] Dien Bien Phu's topography was the seed for the garrison's strategic and tactical problems. Once Dien Bien Phu was besieged, the

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[39] Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 188-189
[40] Windrow, *The Last Valley*, 211
[41] Ibid., 228
[42] Fall, *Hell In A Very Small Place*, 35
[43] O'Ballance, *The Indo-China War 1945-1954*, 216
[44] O'Neil, *General Giap*, 143

FFEEC and VNA paratroopers faced a severe logistical problem as the siege became a battle of attrition with the outcome to be decided by the side that had the manpower, firepower, and willpower to win.

The siege began on March 12th, 1954 and lasted until May 7th/8th, 1954. Giap had forty-four howitzers, sixty-two mortars, eighty 37 mm antiaircraft guns, one hundred antiaircraft machineguns, and a dozen Russian-made Katyusha six-tube rocket launchers. VLA Main Force infantrymen outnumbered FFEEC and VNA paratroopers by a factor of at least five to one. More importantly, Giap's men were supported by superior and effective firepower, hidden in camouflaged positions on the higher ground. Meanwhile, Navarre's paratroopers holding the valley floor was completely exposed to incoming fire.[45] The FFEEC and VNA's locus of resistance surrounded the airstrips, the logistical lifelines of the besieged garrison. The airstrips were defended by strong-points such as Isabella, the centre of tactical command, Gabrielle to the north of Isabelle, Anne-Marie to the west and Beatrice to the east of Gabrielle. Paralleled to Isabella's left and right flank were Huguette and Claudine to the west, and Dominqiue and Eliane to the east. De Castries had located these strong-points in "a classical pattern of interlocking and mutually supporting positions" in order to "break up mass [enemy] attacks" by forcing Giap's Main Force units to divide themselves to take these positions instead of concentrating all their forces against one position.[46]

The siege can be divided into three phases. Phase one ranged from March 13th to 28th, phase two from March 30th to April 30th, and phase three from May 1st to 7th. The first phase of the siege of Dien Bien Phu commenced at 1700 hours of March 13th, 1954, when VLA artillery wrecked many parked aircraft, enflamed fuel dumps, and blew up ammunition stored at Beatrice.

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[45] Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 223-225
[46] Ibid., 228

Following well-prepared and extended artillery barrages, VLA infantry units overran Beatrice and seized the largest airstrip, cutting off the garrison's logistical lifeline. Gabrielle soon fell and Anne-Marie was abandoned without a fight. The loss of the main airfield created severe logistical problems for "Hereafter supplies and reinforcements would have to be delivered by parachute – the most ineffective delivery method in modern war. The airfield's loss completed Giap's victory in the 'battle of logistics,'" concluded General Phillip B. Davidson of US Army Intelligence.[47] Military historian Charles Mey has argued further that even "before the real trial of strength begins the French have lost the logistic battle. When the airstrip is destroyed and the parachute is the only means of supply, the consequences will be disastrous for the French."[48] Moreover, FFEEC and VNA artillery could not counter VLA guns firing from higher ground. FFEEC fighter, bomber, and supply aircraft supporting the garrison were shot out of the sky by VLA guns. To reinforce friendly ground units and evade VLA's antiaircraft guns, FFEEC's aircraft were ordered to spend less time over the intended drop-zones. Forced to fly at higher altitudes and obliged to drop their supply loads into an ever shrinking perimeter, fifty percent or more of the parachuted supplies fell into VLA hands.[49]

During the second phase, FFEEC and VNA paratroopers engaged VLA infantrymen in fearsome skirmishes. Outgunned and outnumbered, FFEEC and VNA troops were forced to withdraw from one strong-point to the next. Thinking that Dien Bien Phu would be a temporary base for mobile special operational forces, de Castries had not ordered his commanders to properly prepare the defensive perimeters around their strong-points. Instead, defensive perimeter construction was left to each individual commander's discretion, but most had focused

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[47] Ibid., 235-237
[48] Charles Mey, "Dien Bien Phu, 1953-1954", in Jon E. Lewis, ed., *The Mammoth Book of Battles: The Art and Science of Modern Warfare* (London: Robinson, 1995), 437
[49] Douglas Porch, *The French Foreign Legion: A Complete History of the Legendary Fighting Force* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), 557

on training their troops for mobile offensive operations. Additional problems arose when monsoon rains flooded many FFEEC and VNA positions. "Their [FFEEC and VNA] bunkers were not strong enough to stand up to Viet Minh artillery fire, or for that matter to the monsoons, nor had any effort been made to camouflage them," Douglas Porch pointed out, "all of which was to leave the French garrison very vulnerable."[50] The fall of Eliane was followed by Dominique, Claudine, and Huguette. As each strong-point came under VLA control, reinforcement and supplies drop zone shrank and then disappeared altogether. Attempts to retake former strong-points were futile due to the shortage of combat-effective troops, firepower, and supplies. Moreover, once VLA soldiers took a strong-point, they immediately prepared their newly captured positions against possible FFEEC and VNA counterattacks. As frontal assaults were costly, Giap ordered Main Force units to dig trenches leading toward FFEEC and VNA positions, thus cutting the distance VLA infantry would have to travel in the open before striking their intended targets. Furthermore, as VLA units entrenched themselves closer to French positions, any attempts to provide close fire support to embattled FFEEC and VNA risked killing both enemy and friendly troops since both were too closely engaged in the killing-zones. In some strong-points, VLA and FFEEC/VNA troops were close enough to engage each in hand-to-hand combat.[51]

The third and final phase of the siege came between May 1st and 7th. By this stage, Giap had thoroughly won the logistical battle. VLA Main Force units were now entrenched, well fed, refit and rearmed, and in high spirits, while the demoralized FFEEC and VNA paratroop units had to fight on with greatly depleted supplies. US Army logistics experts estimated that FFEEC and VNA units required 200 tons of supplies per day to fight well. But from March 13th to May

[50] Ibid., 557
[51] Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 256-262

7th, besieged FFEEC and VNA paratroopers received just 120 tons per day while 20 tons or more fell into VLA hands.[52] In the darkest hours of Dien Bien Phu, three rescue operations—Vulture, Condor, Albatross—were seriously considered by the most senior staff members of the French, British, and American military forces.[53] These top secret missions, ranging from sending a heavy fighting column to dropping tactical nuclear weapons in the surrounding hills to relieve the besieged garrison, although carefully planned by senior French and American military personnel, never received the final approval as their political leaders hoped to salvage the desperate military situation through diplomacy.[54] At 1730 hours on May 7th, VLA Main Force units launched their final assault and overwhelmed the garrison, ending the siege.

Dien Bien Phu's loss had significant strategic and political implications. Before the siege, FFEEC military positions in southern Vietnam were secured. But the military situation in Indochina did not really matter to France's allies who needed its assistance in containing the USSR threat in Europe or a French public tired of war. The demoralized political atmosphere throughout France after Dien Bien Phu fell was vividly captured by Stanley Karnow, an American journalist based in Paris. "At home the French had grown increasingly disgusted with what they called '*la sale guerre,*'" wrote Karnow. "The mounting costs of the conflict had depleted their treasury, poisoned their political system and punctured their dreams of glory. They had long realized that they were trapped in a futile venture, yet the defeat, when it came, dealt a devastating blow to their pride."[55] Deputy Secretary James Cable of the British Foreign Service Office Southeast Asia Branch judged that "even if the French held out there [Dien Bien Phu],

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[52] Porch, *The French Foreign Legion*, 559
[53] John Prados, *Operation Vulture* (New York: i Books, 2002), 2-15
[54] Document #5 "Cable to Dulles on Appeal for Air Support at Dien Bien Phu": *Cablegram from Douglas Dillon, United States Ambassador to France, to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles on April 5,* and Document #6 "Dulles Cable Barring Intervention": *Cablegram from Secretary Dulles to Ambassador Dillon in Paris, April 5, 1954*, Neil Sheehan et al, ed. *The Pentagon Papers* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), 38-40
[55] Stanley Karnow, *Paris In The Fifties* (New York: Random House, 1997), 210

they lacked the resources to establish and maintain control throughout Indochina."[56] Historians have concurred, noting that the prolonged struggle had cost lives, money, and enflamed public opinion.[57] The lack of popular support among French union leaders and workers of the French Socialist and Communist Parties led to sabotage in many war factories, affecting the quality of armaments sent to the FFEEC in Indochina.[58] "The defeat struck harshly in military circles," observed French historian Philippe Devillers and journalist Jean Lacouture, everyone "feared that Dien Bien Phu was only the prelude to other, even more bloody, reverses and that it might even lead to the collapse of the entire French position in northern Indochina."[59] Even with American aid, the war's continuation, though militarily possible, was politically unrealistic given war weariness at home and opposition from France's key allies.[60]

But while the French and Vietnamese of all stripes learned what a protracted war could do to both an expeditionary force's morale and a metropolitan state, some assert that Americans refused to learn from the French or to listen to Vietnamese nationalists.[61] "The people who knew the most about Ho Chi Minh's military forces were those who had fought with them or against them or, in some cases… both," wrote ARVN Lieutenant Colonel Tran Ngoc Chau, who also served in the VLA prior to 1950. But "the Americans seemed not to be very interested in what we Vietnamese knew about the communists."[62] Americans also forgot that non-communist Vietnamese had struggled against communist Vietnamese since 1945. Communist and non-

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[56] James Cable, *The Geneva Conference of 1954 on Indochina* (London: MacMillan Press, 1986), 56. Most of Annam (Central Vietnam) and all of Cochinchina (South Vietnam) was defended by non-communist Vietnamese nationalist forces—the VNA (Vietnamese National Army), the Hoa Hao, Cao Dai and Binh Xuyen).
[57] Gordon Wright, *France In Modern Time*, 5th ed. (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 407
[58] Peter Harclerode, *Fighting Dirty: The Inside Story of Covert Operations from Ho Chi Minh to Osama Bin Laden* (New York: Cassell & Co., 2001), 108; Porch, *The French Foreign Legion*, 562
[59] Philippe Devillers and Jean Lacouture, *End of A War: Indochina, 1954* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), 171
[60] Walter Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical & Critical Study* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1998), 267
[61] David Halberstam, *The Best and The Brightest* (New York: Ballantine Books, 19992), 84-85; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 42
[62] Lieutenant Colonel Tran Ngoc Chau,"My War Story from Ho Chi Minh to Ngo Dinh Diem", in Harvey Neese and John O'Donnell, ed., *Prelude to Tragedy: Vietnam, 1960-1965* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 187-188

communist Vietnamese knew the Americans, like the French, would eventually leave Vietnam but American planners were convinced they would succeed thanks to their military might and righteous cause.[63] But America's ideas for nation-building would immediately clash with Vietnamese nation-building visions after the Geneva settlement that divided Vietnam and led to the creation of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) in the southern half of the country.

Transition, 1954-1955 France's defeat at Dien Bien Phu sealed its fate in Indochina. The future of post-colonial Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, however, was still to be decided by the former European powers and the emergent superpowers rather than by the peoples of Indochina.[64] At the Geneva Conference, which began on April 26th and ended on July 21st, 1954, France, Britain, America, the USSR, and the PRC placed their own interests ahead of any definitive solution to Indochina's problems. While these powers succeeded in arranging a military truce, they failed to find a political solution to Vietnam's complex political problems. "In the end," Karnow has commented, "the Geneva Conference produced no durable solution to the Indochina conflict, only a military truce that awaited a political settlement, which never really happened."[65] Vietnam was divided temporarily at the seventeenth parallel until reunification could take place via a nation-wide election, scheduled for 1956.[66] In the meantime, the FFEEC and the PAVN exchanged prisoners and regrouped their combatants on their respective sides of the demilitarized zone,[67] a demarcation line that was intended to be

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[63] Halberstam, *The Best and The Brightest*, 94, 124; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 42
[64] Robert F. Randle, *Geneva 1954: The Settlement of the Indochinese War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 107
[65] Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 215
[66] George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 49; James S. Olson and Randy Roberts, *Where The Domino Fell: America and Vietnam, 1945-1995*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 3
[67] Frances Fitzgerald, *Fire In The Lake: The Vietnamese and The Americans in Vietnam* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2002), 66

provisional, political or territorial boundary.[68] Political amnesty was encouraged and reprisals against citizens for their wartime activities were prohibited. Freedom of movement throughout the country was to be respected by authorities in the North and South and all Vietnamese could pick the zone—hence which regime—they chose to live in.[69] Overseeing these clauses was an International Supervisory Commission of Poland, India, and Canada, chaired by an Indian official.[70]

The Viet Minh government and military, officially and respectively the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the People's Army of Vietnam, gained control of Vietnam north of the seventeenth parallel. Despite a loss in military momentum thanks to partition, having the DRVN government and territory diplomatically recognized and gaining the PAVN more time to recuperate was a long-term strategic gain for the Vietnamese communists.[71] As Giap declared on January 1960, "the North has become a large rear echelon of our army. The North is the revolutionary base for the whole country."[72] To assist the NFLSVN and the PLAF, the DRVN could order the PAVN to supply war materials and infiltrate troops into southern Vietnam through the de-militarized zone or via Laos or Cambodia. Therefore, the Geneva Agreement was not a complete political defeat for the DRVN even if its leaders desired to govern all of Vietnam.

South Vietnam would become the place where the US and its allies would contain the spread of communism in Asia. By 1954, President Dwight David Eisenhower had replaced Truman but the change did not alter the US strategy of containment. If China's fall to the CCP

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[68] Directly quoted from Document 1, Section 6, the Geneva Conference, July 21, 1954, Randle's *Geneva 1954*, 570
[69] Ellen J. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), 335-336; Fitzgerald, *Fire In The Lake*, 66
[70] Indirectly quoted from Document 1, Section 7, the Geneva Conference, July 21, 1954, Randle's *Geneva 1954*, 570
[71] Kolko, *Anatomy of a War*, 62-65; William J. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life* (New York: Hyperion, 2000), 460; Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: Harper-Perennial, 1991), 37-42; Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 218
[72] Quoted in Guenter Lewy, *America In Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 17; Pike, *Viet Cong*, 78

had strengthened the Truman administration's resolve to support France in Indochina in return for France's support of US containment strategy in Europe, the conclusion of the Korean War in 1953 convinced the Eisenhower administration that a real war, possibly involving nuclear weapons, could happen if Washington failed to signal Moscow its willingness to resort to arms if Soviet foreign policy threatened US national interests.[73] Further loss of territories to communist control or influence in Asia particularly or elsewhere generally was interpreted by the Eisenhower administration to engender three grave implications to Western political and military positions. First, the loss of resource-rich countries to communism would enhance Soviet and PRC war-making capability.[74] Secondly, the demise of a pro-American client state would place other American allies in a disadvantageous strategic position. Finally, if the USSR and PRC expanded their spheres of influence without resistance, inevitably, small nations would appease the USSR and the PRC as they could not trust the US and the West to defend them against communist aggression.[75]

At press conferences and in meetings with foreign dignitaries, President Eisenhower reiterated "the domino theory," contending that the failure of the West to prevent one country from falling under communist control would inevitably lead to more countries being lost. In Eisenhower's words:

> You have the specific value of a locality in its production of materials that the world needs.... You have the possibility that many human beings pass under a dictatorship that is inimical to the free world.... You have the broader considerations that might follow what you would call the "falling domino" principle. You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is certainly that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences.... Now you begin to talk about areas that not only multiply the disadvantages that you would suffer through loss of

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[73] John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 127-163

[74] Robert J. McMahon, *The Limits of Empire: The United States and Southeast Asia Since World War II* (New York; Columbia University Press, 1999), 120; Gabriel Kolko, *Confronting The Third World: United States Foreign Policy 1945-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 60

[75] Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 164-197

> materials, sources of materials, but now you are talking really about millions and millions and millions of people.[76]

North Vietnam had already fallen into the USSR and PRC sphere-of-influence. However, South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were still contested territories. But should South Vietnam fall so would Laos, Cambodia, Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Japan, and Taiwan.[77]

Adding to the domino theory was the fundamental belief shared by the presidential administrations about the importance of upholding US credibility. Enemy and friendly states were watching US military and diplomatic relationships with its allies, especially those who were threatened by home-grown communists. US credibility, whether the US would prove to be a reliable ally to the world's middle and small powers, depended on its ability to build a viable non-communist state in southern Vietnam.[78] Therefore, to let southern Vietnam fell to the DRVN plus the USSR and PRC without a fight was considered by US officials to be worse than losing it through political intervention and limited military action. The former option would be perceived by US friends and foes as complete capitulation while the latter option, at least, demonstrated to allies and enemies that the US would employ force to stop communism's global spread.[79]

Nation-building, a monumental undertaking under peaceful circumstances, let alone in times of revolution and war, is a historical process highlighted by episodes of human triumph, punctuated by incidences of human brutality, and often unfolds quite differently than envisioned by nation-builders. The leaders, governments, and militaries, especially those from the economically undeveloped, socially unstable, and politically fragile countries of the Third

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[76] Quoted in Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President*, Volume II (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), 180

[77] Herring, *America's Longest War*, 20-21, 28, 42; Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 144

[78] John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 151

[79] McMahon, *The Limits of Empire*, pp. 44-45; Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 27-28

World, often find the task of nation-building a daunting one under any circumstances, let along doing so while fighting against an organized, determined, and experienced enemy. The government and military that emerged to rule the southern part of the divided Vietnam inherited all of the aforementioned social, political and military factors typically confronted by Third World countries. In South Vietnam, various US presidential administrations and their non-communist Vietnamese allies attempted to build a strong, viable, and self-reliant nation-state.

Like all Southeast Asian countries which have been exposed to the civilizing influences of China and India, Vietnam has had all the characters of a mosaic nation:[80] regional differences; different life styles in cities, towns, and villages; layers of cultures derived from a long history of resistance and conquest; diverse ethnic groups; a plurality of religions subdivided by sub-sectarian beliefs; and a vibrant maritime commerce that exposed the country to foreign ideas about society, economic, military, and politics.[81] Peace might have given the fragile mosaic nation a chance to contribute to the progressive development of Vietnam's economic, culture, and politics. However, Vietnam had undergone economic depression, revolution, and war while transforming from a colonized to a de-colonized country. Vietnam was never in a state of perpetual economic depression or revolution or war. However, the country experienced a state of perpetual instability caused by turmoil within and without Vietnam in the first half of the twentieth century.

Years of revolutionary upheaval and guerrilla warfare had left hundreds of thousands of families divided, uprooted from their ancestral lands and destitute as they migrated from war-

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[80] D.G.E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, 4th ed. (London: MacMillan Press, 1981), 3-48; Milton Osborne, *Southeast Asia: An Illustrated Introductory History* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), 16-114; Craig A. Lockard, *Southeast Asia in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press), 20-134

[81] Le Dinh Chi, *Nguoi Thuong Mien Nam Viet Nam* (*The Highlanders of Southern Vietnam*) (Garden, CA: Van Moi, 2006), 25-197; Pierre Brocheux, *The Mekong Delta: Ecology, Economy, and Revolution, 1860-1960* (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1995), 91-185; Mark Philip Bradley, *Vietnam At War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 13-14

torn rural areas to safer urban zones.[82] The heaviest fighting in the French Indochina War took place in central and northern Vietnam. Nevertheless, South Vietnam's economic infrastructure, social harmony, and political balance were also damaged. In towns and cities, family houses and governmental buildings were either damaged or destroyed. Many roads, railways, and bridges were mined, unusable, or badly needed repair.[83] Only the everyday socio-economic life of coastal fishing villages or of the Mekong River Delta seemed to return to normalcy as locals continued to fish and sell products aboard their sampans. Water, electricity, and communication lines were available in major cities and towns but usually not in more remote villages and hamlets. Production from coffee, tea, pepper, rubber, and other plantations decreased while rice paddies remained under-cultivated or had been abandoned. Disrupted by World War II with little time to recover before the French Indochina War had begun, South Vietnam's import and export industries had ground to a halt by the mid-1950s. All these factors had caused the price of goods to rise and devalued currency, leaving South Vietnam's postcolonial economy in shambles even as the black market and racketeering thrived.[84]

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[82] Major General Nguyen Duy Hinh and Brigadier General Tran Dinh Tho, *The South Vietnamese Society, Indochina Monographs* (College Park, M.D.: NARA II Library, 1984), 28; Bui Diem, *In The Jaws of History*, 61; Le Ly Hayslip with Jay Wurts, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places: A Vietnamese Woman's Journey from War to Peace* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 1-101; Minh Than Nguyen, *Leaving Vietnam* (Edmonton: NeWest Publishers Limited, 1996), 6; Edward B. Atkeson, *A Tale of Three Wars* (Carlisle: Army War College Foundation Press, 1997), 1-394; Nguyen Dinh Hoa, *From The City Inside The Red River: A Cultural Memoir of Mid-Century Vietnam* (London: McFarland & Company, 1999), 1-200; Duong Van Mai Elliott, *The Sacred Willow: Four Generations in the Life of a Vietnamese Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 83-242; Yung Krall, *A Thousand Tears Falling: The True Story of a Vietnamese Family Torn Apart by War, Communism, and the CIA* (Atlanta: Longstreet Press, 1995), 36-37; Truong Nhu Tang with David Chanoff and Doan Van Toai, *A Viet Cong Memoir: An Inside Account of the Vietnam War and its Aftermath* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 1-41; Bui Tin, *Following Ho Chi Minh: Memoirs of a North Vietnamese Colonel* (Honolulu: University of Hawii Press: 1999), 1-22; Doan Van Toai and David Chanoff, *The Vietnamese Gulag* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), 25-40

[83] Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 33-34; Seth Jacobs, *Cold War Mandarin: Ngo Dinh Diem and the Origins of America's War in Vietnam, 1950-1963* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 42

[84] Nguyen Anh Tuan, *South Vietnam Trail and Experience: A Challenge for Development*, Monographs in International Studies/Southeast Asia Series Number 80 (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1987), 25

The DRVN government and its military established and spread their authority throughout North Vietnam despite its considerable social, political, and economic problems. This was not the case in South Vietnam. No willful political leader immediately emerge who was capable of uniting southerners in a common cause against the DRVN's communist design for the entire country. Instead, factional chiefs and their private militias vied for military hegemony and political leadership. The lack of leadership coupled with the lack of a functioning government prevented South Vietnam from beginning the recovery and rebuilding processes. Between 1954 and 1956, underpaid French-trained Vietnamese bureaucrats in Saigon lacked education, training, personal initiative, and clear direction from higher authority.[85] The VNA soon to be responsible for restoring law-and-order throughout South Vietnam in the name of the new RVN government and state was, in 1954, in the words of US Army Brigadier General James Lawton Collins, a special US envoy to southern Vietnam, "a collection of former French colonial troops with little command experience and no support forces worthy of mention."[86]

The FFEEC and hardcore French colonialists who went south after Dien Bien Phu were determined not to let Cochinchina fall to either the communist or the non-communist Vietnamese. The HHPF and CDPF carved out their own fiefdoms in the Mekong Delta River while the BXPF controlled the police and the black market in Saigon-Cholon. The VNA was ready neither for internal or external security yet its generals and colonels conspired with French and American officials to promote themselves as potential new commanders and future rulers of the southern Vietnamese armed forces and nation-state. The arrival of northern refugees, most of whom were Catholics and had served in the FFEEC, the VNA, or the CSDF in the Bui Chu and

[85] Hinh and Tho, *The South Vietnamese Society*, 28-29
[86] Brigadier General James Lawton Collins, Jr., *The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Army, 1975), v

Phat Diem Catholic conclaves, into a predominantly Buddhist southern Vietnam complicated matters as Buddhists sought a more influential political voice in the affairs of South Vietnam.

The arrival of the refugees from North Vietnam merits a critical analysis. The regional identities, factional politics, and religious beliefs that the northern refugees brought with them to the south mirrored a mosaic Vietnam. At the same time, their very regional identities, factional politics, and religious beliefs also indirectly contributed to the breakdown of the mosaic Vietnam. The economic stagnation and social turmoil in South Vietnam was exacerbated by a flood of refugees from northern Vietnam. In the April 4, 1955 issue of the weekly newsmagazine, *Time*, correspondent John Mecklin estimated the number of northerners fleeing the DRVN to exceed "500,000 and still pouring south at the rate of 10,000 a week."[87] General John W. O'Daniel, head of MAAGV from 1953-1955, placed the refugee number at 600,000.[88] Former ARVN senior officers, Major General Nguyen Duy Hinh and Brigadier General Tran Dinh Tho, both of whom were involved in the relocation of northerners to southern Vietnam as junior VNA officers, estimated that one million refugees left the DRVN after the Geneva Agreement was signed. Historians now agree that between eight hundred thousand to one million northerners arrived in South Vietnam from 1954 to 1955.[89]

The causes behind this southward migration remain controversial. To those who witnessed the refugees catastrophic plight, the cause was simple. In an interview on the NBC Television Network on April 20, 1960, General O'Daniel said that free men and women, old and young alike, were voting with their feet by fleeing the north's totalitarian government, "where

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[87] John Mecklin, "South Vietnam: The Beleaguered Man," *Time: The Weekly News Magazine*, Canadian Edition, vol. LXV, no. 14 (April 4, 1955), 22

[88] *General O'Daniel Discusses "Nation That Refused To Starve" on Radio Report Inc.-NBC Television Network with correspondent Miss Emerson, April 20, 1960*, 2; Folder 1; Box 1; Collection: Gen. John William O'Daniel Papers; Archive: United States Army Military History Institute (USAMHI), Carlisle Barrack, PA

[89] Hinh and Tho, *The South Vietnamese Society*, 22; Jacobs, *Cold War Mandarin*, 45; Bradley, *Vietnam At War*, 79

the communists dominate," for the more open social and political system of the south "where freedom exists."[90] Facilitating the movement of northern refugees, Nguyen Duy Hinh, then a VNA Captain, recalled that the DRVN government used threats followed by violent measures to prevent refugees from leaving PAVN-controlled rural areas for FFEEC and VNA-controlled urban areas. According to Hinh, "villages and towns were cordoned off and placed under close surveillance" by PAVN personnel. Many VNA units intervened directly to break these blockades. On Route Nationale 5, for example, Hinh used his armoured column to free villagers whose escape would have been nearly impossible without such VNA intervention.[91]

There is now convincing evidence that the DRVN systematically discouraged migrants from heading south. Through a combination of "administrative obfuscation" and "military force", the DRVN denied passports to those seeking to leave and the PAVN prevented would-be migrants from reaching the Hanoi and Haiphong departure points.[92] However, the US and South Vietnam also systematically encouraged northerners to move south after 1954. One agency partly responsible for the large influx of refugees into South Vietnam was the psychological warfare team headed by Colonel Edward Geary Lansdale. Lansdale had been with the Office Strategic Services (OSS), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)'s predecessor, in the Pacific Theatre of World War II before leading a CIA team in the Philippines to help crush the Huk (Communist) rebellion. In Washington, D.C., Lansdale's official cover was that he worked for

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[90] *General O'Daniel Discusses "Nation That Refused To Starve" on Radio Report Inc.-NBC Television Network with correspondent Miss Emerson, April 20, 1960*, 2; Folder 1; Box 1; Collection: Gen. John William O'Daniel Papers; Archive: USAMHI

[91] Hinh and Tho, *The South Vietnamese Society*, 21

[92] Peter Hansen, "Bắc Di Cu: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam, and Their Role in the Southern Republic, 1954-1959," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 4, issue 3 (Fall 2009), 181

the United States Air Force (USAF) and Department of Defence (DOD). In South Vietnam, Lansdale's cover was MAAGV.[93]

Lansdale never kept any records about covert operations in North Vietnam in 1954 -1955. However, prior to the refugee crisis of the post-Geneva Agreement, Lansdale and perhaps MAAGV staff produced a concise eleven page psychological warfare study of the FFEEC, VNA, and VLA during the French Indochina War. The psychological warfare study analyzed how each army trained their psychological warfare officers and how they used psychological warfare against enemy combatants on the frontline and captured prisoners of war under interrogation, before making judgements about the strengths and weaknesses of each army's conduct of psychological warfare.[94] On the surface, the study seems to suggest nothing more than a recognition that psychological warfare was used by various friendly and enemy forces in the French Indochina War. However, the study could also be interpreted as a preparation for renewed psychological warfare operations if future political and military circumstances in Indochina required such clandestine operations against the communist government and military. From 1950 to 1953, for example, the FFEEC had air-dropped 4 million leaflets in northern Vietnam and had distributed about 145,000 newspapers containing propaganda contents such as "Surrender leaflets", or "Life is better in the [French-Bao Dai] controlled zone", "The Viet-Minh is dominated by the Chinese", or "Bao Dai is a nice person."[95] After 1954, Lansdale's team used FFEEC psychological warfare methods to disseminate its anti-DRVN messages and pro-south Vietnamese regime propaganda in North Vietnam.

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[93] Cecil B. Currey, *Edward Lansdale: The Unquiet American* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1998), 9-55; Jonathan Nashel, *Edward Lansdale's Cold War* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 25-48
[94] "Psychological Warfare", Date: n/a; File 808; Box 35; Collection: Lansdale Papers; Archive: HIWRP
[95] Ibid.

In his nearly four hundred page memoir, Lansdale devoted just eight pages to his psychological warfare actions in Saigon in 1954. Further, only three sentences raised any suspicions about his team's clandestine activities in northern Vietnam. "I split my small team in two. One half," Lansdale recalled, "under Major Conein, engaged in refugee work in the North. The other half stayed with me to help with other endeavors."[96] Even *The Pentagon Papers* never revealed the details of this "refugee work" in North Vietnam, although it provided historians with some information about the nature of that "refugee work." According to *The Pentagon Papers*, in August 1954, "Major Conein was given responsibility for developing a paramilitary organization in the north, to be in position when the Vietminh took over.... [His]... team was moved north immediately as part of the MAAG staff working on the refugee problem. The team had headquarters in Hanoi, with a branch in Haiphong. Among cover duties, this team supervised the refugee flow for the Hanoi airlift organized by the French."[97] "The refugee problem" that Lansdale's team was working on was really to encourage northerners, especially Catholics, to head south by using printed newspaper headlines and propaganda leaflets with phrases like "Christ has gone to the South" and "the Virgin Mary has departed from the North."[98] Lansdale's team was not the only unit interested in clandestine "refugee work" in North Vietnam. The VNA's own "paramilitary group for Tonkin operations was being developed in Saigon through [VNA] General Nguyen Van Vy" with the assistance of another member of Colonel Lansdale's team, a Major Allen.[99] However, Lansdale's team coordinated and led the psychological warfare efforts of MAAGV and the VNA.

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[96] Edward Geary Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars: An American's Mission to Southeast Asia* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1991), 168
[97] Sheehan, et. al., *The Pentagon Papers*, 57
[98] Quoted in George McTurnan Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1987), 76
[99] Sheehan, et. al., *The Pentagon Papers*, 59

The relocation of northern Vietnamese refugees to the south, Operation "Passage to Freedom", was carried out by the FFEEC, VNA and the Seventh Fleet of the US Navy (USN). FFEEC, VNA and USN Seventh Fleet personnel helped the refugees by transporting, feeding, clothing, and sheltering them. However, hidden behind this humanitarian operation was CIA's psychological warfare operations designed to enhance the popularity—hence legitimacy—of the South Vietnamese regime while discrediting the legitimacy of the DRVN government and destabilizing its society and economy.[100] Historian Marilyn B. Young has concluded that:

> Of particular propaganda value to Diem [future leader of the south Vietnam regime] was the exodus of almost 1 million Catholics from north to south who were said to have 'voted with their feet' for freedom. They did not really use their feet, nor was their flight entirely about freedom. Encouraged by the Catholic hierarchy and organized by Lansdale and his team, entire parishes were carried south in Americans, following priests who told them Christ had moved south, as well as making promises of land and livelihood.[101]

Not all historians interpreted the plight of Vietnamese refugees—the majority of whom were Catholic although others were Protestants and Buddhists, urbanized middle class professionals, civil servants, students, and peasants and commoners—in this light.[102] In his study of the refugee crisis of 1954-1955, Peter Hansen argued "such a claim rests on the rather patronizing assumption that the Bac di cu [northern refugees] left because they were superstitious and therefore susceptible to such simplistic attempts at manipulation—an assumption that seems to have colored much of the initial reporting of the migration."[103] "To be sure," historian Seth Jacob has claimed, "thousands of North Vietnamese would have fled communist domination no matter

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[100] Schulzinger, *A Time For War*, 81
[101] Young, *The Vietnam War,* 45
[102] Ronald H. Spector, *United States Army in Vietnam: Advice and Support: The Early Year of the United States Army in Vietnam, 1941-1960* (Washington, D.C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1985), 226; Bradley, *Vietnam At War*, 79; Anthony James Joes, *The War For South Vietnam, 1954-1975*, revised ed., (London: Praeger, 2001), 35
[103] Hansen, "Bac Di Cu: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam, and Their Role in the Southern Republic, 1954-1959", 182-183

what Americans did. Washington, however, was hardly reluctant to give a nudge to any northerner vacillating between Diem [the future leader of South Vietnam] and Ho."[104]

Still, there is no denying that the refugee crisis of 1954-1955 created unforeseeable short and long term problems for both the DRVN and the emergent RVN. While South Vietnam should have gained the short-term propaganda advantage from the refugee crisis, the DRVN won those long-term social, political, and military advantages. In his letters and speeches between 1954 and 1956, Ho Chi Minh, DRVN President, never mentioned once how the refugee crisis might have affected the DRVN. While welcoming former VLA political and military personnel who had resettled in the DRVN after the Geneva Agreement, Ho reminded communist agents still in South Vietnam that Hanoi's new revolutionary policy was "to consolidate the North and to keep in mind the South."[105] Giap neither mentioned the short- and long-term political and military problems the DRVN might encounter with the refugee crisis in his memoirs. In his 1964 article "The South Vietnamese People Will Win", Giap again failed to discuss how the refugee crisis had shaped DRVN strategy after 1954. However, Giap noted the bravery of "our southern compatriots experienced countless sufferings and losses, but they carried the day" and encouraged them to continue "to overthrow the enemy, attain the fundamental aspirations of the broad masses of the peoples, there was no other way than to wage a revolutionary struggle."[106] The DRVN, however, suffered a temporary setback since a large proportion of the refugees who fled south were amongst the "most affluent, creative, and industrious people, since Catholics made up a high percentage of the commercial, professional, and intellectual elite of the country." As for the DRVN's stability and security after the FFEEC withdrew to southern Vietnam,

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[104] Jacobs, *Cold War Mandarin*, 52

[105] Bernard B. Fall, ed., *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution: Selected Writings, 1920-66* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), 255-272

[106] Russell Stetler, ed., *The Military Art of People's War: Selected Writings of General Vo Nguyen Giap* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 190-191

historian William J. Duiker concluded that "the exodus served to spare the new regime a potential source of opposition."[107] Clearly, the DRVN government and military only suffered a temporary setback from the Geneva Agreement and the refugee crisis of 1954.

Starting in 1955, consistent with the new integrated political and military policy of Ho's government to "Build the North, look to the South,"[108] Giap received a new mission. He was to transform former VLA Local, Regional and Main Force units into a professional conventional army, the PAVN, "to beat off future [external] assaults on the Motherland" with the combined arms support of a newly-established DRVN's Air Force and Navy.[109] The DRVN's armed forces received equipment, training, and counselling from the USSR and PRC. For advanced military schooling and training, DRVN sent its officers to Soviet and Chinese military academies.[110] As the demands of the Vietnam War grew, the PAVN's mission moved from "the protection of the Fatherland and the preservation of peace" to aiding the NLFSVN and the PLAF in southern Vietnam. As the PAVN's official history pointed out, this was done to "firmly maintain and expand the political struggle movement of the people of the South in order to consolidate peace, achieve national unification, and complete our mission of achieving independence and democracy for the entire nation."[111] Further, from 1955 to 1963, the DRVN underwent social, political, and economic reconstruction while the PAVN undertook military reorganization, retraining, and intervention in South Vietnam with little resistance from its own population or an external threat coming from the South Vietnamese regime and its allies. The same cannot be said

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[107] Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, 465-466
[108] Ibid., 473
[109] Colvin, *Giap, Volcano Under Snow*, 149
[110] Qiang Zhai, *China & The Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 73; Ilya V. Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy toward Indochina Conflict, 1954-1963* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press, 2003), 95-96
[111] Merle L. Pribbenov, translated, *The Military History Institute of Vietnam's Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 5

of the ARVN which undertook reorganization and retraining while combating the combined PAVN and PLAF.

Refugees coming from North Vietnam furthered destabilized South Vietnam since their regional identities, religious faiths, and political beliefs were not easily hidden or readily accepted by southerners. Moreover, because many northerners were political refugees, they brought their own factions and followed their own factional leaders into South Vietnam's political arena which already had too many factions and ambitious men. In time, social turmoil, economic demise, and political instability in South Vietnam made that part of the country more, not less, vulnerable to a military take-over by the DRVN's PAVN and NLFSVN's PLAF.

To prevent Southeast Asia from fallen into the USSR and PRC sphere of influence and to protect US political, military and economic interests in the western Pacific, the US indirectly intervened in South Vietnam to prevent it from being taken over by the DRVN. The natural allies of the US in South Vietnam were the fiercely anti-communist Catholic refugees from North Vietnam. One of those influential Catholic families, the Ngo clan, received political, military and economic support from Eisenhower's administration. Still, the Ngo family was not a puppet. The Ngo's relationship with the Americans was a complicated one, and the accomplishments and failures of its two infamous sons, Ngo Dinh Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu, in the political arena and on the battlefield were due to the brothers themselves as much as their American patrons.

The Ngo family had a history of service in the Vietnamese imperial court before and during French rule.[112] After graduating from Hanoi's School of Law and Administration, Ngo Dinh Diem, the second eldest son, became one of Emperor Bao Dai's district chiefs. The youngest son, Ngo Dinh Nhu, returning from study in France, became an archivist and a political activist. While Diem was a political idealist, Nhu was a hardnosed political realist with a taste for

[112] Mecklin, "The hour is late, the odds are long: South Viet Nam's Diem: The Beleaguered Man", 23

secrecy and intrigue. However, both Diem and Nhu were devout Catholics. They uncompromisingly opposed France's imperialism but wanted to regain Vietnam's independence and liberty through political reforms and by working within Vietnam's traditional mandarin system instead of against it.[113] They were nationalists but very conservative, which made them more appealing to the Americans. Being both anti-French but also anti-Viet Minh as the latter had assassinated his oldest brother, Diem had lived abroad for most of the French Indochina War. However, prior to his departure from Indochina in 1945, Diem and his family established and maintained political relationships with other non-communist nationalist parties, some of which later opposed his bid for the presidency of South Vietnam. While in the US, Diem made political connections with American statesmen and the Catholic community which had important political ties. In Diem's absence, Nhu, his relatives, and other political associates persuaded US foreign service and military officers that Vietnamese communism was a force to be reckoned with, that other non-communist nationalists were mere factions with neither cohesion nor plans, and that Vietnamese Catholic northerners were the last best hope for Vietnam against homegrown communists.[114] Of course, neither Diem nor Nhu would have succeeded had their influential American allies inside and outside of the US government and military not shared their religious faith, political conservatism, and anti-communism.[115] After all, many other non-communist Vietnamese nationalist factions had failed to gain US backing. But could the Ngo brothers be the solution to the colossal problems in postcolonial southern Vietnam?

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[113] Ellen J. Hammer, *Vietnam: Yesterday and Today* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 130
[114] Edward Miller, "Vision, Power and Agency: The Ascent of Ngô Đình Diêm, 1945-154", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 35, no. 3 (October 2004), 435-452
[115] Bradley, *Vietnam At War*, 80-81

Although the Diem government relied on the US for economic, military, and political backing,[116] Diem was no American puppet.[117] Most Vietnam War historians share Seth Jacob's argument that "None of America's Cold War allies worked harder than Diem to demonstrate that acceptance of American aid did not entail submission to American demands."[118] As Mark Moyar put it more vividly, "Ngo Dinh Diem... would ultimately suffer death for refusing to yield to the demands of his American allies."[119] Ellen J. Hammer, America's premier scholar on the First Indochina War and Ngo Dinh Diem, remarked that "Diem was not yet a national leader in the mid-1950s, when he was hailed unconditionally in Washington. And when he succeeded in raising his status from that of a United States dependent to that of an independent ally, and did become a national leader." Furthermore, wrote Hammer, Diem "was helped to his doom by American exploitation of the Buddhist crisis—at a time when he had already been persuaded, through international mediation and the efforts of patriots at home, to change his administration and renounce what was wrong in his policies."[120] Lieutenant Colonel Tran Ngoc Chau, who fought for Ho Chi Minh and then Diem and President Nguyen Van Thieu, thought that the "overthrow of President Diem was a great tragedy for South Vietnam and for me personally. I did not always agree with the Diem administration, but I respected President Diem and considered him a true Vietnamese patriot."[121]

Not all non-communist nationalists shared Hammer's view or Chau's sentiments. Many, like the later South Vietnamese Ambassador to the US, Bui Diem, despised Diem's government

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[116] Herring, *America's Longest War*, 53-87; Sheehan, et. al., *The Pentagon Papers*, 15
[117] Ellen J. Hammer, *A Death In November* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 42-85; Francis X. Winters, *The Year of The Hare: American In Vietnam, January 25,1963 – February 15, 1964* (London: The University of Georgia Press, 1997), 19-28; 40-53; 153-165; Philip E. Catton, *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 5-24
[118] Jacobs, *Cold War Mandarin*, 3
[119] Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, xiv
[120] Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina*, v
[121] Chau, "My War Story from Ho Chi Minh to Ngo Dinh Diem", in Neese and O'Donnell, *Prelude To Tragedy: Vietnam, 1960-1965*, 99

for closing the political process in Saigon.[122] "With the coup's success," wrote Bui Diem about the 1 November 1963 ARVN's Coup d'État, "I felt a swell of hope that those wasted years might not have been fatal after all, that we could now begin where we should have begun back in 1954."[123] Whatever reservations nationalist leaders in southern Vietnam had toward the Diem government, they supported the RVN government's elimination of 'states within a state' between 1954 and 1955. "I had an aversion to the sects' armies," Bui Diem asserted, as "private military forces owing allegiance to their own commanders was not something a sovereign state could tolerate."[124]

The rise of Diem's government added another contender for power in Saigon where too many players already had their own private armies pursuing their separate interests.[125] In Frances Fitzgerald's words, from "the moment of Diem's arrival in Saigon the various factions of the Hoa Hao, the Cao Dai, and the Binh Xuyen had engaged in a bewildering series of maneuvers to gain power for themselves in Saigon."[126] Nevertheless, scholars consent that Diem's handling of these sects—ranging from political manipulation to bribery to military suppression—was his finest hour.[127]

Given the circumstances South Vietnam found itself in the mid-1950s, building the country would require an extraordinary amount of military effort and political will over an indefinite period of time precisely because of the complex social, political, and military

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[122] Nguyen Tran, *Cong va Toi* (*Actions and Crimes*), 305-322, 335-339
[123] Bui Diem, *In The Jaws of History*, 96
[124] Ibid., 90
[125] Nguyen Tran, *Cong va Toi: Nhung Su That Lich Su, Hoi Ky Lich Su Chinh Tri Mien Nam Viet Nam 1945-1975 (Actions and Crimes: Historical Truth Memoir of the Political History of South Vietnam, 1945-1975)*(Los Alamitos: Xuan Thu, 1992), 97-100; Lieutenant General Tran Van Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung: Hoi Ky Chanh Tri*, (*Viet Nam Witness: A Political Memoir*) (Los Alamitos, CA: Xuan Thu, 1989), 111-116; Lieutenant General Ton That Dinh, *25 Nam Binh Nghiep* (*25 Years of Military Service*) (San Jose, CA: Chanh Dao, 1998), 61- 63; Catton, *Diem's Final Failure*, 9; Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina*, 347-348; 360-362
[126] Fitzgerald, *Fire In The Lake*, 79
[127] Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 238-239; Bernard B. Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams: A Political and Military Analysis* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), 245-246

problems. Therefore, unless the US colonized South Vietnam or stationed troops permanently there as it had in South Korea and West Germany, successful nation-building would prove to be a near impossible task, especially when the nation-building project was to be a joint enterprise between with a weak ally, the RVN government and its military.

The Geneva Agreement gave the Vietnamese nationalists an opportunity to regroup and, with American political and military support, to build their nation-state and armed forces.[128] The Ngo's delegates did not share this view. As Diem's latest biographer, Philip E. Catton, wrote:

> He [Diem] bitterly criticized the French decision to abandon the north to the Viet Minh after Dien Bien Phu; and he was outraged by the Franco-Viet Minh carve-up of the country at Geneva. In his view, partition flew in the face of his legal and moral claim to represent a unified independent Vietnam. Given his regional prejudices as a native of central Vietnam, he also felt that he had been left with the least patriotic and industrious section of the country.[129]

In fact, Diem was wrong to believe that South Vietnam was "the least patriotic [part]... of the country," for the VNA, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and even the Binh Xuyen had opposed the French and had fought the Communists as well as Catholic self-defense militias had done at Phat Diem and Bui Chu in the Red River Delta. These enclaves became untenable as the French pulled out of the Red River Delta. Whatever the reasons for Diem's anger with the French about abandoning the north, there was no option. For Vietnamese nationalists, the Geneva Conference was a victory, not a defeat.

Reintegration, 1955-1956 Immediately after the French Indochina War ended, South Vietnam, a leaderless, impoverished, fractured region, was the only bastion of non-communist nationalism in Vietnam.[130] Saigon was riddled by political factionalism as former anti-communist allies became enemies. The loyalists of Emperor Bao Dai, VNA senior officers, the paramilitary-theocratic Hoa Hao, the Cao Dai sects, and the Binh Xuyen Mafioso all competed

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[128] Hinh and Tho, *The South Vietnamese Society*, 27-28; Bui Diem, *In The Jaws of History*, 88
[129] Catton, *Diem's Final Failure*, 26-27
[130] Hinh and Tho, *The South Vietnamese Society*, 27-30; Schulzinger, *A Time for War*, 80

for political influence in what appeared to be a power vacuum.[131] As the experienced Far East correspondent Arthur J. Dommen has assessed, "they [the sects] were to enormously complicate the efforts of the post-war non-Communist [South] Vietnamese government to deal on its own with the nationalist forces after the withdrawal of the French."[132] The HHPF, CDPF, and BXPF might not have had much political strength but their sizeable armies threatened Diem's government.[133] Diem was unwilling to let these different factions remain as autonomous allies against the Communists as the French had done. Probably no nationalist leader could have done so. American correspondent Neil Sheehan has argued that a "wise ruler would have compromised with the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao," which "could have been talked into an arrangement."[134] Diem's government tried to persuade various sect leaders to integrate their forces into the RVN military. However, dissident HHPF and CDPF members opposed the Diem government and their own leaders, schisms that provided favorable conditions for the divide and conquer strategy produced by Diem's officials and Lansdale's CIA team.[135] Radical dissidents in the HHPF and CDPF were singled out and killed. Beyond the threats presented by the militias, lurking dangerously in the urban bedlam and rural countryside of southern Vietnam were DRVN's communist cadres, ordered to remain behind in the RVN to prepare for a future political and military struggle to reunify Vietnam.[136]

The HHPF, CDPF, and BXPF continued to receive military aid from die-hard FFEEC officers in South Vietnam and Paris officials who opposed Diem's government because it was

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[131] Fitzgerald, *Fire In The Lake*, 77
[132] Dommen, *The Indochinese Experiences of the French and the Americans*, 195; Hinh and Tho, *The South Vietnamese Society*, 29
[133] Fitzgerald, *Fire In The Lake*, 79
[134] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 178
[135] Chinh Dao, *Cuoc Thanh Chien Chong Cong*, 182-185
[136] Fitzgerald, *Fire In The Lake*, 146; Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 242; Pribbenow, *Victory in Vietnam*, 3-5, 14-19; *Secret & Guard*, Despatch No. 36, British Embassy, Saigon, August 20, 1960, 23, FO 371/152778/206419, the United Kingdom National Archives (UKNA), London, England

anti-French.[137] But these groups too were divided.[138] Hence the Diem government, with Lansdale's CIA team,[139] pressured the FFEEC to be neutral about South Vietnam's internal affairs while they exploited the conflicts between the CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF in order to neutralize them.[140] Diem's government and Lansdale read the politics of the sects correctly. The sects lacked unity and their leaders were too "suspicious of each other" to formulate "grand strategies."[141] Their followers, confused about their political objectives, became increasingly disenchanted with their superiors. Together the CDPF and HHPF fielded 35,000 soldiers, and HHPF troops were considered to be the best in South Vietnam, but their lack of unity and direction made them easy targets for the Diem government which opened the ARVN to sect soldiers as individuals but not as units.[142] When sect leaders refused, Diem's government and Lansdale's CIA team cleverly played one rival off against the other. The Diem government offered political offices and military positions to some sect leaders and certainly bought off others.[143] "According to most historians of the period," Frances Fitzgerald noted, "Diem's effort to destroy the sects cost the American government some twelve million dollars in bribes—or subsidies."[144] CDPF General Trinh Minh The received $2 million, his lieutenant General Nguyen Thanh Phuong pocketed $3.6 million (plus monthly payments for his troops), and General Tran Van Soai of the HHPF got $3 million. Once their leaders' allegiance switched, the followers were integrated as individuals into the ARVN.[145]

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[137] Dommen, *The Indochinese Experiences of the French and the Americans*, 284; Philippe Devillers and Jean Lacouture, *End of War: Indochina, 1954*, 361-381; Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 238
[138] General Cao Van Vien, *Leadership, Indochina Monographs* (College Park, M.D.: NARA II Library, 1983), 41-43
[139] Sheehan, *Pentagon Papers*, 16, 19
[140] Chinh Dao, *Cuoc Thanh Chien Chong Cong*, 182, 185; Vien, *Leadership*, 43
[141] Fitzgerald, *Fire In The Lake*, 79
[142] Hammer, *A Death In November*, 67
[143] Chinh Dao, *Cuoc Thanh Chien Chong Cong*, 184
[144] Fitzgerald, *Fire In The Lake*, 79
[145] Nguyen Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 106; Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams*, 245-246; Sheehan, *The Pentagon Papers*, 20

However, not every CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF leader defected. Recalcitrant militants were crushed by the VNA although the option of integrating into the ARVN was retained for those who surrendered. One HHPF guerrilla commander, Le Quang Vinh, better known as Ba Cut, resisted but he was captured, tried, and guillotined.[146] But the CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF were crushed less because of the VNA's strength than their own strategic disadvantages. With no safe-havens in neighbouring countries and lacking mass popular support, CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF militants were easy targets.

The Diem government received unanimous support in dissolving Bay Vien's black market in Cho-lon from the HHPF, CDPF, VNA, the Americans, and the Vietnamese people primarily because the BXPF was a mafia. Yet, it still controlled the Saigon's police,[147] while its sizable army posed a far greater military threat to any government in Saigon than the HHPF and CDPF[148] who had some political principles and moral qualities. In 1955, the BXPF, which had 4,000 troops, was openly supported by the FFEEC's FMI which prepared plans for BXPF offensives against Diem's government.[149] However, the BXPF was geographically isolated and lacked short-term and long-range political objectives or support from inside or outside of the country. Once the FFEEC had completely withdrawn from South Vietnam and the FMI ceased giving information and arms (thanks to US diplomatic pressure and the Algerian insurrection),[150] the BXPF's cause was doomed. VNA and BXPF units skirmished in Saigon, while outside the capital region the BXPF was annihilated.[151]

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[146] Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 122; Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 238
[147] Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina*, 360
[148] Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 123; Chinh Dao, *Cuoc Thanh Chien Chong Cong*, 185-188
[149] Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 238; Porch, *The French Secret Services*, 356
[150] Porch, *The French Secret Services*, 357
[151] Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 123-124; Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 238-239; Vien, *Leadership*, 44-52

However, the victories over the sects proved hollow as the real threat to South Vietnam was Hanoi's remaining cadres in the south and the PAVN. Ellen J. Hammer has concluded that Diem's victory over the CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF was "more superficial than real and recalled the period of the Viet Minh war when relative peace prevailed in the big cities under French control while the rest of the country was left in a continuing state of rebellion."[152] Frances Fitzgerald's assessment of the BXPF's defeat at the hands of the VNA revealed weaknesses which the PLAF and the PAVN did not share:

> At the end of April the Binh Xuyen and units of the regular army joined battle in the center of Saigon; in the course of several days' fighting they managed to destroy an entire district and to plunge the city into chaos and near starvation. Finally the Binh Xuyen retired to the outskirts of the city, allowing the regular army to reoccupy the population centers.... With the loss of the city the sect leaders gradually lost faith in the eventual success of their cause. The small warlords retreated into the swamps where, unable to organize a new offensive, they fought a hopeless rearguard action against the well-supplied forces of the regular army.[153]

The PLAF and the PAVN were much more organized and far more dangerous than the sects as they had popular support in South Vietnam and aid from North Vietnam, the PRC, and the USSR. The PLAF would not lose "faith in the eventual success of their cause" for the DRVN would politically and militarily resurrect the NFLSVN before it deteriorated in the late 1950s and early 1960s and then again after the 1968 Tet and the 1972 Easter Offensives. The PLAF was hunted down by RVN's security services and military forces between 1954 and 1963. Later in the Vietnam War, the Thieu government violently uprooted southern communist guerrillas from 1968 to 1972 in the Phoenix Program, which used intelligence, torture, raids, and assassinations to eliminate the senior guerrilla leadership.[154] Backed by the PAVN, the PLAF managed to re-group, re-organize, and renew its offensives with the PAVN in 1974 and 1975. David Marr, US Marine intelligence officer in Vietnam from 1962 to 1963 who later became a Vietnamese

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[152] Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina*, 362
[153] Fitzgerald, *Fire In The Lake*, 80
[154] See Mark Moyar's *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: The CIA's Secret Campaign to Destroy the Viet Cong*

scholar, revealed the flexibility of enemy operations in southern Vietnam and the Communist ability to rise from the ashes:

> I could not help but be struck by the ability of the National Liberation Front [NFLSVN] to conduct complex political and military operations amidst some hundred different locations, hounded from air, sea, and ground... the NLF managed to avoid being fragmented and destroyed piecemeal... there were times when all the NLF leaders in a specific village or district were killed, captured, or forced to flee to another area, yet 'anti-government' activity did not cease entirely. Indeed, after a period of several months or a year, such activity had a tendency to build up again.[155]

The DRVN and PAVN played their cards shrewdly throughout the war. They sent enough men and material south to the NFLSVN and PLAF without provoking an unlimited war with the US. While the HHPF, CDPF, and BXPF were trapped in the swamps, the PLAF operated freely across the borders from North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. If the RVN went on the strategic offensive against the sects between 1954 and 1956, the DRVN held the strategic initiative throughout the Vietnam War. The VNA could deal with internal threats alone, but ARVN could never ignore the possibility of an overt PAVN attack.

On 21 January 1956, MAAGV assessed VNA successes but also ARVN's potential weaknesses should it confront the more formidable communists. It also assessed the military and political consequences of the sect wars, noting RVN inflexibility and DRVN's resiliency. While the BXPF was "destroyed as an effective anti-government military force and a major portion of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao forces have been integrated into the National Army," the assessment was pessimistic. US intelligence officers considered the VNA "capable of establishing and maintaining internal security throughout the populous areas of Free Vietnam against dissidents and bandit attacks against civilians friendly to the government, and small Vietnamese Army detachments." However, in the event of a "large-scale guerrilla activity by implanted [stay behind communist] Viet Minh cadres acting under centralized direction of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam), the Vietnamese Army might have to surrender control of

[155] David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), vii

relatively large areas of the country. Armed convoys would be required and many scattered villages would be without adequate protection."[156] The potency of the communists compared to the sects and the weakness of the ARVN compared to VNA strength was dangerously clear to US and RVN observers from the start.

The Communists opened their arms to disgruntled members of the HHPF, CDPF, and BXPF between 1954 and 1955. On 21 January 1957 MAAGV noted that "recent mergers of other dissident and rebel elements with the Viet Minh, have considerably strengthened the Viet Minh cause." DRVN and its left-behind cadres benefited from RVN's victory and its own flexibility and resiliency. MAAGV indicated that "despite heavy losses due to military operations and desertions, the [communist] Viet Minh organization in Free [South] Vietnam remains a serious problem."[157] The Communist Party never hesitated to discipline its members or to destroy its rivals. Equally, it learned the importance of propaganda coups, systematic terrorism, "propaganda by [the] deed,"[158] and making political and military alliances that granted it time and space to destroy its rival.[159]

Western journalists and historians have contended that the DRVN played no part in starting the guerrilla war in South Vietnam which began thanks to heavy-handed counter-guerrilla operations of the RVN military sanctioned by the US. The DRVN, PRC, and USSR assisted NFLSVN cadres and PLAF guerrillas in the south *only* at their own requests. Frances

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[156] File: MAAGV Security 350.09, Country Statement, 21 January 1957, Secret: Section C: Army Section, 22, Box 11; RG 472; Archive: NARA II

[157] Ibid., 22

[158] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 155; Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 43; Walter Laqueur, *A History of Terrorism* (London: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 82, 119; Caleb Carr, *The Lessons of Terror: A History of Warfare Against Civilians* (New York: Random House, 2003), 208

[159] Douglas Pike, *History of Communism, 1925-1976* (Stanford: Stanford University Hoover Institution Press, 1978), 1-40; Douglas Pike, *War, Peace and the Viet Cong* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1969), 111-122; William J. Duiker, *The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam, 1900-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), 234-255; 271-286

Fitzgerald claimed that the Diem government's "repressions only advanced the date of a new armed struggle" against the RVN.[160] Stanley Karnow observed that "Diem had smashed most of the former Vietminh cells in the Mekong Delta," by 1959. "Ultimately, though," continued Karnow, "Diem's severity probably created more enemies than it crushed."[161] Gabriel Kolko held that everything Diem "did made the Saigon government unpopular," adding that by the summer of 1958, the Communist Party "responded hesitantly to this dire crisis and agreed to set up base areas, mainly in the remote Central Highlands," but only "intended for survival."[162] Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin have concluded that far from fomenting rebellion, the DRVN simply lent its support to "the spontaneously emerging guerrilla movement in South Vietnam."[163] The communist guerrilla war in South Vietnam, compared to other cases of partisan wars in history, was far from being a spontaneous uprising.[164] The NFLSVN and PLAF were closely-knit organizations directed by the DRVN and PAVN. If the NFLSVN truly had been a "spontaneously emerging guerrilla movement" without DRVN aid, the ARVN would have crushed the left-behind cadres. Moreover, DRVN's land reforms in the late 1950s had prompted northern Vietnamese peasants to rebel just as RVN's repression had alienated southern Vietnamese.[165] However, while the RVN failed to destroy an organized revolutionary movement, the DRVN mercilessly suppressed the spontaneous uprisings, largely because North Vietnamese peasants lacked organization and outside help.[166]

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[160] Fitzgerald, *Fire In The Lake*, 148
[161] Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 243
[162] Kolko, *Anatomy of a War*, 102
[163] Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 75
[164] Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical and Critical Study*, 273
[165] Bui Tin, *Following Ho Chi Minh*, 23-46
[166] Robert Thompson, *Revolutionary War in World Strategy 1945-1969* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1970), 126; Herring, *America's Longest War*, 81; Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 274

Communism in Vietnam was not invincible, but it was a powerful force able to assess, adapt, and overcome obstacles in time to avoid annihilation. The RVN could overcome this menace, not merely through good government, but through ruthlessness. During the French Indochina War, VLA units in Cochinchina were torn to pieces by the FFEEC, VNA, and sect outfits. The same thing happened in the three years after the Geneva Conference as RVN's security services wrecked the left-behind communist cadres.[167] By 1957, Communist guerrillas in South Vietnam were close to annihilation until the DRVN intervened by dispatching former southern communists resettled in the north and sending a limited supply of PAVN arms and ammunition in June 1959.[168] Historian John Prados has estimated that each shipment contained a little "more than a few hundred rifles plus ammunition"; thus, the effect on 5,000 PLAF guerrillas was "psychological more than anything else." These new weapons had "a direct impact only in the region where the equipment was distributed," therefore, the guerrillas attacked counter-guerrilla and pacification forces, including small, isolated, ARVN outposts, to procure additional arms.[169] But Prados has failed to consider the PLAF's strategy to use systematic terrorism and assassination to achieve political ends while waiting patiently until its members were better prepared for battle before it engaged large forces. A former PLAF cadre, Truong Nhu Tang, remembered that in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the PLAF opted for small military actions to reach political objectives in response to the RVN's harsh but effective counter-guerrilla strategy and tactics:

> We [the NLF/VC] envisioned as our goal a political settlement that could be brought about largely by political means. Military victory was seen neither by us nor by anyone else as a serious

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[167] Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey*, 4-5; Rodger Swearingen and Hammond Rolph, *Communism In Vietnam: A Documentary History of Theory, Strategy and Operational Practices* (Chicago: American Bar Association, 1967), 36-37; Kolko, *Anatomy of a War*, 99-100

[168] Colonel Hoang Ngoc Lung, *Strategy and Tactics*, *Indochina Monographs* (College Park, M.D.: NARA II Library, 1983), 2-4; Pribbenow, *Victory in Vietnam*, 14-19, 20

[169] John Prados, *The Blood Road: The Ho Chi Minh Trail and the Vietnam War* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), 13, 16

> possibility. Diem's own army [ARVN] was vastly superior to any forces we might deploy—and behind Diem were the Americans. A high level of warfare would bring with it the grave danger of direct American intervention, which we wished at all costs to avoid. What all this meant was that violence was called for, but a carefully controlled violence that would serve political ends.[170]

Nor did Prados account for supply dumps buried throughout South Vietnam since the end of French Indochina War in 1954. In any case, he underestimated the military aid sent south.

Historian Guenter Lewy has argued that "July 1959 saw the beginning of large-scale infiltration of armed cadres to raise and lead insurgent forces; it is estimated that during 1959-60 some 4,000 Southerners who had gone north in 1954 returned to South Vietnam."[171] The Military History Institute of Vietnam in Hanoi has indicated that the PAVN routinely infiltrated from North Vietnam, the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone), Laos, and Cambodia. The PAVN's Military Transportation Group 559, established in 1959, included the 301st Land Transportation Battalion and the 603rd Sea Transportation Battalion, over six hundred PAVN cadres and soldiers. By 1959's, Military Transportation Group 559 had shipped south 1,667 infantry weapons, 188 kilograms of explosives, military maps, compasses, and binoculars. While this equipment was barely enough for a regiment, the PAVN also sent over five hundred cadres with command experience at the platoon and company levels plus regular soldiers and specialists in sapper training, cryptography, and weapons repair. These men were instrumental in providing leadership and technical know-how to PLAF guerrillas. Over five hundred PAVN officers, NCOs, and soldiers traveled to the Mekong River Delta and formed battalions, companies, platoons, and sapper teams to "perform their revolutionary duties."[172] DRVN's logistic pipeline to southern Vietnam was not "psychological more than anything else," as Prados has suggested.

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[170] Tang with Chanoff and Toai, *A Viet Cong Memoir*, 72-73
[171] Lewy, *America In Vietnam*, 17
[172] Pribbenow, *Victory in Vietnam*, 53

Instead, it was a clear case of covert and dangerous aggression against the RVN. According to Douglas Pike:

> The famed Ho Chi Minh Trail (formerly the Truong Son Route) operation, conducted by Group 559... was [of] an impressive example of human endurance, doggedness, and organization.... The existence Group 559 and deep PAVN involvement in the war were reported early in the war by Hanoi watchers and some journalists but denied by Hanoi.... Only now do Hanoi historians corroborate the fact that there was deep PAVN command and control in the South from the earliest days, as well as systematic logistic support during the war... they [Hanoi historians] boast that the communist military force in the South was always regarded by the Hanoi High Command as a single military entity with but one purpose: to advance the cause of uniting all Vietnam under Hanoi's banner.[173]

DRVN's material support and leadership meant a great deal to the NLFSVN and PLAF. Until 1961, DRVN still *only* injected men and materials south of the seventeenth parallel through Laos and Cambodia to subvert the RVN, but RVN *perceived* DRVN's clandestine supply routes to be a *springboard* for an invasion. This instinct proved right on the mark.

Neil Sheehan of the *New York Times*, who vehemently disliked Diem's government and opposed US intervention, recognized that by 1957, "not many of the original stay-behind cadres were left in the South."[174] The Diem government's Agrovilles, involving the resettlement of populations in the Central Highlands, and the Strategic Hamlet Program, making rural South Vietnamese villages into political, military, social, and economic conclaves against the PLAF, generated little popular support.[175] But they did threaten "the insurgents' physical access to the population."[176] According to Ellen J. Hammer, more "than half the hamlets in the country had been transformed into strategic hamlets by spring 1963," adding that, "some of them better placed and organized to resist attack than others."[177] If Diem's government could not capitalize on its temporary military successes over the communists, neither could the PLAF survive

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[173] Pike, *PAVN*, 47
[174] Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 191
[175] Hammer, *A Death In November*, 40; Catton, *Diem's Failure*, 63-71, 73-98
[176] Catton, *Diem's Failure*, 174
[177] Hammer, *A Death In November*, 40

without DRVN's assistance.[178] This pattern of PAVN-PLAF support and cooperation fluctuated according to the tempo of the war in South Vietnam, RVN's reactions, and US actions when RVN failed. From the US Escalation in 1965,[179] the Tet Offensive of 1968,[180] the Easter Offensive of 1972,[181] and the fall of Saigon on April 30th 1975,[182] DRVN sent men, weapons, and arms south when PLAF guerrillas were besieged, ordered the PAVN into disastrous battles against US and RVN military forces, and finally overran the RVN with Soviet tanks and Chinese arms.[183] From the beginning to the very end, whether "led or driven, the DRV clearly did involve itself in the South in terms of doctrinal know-how and civilian cadres and, later, in more material ways."[184] When these "more material ways" failed to let the PLAF defeat the Diem government (or the Thieu government in 1968 and 1972), the DRVN, backed by USSR and PRC, threw the PAVN in against the ARVN and its allies.[185]

The debate as to the origins of the communist insurgency in South Vietnam is sensitive and heated. Yet critics of South Vietnam's government must recognize that the communists presented not one but two dangers—an insurgent threat and a conventional one. As a result, the ARVN could not afford to train for counterinsurgency warfare alone—as many American scholars and soldiers have asserted—but for both low tempo anti-guerrilla operations and high intensity conflicts. However, for any army to counter two such threats at once was challenging. It

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[178] Pike, *Viet Cong*, 78; Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, 524-525; Lewy, *America In Vietnam*, 15-18
[179] Halberstam, *The Best and The Brightest*, 460-481; Robert Mann, *A Grand Delusion: America's Descent Into Vietnam* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 512-517; Kahin, *Intervention*, 260-285
[180] Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years In Vietnam* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1999), 12-16; Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 528-581
[181] Lieutenant General Ngo Quang Truong, *The Easter Offensive of 1972, Indochina Monographs* (College Park, M.D.: NARA II Library, 1977), 1-20; Sorley, *A Better War*, 318-342; Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey*, 277-278; See Dale Andrade's *Trial By Fire: 1972 Easter Offensive*
[182] See James H. Willbanks's *Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost Its War* and Stephen T. Hosmer, Konrad Kellen and Brian M. Jenkins's *The Fall of South Vietnam: Statements by Vietnamese Military and Civilian Leaders*
[183] General Cao Van Vien and Lieutenant General Dong Van Khuyen, *Reflections on the Vietnam War, Indochina Monographs* (College Park, M.D.: NARA II Library, 1983), 116-135; Pribbenow, *Victory In Vietnam*, 333-427
[184] Pike, *Viet Cong*, 78
[185] Pike, *PAVN*, 39-56

required effective and flexible leadership, constant monitoring, assessment, and adaptation to the enemy's strengths and exploiting their weaknesses, something the ARVN Officer Corps found hard to do for reasons of organization, training, politics, nepotism, corruption, and incompetence—especially at the highest leadership levels.

At the signing of the Geneva Agreement on 21 July 1954, the VNA had 167,700 regulars and 37,800 auxiliary troops. This military force maintained a force structure of six mobile group headquarters, an airborne group headquarters, eighty-two battalions, eighty-one light battalions, five paratrooper battalions, six imperial guard battalions, nine artillery battalions, ten reconnaissance squadrons, four engineer battalions, and six transportation battalions. The VNA would become the core of the ARVN. At the beginning of 1955, through political inducement and military pressure, CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF elements were disarmed and integrated into the ARVN. While hardened veterans, these men lacked cohesiveness and a sense of purpose. What was needed most in 1954 was for these armed factions to be re-organized, trained, and equipped for a new mission. However, these processes did not really begin until 1956, after the CPD, HHPF, and BXPF were fully integrated, and were not completed until 1959.[186]

In 1954, RVN's Minister of Defence, Brigadier General Nguyen Van Vy, told Chief of MAAGV Lieutenant General John W. O'Daniel that Diem's government wanted a 300,000 army able to suppress internal dissidents but that was also strong enough to withstand external attacks with little or no outside assistance. Recognizing the importance of rallying the people behind a national cause, the RVN government and military held that once foreign troops stepped on South Vietnamese soil their physical presence would discredit the Diem government and military. Vy told O'Daniel, "hostilities may recommence at any time. The country must be able to defend

[186] Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, 5, 9; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 243-249

itself before others come... if we call upon help from others before we fight ourselves, we will lose the population."[187]

During this time, the Eisenhower administration was putting together the Manila Pact,[188] the Southeast Asia Collective Defence Treaty which eventually became the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), to guarantee that non-communist Southeast Asian countries would aid the RVN against DRVN aggression.[189] Relying on SEATO and facing financial constraints, the Eisenhower administration preferred a 100,000-man strong army, still believing that ARVN's "primary role would be to preserve internal security."[190] Secretary of State John Foster Dulles even suggested that 50,000 soldiers would be "adequate" to withstand "political subversion."[191] This ceiling troubled Diem's officials who, Ronald H. Spector has maintained, "saw their army primarily as an instrument of defense against external aggression."[192] Moreover, the RVN-US discussion over ARVN's size, to Diem's government, was also about the level of commitment Eisenhower's administration would offer to the RVN. The RVN government and military distrusted foreigners' promises of military assistance and feared the negative political and social implications of relying on foreign troops on Vietnamese soil. In any case, the RVN military had to be able to delay the DRVN military long enough for allied help to arrive. After

[187] File: MAAGV 092.1 International Affairs and Relations, Minutes of Conference At MAAG, 29 Nov 54, 3; Box 2; RG 472; Archive: NARA II
[188] Ibid., 4
[189] Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 178, 235-241; Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 169, 174; Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 151-152, 182
[190] Spector, *Advice and Support*, 263
[191] Ibid., 228
[192] File: MAAGV 092.1 International Affairs and Relations, Minutes of Conference At MAAG, 29 Nov 54, 1-7; Box 2; RG 472; Archive: NARA II

further negotiations, both sides agreed that ARVN should have 150,000 soldiers.[193] The 150,000 figure was not final, however, for it shrank and grew according to the war's tempo.[194]

According to conventional wisdom, the US Army organized, trained, and equipped the ARVN for conventional warfare when it should have been prepared for counter-guerrilla warfare. Further, Ronald H. Spector has argued that the RVN government and military insisted that the ARVN be re-organized, re-trained, and re-quipped for conventional warfare. However, Spector has failed to explain *why* the South Vietnamese wanted a conventional army and downplayed the fact that they wanted a force with a dual mission—anti-guerillas as well as conventional. These views are echoed in South Vietnam accounts most easily accessible in the English language. The US Army Center of Military History's *Indochina Monographs* presented the Vietnam War from the perspective of former ARVN officers living in exile. Wanting to deflect their failure to the Americans, the former ARVN commanders explicitly stated that ARVN's mission was simply to defend South Vietnam against a PAVN attack. In *The RVNAF*, ARVN Lieutenant General Dong Van Khuyen stated that, from 1957 to 1959, "under MAAG guidance, the Vietnamese army was revamped to give it the ability to cope with aggression from North Vietnam."[195] "With U.S. assistance," Major General Nguyen Duy Hinh and Brigadier General Tran Dinh Tho wrote, "South Vietnamese armed forces began training and reorganizing. The Army formed infantry divisions which were trained and equipped to face open aggression from Communist North Vietnam."[196] ARVN Colonel Hoang Ngoc Lung examined the US Army

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[193] Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 263; File: MAAGV 370.2 Country Statement on MDAP, Non-NATO Countries, 15 January 1956, Section A, 1; Box 1; RG 472; Archive: NARA II; Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, pp. 10-11

[194] File: MAAGV 320.3 Organization of the Army 1956, 1; Box 5; RG 472; Archive: NARA II; Pham Phong Dinh's *Chien Su Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa* (History of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces), illustrated the reduction and expansion of the ARVN according to battlefield demands.

[195] Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, 9

[196] Hinh and Tho, *The South Vietnamese Society*, 38

doctrines of re-organizing, re-training and re-equipping the ARVN very critically. In Colonel Lung's words:

> When the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) was established in 1956 it continued the French training of the regular forces for conventional warfare. The tactics and techniques that American advisors passed on to Vietnamese officers were those that had been learned during World War II or in the Korean Conflict and were thus confined to conventional warfare. Although many Vietnamese officers had fought the Viet Minh, which required the use of unconventional methods, the doctrine upon which all training and operations were based in Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) continued to be that of conventional war.[197]

These statements imply that from 1954 to 1975, the ARVN was solely responsible for border defense while any internal disturbances were entirely handled by paramilitary pacification and counterinsurgency forces outside the army. However, a reading of the language used in the *Indochina Monographs*—written "under MAAG guidance" and "with U.S. assistance"—show that these RVN official histories, although written by former RVN military officers, reflected what the Americans wanted the ARVN to be.

These arguments were thoroughly researched, passionately argued, and their observations often are acute. But they have flaws. The authors focused on what the US Army intended ARVN to be, not what the RVN government and military wanted which was a force capable of handling subversion from within and attack from without. These scholars considered U.S. counterinsurgency policy but ignored any counter-revolutionary alternatives proposed by the RVN. In the final analysis, these examinations are essentially American, ignoring the non-communist Vietnamese point of view. Indeed, most of these authors simply assumed that the South Vietnamese solutions to their political and military crisis were mere reflections of U.S. policies. In fact, contemporary Vietnamese nationalists resisted American civil-military planning

[197] Colonel Hoang Ngoc Lung. *Strategy and Tactics*, *Indochina Monographs* (College Park, M.D.: NARA II Library, 1983), 7

more than they accepted it because their history and experience differed immensely from those of the Americans.

History shaped the opening phase of American intervention in Vietnam. Western scholars have agreed that the failure of the US Army to prepare the ARVN for counter-guerrilla warfare was rooted in America's victories in the First and Second World Wars and the stalemate in Korea, experiences which led US military officers not to critically question their past successes.[198] "Defeat often leads a vanquished army to question its methods and change its approach to conflict," wrote Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., "but the United States Army had never had to undergo such a soul-searching process."[199] Junior officers who had fought the German Army in Europe and the PLA and DPRK army in the Korea were senior officers during Vietnam, and they believed that their conventional strategies and tactics could be successfully reapplied in Vietnam.[200] American interpretations of the world and warfare shaped the US Army, trained the ARVN, and eventually lost the war in Vietnam.

At the highest levels of politics and strategy, D. Michael Shafer has argued that this process also stemmed from intellectual debates on the origins of revolutions and conflicts in the Third World, which led to the formation and application of American counterinsurgency policy. The reasons America prevailed in Greece and the Philippines,[201] two of its major counter-revolutionary efforts before Vietnam, had less to do with US counterinsurgency policy than with the political and military advantages US-backed forces enjoyed over communist rebels in these cases.[202] Having critically analyzed policymakers' assumptions about political change in the

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[198] Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 343; Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 3-7; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 268, 272-273, 296, 299; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 49-55, 59, 106-108; Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms*, 245, 247
[199] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 6
[200] Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 343; Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 3-7; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 268, 272-273, 296, 299; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 49-55, 59, 106-108; Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms*, 245, 247
[201] Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms*, 166-204, 205-239
[202] Ibid., 3, 5, 15

underdeveloped world by asking why these interpretations were so inaccurate yet widely accepted and resistant to change, Shafer has concluded that American policymakers misunderstood the sources of insurgency. They interpreted the Third World using "a set of ideas deriving from the long tradition of Western social analysis and *histoire raisonnée*", meaning that liberal democratic governments based on the American model would be more responsive to the political demands and economic needs of their citizens. If these two desires were met, then people would have no reason to rise up against the government. American policymakers believed that the liberal democratic government and its institutions—an executive, a legislative and a judicial branch of government—could establish law and order in society without infringing the rights of its citizens while at the same time allowing citizens to contribute toward the development of a just, free, and prosperous nation-state. Furthermore, a liberal democratic government would likely prompt a capitalist economy. But Washington underestimated the constraints on its allies' willingness and capacity to make suggested changes, and overestimated its role as an outside promoter of security and development.[203]

While Shafer's argument was provocative, sophisticated, and influential,[204] it revealed little about how Saigon received Washington's plans or the alternatives to American policies. While American administrations might have interpreted events in Vietnam from "the long tradition of Western social analysis and *histoire raisonnée*"[205] or America's "experiences of revolution and nation building" and expected the Americanization of South Vietnam to be "a relatively easy, painless, and orderly transition,"[206] Diem's government was a product of neither French *histoire raisonée* nor "Western veneer" but of "a Vietnamese culture unknown to the

[203] Ibid., 9
[204] Hammer, *A Death In November*, 42-85; Catton, *Diem's Final Failure*, 5-50
[205] Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms*, 9
[206] Catton, *Diem's Final Failure*, 20

American foreign service."[207] It confronted a war-ravaged society "full of difficulties and hazards," a divided allegiance of "a people who seemed not easily amenable to a common purpose," and had to "maintain security and political stability" for the "nation-building effort."[208] These different viewpoints created conflicts between Saigon and Washington and between the US Army and the ARVN. Although allied with America, Saigon was no puppet of Washington. Experienced South Vietnamese civilian and military leaders often bitterly challenged inexperienced yet arrogant American decision-makers. These divisions must be examined in order to comprehend ARVN's organization, training, missions, successes, and failures.[209]

In Ellen J. Hammer's words, "with few exceptions," Americans "knew little of this remote part [Vietnam] of Asia."[210] "The year was 1957," wrote an aspiring future scholar on Vietnam while he pursued his studies at Yale, almost nobody in America "knew much about Viet Nam, and I was no exception."[211] Vietnamese and Americans had lived through the same period of history but experienced different pasts. World War I and II and the Korean War demonstrated America's power but also its limitations. Meanwhile, non-communist nationalist civilians and military leaders had endured brutal experiences of revolutionary politics and wars in schools, political movements, prisons, civilian life and military service from the Japanese occupation to the French Indochina War.[212] While Americans were ignorant of the history, peoples, and wars

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[207] Hammer, *A Death In November*, 48
[208] Hinh and Tho, *The South Vietnamese Society*, 28
[209] Aside from Shafer's *Deadly Paradigm*, Fall's *Street Without Joy*, Spector's *Advice and Support*, Krepinevich's *The Army and Vietnam* and Sheehan's *A Bright Shining Lie* discuss the relationship between the U.S. Army and the ARVN.
[210] Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina*, quoted from the preface to the book
[211] John T. McAlister, Jr. and Paul Mus, *The Vietnamese and Their Revolution* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970), ix
[212] General Hoang Lac, "Blind Design", 58-85, ARVN General Lu Lan, "The People's War or Wars on the People?", 129-154, and Lieutenant Colonel Tran Ngoc Chau, "My War Story from Ho Chi Minh to Ngo Dinh Diem," 180-209, all in Neese and O'Donnell, ed., *Prelude to Tragedy Vietnam 1960-1965*; Bui Diem, *In The Jaws of History*, 11-89; Nguyen Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 21-88, Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 15-96; Dinh, *20 Nam Binh Nghiep*, 17-61; Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century*, 5-76; Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 35-53, 288-326, 368-412

of Indochina, the Vietnamese experienced revolutionary conflicts, guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare and social, political, and economic upheaval.

President Diem and Political Advisor Nhu understood their enemies and their allies better than did the Americans[213] although the effectiveness of their political policies and military strategies often were challenged by Americans and Vietnamese nationalists.[214] While indifferent to American counter-guerrilla warfare practices in Greece and the Philippines, British and French experiences in Malaya and in Algeria influenced Diem and Nhu. As the CIA Chief of Station, Saigon, and a confidante of Diem and Nhu, William Colby found Nhu to be very knowledgeable about the communist concept of people's war, the First Indochina War, the recent Malayan Emergency, and the contemporary Algerian insurrection.[215] No admirer of Diem, Krepinevich has held that the implementation of the President's program "often left a great deal to be desired. They were often the victims of poor leadership, half-hearted execution, and corruption."[216] Yet, Krepinevich has recognized Diem's understanding of the importance of the army's "clear-and-hold operations," dispatching "political indoctrination teams" to live and resist communism with the people through "civic action," deploying "paramilitary security forces" to hunt down guerrillas and restore rural security, and "land reform." Thus, Krepinevich concluded that "Diem's approach to combating the insurgent threat is hard to fault in general terms."[217] In other words, while top civilian and military officials in Washington were trying to comprehend guerrilla warfare and devise how best to reverse that tide, South Vietnamese decision-makers understood communist methods and the measures needed to defeat the guerrillas. According to

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[213] Catton, *Diem's Final Failure*, 89-90
[214] Nguyen Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 172-193, 253-272; Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 141-187; Rufe Phillips, "Before We Lost in South Vietnam", 7-57, and General Hoang Lac, "Blind Design", 58-85, both in Harvey Neese and John O'Donnell, ed., *Prelude to Tragedy Vietnam 1960-1965*
[215] Catton, *Diem's Final Failure*, 90
[216] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 4
[217] Ibid., 24

Mark Moyar, commanders of anti-guerrilla units during the Diem era were "inept," selected not on the basis of "military competence" but of "political reliability" or "personal connections" to the President. Yet, Moyar concluded, President Diem demonstrated that he "knew how to fight the nascent VC [Viet Cong or PLAF] shadow government."[218]

Like Ho and Giap, Diem and Nhu looked at history with anything but passivity. Rather, they were suspicious of foreigners' intentions and critical of their advice.[219] The Ngo brothers questioned whether the British counterinsurgency model in Malaya or the French Army's *la guerre révolutionnaire* in Algeria were applicable to Vietnam. Among the top advisors to the John F. Kennedy administration and the Diem regime was Sir Robert Thompson, a counter-guerrilla warfare specialist who headed the British Advisory Mission to Vietnam. As Britain's suppression of the Malaya Emergency from 1948 to 1960 had impressed the Americans, they asked the British to advise the South Vietnamese. Upon his arrival to the country, Thompson discovered "nothing new" about the nature of the insurgency in South Vietnam, its only difference from the insurgency in Malaya being "in scale or intensity."[220] This overly generalized assessment of differences and similarities between Malaya and Vietnam astonished optimistic audiences in Washington but not in Saigon. As an Australian veteran of Malaya and Vietnam, Brigadier General John Coates, later argued, "one of the most frequent statements made by Australian army officers who fought in both campaigns, was that difference in scale and intensity between the two conflicts made all the difference in the world."[221]

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[218] Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey*, 35-36
[219] Catton, *Diem's Final Failure*, 5-24, 25
[220] Robert Thompson, *No Exit From Vietnam* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), 133
[221] John Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency: An Analysis of the Malayan Emergency, 1948-1954* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992), 2; for Australian involvement in South Vietnam see H.G. Gelber's *Problems of Australian Defence*, Biren Chakravorty's *Australia's Military Alliance: A Study In Foreign and Defence Policies*, Dayton McCarthy's *The Once and Future Army: A History of the Citizen Military Force, 1947-1974*, and Ian McNeill and Ashley Ekins's *The Official History of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1975*; Peter King's

The geographies of Malaya and Vietnam are completely different.[222] The British and Australian navies were able to blockade Malaya, whereas the Ho Chi Minh Trail was impossible to seal off because of canopied jungles and the sovereignty of Laos and Cambodia.[223] The incursions into Cambodia in 1970 and Laos in 1971 sparked uproars in the United States.[224] In Malaya, British and Australian professional volunteers had only to contend with Chinese communist guerrillas who drew their entire political and material support from the Chinese minority,[225] some fifteen percent of the population of one ethnically and religiously fragmented country. Thompson argued, however, that these non-military factors made Malaya more complicated than South Vietnam, not less. Moreover, the Chinese community was divided on social and economic lines as the interests of capitalists were better protected by a British- or capitalist-Malaya than a Maoist one.[226] Population resettlement was possible in Malaya but not so in Vietnam because of its large and more homogenous population. While the PLAF and the PAVN possessed active sanctuaries in North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia,[227] the communist insurgents in Malaya were completely isolated from the outside world and most Malays. Unified by Islam, Malays considered MCP's secularist and atheistic ideology to be threatening to their faith. Meanwhile, Vietnamese Catholics, Christians, and Moslems were minority groups surrounded by the majority of the Vietnamese who practiced a mixture of Confucianism, Buddhism, and ancestral worship. Throughout the Malayan Emergency, British and Australian

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Australia's Vietnam: Australia In The Second Indo-China War; Jeff Doyle, Jeffrey Grey, and Peter Pierce's *Australia's Vietnam War*

[222] Sir Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 19

[223] Dinh, *20 Nam Binh Nghiep*, 208-209; see John Prados's *The Blood Road: The Ho Chi Minh Trail and the Vietnam War*, a very important contribution to the historiography of the Vietnam War.

[224] Sorley, *A Better War*, 191-216, 243-260

[225] Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 288; Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, 19-20

[226] Christon I. Archer, John Ferris, Holger H. Herwig and Timothy H.E. Travers, *World History of Warfare* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 561; Thompson, *No Exit From Vietnam*, 131-134

[227] Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 346-348

fought a "low intensity operation" because the guerrillas could not muster even battalion-size forces. Hence, clashes produced few casualties.[228] On the other hand, in the Ia Drang Valley of the Central Highlands of South Vietnam in mid-November 1965, during the first engagement between the US Army and the PAVN, 1,200 North Vietnamese and 200 Americans died.[229] In 1955, the British and Australian SAS (Special Air Service), with the help of indigenous tribes, built a permanent base from which they could operate deep in enemy territory.[230] The French paratrooper, Foreign Legionnaires, and VNA paratroopers, the very best of the FFEEC troops, tried to establish a similar air-land commando base but were defeated at Dien Bien Phu.[231]

Thus, Diem and Nhu were skeptical of British methods and advice on defeating the communist guerrillas in South Vietnam. "While the Malayan experience was a fashionable object of study in the palace," wrote Philip E. Catton, "the Ngos were not starry-eyed about it. Diem told U.S. officials in June 1960 that the insurgencies in the two countries were not comparable because Malaya was an isolated peninsula, food was not so easily available, and the guerrillas, all of whom were ethnic Chinese, were more readily identifiable."[232] Moreover, Diem—more than Nhu—emphasized the strategic importance of Vietnam's Central Highlands.[233] Diem and his senior officers thought the Central Highlands was key to defending of South Vietnam against a potential infiltration of communist supplies, arms and insurgents, as well as against a PAVN conventional attack via Laos.[234]

Militarily, this area was difficult to monitor or seal off and could easily be infiltrated. By 1959, ARVN Special Force, paratrooper and ranger units, having gathered intelligence about

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[228] Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, 143
[229] Lieutenant General Harold G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway, *We Were Soldiers Once... And Young* (New York: Harpertorch, 1992), 1-479; Halberstam, *The Best and The Brightest*, 612
[230] Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, 157-159
[231] Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 312-329; Windrow, *The Last Valley*, 624
[232] Catton, *Diem's Final Failure*, 96
[233] Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 100-104; Dinh, *20 Nam Binh Nghiep*, 128-132, 149-161
[234] Dinh, *20 Nam Binh Nghiep*, 134

communist activities in the vicinity,[235] had concluded these were possible infiltration routes for North Vietnam to conquer South Vietnam.[236] This long track of canopied jungles and high plateaus ran parallel to the border of South Vietnam, offering concealment to invading forces.[237] The defence of the lowlands coastal cities of Qui Nhon and Nha Trang began at the highlands cities of Kontum, Pleiku, and Ban Me Thuot. If these outposts fell into enemy hands, the coastal lowlands would be threatened. If the Central Highlands fell under Communist control, South Vietnam's security would be jeopardized.[238] "These geographical aspects meant that only a defense in depth was a feasible strategy for South Vietnam," assessed ARVN Colonel Hoang Ngoc Lung, "and such a defense would require a large force with superior mobility."[239] The Central Highlands was home to the indigenous population of Laos and Vietnam, known as the Montagnards[240] who were pro-French because the imperialists had promised them their sovereignty[241] and anti-Vietnamese rather than pro-communist or pro-nationalist. The Central Highlands, sparely populated, was chosen as a site for the settlement of newly arrived northern Vietnamese refugees to the south[242] as the state aimed to assimilate the indigenous people.[243]

As South Korea was naturally shielded in the east and west by the Yellow Sea and the Sea of Japan, the ROK (South Korean Army), the US, and the UN forces had only to hold the 37th Parallel. But the ARVN had to contend with PLAF/PAVN conventional stabs from the 17th

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[235] Prados, *The Blood Road*, 18
[236] Dinh, *20 Nam Binh Nghiep*, 155-157; Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 104
[237] Lung, *Strategy and Tactics*, 6
[238] Dinh, *20 Nam Binh Nghiep*, 134
[239] Lung, *Strategy and Tactics*, 6
[240] Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 104; Dinh, *20 Nam Binh Nghiep*, 128-132, 149-161; see Gerald Cannon Hickey's *Free In The Forest: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese Central Highlands 1954-1976*; my knowledge of the Central Highland also derived from a collection of private papers, *Van De Dong Bao Thuong Viet Nam Tu 1954 – Den Nay, Issues of the Vietnamese Indigenous Population from 1954 to the Present Day*, mailed to the author by ARVN Colonel Nguyen Van Nghiem who worked with Montagnard population from the Diem to the Thieu governments.
[241] Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 277-278
[242] Dinh, *20 Nam Binh Nghiep*, 151-152; Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 104; Catton, *Diem's Final Failure*, 56-63
[243] Gerald Cannon Hickey, *Free In The Forest: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese Central Highlands 1954-1976* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 1-46; *Van De Dong Bao Thuong Viet Nam Tu 1954 – Den Nay, Issues of the Vietnamese Indigenous Population from 1954 to the Present Day*, 1-8

Parallel near Quang Tri, eastwardly from Kontum, Pleiku, and Ban Me Thuot all the way down to the Cape of Ca Mau in the Mekong Delta. This unresolved security dilemma facing the RVN government and military throughout the Vietnam War was revealed by ARVN Lieutenant General Ngo Quang Truong who analyzed South Vietnam's overall strategic position after the 1972 Easter Offensive:

> The geographical configuration of South Vietnam did not lend itself to defense against invasion.... South Vietnam was a narrow strip of land averaging approximately one hundred miles in width... the narrowness would not have been a problem if South Vietnam had been a peninsula surrounded by waters like South Korea... South Vietnam's western border from the DMZ to Ha Tien City was over 600 miles long. About two thirds of it ran through the jungles and mountains along the Laotian and Cambodian borders.... This open border area did not provide the natural features needed for an effective defense... it was especially difficult to defend against an enemy who enjoyed total freedom of movement along the entire frontier... the enemy was able to infiltrate and build up his forces with little interruption and attack where and when he wished.[244]

The design of the ARVN was historically rooted, its size was organic, and its political objectives were fluid, fluctuating in response to Hanoi's threats and Washington's pressure. The VNA and early ARVN discussed and tested light and heavy infantry divisions in guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare.[245] General Nguyen Van Hinh, VNA Chief of Staff in the First Indochina War, wanted the VNA to field two types of formations, *Quan Chinh Quy*, for large conventional battles, and *Khinh Quan*, for anti-guerrilla warfare and pacification.[246]

South Vietnamese, British, and American analysts between the First and Second Indochina Wars also argued that the ARVN required a conventional and unconventional capability. In a secret 15 January 1956, MAAGV Summary Evaluation and General Comments for Non-NATO countries, American advisors praised ARVN's handling of the sects. "Success against the Sects, with associated experience and improved esprit-de-corps," indicated the report,

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[244] Truong, *The Easter Offensive of 1972*, 160-164
[245] General Nguyen Van Hinh, "Les forces armée vietnamiennes," in Philippe Héduy, ed., *La Guerre d'Indochine 1945-1954*, 238-239; Porch, *The French Foreign Legion*, 552-554
[246] Don, *Viet Nam Nhung Chung*, 85

"has increased the effectiveness of the Vietnamese forces, despite concurrent reduction in strength." Still, MAAGV warned that while "Vietnamese Armed Forces are currently capable of establishing internal security against bandits and/or dissident elements excluding organized All-out activity by [communist] Viet Minh cadres under centralized direction of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN)," they could not react "with sufficient speed and effectiveness to effectively utilize the natural defensive terrain" against a "full scale Viet Minh [PAVN] invasion."[247] However, MAAGV did not estimate when this "All-out activity by Viet Minh cadres" or "full scale Viet Minh [PAVN] invasion" would come nor did it define back up plans for South Vietnam. It identified problems but offered no solutions as to how ARVN could simultaneously halt threats within and without its borders.

Britain also took part in the re-organization and training of the ARVN as the South Vietnamese and Americans trusted British small-war expertise. British officers doubted whether the US Army organization and doctrine could be imposed on the ARVN or used effectively against communist guerrillas in South Vietnam. Thus, on 26 August 1960, the British Military Attaché Colonel H.C.B. Cook warned his superiors that the ARVN was being ineffectively trained in the image of the US Army:

> Much of the initial trouble experienced by the Vietnamese Army in getting to grips with the insurgents springs from the policy of building an army of seven divisions equipped and trained for conventional warfare of the type waged in Korea. Such a policy, with its accent on the motorized deployment of troops and the use of unnecessarily heavy equipment, has fitted the [South Vietnamese] Army ill to engage in anti-guerrilla operations in the difficult country of the Mekong Delta, or in the jungles to be found elsewhere in Vietnam.[248]

South Vietnamese resisted American attempts to control their defence policy. Cook thought this policy had less to do with the South Vietnamese and their American counterparts in Saigon than

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[247] File: MAAGV 370.2, 15 January 1956, Non-NATO Countries Statements; Box 7; RG 472; Archive: NARA II
[248] *Secret & Guard*, Despatch No. 36, British Embassy, Saigon, August 20, 1960, 19, FO 371/152778/206419, UKNA

with American strategic planners in Washington, D.C. As Colonel Cook briefed the Ambassador:

> This [MAAGV] Mission... has done a remarkable job in producing an effective force of any kind out of the rudimentary military units left by the French at the end of the Indo-Chinese War. Many of the officers are fully aware of the shortcomings of the policy they are charged with helping to carry out... the Mission has been acting under directives from the Pentagon which have suffered from two defects; namely the over-rigidity characteristic of the American military system, which required training in Vietnam to be standardized as far as possible with that being applied in the other two Far Eastern countries allied with the United States, South Korea and Nationalist China... although that policy is not yet abandoned, the Americans appear... to have been assisting the Vietnamese Military Authorities to provide a different kind of training more fitted for the task in hand, notably in helping them to turn out at high speed the commando companies.[249]

Cook concurred with the South Vietnamese and local US advisors that ARVN must prepare for both low-tempo conflicts in the short run and high-intensity warfare in the long run. He also estimated when, where, and how imminent the PAVN threat was and how best Saigon could refit the ARVN to check the PAVN axes of advances:

> The [South] Vietnamese Army cannot do without some element trained in conventional warfare to meet the remote but always possible threat of a full-scale invasion from the North... an invasion would certainly be accompanied by a turning movement through the difficult country on the borders between Vietnam and South Laos and North Cambodia, executed by enemy troops trained in guerilla tactics. The President [Diem] is anxious to have it both ways.... The right solution would appear to be for the Vietnamese to have two or three divisions trained as a motorized striking force on conventional lines and the remainder of their forces organized in smaller mountain or jungle formations and trained to meet the guerrilla attack from the flank and insurgency from within. At a latter stage, units and formations may reach a level of efficiency where they can be trained to operate under both sets of conditions [counterinsurgency and conventional warfare].[250]

Cook thought a "full-scale invasion from the North along the coastal plain" was always possible if remote, but it "would certainly be accompanied by a turning movement through the difficult country on the borders between Vietnam and South Laos and North Cambodia, executed by enemy troops trained in guerilla tactics."[251] But American military planners had already considered this. The Joint Intelligence Conference meeting at the Far East Command on 17-20

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[249] Ibid., 19-20
[250] Ibid., 21
[251] Ibid., 20

April 1956 and the 12 June 1957 meeting of the Intelligence Estimate to Limited War Capabilities Study group, seriously considered a conventional invasion of South Vietnam.[252] These conferences concluded that invasions through neighboring Laos and Cambodia always were a dangerous possibility. Senior US commanders studied in detail three potential invasion routes, but not as possible infiltrating routes, which the South Vietnamese carefully did.[253] One was across the 17th parallel and down the narrow coastal plain of central Vietnam. The second came from Laos across the high plateau to the Coast of the Central Highland of South Vietnam. The third was a deep, long, stab southward from North Vietnam through Laos and Cambodia into the Mekong Delta directly threatening Saigon.[254] In 1965, 1968, 1972, and 1975 VC main forces and PAVN regulars came down all of these routes and eventually overran South Vietnam.

In retrospect, between 1954 and 1963, the ARVN needed to train for both styles of warfare, not just for one or the other. This is exactly what South Vietnamese political and military establishments wanted to do. As Cook wrote, "The President is anxious to have it both ways and has repeatedly complained to me of the refusal of the Americans to pay for an Army in excess of 150,000 men."[255] That was the mandate the ARVN was assigned: to defend South Vietnam against a PAVN invasion while supporting lightly armed counterinsurgency and pacification forces inside South Vietnam. As Lieutenant General Ngo Quang Truong, ARVN's most competent officer,[256] noted:

> The threat of a military conquest by North Vietnam was genuine, especially after 1956. South Vietnam's leaders estimated then that this conquest could materialize either under the forms of a subversive war waged by Hanoi-directed Communist elements remaining in the South or through an outright invasion from the North conducted by the NVA regular forces.

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[252] Quoted in Spector, *Advice and Support*, 268
[253] Prados, *The Blood Road*, 16-17
[254] Spector, *Advice and Support*, 268
[255] *Secret & Guard*, Despatch No. 36, British Embassy, Saigon, 20 August 1960, 20-21, FO 371/152778/206419, UKNA
[256] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 197; Davidson, *Vietnam At War*, 685; Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century*, 289; Kolko, *Anatomy of a War*, 532

> In the face of this double threat, South Vietnam planned its defense structure to cope with either or both possibilities... defending the national territory against a possible invasion from across the borders and eliminating subversive activities within the national boundaries.
>
> ... the force structure of South Vietnamese was organized into two principal components: the regular forces and the territorial forces. Regular forces consisted of infantry, airborne, marine, ranger units, etc., which were for the most part conventionally organized into divisions with organic support elements similar to U.S. counterparts, and whose primary mission was to destroy the enemy through combat operations and to defend the national borders. Territorial forces were made up of the Regional Forces and the Popular Forces, formerly known as the Civil Guard and the Self-Defense Corps respectively. Their organization was local in nature, being kept most at the small unit level, (platoon and company), lightly equipped, and tasked for pacification and the maintenance of territorial security.[257]

A MAAGV Country Statement of 21 January 1957 offered an identical assessment of the association between the ARVN counter-guerrilla and pacification forces:

> The Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps (in villages throughout Free Vietnam) are of material assistance in supplementing the efforts of the [South] Vietnamese Army in the accomplishment of the internal security mission. As these para-military units become better equipped and trained, their increased capability for assuming the major role in maintaining internal security will afford necessary relief of Army units for training. Simultaneously, this will add to Free Vietnam's potential for providing resistance to external aggression.[258]

Britain's Military Attaché in Vietnam also observed that the ARVN must carry out one of the three following tasks, sequentially or simultaneously, at any given time: (A) "External attack by what may be described as conventional military forces from the North;" (B) "External attack by well trained guerrilla forces;" (C) "Internal insurrection." Of these three threats, Cook believed the least likely was a PAVN invasion which could lead to "the outbreak of a world war and the [South] Vietnamese would therefore not be fighting alone." Option C, "internal insurrection," was "with us already," while North Vietnamese infiltration of South Vietnam through Laos and Cambodia was causing Option B. If Options B and C were combined, Hanoi could create great logistical problems for Saigon for irregular units could cut off supply and communication lines between Saigon and the fronts. As Cook reported:

> The internal problem is one moreover which can hamstring the [South] Vietnamese effort in time of war. The Vietnamese High Command itself considers that in the present state of the country the

[257] Lieutenant General Ngo Quang Truong, *Territorial Forces*, *Indochina Monographs* (College Park, M.D.: NARA II, 1984), 5

[258] File: MAAGV Security 350.09, Country Statement, 21 January 1957, Secret: Section C: Army Section, 22; Box 7; RG 472; Archive: NARA II

> communications of forward troops with Saigon would probably be cut and, for logistical purposes, their forces in some areas might not be able to hold for more than five days.[259]

The question of how far the ARVN should have trained for counter-guerrilla instead of conventional warfare was affected by the fact that the PLAF and PAVN threats also fluctuated between guerrilla and conventional warfare, depending on Hanoi's strengths and the weaknesses in Saigon and Washington. Between 1954 and 1963, the PLAF posed the most real threat to the RVN, especially because Hanoi had yet to order the PAVN into battle. But the DRVN was infiltrating men and materials into South Vietnam via Laos and Cambodia[260] in response to Diem's effective repression of the guerrillas.

Conclusion Was the ARVN wrong to prepare to fight a conventional war when it should have carefully trained for a war of counter-guerrilla warfare? We should be open to a more nuanced and historical interpretations rather than a political theory and/or a guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare model based interpretation. If anything, the sources cited above reflected the dilemma faced by contemporary civil-military officers in Washington and Saigon. Worried about the combined PLAF/PAVN threat, they could not find the right solution to deal with either. Furthermore, the debate mirrored once more the school of thought that still believes that the war could have been won using counter-guerrilla warfare. But this debate obscured another important question: whether or not the ARVN could organize, train, and adapt itself given the colossal of problems involved in nation-building in the young RVN?

In the 15 January 1956 MAAGV Country Statement on Non-NATO Countries, American advisors in South Vietnam pessimistically warned Washington that the ARVN could not check a great PAVN advance until friendly countries came to its aid:

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[259] *Secret & Guard*, Despatch No. 36, British Embassy, Saigon, 20 August 1960, 24, 25, FO 371/152778/206419, UKNA

[260] Prados, *The Blood Road*, 13

> In measuring the [South] Vietnamese capability to delay a full-scale [communist] Viet Minh aggression it is significant to note that effective delaying action would require command, control and coordination of a relatively large force with associated flexibility to rapidly cope with developments such as the destruction of a key rear bridge. This requires training which the Vietnamese have not had to date as well as an organized force in being, not on undergoing complete reorganization.[261]

The message implicitly emphasized the need for the ARVN, while fighting small wars, to adapt to the communist weaknesses and strengths, including large-scale conventional operations against enemy infiltration and sabotage in the ARVN's rear area. ARVN Colonel Hoang Ngoc Lung shared MAAGV's concern. He thought the battlefield conditions in South Vietnam demanded a doctrinal change in order to prepare ARVN to cope with sequential or combined communist insurgency and conventional threats. The Colonel was disappointed that Saigon never accomplished this task "because the security situation—the press of daily operational requirements—never gave the RVNAF time to work out a more suitable doctrine."[262] However, Saigon failed to adapt the ARVN to the demands of war in South Vietnam for many reasons—organization, training, corruption, politicization, nepotism—but also unhealthy relationships and conflicts of interest between US advisors and ARVN officers that reflected clashes between Washington and Saigon over how the war should be fought.

With the elimination of the sectarian militias by the VNA and the integration of their surviving members into the ARVN, the only forces able to topple Diem's regime were the PAVN and NLF—or the ARVN. Ironically, precisely at the time when the South Vietnamese Officer Corps was asked to learn not only how to fight conventional and counter-guerrilla warfare but to switch back and forth between them, Diem and Nhu placed politically loyal but not necessarily military competent officers at their head. The politicization of the ARVN was caused as much by the Generals as by Diem and Nhu. Military politicization was neither a new

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[261] File: MAAGV 370.2, 15 January 1956, Non-NATO Countries Statements; Box 7; RG 472; Archive: NARA II
[262] Lung, *Strategy and Tactics*, 7

phenomenon nor necessarily negative. Many politicized and corrupt armies in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America have crushed local insurgencies when Western armies failed. Between 1954 and 1957, Diem's army, plagued by organizational and training problems as well as nepotism and corruption, still crushed the sects, forces to be reckoned with, while most Viet Minh cadres in the South were arrested or shot by 1957. However, the will of the communist guerrillas in South Vietnam was bent but not broken thanks to Hanoi's unyielding perseverance.

Unlike the sects, the communists had access to safe havens in North Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, and popular support among South Vietnamese peasants and foreign countries. More significantly, the communists also had guerrilla and conventional capabilities. What was unusual in South Vietnam was not a corrupt and politicized army, but the power of the PLAF and the PAVN. Diem might have succeeded had the politicized and corrupted ARVN only contended with the Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Binh Xuyen, just as the politicized Egyptian, Jordanian, and Syrian militaries performed well until they met the Israeli Defense Force (IDF). Therefore, the question is not whether the ARVN should have been organized, trained, and equipped for either conventional warfare or counterinsurgency, but whether the ARVN organize and train to fight the PLAF/PAVN while also nation building. Often the problems of nation-building in South Vietnam caused the ARVN to delay its organization and training, hence, decreasing its combat effectiveness. In other words, by failing to analyze the ARVN in the historical context of a war-torn South Vietnam, theorists of guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare provided inadequate answers to how the PLAF/PAVN won while the ARVN eventually lost. By studying the ARVN in the historical context of a South Vietnam in turmoil and troubled Diem government, one must ask a more important question: Were there military or political solutions to save the RVN given

how weak and inexperienced it was compared to the DRVN? Above all, how could the young RVN deal with such colossal problems created both by itself and its enemy?

Chapter 5
Organizing the ARVN, 1956-1959

Between 1956 and 1959, a temporary peaceful respite in South Vietnam opened a small window of opportunity for Diem's government to organize itself and train its military. Three important factors made this possible. First, the disintegration of the sect militias and their reintegration into the Republic of Viet Nam Armed Forces (RVNAF) neutralized any non-communist military threats to Diem's government by 1956. Diem's defeat of non-communist factions also ushered a period of calm in South Vietnamese society. Second, the Eisenhower administration's timely intervention into Indochina's diplomatic affairs, though it failed to stave off France's defeat, prevented the DRVN from seizing all of Vietnam. American-financed civil and military projects also assured the upward spiral in the southern Vietnamese economy. Finally, the DRVN had turned inward to consolidate its political and military position from 1954 to 1960.

As discussed previously, the DRVN suffered temporary diplomatic and economic setbacks after the Geneva Conference. When the Geneva Agreement was signed in mid-1954, a large proportion of the DRVN's population that left for the RVN was amongst "the most affluent, creative, and industrious people, since Catholics made up a high percentage of the commercial, professional, and intellectual elite of the country." According to historian William J. Duiker, "the exodus served to spare the new regime a potential source of opposition."[1] Starting in 1955, Ho Chi Minh formulated a new revolutionary policy: "Build the North, look to the South",[2] aimed at rebuilding war-torn North Vietnam at the temporary expense of Vietnam's reunification. As the DRVN reformed its government, restored law and order, and sought to industrialize its broken economy, its military also underwent changes. General Giap, now

[1] William J. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life* (New York: Hyperion, 2000), 465-466
[2] Ibid., 473

DRVN's Minister of Defence, and the General Military Party Committee, were tasked with a new mission. They were to revamp the VLA, turning it into the PAVN, a modernized conventional army able "to beat off future [external] assaults on the Motherland" with the support of its small but newly-established air force and navy.[3] As the demands of the Vietnam War grew, the PAVN's mission objective shifted from providing "protection of the Fatherland and the preservation of peace" to aiding the NFLSVN revolutionary party and its revolutionary military, the PLAF, in South Vietnam. As the PAVN's official history pointed out, the military's additional mission objective was to "firmly maintain and expand the political struggle movement of the people of the South in order to consolidate peace, achieve national unification, and complete our mission of achieving independence and democracy for the entire nation."[4]

However, this shift in strategy from defending the DRVN to supporting the NFLSVN and PLAF, placing the PAVN on an offensive war footing, did not come until 1960 when the NFLSVN formed and the PLAF increased its guerrilla operations. Between 1954 and 1959, the PAVN's strategy remained tailored to meet the political objective of the DRVN government, strengthening North Vietnam politically, militarily, and economically. By default, DRVN policy allowed the RVN government precious time of relative peace to organize and train its armed forces. In retrospect, 1954 to 1959 were the only years in the history of the RVN when its government and military could prepare for war without having to combat the combined military threat of the PAVN and PLAF. By 1960 when the PLAF, with PAVN support, stepped up its attacks, the RVN government and military fought for three years but failed to defeat the NFLSVN and PLAF. By 1963, the Diem government was toppled in a US-backed RVNAF coup

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[3] John Colvin, *Giap, Volcano Under Snow: Vietnam's Celebrated General Giap, Victor at Dien Bien Phu and Mastermind of the Tet Offensive* (New York: SOHO Press, 1996), 149

[4] Merle L. Pribbenow, translated, *The Military History Institute of Vietnam's Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 5

d'état—the first turning point in the history of the Vietnam War. The ensuing political chaos and chains of military debacles in post-Diem southern Vietnam deepened US involvement in the country. By 1965, the US had to use direct force to deny South Vietnam to the DRVN.

Why did the RVN fail to win by 1963? One of the roots of the RVN's first defeat and the DRVN's first victory in the Vietnam War originated with the organizational and training problems of the RVN military. But non-military problems—political, social, and economic—overwhelmed the RVN government's capability to formulate workable solutions to permanently end the guerrilla war. As the PAVN and the PLAF intensified their attacks, unresolved non-military problems further adversely affected the RVN. The PAVN and PLAF threats did not materialize till the early 1960s. However, from 1954 to 1959, neither did the RVN take advantage of its enemy's hesitation to properly organize and train the RVNAF. The weaknesses of the RVN government and military, combined with the difficult problems they failed to resolve, invited political and military challenges from the DRVN and NFLSVN. Unstable RVN's political and military foundations were further weakened by DRVN and NFLSVN political and military challenges. When the Eisenhower administration left the White House, the Kennedy administration had to decide on one of two Vietnam policies, to cooperate with Diem's government, or to replace it with a new administration that might succeed.

The following chapter will critically analyze the organizational problems of the RVNAF, mainly the ARVN and other supporting land forces. As such, it is a precondition to the subsequent chapters on the training and combat capability of the ARVN and its auxiliary ground forces which will explain how southern Vietnamese counter-revolutionary forces actually performed against communist revolutionary forces from 1960 to 1963. This chapter, however, is

concerned more with how the ARVN and its auxiliary land forces actually organized to combat the combined threats of the PLAF and the PAVN from 1954 to 1959.

From 1955 to 1963, the RVNAF fell under the political and military control of the Office of the Presidency, the Service of Social and Political Studies (SSPS), the Ministry of Defence, and the Ministry of Interior. The Office of the Presidency controlled fourteen ministries, ranging from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of Public Work and Transportation in addition to the Ministries of Defence and Interior.[5] The Office of the Presidency consisted of sixteen administrative bureaus, ranging from the Commissioner-General for Co-operation of Village and Rural Communities to the Director for Social Development in the Highlands of Central Vietnam. Perhaps the single most important bureau that received direct orders from and reported only to the Office of the Presidency was the SSPS.

From 1955 to 1956, the Office of the Presidency ordered the integration of all intelligence, security and police agencies left behind by the FFEEC, the FMI, the Sûreté, and the VNA's General Staff Intelligence (J-2). These consisted mainly of the Military Security Service (MSS) responsible for counterintelligence, the Imagery Interpretation Center (IIC), and other civil, police, and military intelligence services into one coherent and functioning SSPS.[6] The process of integrating all these civil, police, and military intelligence bureaus was supervised by Diem's brother and closest advisor, Ngo Dinh Nhu, whose formal title was Counsellor to the President. Nhu and Diem selected Tran Kim Tuyen as SSPS Director. Tuyen, a medical doctor by profession with little or no experience in intelligence work, was a devout Catholic who had taken refuge at the Phat Diem Catholic Self-Defence conclave in northern Vietnam during the

[5] Hồ Đắc Huân, *Thành-Tích Sáu Năm Hoạt-Động Của Chủnh-Phủ Việt Nam Cộng Hòa* (*The Performance of Six Active Years of the Republic of Viet Nam*) (Published in Saigon, RVN: the Ministry of Information, 1960/ Reprinted in Little Saigon, California: Van Loc Foundation, 2007), 383-871

[6] Colonel Hoang Ngoc Lung, *Intelligence,* Indochina Monographs (College Park, MD: NARA II Library, 1982), 12

French Indochina War, a hardcore anti-communist, and a staunch supporter of Diem's government.[7] By appointing Tuyen to lead one of the most important bureaus despite his questionable credentials, Diem's government had set the unofficial standard for the selection of ministers for security and defence agencies and senior officers for the RVNAF. Individual merit ranked lower than personal loyalty to the Diem government which measured the loyalty of selected officials based on political, religious, and geographical affiliations. Lieutenant General Dong Van Khuyen, a junior VNA officer who became a respected senior ARVN staff officer, critically analyzed the official and unofficial—hence politically influenced—system of promotion in the RVNAF:

> Under the First Republic, the authority to promote company grade officers rested with the Minister of Defense. The promotion of field grade and general officers was the sole prerogative of the President. The selection procedure was then so hermetic that only a few military personnel knew anything about it. The rumour circulated among military officers that the decisive factors were the three Ds, the Vietnamese initials for Party [Dang], Religion [Dao], and Region [Dung]. An officer had to possess one of these three qualifications for promotion or a good position.[8]

The chief of the Diem government's spy agency was blessed with all "the three Ds" despite his lack of theoretical and practical knowledge about intelligence work.

The Ministry of Defence ran the RVNAF with the assistances of eleven directorates, ranging from the Directorate of Research and Training to the Directorate of Veteran Affairs.[9] The RVNAF had three main services: the ARVN, the Viet Nam Air Force (VNAF), and the Viet Nam Navy (VNN).[10] The VNAF and VNN were always smaller then the ARVN because the majority of the decisive battles, especially in counter-guerrilla warfare, occurred on land.

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[7] Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 246; Philip E. Catton, *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam* (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 2002), 16

[8] Lieutenant General Dong Van Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, Indochina Monograph (College Park, M.D.: NARA II Library, 1978), 86

[9] Ibid., 7

[10] Đắc Huân, *Thành-Tích Sáu Năm Hoạt-Động Của Chính-Phủ Việt Nam Cộng Hòa*, 851-854

Nevertheless, the size of the VNAF and the VNN increased to meet battlefield demands.[11] In 1955, for example, the RVNAF consisted of 250,000 men, but by 1975 it had over 1 million men, with over 60,000 airmen in the VNAF and over 40,000 seamen in the VNN.[12] The arsenals of the VNAF and VNN also increased during the war years. In 1972, the VNAF possessed 1,500 assorted helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft. Between 1962 and 1964, the VNN had 2,000 ships of different sizes and various combat capabilities, capable of operating in both the shallow Mekong River Delta and the South China Sea.[13]

As for the RVNAF's land forces, the numbers increased dramatically. In 1955, the ARVN had 150,000 men but over 450,000 men by 1975.[14] The ARVN was reinforced by the Viet Nam Marine Corps (VNMC) which specialized in both amphibious and land warfare. At its peak in 1972 to 1975, the VNMC consisted of one Division but, with the exception of its amphibious landing craft, most of its artillery, tanks, and airlift capability were provided by the ARVN and VNAF.[15] The VNMC had 1,800 members in 1956 and over 14,000 marines in 1975.[16] Together with South Vietnamese paratroopers, rangers, and special force soldiers and sailors, South Vietnamese marines constituted one of the RVNAF's strategic reserve forces prepared for operations anywhere throughout southern Vietnam. Further augmenting the ARVN and VNMC were over 540,000 men—no more than 1,000 in 1956—in various paramilitary and

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[11] James S. Corum and Wray R. Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2003), 235-236

[12] Colonel Ha Mai Viet, *Steel and Blood: South Vietnamese Armor and the War for Southeast Asia* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 280; Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, 22

[13] Thomas J. Cutter, *Brown Water, Black Berets: Costal and Riverine Warfare in Vietnam* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1988), 21; Lieutenant Pham Phong Dinh, *Thien Hung Ca: Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa (The Republic of Viet Nam Armed Force)* (Winnipeg: Pham Quoc Thoai, 2004), 597, 555

[14] Dinh, *Thien Hung Ca: Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa*, 373

[15] Vietnamese Marine Division Headquarters, *Chien Su Thuy Quan Luc Chien (History of the Vietnamese Marine Corps)* (College, M.D.: NARA II Library, 1997), 30

[16] Dinh, *Thien Hung Ca: Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa*, 373

national and local police forces, charged with keeping order and security in rural southern Vietnam from 1957 to 1975.[17]

The escalation of the Vietnam War in the mid-1960s also meant that wounded and dead troops had to be replaced. But troops who went on training courses, guarded bases, fell ill, wounded themselves to avoid frontline duties, or deserted also had to be replaced. Such 'wastage' forced rear echelon RVNAF personnel to become frontline combat troops, leaving many non-combat military roles vacant.[18] Battlefield demands thus left many rear echelon military positions—doctors, nurses, administrators, accountants, logisticians, intelligence analysts, communication specialists, etc.,—to be filled by women. In the French Indochina War, the FFEEC and the VNA had used le Personnel Auxiliaire Féminin (PAF) made up of 6,000 women. By 1965, the PAF became the Vietnam Women's Armed Forces Corps (VWAFC also known as the Women's Auxiliary Corps) with 10,000 female officers, NCO and troops. Vietnamese female soldiers were inducted, trained, and selected to attend specialized and advanced training in France and the US. Although PAF and VWAFC members were trained in the use of weapons, martial arts, and combat tactics, no more than a handful of them experienced combat as doctors and nurses stationed at forward bases of operation. More female military personnel, however, performed non-combat military duties at RVNAF's bases.[19]

Although the majority of RVNAF officers, NCOs, and troops were of Vietnamese origins, ethnic minorities also served. Ethnic minorities inhabiting the Central Highlands were collectively referred to as "the Montagnards" and "the Chams." They were conscripted to serve in the RVNAF, particularly in paramilitary units operating near their home areas. Vietnamese of Chinese and Cambodian ethnicity were also drafted into the RVNAF. Like many Vietnamese,

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[17] Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, 22; Viet, *Steel and Blood*, 280; Dinh, *Thien Hung Ca: Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa*, 629
[18] Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, 71-73
[19] Dinh, *Thien Hung Ca: Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa*, 689-695; Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, 32

some ethnic minorities tried to avoid military service. Still others contributed significantly by providing the RVNAF with committed soldiers, NCOs, and officers, many of whom became company and battalion commanders.[20]

Robert K. Brigham has pointed out that during the Vietnam War "many U.S. critics of the ARVN suggested that the army was made up mostly of ethnic Chinese, explaining their lack of desire to fight for South Vietnam." But Brigham, challenging this conventional wisdom, has argued the contrary that similar to "their [ARVN's] counterparts in the PAVN and PLAF... nearly 90 percent of the ARVN were ethnic Vietnamese; only 1.6 percent were ethnic Chinese."[21] An estimated 1 million Chinese and 400,000 Cambodians lived in the RVN.[22] Based on the US and RVN census reports of 1960, approximately 14,6 million people lived in South Vietnam.[23] Eighty-five percent of the RVN's population were Vietnamese while the remainder were Chinese, Cambodians, Montagnards, and Chams. Furthermore, the US and RVN research on "Ethnic derivation" of the South Vietnamese military revealed that 88.2 percent were Vietnamese origin, 1.6 percent Chinese, 2.8 percent Cambodian, 0.2 percent Cham, and 7.2 percent Montagnard. The VNMC was 90.7 percent Vietnamese, 1.7 percent Chinese, 4 percent Cambodian, 1 percent Cham, and 2.6 percent Montagnard. The VNN was 99.4 percent Vietnamese. The VNAF was completely Vietnamese. Excluding the paramilitary forces and various police forces in southern Vietnam, the RVNAF was 91.9 percent Vietnamese, 1.2 percent Chinese, 2.2. percent Cambodians, 0.2 percent Chams, and 4.5 percent Montagnards.[24]

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[20] Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, 44
[21] Robert K. Brigham, *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army* (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 2006), 19
[22] Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, 43
[23] Robert M. White, *Anthropometric Survey of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam*, sponsored by Advanced Research Project Agency, Washington, D.C. (Natick: US Army Natick Laboratories, October 1964), 11
[24] Ibid., 19

To better understand the problems of the RVN military, we have to look beyond the ethnic groups that made up the RVNAF for three important reasons. To ignore the minorities is to deny their micro-histories which combine to form the macro-history of the Vietnam War. Secondly, blaming ethnic minorities for the RVNAF's defeat victimizes Vietnamese southerners by falsely implying that their historical roles and destinies were controlled by others. Most importantly, scapegoating ethnic minority groups was an easy excuse not to critically analyze far more serious problems that plagued the RVNAF combat capabilities. An ethnically diverse military that is well organized, properly trained, and united through inspiring leadership can succeed where an ethnically homogenous but disorganized, ill-trained, and poorly commanded military can fail. Montagnards and the Chams of the Central Highlands of Vietnam were preferred recruits by both French and American commandos for special warfare given their intimate knowledge of the Highlands. As hunters, they could track communist guerrilla forces and advise which weapons were best suited in mountain and jungle conditions. The Montagnards, recalled former US Army Green Beret Shelby L. Stanton, "were brave hunters and skilled in the use of poisons."[25] Such diversity thus added potential strength to the RVN and US counter-guerrilla forces. The real question was whether these diverse fighting elements could form a cohesive military force.

However, as VLA and FFEEC performance indicated, numbers alone are but one factor contributing to the overall effectiveness of a military force. Other factors—policy, strategy, tactics, intelligence, organization, training, personnel, morale, enemy's calibre, and leadership—are equally important variables to assess the overall performance of one military force versus

[25] Shelby L. Stanton, *Green Berets At War: U.S. Army Special Forces in Southeast Asia, 1955-1975* (New York: Ivy Books, 1985), 44

another. The next step must be to determine how the ARVN and other auxiliary counter-guerrilla forces were organized before we can critically analyze how they were trained.

Receiving orders from and reporting directly to the Office of the Minister of Defense and Special Military Staff—both in turn reported to the Office of the Presidency—was the Office of Chief of Staff of the Joint General Staff (JGS) which overlooked and commanded all military branches of the RVNAF. The Chief of the JGS commanded the JGS and the RVNAF though four important staff bureaus: Personnel (J-1); Intelligence (J-2); Operations (J-3); Logistics (J-4); Political and Psychological Warfare (J-5). Subordinate to the JGS and its four main staff bureaus were other Directorates and Commands: Personnel Directorate; Military Security Directorate; Artillery Command; Aptitude Test Institute; Telecommunications Command; Armor Command; Engineer Command; Transportation Command; Military Region Command (directly reported to the JGS); the Sub-Region Military Command (directly reported to the Military Region Command); the Sector Military Command (directly reported to the Sub-Region Military Command). By 1963, the war's escalation had led to new subordinate commands being attached to the JGS, including Field, Army, Air Force, Navy (also commanding the Marines), Military Police, Signal, and Ranger commands.[26]

One of the pillars of the RVN state was the RVNAF which was held together by pillars of its own, the officer corps, which was responsible for organizing, training and leading the RVN military against external and internal enemies. Beginning in 1955, the development of the RVN military, particularly its land forces component, was a joint endeavour of MAAGV and the JGS, with the latter submitting a proposal to organize and train RVN land forces, particularly the ARVN, to MAAGV. Historians have neglected to explain how the military experiences of key JGS senior officers may or may not have influenced the official plan they had for organizing and

[26] Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, 7, 12

training the ARVN. Take Brigham's description of the conflicts between President Diem, the JGS and MAAGV over the development of the ARVN for example. "He [Diem] understood his own generals' opposition to the American plan, and," as Brigham has explained, "some of his aides suggest, he also feared that he was going against accepted military practices and Vietnamese traditions."[27]

A number of questions arise. For example, what was JGS's blueprint to build the ARVN? What was MAAGV's plan to organize South Vietnam's army? Did the JGS and MAAGV argue over ARVN's organization and training or did they blend ideas? When explaining how MAAGV had organized and trained the ARVN historians incorrectly interpreted that MAAGV built the ARVN purely for conventional warfare based on the Korean War example.[28] We must now critically analyze the military backgrounds of key JGS commanding generals and if their service in the French Indochina War affected ARVN development.

Before President Diem sacked and exiled him to France, General Nguyen Van Hinh, the VNA's former Chief of Staff, considered his four Colonels—Le Van Kim, Nguyen Van Vy, Tran Van Minh or "Little Minh" ("Big Minh" was Duong Van Minh), and Tran Van Don—as "the first four pillars of the army."[29] In addition, Colonels Le Van Ty, Ton That Dinh, and Duong Van Minh constituted the additional pillars of the JGS. Together, these senior officers drafted a proposal for the Office of the Presidency and MAAGV about how the South Vietnamese land forces should be prepared to combat the communist threats. What were the

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[27] Brigham, *ARVN*, 5

[28] Bernard B. Fall, *Street Without Joy* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1994), 343; Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 3-7; D. Michael Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms: The Failure of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 244-247; Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years of the United States Army in Vietnam, 1941-1960* (Washington, D.C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1985), 268, 272-273, 296, 299; Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and American in Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 49-55, 59, 106-108

[29] General Tran Van Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung: Hoi Ky Chanh Tri (Viet Nam Witness: A Political Memoir)* (Los Alamitos: Xuan Thu, 1989), 137

military experiences of these key JGS commanders and how much did their experiences influence plans to transform the VNA and other auxiliary forces into the ARVN and other paramilitary forces? While DRVN's leaders had considerable experience in governing and military affairs, RVN's statesmen and generals lacked both political and military experience. When one thinks about DRVN military leadership, Giap immediately comes to mind. But Ho Chi Minh, had served briefly in the PLA's 8th Route Army during WWII. Meanwhile, Diem had administrative but no military experience. Furthermore, compared to the General Staff of the DRVN's military, the JGS had limited battlefield and even less command experience. The largest unit commanded by supposedly senior officers of the JGS was a battalion. Before assessing their proposal to build the RVN land forces, a brief biographical sketch of key JGS commanding generals—ARVN Commander Major General Tran Van Don, Superintendent of the Vietnamese National Military Academy Brigadier General Le Van Kim, Paratrooper Commander Brigadier General Nguyen Van Vy, Chairman of the JGS Lieutenant General Le Van Ty, Commander of III Corps Brigadier General Ton That Dinh, Military Assistant to the President Major General Duong Van Minh—reveals the limited background of these RVNAF senior commanders.

Dennis Werner, an Australian journalist, recalled Major General Tran Van Don was "generally regarded at this time [1954-1955] as South Vietnam's best soldier."[30] Don's military experience before he became a full Colonel in the VNA and then a Major General in the RVN's JGS, as noted in his memoir, had been limited to being a junior intelligence officer in General Jacques Philippe Leclerc's staff in 1945. Don's task had been to inform Leclerc whether there was popular support in Vietnam to restore the exiled Vietnamese Emperor Duy Tan who then

[30] Dennis Werner, *The Last Confucian: Vietnam, South-East Asia, and the West* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1964), 104

died when his plane crashed while en route to Indochina. Further, Don was to assess the intentions of the Viet Minh government and military.[31] From 1951 to 1953, promoted to Colonel, Don headed the VNA's military security bureau.[32] During the fighting between the VNA and the sects, Don's military duties involved collecting and assessing intelligence about opponents of the Diem regime.[33] Though lacking in military experience, Don's political ambition and intrigues were well known. Lam Quang Thi, who served under Don during the French Indochina War, said Don was "known in the army as a master politician who skilfully switched sides to position himself with the winning party."[34] To conclude, Don's theoretical knowledge of warfare was unknown and his practical military experiences very limited. He had neither combat nor command experience at any level, be it the platoon, company, battalion, regiment, or division. As for his staff duties, records do not demonstrate involvement in any organizing a military unit or operational planning.

Amongst the most highly educated VNA officers in the early JGS was Colonel, later Brigadier General in the ARVN, Le Van Kim. Lansdale considered Kim a "rare creature, a Vietnamese graduate of the French War College," who ensured that joint meetings and planning between MAAGV and the JGS went "quickly and well."[35] Dennis Warner praised Kim as "the best educated of the South Vietnamese military leaders." Bui Diem, RVN's future Ambassador to the US, deemed Kim as intelligent and honest.[36] Trained as an artillery officer,[37] there is no evidence that Kim served on the frontline or led men in combat during the French Indochina

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[31] Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 45-62
[32] Ibid., 84-88
[33] Edward Geary Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars: An American's Mission to Southeast Asia* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1991), 269
[34] Lieutenant General Lam Quang Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century: A South Vietnamese General Remembers the Indochina War to the Fall of Saigon* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2001), 103
[35] Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars*, 239
[36] Bui Diem with David Chanoff, *In The Jaws of History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 100
[37] Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century*, 109

War. In 1955, Kim "recreated an indoctrination course" for two ARVN divisions before they were dispatched on a Civic Actions mission to remove VLA stay-behind-cadres and provide security for refugees from northern Vietnam settling in Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh provinces.[38]

Kim's impressive educational background but middling military experience mirrored the records of many ARVN officers before 1963. The majority of RVNAF officers came from the urban areas and were university graduates before joining the military. General Cao Van Vien, the longest serving JGS Chairman, 1965-1975, has argued that choosing RVNAF junior officers under the Diem government was "entirely based on academic achievements or formal education." Vien recognized that observers had criticized that the RVNAF was commanded by "the educated urbanites—the rich people—and that such selection process lacked a popular base." "This criticism was partly true," Vien has judged, "especially during the formative years [1955-1963] of the Vietnamese Armed Forces."[39] According to the RAND Corporation, many ARVN officers had trained as teachers before entering military service. The RAND survey revealed that 5 percent of ARVN Generals, 13 percent of ARVN Colonels, and 15 percent of ARVN field-grade officers held doctoral degrees.[40] "The ARVN had a well-educated officer corps," argued Professor Anthony James Joes, "but it was not a well-trained army."[41] The quality of the RVNAF officer corps, therefore, cannot be accurately evaluated based on the education of its officers but must also include military training and combat experience. In his case, Kim's military accomplishment was no match for his academic achievements. In wartime scenario, the

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[38] Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 57; Rufe Phillips, "Before We Lost in South Vietnam", in Harvey Neese and John O'Donnell, ed., *Prelude to Tragedy: Vietnam, 1960-1965* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 15

[39] General Cao Van Vien, *Leadership*, Indochina Monographs (College Park, M.D.: NARA II Library, 1983), 37-38

[40] Allan E. Goodman, *An Institutional Profile of the South Vietnamese Officer Corps* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1970), 9

[41] Anthony James Joes, *The War For South Vietnam 1954-1975*, revised ed. (Wesport: Praeger, 2001), 89

importance of an officer's military education combined with combat and command experiences outweighed his civilian vocational training.

A subordinate of Hinh but a superior to Don and Kim was the combat-hardened VNA paratrooper Colonel Nguyen Van Vy. Promoted to General in 1955, Vy fell from grace with Diem by 1956 for his loyalty to Hinh and Emperor Bao Dai. However, Lansdale saw Vy as "one of the most competent Vietnamese combat commanders" and admired Vy's "evident integrity and thoughtful manner" and sense of honour.[42] To Lansdale's superiors, Lieutenant General John Williams O'Daniel, MAAGV Chief from 1953 to 1955, and General James Lawton Collins, President Eisenhower's Special Representative and Envoy to President Diem, Vy was "the ablest available combat-type officer" in the VNA.[43] While Vy's combat and command records impressed O'Daniel and Collins, no records suggest that he had commanded any unit larger than a VNA paratrooper battalion or that he helped to organize and plan operations beyond the battalion level.

Two other senior VNA officers who cooperated with MAAGV to reorganize the ARVN were Colonel Ton That Dinh and Colonel Le Van Ty. Dinh and Ty were chosen by Diem and Nhu for their perceived political loyalty to the Diem government. By the early 1960s, Dinh would be promoted to Brigadier General and Ty to Lieutenant General. However, their military and records, especially Ty's, were unimpressive. Before 1948, when he was transferred from the FFEEC to the VNA, Ty had served over thirty years in the French army to obtain the final rank as a captain. While no records outline Ty's military exploits in WWII or the French Indochina War, by 1955 Ty, a former company commander, made general. That rank would have allowed him to command a brigade or a division in most Western armies, but in Diem's army he was the

[42] Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars*, 280
[43] General John Lawton Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography* (Novato: Presidio, 1979), 393

top soldier. Ty, whose command experience had been limited to leading a company of 100 soldiers and who had never attended Staff College in France or the US, led 150,000 men in the ARVN. But Ty, a MAAGV senior advisor thought, "would have made a real good sergeant."[44] To O'Daniel and Collins, Ty was "a man... [with] few traits of leadership and backbone."[45] By contrast, Giap's resume involved leading the VLA in both guerrilla and combined arms warfare from battalion to divisional level at Dien Bien Phu.

Another favourite military officer was Colonel, later Brigadier General, Ton That Dinh. President Diem considered Dinh his adopted godson. A veteran of the FFEEC and VNA paratrooper battalions, Dinh's baptism of fire had come while defending two FFEEC protected Catholic conclaves in central Vietnam against VLA regulars in the French Indochina War. Thereafter, most of Dinh's military experiences had been in northern and central Vietnam. Dinh's family background, political beliefs, and religious faith naturally drew him to the Diem government and quickly made him a Diem favourite. Born and raised in Hue, Dinh's family, of northern Vietnamese background, had immigrated to central Vietnam in the late eighteenth century. While Dinh was a nationalist, his family had blood ties with the Nguyen dynasty; hence, his politics were a mixture of nationalism, monarchism, and conservatism.[46] Nothing pleased the Diem government more than the fact that Dinh, a devout Catholic, had defended Bui Chu and Phat Diem where Diem's family had taken refuge. Like Tuyen, Dinh was a military officer of northern/central Vietnamese descent, a nationalist, a monarchist, and a conservative Catholic. Dinh thus had all the three "Ds" that helped Tuyen to become head of Diem's spy agency. However, to outsiders, including Stanley Karnow, Dinh's leadership style was one of "a

[44] Spector, *Advice and Support*, 280
[45] Collins, *Lightning Joe*, 393
[46] General Ton That Dinh, *25 Nam Binh Nghiep (25 Years of Military Service)* (San Jose: Chanh Dao, 1998), 12-46

swaggering prima dona."[47] American journalist Malcolm W. Browne characterized a boastful Dinh as "engaging and forceful" with an ambition to "be premier of Viet Nam" but he "drinks hard and lives hard, and can be a canny military tactician at times."[48] Therefore, it was unsurprising to Colonel Francis Peter Serong, a veteran of the Malayan Emergency and the first commander of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV), that Dinh, given his vain leadership style, loud manner, and drinking problem was not a fitting commanding officer but rather "a young punk with gun—and dangerous."[49] Dinh's combat experience was not in question. However, Dinh's command experience beyond the battalion level as well as his ability to organize and plan operations at the regimental and divisional level were in doubt.

The last of the ARVN pillars was Colonel, later Major General, Duong Van Minh ("Big Minh"). Minh lacked formal education and military training, and unlike all of his contemporary colleagues, he had little political connection with Hinh, Bao Dai, or Diem prior to being appointed to the JGS. He had risen through the ranks by first fighting with the French against the Japanese in WWII, then by fighting against the FFEEC with the VLA in 1946, and finally by fighting against the VLA while serving in the VNA after 1950. Unlike Dinh and Ty, Minh was a proud Vietnamese southerner of peasant stock. Minh appeared to be an aggressive infantry commander without political ambition. However, Minh was a very astute political operator. When William E. Colby, the CIA Chief-of-Station in Saigon, first met him, Minh was "the most senior officers in the [South] Vietnamese Army" who had "served Diem well at a critical moment in the struggles with the sects and their armies but was distrusted and considered not

[47] Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 307
[48] Malcolm Browne, *The New Face of War* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965), 220
[49] Quoted in Anne Blair, *There to the Bitter End: Ted Serong in Vietnam* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2001), 56

very bright by Diem and Nhu."[50] In 1955, Minh proved his military and political worth to Diem's government during the sect suppression campaigns. Like the majority of his comrades-in-arms, Minh had been ambivalent about Diem's government's heavy-handed repressions of the religious military sects. However, like most VNA officers, Minh wholeheartedly supported Diem's decision to crush the Binh Xuyen. While commanding a VNA battalion defending Saigon against the BXPF, Minh demonstrated commitment, determination, and intellect. Following the VNA's victory over the BXPF in 1955, Lansdale recalled that Minh's VNA battalion had fought the BXPF with little to "no official funds for the collection of intelligence" about the enemy. Yet, Minh was well "informed in great detail about the Binh Xuyen forces he was facing" Indeed, Lansdale remembered Minh's initiatives as a battalion commander with fondness, especially when he discovered that Minh "had been collecting information from every source he could think of, including volunteer and paid informants. Money for the latter had come from Big Minh's sale of his own car and furniture, as well as a mortgage on his house. When I learned this, I was most favourably impressed. Here was a man who put duty before self."[51]

Lansdale's praise for Minh should be read with caution, however. While Lansdale praised Minh in the mid-1950s, Colby thought Minh did not deserve to be promoted to Lieutenant General in the early 1960s. As a senior military officer in times of war, Minh spent more time attending his orchids, playing tennis, and spoiling for military confrontation. Yet, Minh was ignorant of politics and barely thought for himself. "Since as a 'field' commander he had no troops under his permanent command," Colby recalled that, "Minh would be harmless [to the Diem government] and could divide his time between orchid-growing and tennis, which he loved, and grumbling about the lack of a dynamic military campaign against the enemy. I met

[50] William E. Colby with James McCargar, *Lost Crusade: A Firsthand Account of America's Sixteen-Year Involvement in Vietnam* (New York: Contemporary Books, 1989), 60
[51] Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars*, 270

him only at occasional receptions or ceremonies, but I found myself very much of Diem's and Nhu's opinions, as I never heard him say anything the least bit original or wise."[52] Although Lansdale and Colby met Minh at two very different times during his military career, their assessments of him reflected Minh's paradoxical character, best summarised by Don who said Minh was "capable of extremely decisive action at one time, and procrastinating on decisions on other occasion, to the utter consternation of his colleagues."[53] Undoubtedly, Minh was an experienced military man. However, as a field grade officer, he had commanded no more than a battalion.

Thus, the military experience—combat, command, organization, operational planning and more—of key JGS staff members varied widely. However, the key JGS staff officers—those directly responsible for planning and organizing the RVNAF—had two things in common. First, they had no experience commanding troops beyond a battalion. Second, they had no experience organizing and planning at the regimental and divisional levels. However, the mixed field and staff experience of key JGS senior officers did not negatively affect their plans to organize the RVN land forces. The fact that the lack of military experience did not hinder JGS members to organize the RVN land forces properly should not surprise us. Giap, the most successful military commander in twentieth century Vietnamese history, had mastered the science and arts of war by poring over military history books and giving lively lectures on the history of revolution and warfare. Giap's experience proved that knowledge of military science and arts could be gained through serious study as much as through formal military schooling and first hand combat experience. Individually, the military experiences of each key JGS commanding general were unimpressive. Together, however, JGS senior officers shared whatever formal military

[52] Colby, *Lost Victory*, 60
[53] General Tran Van Don, *Our Endless War Inside Vietnam* (Novato: Presidio, 1978), 78

education, theoretical and practical knowledge of the science and arts of war, and field and staff experiences they had to properly build a South Vietnamese force capable of withstanding invasions from without but also securing the RVN from internal subversion. Prior to finding the organization of the RVNAF, for example, Brigham has pointed out that the JGS's proposal for the organization of the RVN land forces were sound:

> ARVN military leaders opposed the American plan. Nguyen van Vy and Tran van Don argued for the creation of mobile units from the former Vietnamese National Army battalions organized under the French These smaller units were more organic and would be equipped only with 105-mm howitzers, which were light and mobile. The ARVN would recruit infantry battalions locally, as the Vietnamese had for centuries. These battalions would then conduct local antiguerrilla and civic action operations. This cellular people's army would be motivated by strong personal ties to an area to protect local villages. The ARVN would also create a series of special forces and counterguerrilla groups in the Central Highlands to choke off the invasion that so many Americans in MAAG feared was coming from North Vietnam.[54]

Wiest also praised the JGS for standing up against MAAG's design for the ARVN, which was a plan to create a conventional army for the RVN government. Wiest suggested that the JGS was correct to conceive that South Vietnam "was more likely to face an insurgency than an invasion, and contended that the ARVN should be constructed as a more lithe force based on maneuverability and sustainability within the Vietnamese cultural system." Wiest emphasized further that MAAGV did not heed the JGS organizational ideas for the RVN land forces. Instead, Samuel T. Williams, MAAGV head starting in 1957, "did not relent and eventually settled on creating an ARVN of seven standardized infantry divisions whose task it was to stand against a North Vietnamese invasion long enough for American forces to arrive on the scene to save the day as they had in Korea."[55]

How accurate were such assessments? Was the JGS proposal to organize the RVNAF more appropriate than MAAGV's plan which called for the RVNAF to withstand PAVN's

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[54] Brigham, *ARVN*, 5

[55] Andrew Wiest, *Vietnam's Forgotten Army: Heroism and Betrayal in the ARVN* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 22

offensive long enough until US and allied forces came to its rescue? Did the Korean War so influence MAAGV's senior officers that they failed to question the similarities but also the differences between Korea and Vietnam? When the VNA became the ARVN, did this new army reflect MAAGV's conventional warfare mentality or JGS's counter-guerrilla warfare thinking or did the ARVN and other paramilitary forces represent the organizational ideas of both the JGS and MAAGV? To answers these questions, we must examine the two men most responsible for organizing and training the RVNAF land forces: Lieutenant General John W. O'Daniel and Lieutenant General Samuel T. Williams.

MAAGV's first chief was Lieutenant General John W. O'Daniel. Between 1953 and 1955, O'Daniel, commander of US Army Pacific, was selected to head MAAGI in 1953 which officially changed to MAAGV after the Geneva Conference.[56] A veteran of WWII and the Korean War, O'Daniel studied the theory and practice of Soviet and Chinese revolutionary warfare thoroughly. O'Daniel's knowledge of communist warfare shone through in speeches he gave at US Embassy in Moscow in 1950 and lectures delivered at the US War College in 1951. He understood that successfully applying of revolutionary warfare required cooperation between conventional and partisan forces to conduct various politically guided military operations—"political penetration", "propaganda", "psychological warfare", "Fifth Column activity and espionage [in enemy's territory]", "[small] Cell operations", "Economic penetration toward eventual control [in another word economic warfare]"—simultaneously.[57] To carry out such complex operations, O'Daniel noted, communist commanders had to be tactically flexible. Their plans needed to be "simple and readily understandable" by their subordinates. They must have a

[56] Spector, *Advice and Support*, 173, 256

[57] "Combat Principles of the Cold War Speech," by Inspector of Infantry Major General John W. O'Daniel, Office of the Army Attaché, American Embassy, Moscow, USSR, 7 January 1950, 1-6; Folder 4: John W. O'Daniel's speeches, 1950-1954; Box 8; Collection: John W. O'Daniel Papers; Archive: USAMHI

"unity of command" over their forces which, when on the offensive, must always outnumber the defenders. Prior to any offensive operations, commanders must allot ample time to prepare their troops "mentally" and physically for combat. The security requirements—well kept operational planning and preparation—must be guaranteed before commanders ordered their men forward. When their units hit enemy targets, commanders must ensure that they did so with the element of surprise after the enemy's defensive positions had already been "softened" and enemy morale had been weakened by "propaganda" and "psychological warfare" activities of the "Fifth Column."[58] O'Daniel's conclusions in 1951 mirrored Giap's in 1945: Revolutionary warfare, with the application of good intelligence, guerrilla tactics, and repeated attacks to wear down the enemy was merely one of many means in a total war to defeat a powerful enemy. In O'Daniel's words:

> The Soviet leaders are waging total war against the free world, a ruthless and unrelenting struggle within which cold and shooting war are merely tactical phases... in waging total war [they] are applying all the combat principles military men are taught to apply in a shooting war. We, in turn, must apply similar action in order to take the offensive and defeat this enemy.... We must unify our forces and develop teamwork through the whole democratic world in order to beat this enemy in the war he is waging. We must be the bulwark and the rallying point for our friendly countries and therefore, by example, demonstrate that we are prepared to stand against the Soviets in every respect.[59]

As reflected in his private correspondence with Admiral Arthur W. Radford, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) in 1953, O'Daniel knew that allies of the USSR and PRC practiced their own styles of revolutionary warfare by uniting communism and nationalism against colonialism.[60]

As MAAGV head, O'Daniel was responsible for observing, assessing, and reporting the French Indochina War to the Eisenhower administration, particularly the VNA's organization,

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[58] Ibid., 1-17
[59] Ibid. 16
[60] "Arthur W. Radford's Letter to Lt. General John O'Daniel, USA (Ret.) [in response to earlier paper sent by O'Daniel]", June 7, 1972, 1-12; Folder 3: John W. O'Daniel; Box 8; Collection: John W. O'Daniel Papers; Archive: USAMHI

training, and combat effectiveness. As reflected in his private papers, O'Daniel was concerned with the FFEEC's attempts to organize and train the VNA. O'Daniel's main responsibility involved monitoring the FFEEC and VLA in pre-1954 and then assessing the political and military struggle between various non-communist armed factions in post-1954 South Vietnam.[61] Meanwhile, his supposedly primary duty to assist the FFEEC to organize and train South Vietnam's land forces was relegated to secondary importance. In reality, O'Daniel could only embark on MAAGV's principal tasks to organize and train the South Vietnamese land forces had the VNA defeated the CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF—a task the VNA accomplished as O'Daniel's retirement compelled him to leave MAAGV.

In 1954, using General James A. Van Fleet's plan to prepare the Greek Army to counter communist guerrillas, O'Daniel wanted to turn the 80 fragmented VNA battalions into a more integrated, flexible, and strong ARVN with 8 lightly armed battalions and 9 heavily armed divisions. The future ARVN would be capable of waging both counter-guerrilla and combined-arms operations at the battalion, regiment, and divisional levels, with air and naval support provided by the FFEEC and/or MAAGV.[62] O'Daniel did not have the opportunity to transform the VNA into the ARVN as his tenure with MAAGV ended in 1955. According to historian Andrew J. Birtle, "O'Daniel was faced with a dual task of preparing South Vietnam to meet an invasion from the North and internal instability in the South. As his contemporaries had done elsewhere, O'Daniel adopted the existing array of military and paramilitary organizations as the

[61] Private correspondence between O'Daniel and Lansdale; Folder 5: "LTG O'Daniel, J.W., Diem & Mme. Nhu, 1954-1972"; Box 8; Collection: John W. O'Daniel Papers; Archive: USAMHI
[62] Spector, *Advice and Support*, 222

basis upon which to build a multilayered security system"[63] capable of withstanding an external invasion and countering an internal subversion.

O'Daniel had also hoped that MAAGV would finance and build more training facilities—a military academy, a command and general staff college, a specialist training centre, a amphibious operations training centre, and more—as well as permitting South Vietnamese NCOs and officers to receive advanced military training in the US.[64] Neither O'Daniel's organizational plan nor training proposal for the future ARVN were implemented as the VNA had to crush the sects before it could be developed into the ARVN. Further, the FFEEC had to leave South Vietnam before the VNA could be fully developed into the ARVN.

In December 1954, General James Lawton Collins met with General Paul Ely, the FFEEC chief, after the French withdrew to South Vietnam to extract an agreement that organizing and training the South Vietnamese army should be led by both MAAGV and FFEEC advisors. The resulting "Collins-Ely Agreement on Vietnamese Armed Forces" created the Franco-American Training Relations and Instructions Mission (TRIM) in early 1955.[65] But FFEEC commanders and French statesmen had not America for failing to provide tactical air support at Dien Bien Phu. Furthermore, Paris perceived Washington as working with the South Vietnamese to dismantle French diplomatic, military, and economic ties with its ex-colonies. Ordered by Paris and pressured by an influential community of French settlers in South Vietnam, FFEEC's FMI actively supported the sects against the VNA and MAAGV in a pointless fight to salvage what was left of French influence in Saigon. Collins later attributed TRIM's failure to the fact that the entire VNA—from its command to its logistical system—was in disarray after

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[63] Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 2007), 307-308
[64] Spector, *Advice and Support*, 222
[65] Collins, *Lightning Joe*, 386-387

1954. Moreover, starting in 1955, VNA battalions were scattered throughout South Vietnam for various civic-action projects—relocating northern refugees in central Vietnam and flood relief operations in the Mekong River Delta—and security missions—restoring law-and-order in the rural and urban areas of southern Vietnam, including combating CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF remnants in the Mekong River Delta.[66] Collins had correctly identified the main causes for TRIM's failure. However, he neglected to mention that MAAGV and the VNA faced also a hostile FFEEC and FMI officers who openly supplied money, intelligence, weapons, and even sent advisors and combatants to augment CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF units when they were beaten by VNA units in bloody street fighting.[67] TRIM could not have possibly organized, trained, and turned the VNA into the ARVN as long as FMI officers supplied BXPF in Cho-lon with mortars to attack the Presidential Palace in Saigon even as Lansdale's CIA team and MAAGV advisors were commanding VNA formations to crush dissident units.[68] Unfortunately, even with the accelerated withdrawal of FFEEC combat units throughout 1955 as France began another colonial war in Algeria, the tripartite relationship between FFEEC advisors, MAAGV personnel, and JGS senior officers would not be resolved until the FFEEC's final withdrawal in 1956.

Andrew F. Krepinevich has criticized the missions of O'Daniel, MAAGV, and TRIM for organizing the ARVN for conventional warfare while remaining oblivious to the guerrilla warfare threat:

> The combined training effort went under the name of the Franco-American Training Relations and Instructions Mission (TRIM) and was headed by Lieutenant General O'Daniel. Once TRIM was in place, a shift in emphasis occurred. The U.S. Mission viewed its role primarily in terms of creating a *conventional* army of divisional units and supporting forces... MAAG was soft-pedalling the commitment to organize forces for internal defense against insurgency. It was easier for the Army to envision a Korea-type threat in Vietnam – a cross-border invasion of the Republic of Vietnam

[66] James Lawton Collins, Jr., *The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army, 1950-1972* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1975), 4
[67] Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars*, 260-323
[68] Ibid., 257

> (RVN) by North Vietnam – than the insurgency threat which posed a dramatically different conflict environment than the Army was used to and which it was unprepared to address.[69]

Krepinevich's appraisal has been supported by Lieutenant Colonel John A. Nagl. O'Daniel, MAAGV, and TRIM had organized the ARVN for the wrong mission—conventional warfare. In Nagl's words, "Lieutenant General O'Daniel was put in command of the Franco-American Training Relations and Instruction Mission (TRIM) in February 1955. TRIM saw its primary function as the creation of an army able to resist a conventional invasion from North Vietnam."[70]

Krepinevich's and Nagl's conclusions were incorrect for the RVN required a military force capable of fighting off an invasion from without and subversion from within. Secondly, O'Daniel did not want to build the ARVN solely to fend off a PAVN invasion. Rather, he wanted the RVN land forces to strong enough to stop a communist conventional attack and flexible enough to oppose communist subversion. Finally, TRIM only came into existence because of the "close relations" between Collins and Ely that had developed while they had worked together in the NATO Standing Group in Western Europe.[71] In reality, their subordinates disliked each other intensely and systematically avoided working together. They openly backed their respective South Vietnamese allies in the showdown for the control of Saigon-Cholon. The feud between TRIM's French and American officers ranged from very dangerous activities in the streets of Saigon-Cholon to unprofessional and childish games played out at TRIM's Headquarter by senior and junior officers of both nationalities.[72] Meanwhile, the VNA was not transformed into the ARVN. Soon enough, VNA units were used by the Diem government for a range of operations from civic-action operations in central Vietnam to quelling CDPF, HHPF,

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[69] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 21
[70] John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 119
[71] Collins, *Lightning Joe*, 379
[72] Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars*, 217-220

and BXPF dissident units. The VNA development into the ARVN would have to be postponed until 1956.

With historical hindsight, Krepinevich and Nagl used their guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare theories to criticize O'Daniel for not preparing the ARVN for anti-guerrilla operations and for failing to see how social changes, political instability, and military problems in South Vietnam complicated the VNA-ARVN transformation. O'Daniel was at the mercy of historical circumstances. He could not have let northern refugees settle wherever they chose without providing them with security and humanitarian aid. Neither could he allow VNA units to be incorporated into new ARVN formations while dissident militias wreaked havoc. Nor could he ignore a potential PAVN invasion which would be assisted by communist cadres operating inside South Vietnam. O'Daniel thus had to rely on the only organization that was capable of restoring peace and security and re-establishing law-and-order—the imperfect VNA. O'Daniel's first priority to transform the VNA into an ARVN capable of dealing with both external and internal threats, turned out to be of secondary important compared to humanitarian missions and operations against rebellious militias. By suggesting how the ARVN ought to be organized and trained, Krepinevich and Nagl failed to comprehend that O'Daniel could only develop the ARVN with the tattered VNA units on hand.

Krepinevich's and Nagl's criticism did not end with O'Daniel. Applying their theoretical understanding of revolutionary warfare and how to counter it, they accused Lieutenant General Samuel T. William, O'Daniel's successor, for preparing the ARVN for conventional warfare only. "According to Major General Ruggles, Williams's deputy," Krepinevich has claimed, "just before Williams arrived he received instructions from the Army brass at the Pentagon to 'organize a military establishment in Vietnam that would be capable of fending off attacks from

the North. Ruggles watched as Williams stuck with the idea of big units even as evidence accumulated that the primary danger to South Vietnam was an internal, insurgent threat."[73] Nagl has also criticized Williams for following O'Daniel's plan to organize and train the ARVN for conventional warfare. "His [O'Daniel] successor, General "Hanging Sam" Williams," as Nagl has argued, "explicitly stated his belief that the role of the U.S. MAAG was to prepare for a repeat of the Korean conflict.... This convention focus gave the insurgents freedom to recruit and create terror throughout the South."[74] First, O'Daniel wanted RVN land forces to mutually support each other in the event of a conventional invasion or/and an unconventional subversion, something that Williams also desired. Secondly, historians should use Williams's private papers to draw their own conclusions rather than accepting the interpretations of officers and scholars who relied on theories instead of evidence.

Lieutenant General Samuel T. Williams succeeded O'Daniel as Chief of MAAGV on October 24, 1955,[75] a tenure that lasted until 1960.[76] A veteran of WWI, WWII, and the Korean War, Williams had graduated from the First Officers Training Camp, Infantry School, Command and General Staff College, and the Army War College. He also possessed field and staff command experience ranging from platoon commander to regimental staff officer. By WWII's end, he was Assistant Division Commander of the First Infantry Division, First Military District of the Allied Occupied Germany. Commanding of the 25th Division in Korea in 1952, he later served as Deputy Corps Commander of the II Republic of Korea (ROK) Corps during one of the last PLA's major offensives of Korean War. Before heading MAAGV in 1955, he had led the XI U.S. Corps (Group) in 1954. From early to mid-1955, he was Deputy Army Commander of the

[73] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 22-23
[74] Nagl, *Learning To Eat Soup With A Knife*, 123-124
[75] Spector, *Advice and Support*, 256
[76] Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1942-1976*, 310

Fourth Army then Commander of the Ninth Field Army. Williams's exemplary military service had won him multiple Distinguished Service Medals awards from other allied countries.[77] Thus, Eisenhower's administration could not have chosen a more qualified commanding general to direct MAAGV in its task of assisting the JGS to prepare RVN land forces for war. "Williams's success in dealing with Asian military and political leaders was probably a key to his assignment to MAAG Vietnam," as his biographer, Frederick Walter Schneider, has argued.[78] Despite a tongue-lashing style when dealing with incompetent subordinates, Williams was tough, honest, and fair. To his subordinates, Williams exuded confident, leadership, and an "indomitable grandfather" aura that gained him the respect of his soldiers and officers, including Lansdale who worked well with Williams and developed "a rare friendship" with the new MAAGV's chief.[79]

In a December 30, 1955, letter, written two months into his four year tenure at MAAGV, Williams expressed that his new "assignment [was] the most difficult one of any to date."[80] The rush of refugees into South Vietnam had been brought under control by mid-1955. The conflict between the Diem government and the sect militias had dissipated. Compared to the problems confronting O'Daniel in mid-1954, South Vietnam now seemed less bleak. Therefore, why did Williams write a colleague of his about the difficulties he encountered in southern Vietnam? The answers were threefold: Intelligence about enemy's activities north of the DMZ; the dispersal of unorganized VNA units on missions; and the RVN military's clogged logistical system. All three

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[77] "Biographical Sketch of Military Service of Lieutenant General Samuel T. Williams"; Folder 134: "Miscellaneous Papers of Gen. Williams"; Box 1; Collection: Samuel T. Williams Papers; Archive: USAMHI

[78] Frederick Walter Schneider, *Advising the ARVN: Lieutenant General Samuel T. Williams in Vietnam, 1955-1960* (USAMHI: University of North Texas: Master of Arts Thesis, 1990), 20

[79] Lansdale, *The In The Midst of Wars*, 337

[80] "Letter to General Breas from Lt. Gen. Williams, Chief, MAAGV HQ, Saigon, Vietnam, 30 December 1958"; Folder 32: "Personal Correspondence Aug. To Dec. 1955"; Box 2; Collection: Samuel T. Williams Papers; Archive: USAMHI

factors hampered Williams's efforts to reorganize South Vietnam's regular forces and irregular militias.

Williams's very first task was to study Vietnamese geography. He inspected the South Vietnamese army and paramilitary units at their bases and operational outposts. He immersed himself in Vietnamese history, society, and culture to accurately assess the political and military balance between enemy and friendly forces. Williams spent all of November and December 1955 reconnoitring South Vietnam's landscapes. Lansdale recalled that while he had spent the holiday outside of Vietnam, Williams "had been with the Vietnamese Army at the Demilitarized Zone between North and South over Christmas and New Year's Day and had never felt lonelier in his life." The two months spent familiarizing himself with the country, combined with the disorganized state of the South Vietnamese military, alarmed Williams especially as disturbing intelligence reports about suspicious enemy activities north of the DMZ trickled into MAAGV and JGS headquarters. Williams, recalled Lansdale, "had received reports of North Vietnamese troop movements toward this border, along with reports of their being equipped with new Soviet tanks and artillery. The reports were many days old, so he kept wondering what might be happening *now* as he looked to the north."[81] Thanks to recent studies on the military relationship between the PLA and the PAVN and the published official history of the DRVN's military, we know that intelligence reports about the USSR equipping the PAVN with tanks and artillery pieces were accurate. However, claims that PAVN units were moving towards the DMZ were faulty.

Thanks to the USSR and PRC, by mid-1954, the PAVN could arm three hundred thousand men with small arms, over 6,500 light machine guns, field artillery battalions, seven batteries of mortars, plus trucks and tanks. By mid-1955, supported by a small Air Force and

[81] Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars*, 337

Navy, the PAVN fielded thirteen Infantry divisions, four Engineer-Artillery divisions, and one Anti-Aircraft Artillery Division. However, from mid-1954 to 1955's end, the DRVN's General Military Party Committee (GMPC), which oversaw both the Ministry of Defence and the Central Committee of the Chief of Staff, was preoccupied with regrouping VLA units into PAVN divisions and reorganizing the VLA logistic system to support the PAVN's modernization process. Between 1954 and 1955, the PAVN's official history noted that GMPC's civilian and military officials, "personally went out to inspect and encourage our units as they regrouped and began to carry out their new duties."[82] To address logistic problems, the GMPC recounted the old war material inventory while ensuring that new home-made and foreign produced "weapons and equipment of all units were catalogued and classified." Concerned that PAVN formations would be hampered by the lack of basic civilian and military infrastructure, the GMPC fixed lines-of-communication, roads, tunnels, railroads, bridges and "facilities for weapons and machinery, medical clinics, hospitals, and weapons and quartermaster... production factories... [and]large warehouse... [in] appropriate areas to support the build up of the armed forces and preparations for combat." Once all military units were regrouped and the logistic problems were solved, formations were deployed to defend "the temporary military demarcation boundary [the Demilitarized Zone], the border areas, coastal areas, and the offshore islands."[83] From 1955 to 1957, with the organization of the DRVN's military temporarily completed, the GMPC ordered all units to begin a vigorous training regimen, including physical fitness, marksmanship, combat tactics from the platoon to the division level, and training in waging partisan warfare in conjunction with combined arms warfare.[84]

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[82] Pribbenow, *The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam*, 1954-1975, 9-11
[83] Ibid., 12
[84] Ibid., 39-40

However, there were little evidence that the DRVN's military was building combat staging areas, reinforcing forward operational bases, or moving troops toward the DMZ to support offensive campaigns. Rather, in an effort to recuperate from the Chinese Civil War, the Korean War, the French Indochina War, and to reduce regional international tensions, in 1954 Mao rejected plans for PLA senior advisors to organize and train more infantry, armour, and artillery units for the PAVN. Even though the PRC still supplied the DRVN with weaponry, equipment, and training, Mao removed all PLA advisors in North Vietnam by September 1955.[85] To mount a conventional attack against the RVN in 1955 was out of the question for the DRVN. Apart from the DRVN's own myriad problems, its leaders questioned Soviet and Chinese political support and military commitment. After all, only a year before Moscow and Beijing had forced DRVN leaders to accept Vietnam's partition at the Geneva Conference even though VLA regulars had broken France's political will to fight. Furthermore, by attacking the ROK in 1950, North Korea had provoked a major political response from the UN's Security Council that dragged the USSR, indirectly, and the PRC, directly, into a costly war with little to gain—a valuable lesson the USSR, PRC, and DRVN did not forget.[86] In 1955, as in 1954, DRVN's leaders felt they would have reigned over all of Vietnam had their powerful allies not betrayed them to appease the US and its allies. As experienced and calculating actors, however, DRVN's leaders also knew they could not wage war against the US-backed RVN without Soviet and Chinese backing, especially if the war escalated.

In 1955-1956, Williams did not draw the same conclusion that he would in 1957—that the PAVN would not launch a conventional attack across the DMZ—for Williams neither knew

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[85] Xiaobing Li, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 215
[86] Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, 9; Zhai, *China & The Vietnam Wars*, 49-51; Chen Jian, *Mao's China & the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 116-117; Li, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army*, 111-112

about DRVN's plans to consolidate nor had he interpreted PAVN's military activities to be purely defensive. "Lacking in reliable intelligence-gathering capability," Williams's biographer has argued, "General Williams continued to view an external invasion as his main concern throughout 1956."[87] Based on his Korean experience, Williams interpreted PAVN's military activities as preparatory steps for an offensive and perceived DRVN's officials as aggressors who would attack across the DMZ to reunite Vietnam by force. "Intelligence is of the utmost importance in war," the dean of intelligence history Michael I. Handel has explained, "but it not a prerequisite for military or even victory. The best intelligence is impotent without military strength, while military strength without intelligence can nevertheless accomplish its objective though probably at a higher cost."[88] The success or failure of intelligence does not simply depend on collecting analyzing and then disseminating timely intelligence to appropriate military commanders whose actions likely will decide the fate of battles and campaigns. Rather, intelligence gathering, assessment, and conclusion are complicated processes that are often influenced by flawed perceptions of the enemy and incorrect interpretations by intelligence officers or field commanders.[89] Historian David Kahn has argued that code-breaking is "the most important form of secret intelligence... [for it] produces... much more trustworthy than spies, and this intelligence exerts great influence upon the policies of governments."[90] Code-breaking or "cipher-breaking" is the heart of Communication Intelligence (COMINT), which is a sub-division of SIGINT (the other sub-division of SIGINT is Electronic Intelligence or ELINT, which detects non-communication emissions). However, broken codes or deciphered messages,

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[87] Schneider, *Advising the ARVN*, 20
[88] Michael I, Handel, ed., *Intelligence and Military Operations* (London: Frank Cass, 1990), 65-66
[89] Richard K. Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence: Knowledge & Power in American National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 6
[90] David Kahn, *The Code Breakers: The Comprehensive History of Secret Communication from Ancient Times to the Internet* (New York: Scribner, 1996), xi

even when they are written "in plain language," as British intelligence officer/scholar Michael Herman has concluded, still "have to be translated and interpreted."[91] The process of getting, examining, and spreading intelligence is without a doubt an extremely difficult, even confusing, task—a task which the intelligence staff at JGS and MAAGV headquarters, plus the CIA, failed Williams.

Thanks to his finding mission, Williams saw that the stability had temporarily been restored in South Vietnam by 1956. Yet, VNA units were still scattered throughout the countryside, undertaking humanitarian missions or finishing off the last of the rebel militias. Moreover, the VNA's logistic system was a complete mess as FFEEC and VNA war materials could be found *en masse* throughout the countryside. Eventually, these supply dumps would remove to appropriate storage areas by MAAGV and JGS logistic staff but not before many items made their way to the sectarian and PLAF units. Worse yet, lacking intelligence about enemy intentions, Williams did not know why VLA revolutionary forces were reorganized into PAVN divisions, where those divisions were training, and why PAVN formations were being relocated further south. Williams turned to the J-2 staff of the JGS for information about the enemy's strength and intention only to be disappointed. First, in 1954-1955, the civilian, police, and military intelligence bureaus in South Vietnam were forming one intelligence agency, the SSPS. Thus, the painstaking process of intelligence gathering, assessment, and dissemination became secondary. Secondly, when these various intelligence bureaus did collect, analyze, and share information, ARVN intelligence officer Colonel Hoang Ngoc Lung pointed out their "efforts were largely oriented toward collecting domestic political intelligence"—not foreign. Furthermore, Lung emphasized that in crisis situations, notably when the Diem government confronted the CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF, and in 1963, the year of the Buddhist Crisis, the

[91] Michael Herman, *Intelligence Power In Peace and War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 69

RVN's intelligence community was only targeting Diem's non-communist enemies.[92] Lastly, even if the J-2 staff wanted to improve its knowledge of the enemy, it required more trained personnel, technology, money, and time. In the late 1950s, the RVN lacked personnel, advanced technology, and money to build up a SIGINT capability to listen in to DRVN communication channels. Given the DRVN's capable internal security services and their tight surveillance over North Vietnam's population, coupled with the disorganized, ill-directed, and leaderless RVN's intelligence community developing HUMINT accesses inside the DRVN was a daunting and extremely dangerous task.

Starting in 1957, RVNAF's special operational force played important roles—mainly reconnaissance, sabotage, and rescuing prisoners of war (POWs)—to gather, analyze and disseminate intelligence on the PAVN, allowing the JGS and MAAGV to better calculate enemy's dispositions and intentions. Small parties of RVNAF special operational force infiltrated the DRVN through the Laotian-North Vietnamese border by air and sea. Once inside the DRVN, these units set up camouflaged communication posts to observe, listen, and report back to JGS and MAAGV on PAVN's movements. The cost of failure for RVNAF's special operational force personnel was imprisonment, torture, and death. Their successes, however, gave the JGS and MAAGV a clearer picture of PAVN's battle orders, training methods, plus plans for real operations, and exercises. Unfortunately, from mid-1954 to mid-1956, the RVNAF's special operational force was disorganized, needed retraining, and lacked funding and equipment. It was also demoralized by a lack of leadership caused by political strife between

[92] Colonel Hoang Ngoc Lung, *Intelligence*, Indochina Monographs Series (College Park, MD: NARA II Library, 1982), 13

commanders who backed General Hinh and those loyal to Diem's government.[93] The RVNAF's special operational force had no plans to reconnoitre North Vietnam. Only starting mid-1956 with CIA's fund and training from the US Army Special Operational Force, the Green Berets, did RVNAF's special operational force and Green Beret units, Code Name: First Observation Group, begin training to conduct operations in North Vietnam. The First Observation Group was tasked with waging partisan warfare behind PAVN's axis of advance into South Vietnam.[94] By mid-1956, however, Williams was already too overwhelmed by the job of creating the ARVN to be concerned with dispatching the First Observation Group to northern Vietnam on a Long Ranger Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP)—the mission that would become the specialty of the US and RVN Ranger units.

MAAGV had its own intelligence staff or G-2, which also shared and received intelligence from the USAF, USN and USMC, and local CIA forces led by Lansdale. But Lansdale's picture of the DRVN and PAVN from mid-1954 to early 1956 was no better than the JGS. Lansdale's psychological warfare teams, led by Major Lucien Conein, recruited members of the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang (VNQDD or Vietnamese Nationalist Party) and Dai Viet Quoc Dan Dang (DVQDD or Greater Vietnam Nationalist Party) who were able to operate in North Vietnam in 1954 because the Viet Minh had concentrated its manpower to neutralize FFEEC threats. After the Geneva Agreement, as DRVN military and paramilitary security services consolidated their holds on the politically important Hanoi and Haiphong areas. Conein's team was free to roam the countryside of North Vietnam until 1955. Then, PAVN and DRVN's police forces and security services "mopped up" Conein's teams (only Conein escaped while almost all

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[93] Lieutenant Colonel Phan Ba Ky, *Luc-Luong Dac-Biet giua Nhung To-Chuc Chien-Tranh Khong-Quy-Uoc cua Quan-Luc Viet-Nam Cong-Hoa* (Special Forces and Unconventional Warfare Operations of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces) (Irvine: Nam Van, 2006), 15-16

[94] Richard H. Shultz, Jr., *The Secret War Against Hanoi: Kennedy's and Johnson's Use of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in North Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 14

of VNQDD and DVQDD members were swept up). After that, MAAGV, JGS, Saigon, and Washington "knew next to nothing about what was going on inside North Vietnam."[95]

From mid-1954 to mid-1956, with its clandestine operations in the DRVN compromised, the CIA assisted MAAGV and JGS to gather, analyze, and share intelligence in order to crush the dissident sectarian units. As scanty intelligence reports trickled into JGS and MAAG headquarters from various US intelligence agencies about potential PAVN movements and troop build-ups, Williams sought Lansdale's interpretations of DRVN military activities. However, with his clandestine networks torn apart by the fierce PAVN and DRVN security services, Lansdale's staff no longer had eyes and ears inside North Vietnam to forewarn Williams about PAVN plans. At best, Lansdale could only predict DRVN's intentions. "My own crystal-ball predictions were based on what I knew of the characters of Ho, Giap, and other North Vietnamese leaders," recalled Lansdale, as "I believed that they still thought in terms of guerrilla and clandestine operations." However, having fought in the US Army and having advised the ROK army against various combined conventional attacks by PRC and DPRK forces in 1953, Williams trusted his Korean War experiences while having "small confidence in my [Lansdale's] own prediction that the North Vietnamese would come south secretively, not in an overt invasion."[96]

As MAAGV continued to receive unclear information about a possible PAVN build-up of troops in Vinh, a coastal city less than 200 km north of the DMZ, the mood at MAAGV and JGS grew gloomy. Williams turned to MAAGV's military intelligence staff. Intelligence analyst George W. Allen, the lead liaison officer between J-2, G-2, CIA, and other US intelligence agencies in Saigon since 1954, requested that USAF aircraft and USN aircraft and patrol boats

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[95] Shultz, *The Secret War Against Hanoi*, 14; Kenneth Conboy & Dale Andrade, *Spies & Commandos: How America Lost the Secret War in North Vietnam* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2000), 17

[96] Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars*, 337

undertake reconnaissance flights and coastal patrols even though the Geneva Agreement prohibited any aerial or naval espionage activities off Vietnam's coast. Nevertheless, Allen confidently informed MAAGV and JGS in summer 1956 that reconnaissance photos "emphatically disproved the reported massive build-up north of the DMZ" as the movements of men and materials between Vinh and the DMZ were "the normal deployment pattern" of the PAVN since mid-1954.[97] In other words, PAVN units were redeploying throughout North Vietnam to meet a possible attack from South Vietnam.

Williams disagreed with the conclusions of G-2 that "the principal threat from the North was not an open invasion but rather a resumption of the people's war in the South, supported by infiltration from the North."[98] Believing Williams had organized the ARVN for an incorrect conventional warfare mission, Allen argued that Williams was "single-mindedly pursuing his program of training a conventionally structured Vietnamese army to defend the South against a direct invasion down the coastal route from the North."[99] But was Williams wrong to fear possible attacks by the PAVN across the DMZ if various US intelligence agencies could barely track PAVN's dispositions and intentions just 200 km north of the DMZ? Had the PAVN attacked the RVN, Williams, not Allen, would have to defend South Vietnam. To Williams, this intelligence failure, VNA disorganization, and the disordered RVN military logistic system mattered, and he could only prioritize which problem needed to be fixed first. Thus, he opted to reorganize the South Vietnamese logistic system and military as DRVN military actions were beyond Williams's control. If the PAVN attacked the RVN from without, if communist partisans subverted the RVN from within, or if both scenarios played out, the RVNAF would still have to

[97] George W. Allen, *None So Blind: A Personal Account of the Intelligence Failure in Vietnam* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001), 86
[98] Ibid., 90
[99] Ibid., 111-112

fight. To be combat effective, the RVNAF must be organized quickly and its logistic system fixed immediately. If war break out, transportation, fuel, weapons, ammunition, water, food, medicine, and other essential war materials would need to arrive in the right place at the right time and to the right units in order for the RVNAF to absorb DRVN attacks. Lansdale recalled that Williams dove into the task of reorganizing the VNA into the ARVN:

> General Williams' foreboding of an invasion from the North resulted in his doing his best to help the [southern] Vietnamese armed forces ready themselves to meet such an attack. This meant organizing and training the South Vietnamese in units large enough and with enough firepower to resist an onslaught by many North Vietnamese divisions. As the South Vietnamese prepared for the expected large-scale warfare, their armed forces gradually took on the image of U.S. forces, not only with regiments and divisions (as initiated by General O'Daniel), but also with corps. The day of isolated and independent battalions scattered over the landscape was past. Men and firepower now could be massed for defense.[100]

Lansdale was right to conclude that the days of independent and scattered VNA battalions were gone. But like Krepinevich, Nagl, and Allen, he wrongly concluded that O'Daniel and Williams had reorganized the VNA into the ARVN solely to fight against the PAVN and that the RVNAF, particularly its land elements, mirrored America's armed forces. Instead, O'Daniel, Williams, and the JGS wanted the RVNAF to conduct both conventional and unconventional warfare. Far from reflecting the American military, the RVNAF was a synthesis of JGS and MAAGV concepts about how RVNAF land forces should be organized based on Vietnam's geography, the dual threats of the communist revolutionary forces, and above all, manpower available in South Vietnam and war materials the US could provide to the RVN.

Williams could not dictate DRVN's policies on the use of force or improve MAAGV's intelligence apparatus overnight. However, he could improve the RVN's military and its logistic system so that the RVNAF could deal with various military eventualities. Williams requested Diem's government to allow MAAGV and JGS to recall VNA units from security operations to speed up ARVN organization, and asked for new ARVN units to be relocated to new bases in

[100] Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars*, 337-338

strategically important areas. The Diem government hesitated but ordered the JGS to pull VNA units from security operations as remnants of the CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF militias were disarmed and persuaded to join the new RVN military. As VNA and other paramilitary units returned from their missions, Williams tackled the logistical problem in South Vietnam first. In a letter to a colleague, Williams was pleased that the FFEEC had completely evacuated South Vietnam as he and his MAAGV staff did not receive any "sympathy of the French in this [organizing and training the ARVN] although in theory it [TRIM] is a joint project." However, the FFEEC's sudden departure made a mess of the VNA logistic system. The FFEEC's speedy evacuation restored peace and tranquility at TRIM Headquarters but also left "very large amounts of excess [military] property" which had to be recovered to prevent their falling into enemy's hands and to use it to "help Vietnam or other countries throughout the world we are supporting with Military Aid."[101] The logistic system of the VNA, therefore, was the "primary problem" MAAGV and the JGS had to resolve.

Neither the MAAGV nor the JGS could say how much military material the FFEEC had left behind, what sat in the VNA inventory, and where war materials had been abandoned. According to the Geneva Accord, both communist and non-communist forces could replace their war material but only "on a one-to-one basis" and their requests had to be approved by the ICC.[102] From mid-1954 to 1955's end, the JGS pressured the FFEEC for the complete logistical data about the VNA. Caught up with advising and supporting the rebellious units and distracted by the transfer of French forces to France and Algeria, the FFEEC only partially fulfilled JGS's request. When the FFEEC evacuated South Vietnam in early 1956 "without warning or any pre-

[101] "Letter to General Breas from Lt. Gen. Williams, Chief, MAAGV HQ, Saigon, Vietnam, 30 December 1958"; Folder 32: "Personal Correspondence Aug. To Dec. 1955"; Box 2; Collection: Samuel T. Williams Papers; Archive: USAMHI

[102] Lieutenant General Dong Van Khuyen, *RVNAF Logistics*, Indochina Monograph Series (College Park, MD: NARA II Library, 1984), 33

arrangement [with the JGS] for [the] turnover" of FFEEC military equipments to the VNA, JGS's logistic staff (J-4) had to inspect the VNA's inventory to see what the VNA had in its stockpile. J-4 staff did its best to gather the logistic data but proved unable to reorganize the VNA logistic system. With a basic knowledge of how logistics worked at the battalion level but "without logistical experience" at the regimental, divisional and army level, the J-4 staff was unable to resolve the logistic problems facing the entire VNA whose units, weapons, ammunition and other equipment, worth $1.2 billion, could be found throughout South Vietnam.[103] To solve this problem, MAAGV requested the US Department of Defence (DOD) and State Department to create a Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM) team to assist the JGS to locate, reallocate, and store war materials left behind by the FFEEC. TERM was to also build a new logistical system capable of tracking, sorting, protecting, delivering and receiving current military supplies as well as absorbing US war materials sent to South Vietnam.[104] TERM personnel also had to train J-4 staff to calculate and resolve logistical problems at the regiment and division level. With the logistic problem of the RVN military temporarily brought under control by TERM and J-4, Williams could focus on an even more monumental task—forming VNA and other paramilitary forces into the ARVN and its auxiliary forces.[105]

As the RVNAF adapted to the evolving threats posed by the PLAF and PAVN, the RVNAF logistical system had to become more flexible to meet the demands of the changing Vietnamese battlefields.[106] Yet, as the intensity of the guerrilla war in South Vietnam increased by 1960, RVNAF's logistic system again became problematic. As PAVN and PLAF units stepped up their attacks against vital logistical systems and as RVNAF units required

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[103] Khuyen, *RVNAF Logistics*, 34; Schneider, *Advising the ARVN*, 24
[104] "A MAAG Logistical Inspection Procedures and Check-lists", 2-69; Folder (135): "Training Inspection & Logistical Inspection, 1956"; Box 1; Collection: Samuel T. Williams Papers; Archive: USAMHI
[105] Schneider, *Advising the ARVN*, 25
[106] Khuyen, *RVNAF Logistics*, 450

replenishment while exercising or in the field, MAAGV's G-4 and JGS's J-4 continuously faced the problems of keeping track of military supplies, maintaining and upgrading equipment, and distributing war materials. These unresolved logistic problems required MAAGV and JGS to store military supplies in unsecured installations, find locomotives to transport the materials, train mechanics, technicians and specialists to fix light and heavy military equipments and locate experienced logistic officers to administer the increasingly complex logistical system. The logistic problems did not stop with the shortage of facilities, transportation, and personnel, but accumulated as one unresolved logistic problem—lack of transportation—led to another—undelivered materials taking up storage spaces—thus clogging the logistics system.[107]

MAAGV's G-4 staff assisted JGS's J-4 staff as best as it could but the RVNAF's logistic problem only temporarily stabilized pending the war's tempo. Corruption plagued the RVNAF as some commanders enriched themselves while some troops augmented their low salaries by selling military materials. For example, inspecting an ARVN unit in Vung Tau, a coastal town southeast of Saigon, MAAGV Colonel D.E. Breaksfield, TERM's Chief of Ordnance, and ARVN Colonel Thuan, Chief of Ordnance at JGS's J-4, found new US Army-issued entrenching tools, sledge hammers, chopping axes, water-proof jungle boots, leather gloves, camouflaged and water resistance clothing items, medical kits, and even packages of Ready To Eat Meal (REM) displayed at market stands.[108] These military essentials could only make their way to the merchants through military middlemen. While illegally sold military supplies could be easily replaced by the US military, these materials might also fall into the hands of PAVN and PLAF units. Other ARVN units also were involved in such illegal businesses throughout South

[107] "Logistical Estimate for South Viet in Support of OPLAN CINCPA 32-59 (C) (Short Title: MAAG VN LOG EST 32-59) (U) Prepared by MAAG Vietnam,", dated 1961-1962, 6-143; Folder 113: "Logistical Estimates 32-59"; Box 2; Collection: Samuel T. Williams Papers; Archive: USAMHI

[108] "5 September 1958 Memorandum to Chief MAAGV", pp. 1-2; Folder (43) 11: "Memo to and from TERM 1958"; Box 2; Collection: Samuel T. Williams Papers; Archive: USAMHI

Vietnam, and together they created chronic political and military problems that the RVN statesmen and generals—many of whom were notoriously corrupt—were not concerned with until 1970.[109]

To reduce corruption, MAAGV's G-4 and JGS's J-4 inspected RVNAF's supply depots and their inventories often. These joint inspections ensured military supplies were properly stored in secured facilities and shipped to the correct bases and units while surplus materials were returned to their original warehouses. Written records were to be kept by junior officers and signed off by appropriate senior officers, ensuring they would be held accountable if supplies went missing.[110] But as RVNAF's logistic expert Lt. Gen. Dong Van Khuyen observed, "opportunities for corruption proliferated with the escalation of the war, the division of decadence in society, and the impoverishment of servicemen of all ranks."[111] The last JGS Chief, General Cao Van Vien, concurred with Khuyen's assessment on the causality between the war's escalation and the rampant corruption in the RVN society, government, and military. As Vien concluded:

> Corruption was a topic much talked about in the RVNAF particularly during the later stages of the war. Under President Diem's administration, little was heard about it. Then, there were only sporadic "misappropriations of funds" or purloin cases involving primarily personnel responsible for the management of unit funds. Pilfering and larceny were also committed by some involved in the management of military properties and materiel.[112]

To improve the command and control and the logistics systems, MAAGV and the JGS divided the RVN into five Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ or simply Corps) starting in 1957. Corps I, also referred to as I Corps, consisted of Quang Tri, Thua Thien, Quang Nam, Quang Tin and Quang Ngai provinces. Corps II covered the provinces of the RVN's Central Highlands. Corps III consisted of Saigon-Cho-lon-Gia-dinh (the RVN Capital areas), while all of the Mekong

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[109] General Cao Van Vien, *Leadership*, Indochina Monograph (College Park, MD: NARA II Library, 1983), 119
[110] Khuyen, *RVNAF Logistics*, 361-364
[111] Ibid., 374
[112] Vien, *Leadership*, 119-120

River Delta provinces made up Corps IV.[113] Each Corps had its own major logistics depot as MAAGV and JGS wanted to shorten the distance between logistic depots and stationary military bases, which also had their own logistic depots, and mobile forward operational bases. The Corps's logistic depot, the Area Logistical Command (ALC), had subordinate directorates: Ordnance, Quartermaster, Construction and Engineer, Medical, Signal/Communication Services, and Transportation. Prior to 1963, there were three ALCs. The 1st ALC, located in Da Nang to support Corps I, the 2nd ALC was situated in Qui Nhon to supply Corps II, and the 3rd ALC, the largest ALC prior to 1964, was established in Saigon to provide logistical support to both Corps III and IV (by 1968, the year of the major Tet Offensive, the 4th ALC was formed in Phong Dinh to augment Corps IV, while Saigon's ALC was reduced to supporting just Corps III).[114] As MAAGV and JGS reorganized command-and-control and logistics systems, and as the TERM team relocated left over FFEEC and VNA materials to newly constructed RVNAF's ALCs in the four Corps, Williams reorganized the non-communist conventional and unconventional units into the RVNAF's regular and irregular formations and distributed them evenly to the four Corps.

Before his tenure ended in 1955, O'Daniel worked out a plan with JGS to transform the VNA into an ARVN capable of dealing with both the conventional and unconventional threats that the DRVN posed to the RVN. The pre-1956 MAAGV-JGS scheme for the ARVN aimed to reorganize over eighty VNA battalions into four field and six light ARVN divisions to combat external and internal communist threats. These ten divisions would be supplemented by an airborne brigade, four armoured regiments, eleven artillery battalions, thirteen regional regiments, and six religious sect infantry regiments. "As his contemporaries had done in other countries," Andrew J. Birtle argued, "O'Daniel adopted the existing array of military and

[113] Dinh, *Thien Hung Ca: Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa*, 28-29; Collins, *The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army*, 9
[114] Khuyen, *RVNAF Logistics*, 34-39

paramilitary organizations as the basis upon which to build a multilayered security system."[115] Each field division would have 8,500 men, each light division 5,225 men. All divisions would boast three infantry regiments, with three battalions in each regiment. Latched on to each light division would be a divisional headquarters, an intelligence company, a signal company, an ordnance company, and a regimental weapons company. The six light divisions, thirteen regional regiments, and six sect regiments would constitute a mobile anti-guerrilla strike force unencumbered by heavy equipment or artillery. These lightly armed but mobile counter-guerrilla strike forces would operate in populated areas, mountains, jungles, and swamps. If necessary, they could be regrouped to bolster the four heavy divisions if a conventional attack occurred. The four heavy divisions would have the same organization as the light divisions. However, because the field divisions would operate on road networks, open terrain, and coastal plains, they would be backed by an artillery battalion plus transporters, quartermasters, engineers, and medics.[116]

In 1955, when Williams took over MAAGV, the pre-1955 plan to transform the VNA into the ARVN was overtaken by contemporary political events and military engagements in South Vietnam: VNA battalions had to assist the relocation of refugees from North Vietnam in mid-1954, support South Vietnamese security service and police forces to uproot active VLA cadres, and crush the sects. O'Daniel's plan to develop the VNA into the ARVN was shelved at MAAGV and JGS headquarters until Williams put the organization plan into action. As more VNA battalions returned to base, TERM reorganized the RVN military logistics system and set up ALC posts in the four Corps starting in 1956. MAAGV and JGS began to comprehend how much military work they faced to make the ARVN a reality. Williams still followed O'Daniel's

[115] Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976*, 308
[116] Viet, *Steel and Blood*, 278; Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century*, 88; Gordon L. Rottman and Ramiro Bujeiro, *Army of the Republic of Vietnam 1955-75* (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2010), 15; Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, 9; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 266-267

plan to produce a South Vietnamese land force capable of combating regular and irregular threat. However, Williams disagreed with O'Daniel about fielding heavy and light divisions to carry out both missions. Williams wanted all ARVN divisions to have the same manpower as he believed that a division with multiple regiments and battalions could be more easily taken apart to conduct counter-guerrilla operations. However, assembling light divisions to counter a surprise conventional attack was a complicated task that would require much time as had been demonstrated in 1950 when South Korean army units dispersed on counter-guerrilla missions had been slow to regroup to counter a conventional North Korean attack. Williams suspected the PAVN and PLAF might repeat this scenario.[117] Although historian Allan R. Millet has questioned the traditional view that the Korean War was purely a conventional conflict—he has demonstrated that a partisan war took place in South Korea between 1948 and 1950—while the guerrilla war failed, it distracted South Korea's army from preparing for conventional war with unfortunate consequences in 1950.[118] Having a better picture of the RVN military logistical system than O'Daniel did made Williams all too aware that MAAGV and JGS had limited resources to clothe, arm, feed, and pay so many men in so many mixed divisions that would complicate the unity of command-and-control and logistics systems. As Williams's biographer pointed out, MAAGV and JGS began remaking the VNA into the ARVN in the 1956, a process that did not end until 1959 after "a one-year [mid-1955 to mid-1956] study of the type of organization and equipment they desired for their forces... [having] studied all types of foreign divisions" and field tested them.[119]

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[117] Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 69; Birtle, U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1942-1976, 312

[118] Allan R. Millet, *The Korean War: The Essential Bibliography Series* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 2007), 9-17

[119] Schneider, *Advising the ARVN*, 37

By 1957, the ten ARVN heavy and light infantry divisions were reorganized into seven infantry divisions.[120] By 1959, each ARVN Infantry Division had 10,450 men and the following order-of-battle: a company-size headquarters, medical, ordnance, signal, transportation, quartermaster and reconnaissance units; military police/security detachments; an armoured cavalry squadron;[121] a howitzer battalion plus a 4.2in mortar battalion; and three infantry regiments. Each regiment encompassed a regimental headquarters company, a regimental 81mm mortar company, and three battalions. Battalions consisted of a company-size battalion headquarters and three rifle companies. Each rifle company consisted of a platoon-size company headquarters section, a company weapon section, and three rifle platoons. Each platoon had a platoon headquarters and three squads, and each squad had eleven men.[122] Every division had 3,612 .30 calibre carbines, 5,225 .30 calibre rifles, 626 .45 calibre pistols, 332 .45 calibre submachine guns, 652 .30 calibre Browning Automatic Rifles (BARs), 110 .30 calibre machine guns, 94 3.5in rocket launchers, 36 57mm recoilless rifles, almost 200 mortars of 60mm, 81mm and 4.2in., 12 105mm towed howitzers and 544 grenade launchers.[123] Each division—2,430 riflemen plus support staff and troops—was commanded by a divisional commander (a full general) and an assistant divisional commander (a lieutenant general) and their staff officers (lieutenants, captains and colonels). Each regiment—810 riflemen plus support staff and troops—was led by a regimental commander (a major general), an assistant regimental commander (a brigadier general), and their staff officers. Each battalion—270 riflemen plus support staff and troops—was commanded by a battalion commander (a full colonel), an

[120] Viet, *Steel and Blood*, 279; Dinh, *Thien Hung Ca: Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa*, 24
[121] Viet, *Steel and Blood*, 294; Dinh, *Thien Hung Ca: Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa*, 519
[122] "1959 Vietnamese Army Reorganization Developed by Committee of Vietnamese Officers & US Advisors", Infantry Division Chart/Layout 1 page; Folder 152; Box 3; Collection: Samuel T. Williams Papers; Archive: USAMHI; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 297
[123] Rottman and Bujeiro, *Army of the Republic of Vietnam 1955-75*, 34-35; "1959 Vietnamese Army Reorganization Developed by Committee of Vietnamese Officers & US Advisors", Infantry Division/Recapitulation: Vehicles, Armament, Communications 1 page; Folder 152; Box 3; Collection: Samuel T. Williams Papers; Archive: USAMHI

assistant battalion commander (a lieutenant colonel), and their staff officers. Each company—90 riflemen—was commanded by a company commander (a major or a captain) and an assistant company commander (a captain). Each platoon—30 riflemen—was led by a platoon commander (a first lieutenant) and an assistant platoon commander (a second lieutenant or a sergeant). Each squad—10 riflemen—was led by a squad leader, either a second lieutenant or a sergeant.[124]

Prior to 1960, RVNAF paratroopers and marines constituted the general strategic reserve forces with the manpower, firepower and logistic capability to operate throughout the RVN. In 1959, VNA 1st, 3rd, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th paratrooper battalions, 1st and 2nd paratrooper task force headquarters, and a paratrooper artillery battalion, were assembled into the ARVN 1st Airborne Brigade (by 1975 there were four airborne brigades). The brigade constituted of a company-size headquarters in charge of personnel, intelligence, operations, logistics and other military matters, a airborne reconnaissance company, 8th and 9th airborne battalions, and 1st airborne artillery battalion.[125] Under FFEEC command and prior to 1956, the future VNMC was called the 1st Marine Infantry and was organized into headquarters and a service company, two landing battalions and a 4.2in mortar company. Each landing battalion had a headquarters, a service company, one heavy weapons company, and three infantry companies. FFEEC's Vietnamese marine infantry units were specialized in amphibious warfare.[126] After 1956, while Vietnamese marine infantry still specialized in amphibious warfare, they became another general strategic reserve force for the RVNAF in addition to the 1st Airborne Brigade. The 1st Marine Infantry

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[124] "1959 Vietnamese Army Reorganization Developed by Committee of Vietnamese Officers & US Advisors", Infantry Division/Command from Squad to Divisional Level 1 page; Folder 152; Box 3; Collection: Samuel T. Williams Paper; Archive: USAMHI

[125] Dinh, *Thien Hung Ca: Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa*, 335-336; Rottman and Bujeiro, *Army of the Republic of Vietnam 1955-1975*, 23-24

[126] Captain Robert H. Withlow, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: the Advisory & Combat Assistance Era 1954-1964* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museum Division Headquarters of the U.S. Marine Corps, 1977), 21, Archive: NARA Library, College Park, MD; Major Xuan Dung Tran, ed., *Bo Tu Lenh Su Doan Thuy Quan Luc Chien* (Vietnamese Marine Division Headquarters) *Chien Su Thuy Quan Luc Chien Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa* (History of the RVNAF Marine) (College Park, MD: NARA II Library, 1997), 34

became the 2nd Marine Group in 1959 with 2,276 marines divided into a group headquarters, an administrative and a service company, a mortar battery, and three marine battalions. As RVNAF's general strategic reserve operational units, the 1st Airborne Brigade and 2nd Marine Group were assault units, which were lightly armed to enhance their mobile and raiding capability.[127]

Although the 1st Airborne Brigade fell under the ARVN's command-and-control system and the 2nd Marine Group answered to the VNN's chain-of-command, the JGS had overall command of both elite units which served both as strike forces to finish off enemy units but also as a rescue force to relieve embattled friendly units. The most secret RVNAF elite unit was the 400-man 1st Special Observation Group (1st SOG), which received direct orders from the Office of the Presidency and whose operational planning come from the JGS and MAAGV. SOG late became the 81st Airborne Ranger Brigade. Mobile and lightly armed, 1st SOG were funded by the CIA and trained by the Green Berets to carry out long range reconnaissance patrol (LRRP) and intelligence gathering, airborne, amphibious and rescue operations, and partisan warfare. The primary mandate of 1st SOG from 1957 to 1963 was to conduct clandestine LRRP and sabotage missions deep inside DRVN territory.[128]

By mid-1955, sect members who had surrendered were given opportunities to be integrated into RVNAF's new paramilitary forces: the Civil Guard (CG) and the Self-Defence Corp (SDC).[129] In addition to supporting the ARVN against a PAVN conventional attack or a PLAF unconventional attack, the missions of the CG and SDC were "pacification and the

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[127] Withlow, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam*, 32-33; Dinh, *Thien Hung Ca: Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa*, 373-374
[128] Dinh, *Thien Hung Ca: Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa*, 481-484
[129] Lieutenant General Ngo Quang Truong, *Territorial Forces*, Indochina Monographs Series (College Park, MD: NARA II Library, 1984), 27

maintenance of territorial security."[130] Unconventional CG and SDC paramilitary units plus conventional ARVN and VNMC formations fit JGS and MAAGV plans "for the defense of their new nation [RVN] to be effective, this military force [RVNAF] should have the capabilities to maintain territorial security and fight a mobile war at the same time."[131] Therefore, the CG and SDC were not designed simply to provide local security but also to augment ARVN operations, ranging from attacking enemy's sanctuaries to carrying out civic action programs to win the populace over to the RVN government.[132] In 1956, the Ministry of the Interior authorized the organization and training of a 68,000-men CG and 48,000-men SDC. CG units could not be larger than a battalion or smaller than a company, while SDC units consisted of five to ten men. The CG's mission was to provide territorial security, reconnaissance, and intelligence gathering at the provincial level, while the SDC secured villages and gathered intelligence at the district and village levels. CG and SDC units were lightly armed but while CG units wore standard military fatigues, SDC militias, guarding their own hamlets, wore civilian pyjamas. The SDC's armaments were primitive: pistols, shotguns, single shot rifles, and home-made weapons including booby traps rigged with poisoned spikes or arrows. Their means of communication were even less advanced: drums, tocsins, flag signals, and messengers—no other RVNAF units were as poorly armed and ill-equipped as the SDC. CG units had better armaments and communication equipment, including vintage Ford Lynx armoured vehicles, scout cars, Land Rover trucks, and WWII radio equipments.[133]

On January 1, 1959, the 1st, 2nd, 5th, and 7th ARVN Infantry Divisions were created, followed by the 22nd, 23rd, and 21st ARVN Infantry Divisions later that year. As the war in South

[130] Ibid., 5
[131] Ibid., 24
[132] Rottman and Bujeiro, *Army of the Republic of Vietnam*, 38
[133] Truong, *Territorial Forces*, 5, 27, 30; Dinh, *Thien Hung Ca: Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa*, 624

Vietnam escalated, two more ARVN divisions, the 9th and 25th Infantry Divisions, were formed in 1962. As mentioned earlier, the RVN was divided into four Corps. Each ARVN Infantry Division was given a Tactical Area of Responsibility (TAOR), one or more provinces depended on the size of each province. Corps I was guarded by three ARVN Infantry Divisions, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd with their headquarters in Da Le Thuong, Chu Lai, and Da Nang, respectively, while Corp I's main headquarters, at Da Nang, coordinated all political and military operations conducted by ARVN, CG and SDC units.[134] The strategic importance of Corps I made Quang Tri home to both the 1st Airborne Brigade and the 2nd Marine Group.[135] Corps II was defended by ARVN 22nd and 23rd Infantry Divisions with their headquarters in Qui Nhon and Ban Me Thout, respectively. Corps II's main headquarters was in Pleiku. Corps III was secured by ARVN 5th, 18th, and 25th Infantry Divisions, not including the Office of the Presidency's Palace Guards (an armoured cavalry squadron, air and naval squadrons, battalion-size airborne, marine and artillery units) in Saigon. The Corps III's main headquarters located at Bien Hoa's VNAF Base. Lastly, the main headquarters of Corps IV stationed in Can Tho to command and coordinate all operations of CG and SDG units as well as of ARVN 7th, 9th, and 21st Infantry Divisions.[136] All of the provincial chiefs commanding CG and SDC units reported to the Corps commanding general and his deputy who controlled all ARVN units and answered to the JGS in Saigon. Corps commanders commanded ARVN units, which belonged to the Ministry of Defence, but not CG and SDC units which fell under the authority of provincial chiefs and the Ministry of the Interior. Unity of command has always been the key to coordinate offensive and defensive efforts in any types of warfare, conventional or counter-guerrilla warfare. Therefore, while ARVN, CG, and

[134] Dinh, *Thien Hung Ca: Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa*, 28
[135] Viet, *Steel and Blood*, 279
[136] Dinh, *Thien Hung Ca: Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa*, 28-29

SDC units were preparing for joint operations, commanding generals and provincial chiefs at the Corps-level had yet to achieve unity of command when war fully broke out in 1960.

JGS requested MAAGV at 1959's end to organize and train the 4th Company of each ARVN battalions based on the US Army Ranger model. US Army Rangers also were attached to the four Corps to train selected ARVN infantrymen in hand-to-hand combat, field craft, weaponry, sniping, small-unit raiding, battlefield surveillance, and LRRP. These units, lightly armed for mobile operations in difficult terrain, would conduct counter-guerrilla warfare and conventional light infantry missions. ARVN Ranger training was vigorous, including parachuting and fighting on hills, mountains, jungles, river, marsh-lands, and coastal terrain. Like the 1st Airborne Brigade and 2nd Marine Group, ARVN Ranger units were equipped with radios and lightly armed with submachine guns, medium-size general purpose machine guns, mortars, and rocket launchers. Unlike paratroopers and Marines, ARVN Ranger outfits depended on their home divisions for armour and artillery support, logistical support, and transportation. While the 1st Airborne Brigade and 2nd Marine Group consisted the national general strategic reserve force, ARVN Ranger formations constituted the divisional general strategic reserve force tasked with supporting ARVN, CG and SDC units operating within a specific TAOR of a certain Corps. By 1963, there were five Ranger companies in Corps I, ten in Corps II, forty-two in Corps III, twenty-four in Corps IV, and five in the Capital Military District.[137]

The combat capability of the RVNAF land forces when the war against the PAVN and PLAF for South Vietnam began in 1960 depended not only on the organization of RVNAF land forces but also on their training and leadership at every level. Whether waging conventional or counter-guerrilla warfare, troops required training and needed to be led by competent commanders to ensure victory on the battlefield. When combined, therefore, organization,

[137] Ibid., 441-444

training, and leadership greatly influenced how quickly and effectively the RVNAF land forces could assess enemy capability, adjust to the shifting fields of battle, and adapt to their enemy's strategy and tactics. My conclusion offers nothing new to the field of military history. Instead, it acts as a solemn reminder to military historians to re-examine the organization of the RVNAF land forces in particular, and the Vietnam War in general, not based on theories but on contemporary historical events and their causalities. The historical rather than theoretical approach to understand a multidimensional conflict such as Vietnam, allows us to fully comprehend the complexity of history and painstakingly understand the difficulties confronted Giap, O'Daniel, Williams, and other staff members of MAAGV and JGS, all of whom had to wage war with the resources available to them and under the political constraints civilian leaders imposed on the use of military force.

I have challenged the critics who have unfairly judged JGS and MAAGV for failing to prepare RVNAF land forces for counter-guerrilla warfare. In fact, MAAGV and JGS organized RVNAF land forces to counter the combined PLAF-PAVN threats. Lansdale concluded that MAAGV and JGS were wrong to organize the RVNAF land forces for conventional warfare only:

> Years later, armchair critics with the dubious valor of hindsight claimed that it was stupid to make the Vietnamese Army into so conventional a force. These critics, of course, didn't have to look across a border where heavily armed Communist divisions were forming for an action that looked suspiciously like an invasion. When General Williams questioned my own prediction about a secret infiltration, I had to admit honestly that I might be wrong. The Vietnamese are not that predictable and, further, I didn't know how hard Giap and other Communist military leaders were listening to the advice of Soviet officers who then were busily instructing the North Vietnamese methods of sweeping attacks with massed artillery and armor. A formal invasion could not be ruled out as a possibility by those who would be responsible for meeting it."[138]

This is a remarkable statement as Lansdale had championed the use of guerrilla warfare in North Vietnam and counter-guerrilla warfare in South Vietnam to defeat the communists. Researching

[138] Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars*, 338

through his private papers, no historian could have failed to notice Lansdale's fascination with revolutionary wars and counter-revolutionary warfare as he studied, wrote, and lectured to various American security agencies about countering communist warfare.[139]

Attached to JGS and MAAGV, and having worked closely with Diem's government and Williams, Lansdale recognized the political and military challenges facing the JGS and MAAGV. He vindicated JGS and MAAGV fears about what a potential PAVN attack from North Vietnam in coordination with a PLAF subversion from within South Vietnam might gain. Lansdale's assessment about the unpredictability of Communist use of force was absolutely correct. Years after the Vietnam War, when historian Cecil B. Currey asked Giap about his thoughts concerning Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*. Giap's answer was startling as FFEEC, MAAGV, and JGS intelligence officers had long puzzled over Giap's strategies. "I once studied him [Sun Tzu] and found that he said," Giap recalled, "if enemy forces are ten times larger, then we should not fight. If I had followed him we would still be in the jungle. We would never have gained victory over the French or Americans."[140] Lansdale also correctly concluded that MAAGV and JGS could not have prepared the RVNAF land forces to fight a partisan war with little regards for regular warfare. To Lansdale, the leadership of the PAVN and PLAF were less predictable than some might think. He wrote, "armchair critics with the dubious valor of hindsight" in academies and various militaries have continued to claim that the US and RVN

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[139] Lansdale kept numerous files on revolutions, revolutionary wars and counter-revolutionary warfare that he donated to the Hoover Institution at Stanford University: "The French Army's Missions In The Revolutionary War In Algeria: An Address Given At SHAPE By Lieutenant-General Allard Commanding The Algiers Army Corps on 15 November 1957", 1-20; File: 1259; Box: 43; Collection: Edward Geary Lansdale Papers; Archive: THIWRP; "Unclassified: A Comparison: Viet Nam & the Philippines by Edward G. Lansdale M/Gen., USAF, Retired, Written for the Institute for Defense Analyses", 1-29; File: 249; Box: 74; Collection: Edward Geary Lansdale Papers; Archive: THIWRP

[140] Cecil B. Currey, *Victory At Any Cost: The Genius of Viet Nam's General Vo Nguyen Giap* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1998), 154

could have won the war if only they had organized RVNAF land forces for counter-guerrilla warfare. Birtle has articulated that:

> Too many have erred in judging the Vietnam War from the standpoint of theoretical models of insurgency and counterinsurgency.... The point that is often missed is that the war in Vietnam was not just a 'classic' insurgency of the type posited by theoreticians. It was a kaleidoscopic conflict against an enemy who consisted not just of 'farmers by day and guerrillas by night,' but of large, professional military forces directed and reinforced by an external power that was intent not on redressing grievances or reforming South Vietnam, but on destroying it.... Similarly, using the comparatively limited and straightforward 'emergency' in Malaya as a lens to interpret Vietnam, as Nagl has done, ignores the vast differences between the two conflicts and produces a distorted view. Models and theoretical principles are useful, but ultimately every conflict is unique and must be fought and judged accordingly.[141]

A more thoughtful commentary of the RVNAF land forces, however, came from a veteran of unconventional warfare in Burma in WWII and revolutionary warfare in Malaya in the 1950s. "Obviously," observed Sir Robert Thompson, "such a collection of forces was bound to lead to confusion over roles and tasks, and the co-ordination of their effort alone was an insuperable problem. There would have been a much greater prospect of success if many of these forces had been amalgamated and their roles rationalize. As it was, the size and ubiquity of the army [ARVN], coupled with this conglomeration of para-military forces, led to a state of political instability and a situation in which the rule of force rather than the rule of law prevailed."[142] But Diem's government, not relying on force alone, but also used persuasion to integrate surrendered CDPF, HHPF and BXPF militias into the RVNAF land force. The Diem government could not have possibly allowed defeated but disgruntled sectarian units to return home without being disarmed as many already had switched allegiance to the NFLSVN and PLAF. As for Thompson's criticism that "such a collection of forces was bound to lead to confusion over roles and tasks, and the co-ordination of their effort alone was an insuperable problem. There would have been much greater prospect of success if many of these forces had

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[141] Andrew J. Birtle, "PROVN, Westmoreland, and the Historians: A Reappraisal", *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 72, no. 4 (October 2008), 1247

[142] Sir Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam* (St. Petersburg: Hailer Publishing, 2005), 103-104

been amalgamated and their roles rationalize," Thompson had a point for the combat capability of the RVNAF land forces would test the coordination between the ARVN, CG, and SDC, a subject this thesis will soon explore. "Regardless of how the South Vietnamese Army was organized," Birtle concluded, "it could not operate effectively under any circumstances unless it had first been effectively trained."[143]

[143] Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976*, 311

Chapter 6
Training the ARVN, 1957-1959

Vietnamese communist revolutionary warfare did not always proceed smoothly from one phase to the next as theorized by Mao Zedong. The style of warfare practiced by the VLA, PAVN, and PLAF never moved progressively from systematic acts of terrorism or political violence to low-intensity guerrilla warfare operations and then high-intensity conventional warfare. In truth, the use of terrorism or low intensity guerrilla operations or full-blown conventional warfare was dictated by numerous intertwined military and political factors: geography and topography; the political, military, and economic strengths and weaknesses of friendly forces versus those of the enemy; timing; the element of surprise, and more.

For example, when FFEEC paratroopers were bottled up at Dien Bien Phu by VLA Main Force formations, Regional Force and Popular Force units launched low-intensity guerrilla operations in the Central Highlands while small VLA urban cells deployed revolutionary terrorism in major cities and towns of the Mekong River Delta. The VLA never truly gained a foothold in South Vietnam. Unlike the Red River Delta, the Central Highlands and Mekong River Delta theatres of operation were of secondary importance in the VLA's overarching strategy. Central and South Vietnam were too far from the VLA supply depots, forward bases of operations, and safe havens. In addition, backed by the VNA, CSDF, HHPF, CDPF, and BXPF, the FFEEC's overlapping defence apparatus proved hard to unravel unless all three levels of the VLA forces could sustain military operations over a long period of time. Certainly, this last military option was out of the question for VLA commanders since their forces would be too thinly spread over the country's length to exert decisive military or political influence on any single one region of Vietnam. The strategic decision to concentrate instead of dispersing VLA military effort in North Vietnam was a correct one. VLA commanders maximized their use-of-

force against the FFEEC because their units were operating closer to their sanctuaries, logistic repositories and fire-support-bases, over terrain that favoured their lightly armed and mobile strike forces, and amongst inhabitants who were more sympathetic to their political causes.

George K. Tanham, a leading scholar of Vietnamese communist warfare, has concluded that Giap while accepted:

> Mao's concept of a three-phase war [(1) political agitation/systematic terrorism to (2) guerrilla warfare to (3) mobile guerrilla/open warfare], Giap felt uncertain about the possibility of drawing clear division between the several stages. This uncertainty may have arisen from his awareness of the unique situation of Indochina, with her two theatres of operations—the southern area around the Mekong Delta and the northern one around the Red River (or Tonkin) Delta. Progress in the two areas had been quite different and was to continue so to the end of the war. In the north, the Vietminh in 1945-1946 built up a regular army, which took the field against the French but was quickly defeated. Nothing like this happened in the south. By the end of the war, the north was entering phase three, while the south had hardly emerged from phase one. Only in the northern theatre of operations, therefore, can the development of the three phases be traced fairly clearly."[1]

In other words, Vietnamese communist revolutionary warfare often involved the use of terrorism or low-intensity guerrilla warfare or high-intensity conventional warfare independently in separate regions. However, at other times, coordinated use of terrorism, low intensity guerrilla warfare, and high-intensity conventional warfare sought to exploit every political and military weakness within the enemy's defensive system. It was precisely the concentration-of-force and flexible use-of-force principles which VLA commanders adhered to that made their under-armed military so deadly effective. It also served to warn South Vietnam's military establishment to organize, train, and lead a versatile counter-revolutionary force capable of dealing with future communist conventional and unconventional warfare capabilities as respectively posed by the PAVN and the PLAF.

By the early 1960s, the DRVN and the NLFSVN were revolutionary forces to be reckoned with. Their organization, leadership, and experience had been gained through failures

[1] George K. Tanham, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare from the Vietminh to the Viet Cong* (London: Praeger Security International, 2006), 4

and successes and tested through very tough and unforeseeable political and military circumstances of the French Indochina War. "By the early 1959," Carlyle A. Thayer claimed:

> [The] VWP [Vietnamese Workers Party was another alias of the Vietnamese Communist Party or VCP] decided the time was at hand to devote increased resources to the tasks of the national democratic revolution... giving increased weight to armed struggle. This change in emphasis occurred simultaneously with renewed emphasis on political struggle... the Resistance [the French Indochina War] model was modified and reapplied to suit the new circumstances. Military force would now provide a shield behind which base areas and 'liberated zones' could be built. The embryonic revolutionary society that had survived over the previous six difficult years was to be built up and expanded, challenging the authority and legitimacy of the RVN.[2]

Essentially, Thayer's explanation for the success of the VLA against the FFEEC in the mid-1940s to mid-1950s lay in the VLA's ability to learn from its failures and to adapt to shifting and challenging strategic and tactical circumstances. These institutional lessons and memories were passed on to the PAVN and PLAF in the Vietnam War. Therefore, the Viet Minh's victory over the French was the triumph of realism and pragmatism over doctrinaire ideology, not the other way around. Without a doubt, Viet Minh political and military leaders were well versed in left-wing political ideologies. However, they did not interpret the political and military reality of colonial Vietnam purely through their left wing lens. Rather, Viet Minh statesmen and generals based their political and military decisions on the historical circumstances facing them. For Ho, realizing revolutionary goals would only come when the colonial question had been resolved as all Vietnamese, no matter their political beliefs, were affected by French colonialism. Until 1950 when PLA began to advise and support the VLA, Giap could not afford to alienate armed non-communist factions in Central and South Vietnam. The unity between non-communist militias and his VLA was the strategic balance Giap needed to buy time to strengthen the VLA against French power.

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2 Carlisle A. Thayer, *War By Other Means: National Liberation and Revolution in Viet-Nam, 1954-60* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), xxiv

To analyze the military balance between Vietnamese communist and non-communist forces, I have critically examined how geography, national and international politics, and social and economic problems influenced the DRVN's and RVN's wartime preparations as of 1954. Through this historical analysis, I have questioned Vietnam War scholars whose conclusions on the organization, training, and combat capability of the South Vietnamese military were grounded upon guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare theories. The theoretical approach has maintained that had the US fought a truly counter-guerrilla war against the PAVN and PLAF instead of a conventional one, it 'could have won' the war. I have questioned this counterfactual approach as a fruitful way to learn about the past. How could we understand war without considering the action, inaction, and reaction of all the belligerents involved? How could we explain a military outcome without carefully analyzing the historical circumstance that indirectly or directly caused that outcome? The historical approach of trying to find the answers to the question 'what did happen' seems a more appropriate methodology for us to comprehend a complicated conflict such as Vietnam.

The 'what if' or 'what could have been' scenario of the Vietnam War was not started by Colonel Harry G. Summers Jr., but he certainly popularized the notion.[3] Using Carl von Clausewitz's seminal theoretical work, *On War*, Summers argued that the US lost because it left the DRVN, the centre-of-gravity in the war against the Vietnamese communist, intact. Summers concluded:

> Frustrated by the massive commitment of U.S. combat ground forces, they [DRVN] reverted to the *tactical defensive*. As they had done earlier against the French, their objective was to wear us down. This time [the Vietnam War], however, they had added advantage. Because of our public decision not to invade North Vietnam they were able to accomplish this with an economy of force effort – Viet Cong [NLFSV/PLAF] guerrillas supplied and augmented by selected North

[3] W. Scott Thompson and Donalson D. Frizzell, ed., *The Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Crane, Russak & Company, Inc., 1977), iii-vi. The authors interviewed numerous statesmen and civilian and military officials about what they thought had gone wrong in Vietnam and what could have happened had other policies and strategies were implemented

> Vietnamese [PAVN] regular units – while preserving the bulk of their regular forces in their homeland sanctuary.[4]

Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp furthered Summers's argument:

> We could have brought the Vietnam War to a successful conclusion in short order, early in the game," argued Grant, "once the decision had been made by the civilian leadership to engage with U.S. forces. All we needed to do was assemble the necessary force and then use it the way it was designed to be used.... In fact, we assembled the necessary force quite rapidly. By mid-1965 we had strong air power available. By 1966 we had the full measure of air power to do the job, and our ground forces were strong enough that in combination with such air power properly applied we could have forced Hanoi to give up its efforts to take over South Vietnam. But the authority to use our air power to this end was simply not forthcoming.[5]

The flaw in the 'what if' arguments was that they never seriously considered how the PAVN, the PLAF, or the PRC's PLA would have reacted if the US and the RVN invaded North Vietnam. Andrew F. Krepinevich pointed out the dangers involved in attacking the DRVN, asserting that:

> The invasion approach presented several problems, not the least of which was war with Communist China, a proposition the American public had shown itself ill-inclined to support during the Korean War.... Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that a U.S. occupation of North Vietnam would have produced results any different from those produced by the 1946 French reoccupation. The spectre of PAVN forces retreating to their old sanctuaries in Laos and China for a continuation of the struggle against the United States was the nightmare of American strategists. Given this strategic approach, the Army would have been faced with the necessity of maintaining expeditionary forces in both [North and South] Vietnams and assuming the primary burden of the war over an indefinite period while at the same time positioning a large reserve in the area should the Chinese intervene.[6]

This dissertation has demonstrated that the FFEEC was only able to prop up these Vietnamese auxiliary forces in South Vietnam because FFEEC formations went after the VLA's Popular, Regional, and Main Force units in Central and North Vietnam. Even then, FFFEC operations in the Central Highlands and the Red River Delta were futile at best as the VLA often refused to engage in decisive battles if it lacked the tactical advantage. Instead of risking destruction, VLA's outfits withdrew into Cambodia, Laos, and China to patiently await isolated FFEEC outposts to be evacuated before pouncing on the retreating columns.

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[4] Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1995), 112
[5] U.S.G. Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1998), 2-3
[6] Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 261-262

Historian Marc Jason Gilbert considered Summers's monograph as "a bankrupt form of counterfactual reasoning" and recaptured the conversation between the Colonel and historian Douglas Pike to support his point: "'Harry, [Dr. Pike asked] how can you write a book on strategy in Vietnam and not have one chapter in which you talk about the enemy?' Summers answered, 'Well, that is very hard to do, hard to understand. Anyway, [the book] is about American strategy.' Pike could only reply, 'Well, would you write a book about fighting Rommel in the desert and not go into what Rommel was doing and thinking? Doesn't that escape you? The logic of it.'"[7] Gilbert's critique of Summers's writing mirrored the larger thesis of his book, *Why The North Won The Vietnam War*, a compilation of conference papers. These essays shared a common thread, to research and comprehend the war from both the US and the DRVN vantage points. Employing the post-revisionist/synthesis school-of-thought on the Vietnam War, the authors also accepted Clausewitz's principle of war as a series of social, political, economic, and military interplays that occur when two or more polities consciously opted for use military force to achieve political ends.[8] Thus war could only be properly understood by taking into account the actions, inactions, and reactions of the opposing forces.[9]

However, Gilbert failed to question the implicit assumption of Roger Hilsman, the State Department's Director of Intelligence and Research (1961-1963) and Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (1963-1964) during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, and like Krepinevich. For Hilsman, the US lost the Vietnam War because it failed to learn from its experience fighting American Indians on the Western Plains and nationalist guerrillas on the Philippine archipelagos in the late nineteenth century. As Hilsman reminisced:

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[7] Marc Jason Gilbert, ed., *Why The North Won The Vietnam War* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 27
[8] Ibid., 29-36, 109, 154, 181
[9] Michael Howard and Peter Paret, ed., *Carl von Clausewitz's On War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 216-219; 582-584

> As director of intelligence and research in the State Department, I put the Bureau of Intelligence and Research to work on the problem of guerrilla warfare... my basic premise was that a successful counterinsurgency program depended on winning the support of the mass of the people. This meant that military measures had to be carefully circumscribed. The danger of large-scale military operations was that their very destructiveness would alienate the people... regular forces—although essential for the task of deterring conventional aggression—were unsuited because of training and equipment for the task of fighting guerrillas.[10]

While demolishing Summers's premise that the war could have been won if the DRVN had been brought to the brink of destruction without considering the reactions of the DRVN's allies, Krepinevich also erred by maintaining that "failing to promptly and adequately address this aspect of insurgency warfare and by adopting a strategic approach congruent with its emphasis on conventional war, the [U.S.] Army accelerated the dissipation of support for the war in the United States while failing to effectively advance the defeat of the internal threat to the survival of South Vietnam."[11] Taking both Hilsman's and Krepinevich's premises to their logical conclusions, had US-RVN strategy adopted counter-guerrilla warfare "the support of the mass of the people [South Vietnamese]" could have been risen while "the dissipation of [American's] support for the war" would have been declined and "the internal survival of South Vietnam" would have been defeated would it not? Neither Summers's conventional warfare school-of-thought nor Krepinevich's counter-guerrilla notion placed their theories in the complex political, military, and historical context of the Vietnam War in order to understand why the belligerents fought the way they did.

While Summers and Sharp argued that the war could have been won using a scorched earth policy, Hilsman and Krepinevich averred the conflict could only be won through a counter-guerrilla strategy aimed at winning the hearts-and-minds of the South Vietnamese. According to Mark Moyar:

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[10] Roger Hilsman, *American Guerrilla: My War Behind Japanese Lines* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 1990, 2005), 264

[11] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 268

> Reiterating points made during the war by senior U.S. military officers, veterans like Harry Summers and former politicians like Richard Nixon argued that the war could have been won had the United States taken more aggressive military actions, such as severing the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and bombing North Vietnam massively from the start instead of escalating the bombing gradually. A different group led by a military officer with a Ph.D. named Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., concluded that the war could have been won had the United States been more delicate, rather than more forceful. According to the Krepinevich school, the United States focused on fighting a conventional war in the hinterlands because the U.S. military had been designed to fight such a war, when in fact much greater attention should have been given to securing the populous areas.[12]

Essentially, both Summers and Krepinevich focussed on why the US lost the war. Neither really factored into their calculations what the DRVN might have done politically and militarily in response to their proposed strategies. Nor did they seriously consider how the organizational and training problems of the RVNAF land forces, in particularly, and the complexity of the Vietnam War, in general, restricted American ability to use force. Field Marshal Lord Michael Carver, a veteran of British colonial wars including the Malayan Emergency and an observer of the French Indochina War and the Vietnam War, raised concerns about contrasting one guerrilla war to another. To Carver, Vietnam and Malaya were very different in scale and intensity. Each conflict varied and needed to be critically analyzed in its own complex historical, political and military circumstances. As Carver has convincingly argued:

> There are those who suggest that, if the French had fought their campaign in a different way, if they had followed the pattern which the British did in Malaya, they could have succeeded. But conditions [i.e., geography, military and political] were very different. Ho Chi Minh and Giap had established their position, certainly in Tonkin, in far greater strength politically and militarily than Chin Peng [leader of the Malaya Communist Party (MCP)] in Malaya.... Hopes of restoring French authority throughout Tonkin were very slender even before the Chinese communists reached its frontier [1949-1950]. Thereafter the attempt to do so was hopeless, but into it France poured all her military effort.[13]

The Summers-Krepinevich debate over abstract and counter-factual theories about how the Vietnam War 'could have been won' if the RVNAF land forces had been trained for conventional or counter-guerrilla warfare was devoid of historical reality. As critics who unfairly blamed O'Daniel and Williams for supposedly organizing the South Vietnamese military for a

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[12] Mark Moyar, "Vietnam: Historians at War", *Academic Questions*, vol. n/a, no. n/a (March 24th, 2008), 44
[13] Lord Michael Carver, *War since 1945* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1981), 119-120

conventional war against the PAVN without considering South Vietnam's geography, the enemy's *modus-operandi*, or the political and military problems of post-1954 South Vietnam, Summers, Krepinevich, and their respective followers completely overlooked fundamental problems facing MAAGV and JGS as they prepared South Vietnam's military to meet the threats posed by DRVN conventional forces and NFLSVN unconventional forces. Worse yet, Krepinevich and other proponents of counter-guerrilla warfare failed to sufficiently explain just what exactly counter-guerrilla training entailed.

For example, US Army Major David M. Toczek asserted that the ARVN should have been organized and trained for counter-guerrilla warfare. But he did so without factoring in South Vietnam's geography, how the enemy organized, trained, and operated from 1946 to 1954, the lack of a centralized southern government, or how the South Vietnamese military was not ready to wage any type of warfare, conventional or unconventional. "Steeped in the traditions of victory through conventional war," Toczek maintained, "U.S. advisors consistently taught and encouraged the ARVN to employ strictly military strategies and tactics. Although the MAAG began to dabble in counterinsurgency by the early 1960s, most senior advisors remained committed to defeating the PLAF through conventional military operations. It is not surprising then that the ARVN closely mirrored the U.S. Army, a conventionally oriented force, in doctrine, strategy, tactics, and organization."[14]

Looking for "insight into the thoughts and actions of the U.S. advisors from 1954 to 1963 and how the MAAG envisioned the ARVN should prosecute the war and how it should be organized," Toczek examined *Field Manual (FM) 100-5: Operations* to discern out why the ARVN's organization and training mirrored the US Army's conventional warfare mindset.

[14] David M. Toczek, *The Battle of Ap Bac, Vietnam: They Did Everything but Learn from It* (London: Greenwood Press, 2001), 23

Finding that only three minor revisions were made in the field manual from 1954-1963, he incorrectly concluded that both "the 1954 and 1962 [*FM 100-5: Operations*] versions, which the American advisors used as their doctrinal reference points, clearly embodied a traditional, conventional attitude."[15] Having closely examined *FM 100-5: Operations* from the 1949 to the 1962 versions, I contend that *FM 100-5: Operations* provided field officers with a more thorough understanding of how guerrilla and counter-guerrilla operations were actually being practiced than critics believed.

For instance, from 1949 to 1962, *FM 100-5: Operations* treated regular (conventional) and irregular (guerrilla) warfare as two different but correlated ways to use military force. The 1949 version, placing "partisan warfare" under its "special operations" section, defined guerrilla warfare as "carried on by small independent or semi-independent forces, operating against a greatly superior enemy. Partisan operations were conducted for the purpose of harassing or delaying larger forces and causing losses through attrition. They are also valuable in destroying signal communication, gaining military information, assisting regular forces to re-conquer the country, or making incursions against the enemy's lines of communications and supply." The manual stressed that guerrilla warfare had often been waged deep behind the frontlines but could easily breakout in "the aftermath of the defeat of the main forces of modern armed opponents. They may arise from the intention to occupy territory or quell rebellion. They may be employed in friendly but enemy controlled areas."[16] These last sentences emphasized the political dimension of guerrilla warfare as guerrillas could not survive without political and military support from a foreign power. To sustain their combat capability, guerrillas must also solicit popular support and material aid from the indigenous population to obtain manpower and

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[15] Ibid., 24

[16] *U.S. Army Field Manual 100-5: Operations (Aug. 1949)*, 231; Archive: United States Army Military History Institute (USAMHI), Carlisle, PA

intelligence on the enemy as well as food, money, and other assistance to sustain their forces and operations. As the 1949 field manual concluded, victory for any guerrilla forces depended on the internal and external assistance they received.

The 1953 and 1954 versions of *FM 100-5: Operations*, while dedicating fewer pages on irregular warfare, still addressed "partisan and guerrilla warfare." Like the 1949 manual, the 1953 and 1954 copies stressed the importance of comprehending war as the use-of-force to achieve a political objective as statesmen and generals deployed a conventional force, an unconventional force, or both depending on the resources they had. The 1953 manual explained that guerrilla warfare could flare up in "[the] aftermath of the defeat or withdrawal of friendly forces" or "may arise [from] and be planned for prior to and concurrently with operations to occupy enemy territory" or "may be employed in friendly but enemy-controlled areas and may be overt or covert in nature." Militarily, the "characteristics" of partisan warfare, which could be waged by "independent [irregular] or semi-independent [irregular/regular] forces", were to "hinder, harass, sabotage, or delay operations of enemy forces," or/and "destroying signal communications, gaining information, disrupting lines of communications, destroying supply and industrial installations, [and] assisting combat operations of regular friendly forces." The 1953 manual warned that "mountains, deserts, jungles, and wooded areas are particularly suitable for the conduct of [guerrilla] operations." Should these irregular operations prove successful, "the occupying army [would have] to divert much of its combat power in defense of rear areas."[17]

We shall return to the 1954 version shortly. For now, a critical appraisal of *FM 100-5: Operations* (Feb., 1962) demonstrates it had no shortages of explanations about guerrilla forces operated in conjunction with conventional forces, and much practical advice for US military

[17] *U.S. Army Field Manual 100-5: Operations (1953)*, 287-288; Archive: USAMHI

commanders about how to deal with guerrilla parties operating behind their frontlines, on hazardous terrain and amongst the occupied populations. Compared to the 1949, 1953, and 1954 versions, the 1962 *FM 100-5: Operations* offered the most thorough evaluations on the use of guerrilla warfare plus suggestions about conducting counter-guerrilla operations for commanders in the field. The completeness of the 1962 manual was made possible by the practical experiences gained by US military advisors in Vietnam and other countries. Devoting a whole chapter with multiple sections on the subject of "Unconventional Warfare", the 1962 version treated guerrilla and conventional warfare as two sides of the same coin: The use-of-force—to impress the enemy into subjugation; thus, ending the conflict—constituted both irregular and regular warfare.[18] As earlier versions emphasized that guerrilla forces were organized and trained to conduct various operations in hard-to-access terrain, the 1962 manual reiterated these guerrilla tactics.[19]

More so than other manuals, the 1962 iteration discussed extensively the integration of military operations, psychological warfare, economic development, political struggle, and gaining the trust and active support of the local inhabitants, in guerrilla warfare. "Guerrilla warfare operations are most effective when the guerrilla force has the approval of the local populace; support is normally given to forces representing the aspiration of a people is the desire to be liberated from oppression. However," the manual stressed "this desire, even though strong, will not normally be manifested by overt action or support of dissident elements unless there appears to be a reasonable chance of success."[20] To sustain combat capabilities and effectiveness, guerrilla forces needed the support of a foreign power or local inhabitants or,

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[18] *U.S. Army Field Manual 100-5: Operations (Feb., 1962)* published by the Department of the Army, Chapter 10: "Unconventional Warfare", Section III: "Guerrilla Warfare", Subsections "*b*" and "*d*", p. 130, and Section: "Guerrilla Mission", Subsections: "*a*", "*b*", "*c*", "*d*" and "*e*", pp. 132-133; Archive: USAMHI
[19] Ibid., 131
[20] Ibid., 131

ideally, both. However, the foreign power had the luxury to support proxy guerrilla forces without risking retribution unless its territories—sanctuaries for guerrillas and weapon depots—were invaded by counter-guerrilla forces. Local inhabitants, by passively or actively supporting the guerrillas, however, could be put under tremendous pressures by both the counter-guerrilla and guerrilla forces. Counter-guerrilla forces could collectively punish—imposing curfew on villagers, curtailing food rations and movements, and imprisoning, torturing, and executing suspected supporters—the local inhabitants for supporting the guerrilla forces. By recruiting too many young men and seizing material and food resources from villagers, the guerrilla forces, intentionally or by default, not only invited callous retribution from counter-guerrilla forces, they also took away important manpower required to plough rice paddies at harvest time and pilfered emergency funding and food desperately needed by marginal peasant farmers. Therefore, "the burden on the friendly population supporting the guerrilla force" could increase or decrease pending on how well the guerrilla forces were able to solicit political and military supports from both the indigenous populations and powerful allies from without.[21]

To mobilize local inhabitants to defeat the guerrillas, the counter-guerrilla forces had to strike the right balance. Too little control of the indigenous population would allow guerrillas to gain too much political influence while forceful control of the native residents could incite them to back the guerrilla cause. To effectively combat the guerrillas, counter-guerrilla forces needed a comprehensive strategy. Said strategy meant protecting the local population from the guerrillas, using pacification units to carry out economic development projects, conducting psychological warfare and propaganda, and instituting political reforms and indoctrination to counter guerrilla propaganda and political warfare programs. *FM 100-5: Operations* (Aug., 1949) recognized that guerrillas, unless fully backed by both foreign powers and indigenous population, could not

[21] Ibid., 133-134

defeat counter-guerrilla forces whose "organization, armament, and equipment" were "superior." However, guerrilla militarily weakness could be made up politically by gaining popular support. To the contrary, the counter-guerrilla forces, regardless of their military power, could "be handicapped by lack of reliable information, by dependence on an organized system of supply, and by difficulty in bringing the partisans to a decisive engagement." *FM 100-5: Operations* (1949) concluded that while counter-guerrilla operations should be aimed at "the destruction of partisan forces or the quelling of tribal uprisings," also "every effort" of the counter-guerrilla forces "should be made to enlist the support of native elements to form small mobile constabulary-type units" because they were more "familiar with the area and with the partisan opponents."[22] *FM 100-5: Operations* (Sept. 1954), recognizing the importance of psychological warfare used by the guerrilla forces as "a supporting military weapon, designed to influence the minds of enemy troops and of enemy, neutral or friendly foreign populations," advised field commanders to wage psychological warfare to "lessen the enemy's will to resist, create dissension and defections in his ranks, and reduce or eliminate the support of civilian populations. It can be used as a weapon directed against the moral fibre of the enemy, just as conventional weapons are employed to reduce or destroy enemy's physical capabilities and will to resist."[23]

FM 100-5: Operations (Feb. 1962) warned field commanders that "The ability of relatively small clandestine and covert forces to attack targets deep in enemy territory is a unique capability that cannot be reckoned with the conventional manner. The importance of the targets that can be attacked is the primary consideration rather than the size and composition of such forces." The 1962 proposed that, like the closely-knit political and military operations of

[22] *U.S. Army Field Manual 100-5: Operations (Aug., 1949)*, 232; Archive: USAMHI
[23] *U.S. Army Field Manual 100-5: Operations (1954)*, 40-41; Archive: USAMHI

guerrilla forces, all counter-guerrilla operations must be "closely integrated with economic, political, and psychological warfare" and that "Army force must... be prepared to operate effectively against and defeat such an enemy." It further cautioned field commanders that counter-guerrilla units "seldom" experienced immediate and "decisive results of operations against irregular" especially when their targets proved "elusive" and operated over plains of battle where there "may or may not be a front or a rear in the normal [conventional] military sense."[24] As in previous publications, the 1962 version reminded that guerrilla forces "lose effectiveness when not supported by the civil population, whether such support is provided willingly or is gained through coercion... [but could] increase effectiveness when supported by an external power." Therefore, the manual advised commanders that the ultimate objective of their "operations against irregular forces must make provisions for isolating the irregular elements from these sources [internal and external] of support." Above all, the 1962 manual emphasized the importance of follow-up military operations that involved US advisors working with "non-U.S. forces and personnel for all activities in which they may be profitably employed... [such as] combat operations, security of the civil populace and critical facilities and installations, guides and interpreters, intelligence and counterintelligence tasks, new construction and reconstruction in devastated areas and psychological activities."[25]

The various versions of *FM 100-5: Operations* had consistently taught its military readers to understand guerrilla warfare as an important factor in the use-of-force equation, including the deployment of conventional forces on the battlefield. Furthermore, the manual reminded that pacification operations must proceed once military operations against guerrilla forces had been and/or were terminated. US advisors should always solicit as much active support from the

[24] *U.S. Army Field Manual 100-5: Operations (Feb., 1962)*, 136-137; Archive: USAMHI
[25] Ibid., 139

indigenous populations for both their military and pacification campaigns just as guerrilla commanders systematically conducted joint military and political missions to mobilize the local inhabitants to join their ranks. One can assert that the manual's various versions offered sound theoretical and insightful practical understanding of guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare while leaving intellectual space and operational freedom for field commanders to contemplate how best to organize, train, and adapt to meet the local military and political threats posed by guerrillas operating in their tactical areas of responsibility.

FM 100-5: Operations was certainly not as focussed as the latest US Army and Marine Corps's *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* published on July 4th, 2007. However, just because *FM 100-5: Operations* failed to systematically emphasize small wars, it did not follow that lessons of guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare could not be found throughout the manual, especially if historians carefully researched the entire manual instead of looking for key words like "counterinsurgency." Yet, this has been precisely the arguments made by soldiers and scholars who criticized MAAGV and JGS for preparing South Vietnam's military for conventional warfare instead of counter-guerrilla combat. Certainly, the academic works by Krepinevich, Nagl, and Toczek were important contributions to the study of war and peace in the twentieth century. Their analyses have influenced the academic studies of scholars such as Brian McAllister Linn and popular writers such as Max Boot. Linn reiterated Krepinevich's words to explain how US army fought and lost the Vietnam War: "What one officer termed the 'army concept' of war directly contributed to the Vietnam debacle."[26] Boot suggested that an alternative conclusion to the Vietnam War might have been possible had the US and RVN

[26] Brian McAllister Linn, *The Echo of Battle: The Army's Way of War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 152, 280

militaries pursued a "small war" strategy from "the beginning."[27] But like Krepinevich, Nagl, and Toczek, neither Linn nor Boot took into account fully the peculiar factors that made the revolutionary war in Vietnam unlike the other small wars the US military had fought before.

However well-argued these scholarly works and popular histories may be, their conclusions are not impervious to critical assessment. In fact, their interpretations and conclusions of *FM 100-5: Operations*, which were deeply rooted in their theoretical understanding of guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare, offered little room for nuanced interpretations. Toczek has argued that the "Military Operations against Irregular Forces" chapter of FM 100-5: *Operations* (Feb., 1962) "failed to mention the term 'counterinsurgency,' instead using the term 'irregular' to 'refer to all types of nonconventional forces and operations.'"[28] However, had he not cut and pasted quotes from this section of the manual to support his argument, the term "irregular", often used in the "Military Operations against Irregular Forces" of *FM 100-5: Operations* (Feb., 1962), succeeded in capturing all the intricate military, political, and other essential activities that had been used by guerrilla forces throughout history to defeat more powerful enemies. *FM 100-5: Operations* (Feb., 1962) gave two definitions of the term "irregular," the first definition focussed on the military aspect of revolutionary warfare, while the second emphasized its political and other essential dimensions:

> *a.* The Term irregular, used in combinations such as *irregular* forces, *irregular* activities, *counterirregular* operations, etc., is used in the broad sense to refer to all type of nonconventional forces and operations. It includes guerrilla, insurgent, subversive, resistance, terrorist, revolutionary, and similar personnel, organizations and methods.
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> *b.* Irregular activities include acts of a military, political, psychological, and economic nature, conducted predominantly by inhabitants of a nation for the purpose of eliminating or weakening the authority of the local government or an occupying power, and using primarily irregular and informal groupings and measures.[29]

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[27] Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 286-317, 380-384

[28] Toczek, *The Battle of Ap Bac*, 24-25, 57

[29] *U.S. Army Field Manual 100-5: Operations (Feb., 1962)*, 136-137; Archive: USAMHI

Did the VLA in the French Indochina War not use various military "methods", for example, to harass the FFEEC as described by definition "a" of irregular warfare? Was the Vietnamese population not proselytized by the political, psychological, and economic appeals promised by the Viet Minh between 1947 and 1954? These two definitions offer numerous and nuanced rather than singular interpretations of what guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare had been historically.

Toczek had been inspired to research *FM 100-5: Operations* by Krepinevich. As the first to critically examining *FM 100-5: Operations*, Krepinevich concluded the standard field manuals offered nothing useful about revolutionary and counterrevolutionary warfare. Secondly, because these booklets failed to extensively discuss guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare, Krepinevich concluded "the Army failed to create a coherent body of doctrinal literature for counterinsurgency."[30] Lastly, Krepinevich suggested that the US Army could have institutionalized the lessons of guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare had it recalled its humble beginning as a revolutionary force in the War of Independence, its small wars "against the Indian tribes of the American frontier," and the nationalist guerrillas in the Philippines in the early twentieth century. Unfortunately, Krepinevich argued, "the memory of that experience had long since dissipated by the mid-twentieth century." However, as earlier experiences in partisan and anti-partisan warfare "rapidly faded", American soldiers studied "the great battles in Europe" while failing to learn about "the colonial wars" of the Great Powers. By the mid-twentieth century, WWI, WWII, and the Korean War had "solidified the service's focus on conventional war, which has become a comfortable, familiar frame of reference in which to approach conflict."[31]

[30] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 39
[31] Ibid., 5

Other guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare theorists furthered Krepinevich's argument without fundamentally challenging his assumption that the US army had failed to institutionalize guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare doctrine. As Nagl argued, "the fact that the young American army would fight various Native American tribes for over a century, engaging in these 'small wars' never became recognized as an essential aspect of the business of the army."[32] Boot noted:

> Since World War II, guerrillas have been stymied in Northern Ireland, Israel, Italy, Germany, Spain, Greece, the Philippines, Malaya, Turkey, Kenya, El Salvador, Peru, Guatemala, Mexico, and numerous other countries... the U.S. in the past had considerable success against guerrillas in the Philippines, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Nicaragua, and elsewhere. It was quite possible that Vietnam was sufficiently different from all these prior instances that the U.S. could not have won... this assumption needs to be treated sceptically, especially since the U.S., despite all the mistakes made along the way, came tantalizingly close to winning at least a conditional victory.[33]

Viewing the Vietnam War as merely a guerrilla war and thus concluding that MAAGV and JGS should have organized and trained their military forces to wage counter-guerrilla warfare as advocated by small wars theorists, is problematic. First, whether the US and RVN might have won with different strategies has been investigated in great length by more qualified scholars.[34] It is counterproductive for historians to focus on whether the conflict in Southeast Asia was necessary or not, winnable or unwinnable, moral or immoral. First, it makes some historians unappreciative of the complexity in all historical events. Second, historians often forget that actors in all historical dramas were constrained by circumstances. Without the luxury of historical hindsight, historical actors could only make decisions based on their knowledge and experience. This last important factor leads us to the second criticism of the above guerrilla and counter-guerrilla theorists and their train-of-thought.

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[32] John A. Nagl, *Learning To Eat Soup With A Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 44, 54

[33] Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace*, 314

[34] Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), xi-xxiii; John Prados, *Vietnam: The History of an Unwinnable War, 1945-1975* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2009), xi-xv

None of the aforementioned authors questioned whether MAAGV and JGS could prepare the RVN military for counter-guerrilla warfare—or any other types of warfare—given the geography and topography of South Vietnam, the dual threats posed by the PAVN and PLAF, and the unremitting political, military, and social problems of a South Vietnam at war in 1950s. Ironically, the deep curiosity shown by these authors toward previous small wars did not lead them to conclude that while there were similarities among these conflicts, there were also differences. How had the landscapes of these countries influenced the ways commanders of guerrilla and counter-guerrilla forces conducted their wars? How had the balance of the opposing forces dictated the outcomes of these conflicts? How were small wars viewed in the domestic and international arenas of the mid-nineteenth century, the age of imperialism and colonialism, vis-a-vis the domestic and international arenas of the mid-twentieth century, the age of decolonization and Cold War? They should also have heeded historian Walter Laqueur who said:

> The techniques and organizational forms of guerrilla warfare have varied enormously from country to country according to terrain, size and density of population, political constellation... guerrilla units in small countries have normally been small whereas in big countries they have been large... some countries guerrilla units gradually transformed themselves into regular army regiments and divisions... in others they won the war though they never outgrew the guerrilla stage or despite the fact that militarily they were beaten. In some guerrilla movements the personality of the leader has been of decisive importance.... On other occasions personalities have been of little consequences.... Some involved a great deal of fighting, resulting in great losses, others were, on the whole, unbloody.... Success or failure of a guerrilla movement depends not only on its own courage, wisdom and determination but equally on objective conditions and... on the tenacity and aptitude of the enemy.... But beyond all these factors, subjective and objective, there is still the element of accident which cannot possibly be accounted for, which defies measurement and prediction.[35]

More so than conventional wars, guerrilla wars varied not only from one nation to another but also one country and from one time period to the next within the same conflict.[36] Until each case of small war is being critically analyzed and appreciated for all of its own unique social,

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[35] Walter Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical & Critical Studies* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1998), 401-402

[36] Eric M. Bergerud, *The Dynamics of Defeat: The Vietnam War in Hau Nghia Province* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 1-6; David W.P. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930-1975* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 3-6

political, and military complexities, our understanding of partisan warfare and how to combat it would not advance very far.

Lastly, counter-guerrilla warfare theorists wrongly claimed that the US Army, unlike the USMC which institutionalized counter-guerrilla warfare in its war fighting doctrine by critically analyzing its experiences in past anti-partisan campaigns and compiling lessons learned into its *Small Wars Manual* for future USMC officers,[37] did not institutionalize small wars into its operational doctrine even though it had fought against guerrillas in North America, the Caribbean and Central America, and the Western Pacific. In his detailed two volume study of the *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine* from 1860 to 1976, Andrew J. Birtle has pointed out that it "has long been accepted that the U.S. Army did not have an official, codified, written doctrine for the conduct of counter-guerrilla, pacification, and nation-building activities prior to World War II." Until the Cold War, "a system of comprehensive doctrinal manuals in the modern sense did not exist in the nineteenth century and was still in its infancy during the early decades of the twentieth." Birtle has discovered, however, that counter-guerrilla operational lessons did pass from one generation of officers to the next. Through a combination of "curricular materials, textbooks, war plans... the less official publications of individual soldier... personal experience, folkways, and institutional norms that can be acquired and passed down over time," Union Army officers who fought Confederate guerrillas in the Civil War passed on their knowledge to US Army commanders who had to wage small wars against Indian tribes on the Western Plains plus guerrillas in the Caribbean, Central America, and the Far East. Birtle cautioned guerrilla and counter-guerrilla theorists that by researching the formal manuals alone they would not thoroughly grasp how US Army commanders, through informal means, passed down their small war experiences to their

[37] Nagl, *Learning To Eat Soup With A Knife*, 47

successors. "The absence of a formal, written doctrine," Birtle concluded, "does not mean that American soldiers did not develop concepts and theories about such activities, some of which became enduring principles that guided Army operations for decades despite their meagre mention in the manuals of the day." That guerrilla and counter-guerrilla theorists de-emphasized the differences between small wars also troubled Birtle for "while many threads of continuity exist there are also developments that have no parallel. Continuity and change are the twin muses of history. No two situations are identical, and the fact that something happened in one instance does not mean it will occur in another... [and that] a plethora of political, socioeconomic, cultural, environmental, and military factors give each counterinsurgency, nation-building, and contingency operation a unique hue."[38]

For all their interests in guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare, small war theorists did not discuss the combat training required to conduct anti-partisan operations. By believing that the US Army did not "institutionalize" guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare, they overlooked important lessons about combat training in small war situations that could be found throughout *FM 100-5: Operations* from 1953 to 1962. Yet, the best ways to determine whether MAAGV and JGS gave the RVNAF land forces the appropriate combat training, and whether the South Vietnamese military could have trained for conventional or non-conventional warfare given the situation after 1954, lay in understanding just what exactly that combat training for counter-guerrilla operations entailed.

The "Security" section, or Chapter 6, of FM 100-5: *Operations* (Aug., 1949), for example, recommended that, the "most effective method of destroying guerrillas is to encircle them, blocking all avenues of escape simultaneously to prevent withdrawal of the guerrilla prior

[38] Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1942-1976* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 2007), vii-viii

to the attack." As the size of the counter-guerrilla forces would depend on the strength of the guerrilla forces and vary from one military theatre to the next, "depend upon the size of the guerrilla force and the extent of the area involved, forces employed will vary in size from small patrols to large units of combined forces." The missions of these anti-guerrilla strike forces ranged from guarding "logistical installations to attack and destroying small guerrilla bands operating in the vicinity of the installation." To prevent the return of guerrillas to cleared areas, "special anti-guerrilla units" or pacification units "must be prepared for prolonged operations, using guerrilla methods." These "special anti-guerrilla units" must be made up of committed volunteer troops and trusted indigenous personnel who would "act as guide and interpreters," to single out and neutralize "small guerrilla bands, harass guerrilla communications and supply, and, in conjunction with other anti-guerrilla units or [conventional] combat units, attack and destroy large guerrilla forces." So, just as a conventional force in a small war must be trained for a dual mission of fighting large enemy guerrilla formations while supporting small friendly pacification units, an anti-partisan unit had to train for combat operations against guerrillas while supporting larger counter-guerrilla units to "prevent these irregular forces from receiving support from the civilian population," "isolating guerrilla forces from the civilian population and from each other" and "winning the support of the indigenous population away from the guerrillas and infiltrators." The 1949 manual stressed that "guerrilla forces and infiltrators cannot exist without civilian support" and emphasized that to establish "cooperation and good will between the civil population and military forces," both conventional formations and "special anti-guerrilla units" had to maintain "good order and public safety" combined with the use of propaganda through psychological and political warfare. To protect lightly armed pacification personnel from being targeted, conventional and "special anti-guerrilla" outfits had to guard the indigenous population

while preventing enemy guerrilla forces from concentrating to overrun small pacification units. In such joint operations, conventional formation and "special anti-guerrilla units" must learn how to erect effective defensive perimeters surrounding important installations and populated areas with "liberal use of mines, trip flares, booby traps, and other physical obstacles." Since these "critical localities" would have to be secured from enemy's attacks, supplied with new materials, and reinforced with fresh troops, conventional and anti-guerrilla units needed to train in the techniques and arts of "armed escort for convoys and trains," "guards and patrols" installations and populated areas, and "constant patrolling," tracking and attacking enemy forces "to prevent surprise[d]" attacks on vital line-of-communication and areas where pacification units were active.[39]

The "Jungle Operations" section of FM 100-5: *Operations* (1954) asserted that guerrilla tactics were most suitable in tropical jungles where the initiative lay with those who conducted ambushes, raids, hit-and-run skirmishes, and other engagements that required a speedy withdrawal from embattled zones. Therefore, commanders of conventional and counter-guerrilla units should strengthen the fitness level of their men for "jungle conditions", provide "suitable equipment" for close-quarter-combat, train non-commissioned and junior officers in "small unit" actions to take the tactical initiative during firefights, and instil troops with "discipline" and determination to overcome unforeseeable challenges when tracking and combating elusive foes over unfavourable terrain for long periods of time. The 1954 manual reminded field commanders that stalking guerrilla forces through the jungles usually involved "relatively small bodies of troops" but their soldiers must prepared to operate "off the trails and maintain itself [physically, morally and materially] under extremely arduous conditions." Thus, commanders must tightly control their units while being "sufficiently flexible to permit rapid deployment" of their units

[39] *U.S. Army Field Manual 100-5: Operations (Aug., 1949)*, 8-9; Archive: USAMHI

under changing circumstances of the cat-and-mouse game, which characterized the hunt for guerrillas by counter-guerrilla forces. In jungle warfare, specialized arms and equipment "must provide for maximum mobility through difficult terrain under adverse climatic conditions." As most skirmishes in jungle conditions involved outfits as small as a squad to as large as a company, these engagements would be fought mainly by the captains down to the privates; thus, all men must be well trained and led by inspiring commanders. Therefore, *FM 100-5: Operations* (1954) stressed giving "them [junior officers, NCOs and soldiers] confidence in their jungle techniques, and produce resourceful individuals who consider the jungle an ally."[40]

Building up on the lessons learned of the 1949 and 1954 publications, the "Employment of Forces" section in *FM 100-4: Operations* (Feb., 1962) recommended that commanders reorganized conventional formations "into a number of small, variable size, task forces (squad to brigade) capable of semi-independent action without the combat support normally provided by division, corps and army." However, to improve combat effectiveness, the "Employment of Forces" section left field commanders with considerable organizational and operational freedom. Whether or not to break down or build up counter-guerrilla forces depended upon "the irregular activity in the area" and the commanders, who must determined whether or not guerrilla forces controlled or cleared out or lying in dormant in their areas. To assess enemy strength, commanders were advised to conduct counterintelligence operations by infiltrating "the irregular force itself and to identify leaders and members" to be killed or captured for interrogation. Hopefully without leadership, a guerrilla unit would surrender or self-implode. Since guerrillas rarely fought in the open unless they enjoyed complete tactical surprise, overwhelming manpower, and tremendous firepower, the "Employment of Forces" section suggested commanders to organize, equip and train "small special units" to fight like the guerrillas. These

[40] *U.S. Army Field Manual 100-5: Operations (1954)*, 167; Archive: USAMHI

"small special units", composed of US advisors and indigenous personnel tasked with "hunt down and destroy small guerrilla elements of the irregular force, to establish and maintain contact with large guerrilla formation until arrival of friendly reinforcements [i.e., larger counter-guerrilla force or full-pledged conventional formation], to maintain surveillance of areas, and to continually harass the irregular forces."[41]

The "Section III: Training" of *FM 100-5: Operations* (Feb., 1962) clearly emphasized that operations against guerrilla forces were "often characterized by small unit or combat patrol actions in difficult terrain. Frequently, the military units will have available only the supporting fires of those heavy weapons which can be man or animal packed or lifted by helicopter." Since such small-scale engagements would test the leadership and the nerves of non-commissioned and junior officers, "Subsection 312: Individual and Small Unit Training" emphasized "individual and small unit training programs" for platoon and company commanders. They must master fighting tactics and techniques in "mountains, deserts, and swamps." They had to learn how to conduct "long range combat patrol operations under primitive conditions and utilizing only such supplies as can be transported with the patrol" and to coordinate air-to-ground fire-support and aerial supply and make "cross-country movement at night and under adverse weather conditions." They needed to be trained in "convoy escort," "guard duty," "police type of search and seizure techniques, counterintelligence and interrogation measures," "police type patrolling and control of civilians include the operation of road blocks and check points," and "riot control and civil disturbances, to include the employment of irritant chemical agents." They must also wage psychological warfare and distribute propaganda materials to serve the cause of the force-of-order while undermining the political cause of guerrilla forces. Once troops and commanders had undergone "individual and small unit training," "Subsection 313: Specialized Training"

[41] *U.S. Army Field Manual 100-5: Operations (Feb., 1962)*, 140-143; Archive: USAMHI

stressed that to maximize the combat effectiveness of counter-guerrilla forces, soldiers and commanders must be taught "the local language, customs, cultural background, or personalities of irregular force and friendly leaders, to improve ability to understand, communicate and get along with the local populace."[42]

The counter-guerrilla warfare training regimen of the U.S. Army *Field Manual 100-5: Operations*, with its emphases on intelligence gathering, understanding local languages, cultures, and customs, and launching raids, patrols, and ambushes against the enemy, day and night, was shared by other contemporary guerrilla warfare experts in the early years of the Vietnam War. In 1962, seeking to form a "forward defence" strategy in Southeast Asia to block communism's spread, Australia sent a thirty-man Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV), veterans of the Malayan Emergency, to South Vietnam to advise RVNAF's infantrymen, Rangers, Civil Guards and SDC personnel in jungle and anti-guerrilla warfare.[43] The AATTV was led by Colonel Francis Philip "Ted" Serong, a veteran of Malaya who had trained the Burmese Army for jungle and counter-guerrilla warfare. Serong and his AATTV subordinates, as Anne Blair has pointed out, thought "counter-insurgency must be conducted at Battalion (400-500 [men] in Vietnam) and, even better, at Company level (120), with the same weapons as the enemy, discipline, bare hands and rifles."[44]

Given his experience fighting guerrillas in the Korean War and his study of Lansdale and CIA's counter-guerrilla operations in the Philippines during the Huk Rebellion, Colonel (later General) John Paul Vann was the most vocal and critical MAAGV proponent of counter-guerrilla warfare in South Vietnam. Vann argued that no enduring pacification of the countryside

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[42] *U.S. Army Field Manual 100-5: Operations (Feb., 1962)* published by the Department of the Army, p. 144-145; Archive: United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA

[43] Ian McNeill, *The Team: Australian Army Advisers in Vietnam, 1962-1972* (London: Lea Cooper & Warburg, 1984), 5

[44] Anne Blair, *There to the Bitter End: Ted Serong in Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2001), 30

could begin unless rural security had been restored. "Security may be ten percent of the problem, or it may be ninety percent," as Vann had concluded, "but whichever it is, it's the first ten percent or the first ninety percent. Without security, nothing else we do will last."[45] Vann warned employing overwhelming force in populated rural areas could damage infrastructure, destroy rice paddies, and maim and kill innocent bystanders, thus alienating the population who would remain neutral at best or actively support the guerrillas at worst. Speaking to fellow MAAGV advisors and foreign correspondents, Vann often repeated his famous maxim on the use-of-force in counter-guerrilla warfare: "This [Vietnam] is a political war and it calls for discrimination in killing. The best weapon for killing would be a knife, but I'm afraid we can't do it that way. The worst is an airplane. The next worst is artillery. Barring a knife, the best is a rifle—you know who you're killing."[46]

In counter-guerrilla warfare, as in conventional warfare, soldiers, NCOs, and officers must be in tip-top physical conditions, have high morale, and be properly trained in order to survive and defeat their enemies. Even the simple act of using a knife in hand-to-hand combat requires training as troops must learn to wield the weapon efficiently and calmly to better their chance of winning. But even the most vigorous training does not guarantee survival on the modern battlefield where fortune works mysteriously for each individual soldier. However, thoroughly trained and properly led troops better their chance to live and accomplish their missions. John Keegan has argued that military training:

> makes use of simulation techniques to a far greater extent than that of any other profession; and the justification, which is a sound justification, for the time and effort and thought put into these not very exciting routines is that it is only thus that an army can be sure – hopefully would be more accurate – of its machinery operating smoothly under extreme stress.... For by teaching the young officer [as well as soldiers and NCOs] to organize his intake of sensation, to reduce the

[45] Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and American in Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 67

[46] David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire: America and Vietnam during the Kennedy Era*, revised ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988), 84

> events of combat to as few and as easily recognizable a set of elements as possible, to categorize under manageable headings the noise, blast, passage of missiles and confusion of human movement which will assail him on the battlefield, so that they can be described – to his men, his superiors, to himself – as 'incoming fire', 'outgoing fire', 'airstrike', 'company-strength attack', one is helping to avert the onset of fear or, worse, of panic and to perceive a face of battle which, if not familiar, and certainly not friendly, need not, in the event, prove wholly petrifying.[47]

"Regardless of how the South Vietnamese Army was organized," Andrew Birtle argued, "it could not operate effectively under any circumstances unless it had first been effectively trained." In organizing the RVNAF, the JGS, MAAGV, O'Daniel and Williams "were preoccupied with the Herculean task of creating a viable military organization in a new and unstable country." However, to actually train the South Vietnamese ground forces would prove an even more "difficult tasks."[48]

From 1950 to 1954, several schools and training centers—ranging from Inter-Arms Military School in Dalat to the Reserve Officer School in Thu Duc—were built to train Vietnamese soldiers, NCOs, and officers serving in the FFEEC, VNA, CSDF, CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF. The opening of these centres was meant to address a political and a military problem. Pressured by Eisenhower's administration and Bao Dai's government, France attempted to build a corps of professional Vietnamese military leaders to combat the Viet Minh. The war's escalation, the growing casualty rate, and French public opposition to the Indochina War created a shortage of trained French troops, a shortage that could be rectified by using Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian nationals. But as there were shortages of qualified Vietnamese military instructors, almost all of the military instructors were French. But few Vietnamese officer candidates with operational experience attended advanced courses offered in French military academies and service schools. Lasting one or two years, overseas military courses were generally "comprehensive and well conducted." The same could not be said of training courses

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[47] John Keegan, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme* (London: Pimlico, 1998), 21-22
[48] Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976*, 309, 311

offered at military bases throughout Vietnam which "were much shorter, usually a few months, and were designed to train either specialists or cadres on an accelerated basis."[49] As a MAAGV study noted, VNA training was "satisfactory but not up to American standards." The same study raised concerns that while leadership of "native officers [Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotians] in the company grade [Lieutenant and Captain] is excellent... there is a noticeable lack of officers [Major, Colonel and General] in the field grade and in staff capacities."[50]

The Tactical Training Center, renamed the Center for Military Studies, was established in Hanoi in 1952 "for the training of company, battalion, and regimental commanders."[51] However, a year later, MAAGV reported that only a "limited number of [graduated] native officers" were assigned to VNA units at "the company grade level." There was a lack of "a sufficient number of trained and experienced Vietnamese officers" in the VNA and emphasized that, while the FFEEC "corrected" this problem at "the company grade level" it did so "at an extremely slow pace." Three years after the VNA became operational, FFEEC advisors were still embedded in VNA units, not to mentor VNA officers, but to command and train them. MAAGV observers made it clear that "French officers and non-commissioned officers are cadre of all native regular units. Their job is command and conduct training."[52] However, MAAGV observers and VNA commanders felt that unless the FFEEC planned to fight the VLA forever, Vietnamese NCOs, and junior and senior officers had to be given opportunities to gain combat and command experience against the VLA to prepare them to fight alone against the communists, possibly with MAAGV advisors but definitely without FFEEC commanders.

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[49] Lieutenant General Dong Van Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, Indochina Monograph Series (College Park, M.D.: NARA II Library, 1978), 159-161

[50] "Vietnam 1954-56/Report Army-Navy-Air Force, n.d.", paragraphs #4 and #7; File: 805, Box: 35; Collection: Edward Geary Lansdale Papers; Archive: THIWRP

[51] Khuyen, *RVNAF*, 160

[52] "MAAGV Operations and Reports, 3 Feb. 1953" , 11, 13; File: MAAGV 370.2; Box 1; RG: 472 United States Forces in Southeast Asia, Military Assistance Advisory Group Vietnam, Adjunct General Division; Archive: NARA II

The FFEEC procrastinated when it came to training the VNA, but MAAGV observers did not have convincing evidence that all VNA and sectarian units were ready to operate independently of the FFEEC. Nevertheless, they were optimistic for they saw the potential of some VNA units and their commanders. Until the cease-fire in mid-1954, MAAGV had difficulty assessing the overall "combat effectiveness of the Associated States [Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos] Forces" due to the different geographical and political conditions in each of the three countries and the diverse missions allotted to each of the three militaries.[53] MAAGV observers assessed in 1953 that the "problems in the regular armies of Cambodia and Laos is somewhat different than that of the Vietnamese" since the VLA's "principal effort" was "confined to Vietnam" and its targets were VNA units as FFEEC formations were better trained and backed by effective firepower.[54] As MAAGV observers reported:

> In some of the quiet zones, where the [VNA] battalions are protecting the local population or maintaining the road net, they have had no actual contact with the Viet Minh and consequently cannot be judged on their combat capabilities. At Na San and on 'Operation Bretagne' one Vietnamese Group Mobile and several battalions fought valiantly and gave an excellent account of themselves during the campaign. Reports from the French General Staff indicate that the regular Vietnamese battalions perform well in combat when given proper leadership."[55]

Therefore, MAAGV observers concluded that some VNA commanders had "done much to develop 'esprit' among the Vietnamese units" and were "eager to assume more of the responsibility of command, especially at the higher levels." However, FFEEC commanders did not "feel the Vietnamese officers are sufficiently trained to take over these assignments."[56]

Despite fighting with the FFEEC for years, until hostilities ceased in 1954, senior FFEEC officers continued to think that VNA commanders "above battalion level are not sufficiently

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[53] "Vietnam 1954-56/Report Army-Navy-Air Force, n.d.", paragraphs #4; File: 805; Box: 35; Collection: Edward Geary Lansdale Paper; Archive: THIWRP
[54] "MAAGV Operations and Reports, 3 Feb. 1953", 12; File: MAAGV 370.2; Box 1; RG: 472 United States Forces in Southeast Asia, Military Assistance Advisory Group Vietnam, Adjunct General Division; Archive: NARA II
[55] "Vietnam 1954-56/Report Army-Navy-Air Force, n.d.", paragraphs #4; File: 805, Box: 35; Collection: Edward Geary Lansdale Paper; Archive: THIWRP
[56] "MAAGV Operations and Reports, 3 Feb. 1953", 12; File: MAAGV 370.2; Box 1; RG: 472 United States Forces in Southeast Asia, Military Assistance Advisory Group Vietnam, Adjunct General Division; Archive: NARA II

qualified to take over [command] now." Statistics showed that while there were 658 officer candidates, 1,457 Second Lieutenants, 336 First Lieutenants, and 82 Captains, there were just 45 Majors, 11 Lieutenant Colonels, 5 Colonels, and 1 Major-General.[57] Furthermore, while this small group of senior VNA officers received "on-the-job training as a counterpart of the French general staff," their responsibilities were limited to "organization, training, [and] supplying" VNA units. When the FFEEC scaled down its operations in 1954, the FFEEC left the VNA without a real "working general staff." Consequently, there was neither "tactical unity" within the VNA itself nor were command and coordination efforts carried out among the VNA, CSDF, CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF for "none work together, train together, or are capable of fighting as a tactical unit."[58] Yet to fight experienced military forces such as the PAVN and PLAF whose units operated at various national or village level, the RVNAF land force units had to be capable of conducting separate as well as joint combat operations depending on the political and military circumstances.

When the French Indochina War ended in 1954, the shortage of qualified NCOs, junior officers and senior commanders remained unresolved. The "accelerated expansion program" for the VNA in 1953 and its integration and fast transition into the RVNAF along with the CSDF, CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF starting in 1954, "further aggravated" the shortage of trained officers, and NCOs problems for while South Vietnam's military was expanding, its training facilities and educational programs were not. "Since mid-1953," as a MAAGV training memo of March 22, 1954 indicated, "training facilities have been expanded to ease the shortage of cadre personnel." However, the memo said nothing about the quality of the instructors and the military training

[57] "Vietnam 1954-56/Report Army-Navy-Air Force, n.d.", paragraphs #8; File: 805, Box: 35; Collection: Edward Geary Lansdale Papers; Archive: THIWRP
[58] "MAAGV Operations and Reports, 3 Feb. 1953", 13; File: MAAGV 370.2; Box 1; RG: 472 United States Forces in Southeast Asia, Military Assistance Advisory Group Vietnam, Adjunct General Division; Archive: NARA II

programs for the men who were expected to lead RVNAF land units. Yet, one could conclude from this memo that while the quantity of South Vietnamese military personnel increased during the transition between the French Indochina War and the Vietnam War, the quality of personnel was still in question. As MAAGV concluded: "The Vietnamese Army is still far from being capable of assuming full responsibility for the defense of Vietnam. It will be several years before all of the 800 French officers and the 3,600 French non-commissioned officers serving temporarily as cadres and advisors with the Vietnamese Army can be replaced."[59]

As MAAGV sought to resolve the widening gap between the quickly expanding South Vietnamese military and its slowly expanding corps of NCOs and officers, the JGS took a different path: rapidly promoting senior officers. As discussed previously, South Vietnamese battalion commanders found themselves, some virtually overnight, responsible for leading the RVNAF land forces even though they had not commanded any outfits without FFEEC advisors. MAAGV and JGS were not blind to the reality that the impressive new ranks and important responsibilities—drafting military curriculums and training doctrines, operational and logistic planning, coordinating nation-wide military efforts—nowhere matched the unimpressive military records of future commanders of RVNAF land forces. General Cao Van Vien, the RVNAF's longest serving JGS Chief assessed that commanders of the VNA, CSDF, CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF "differed greatly in command capabilities." The Vietnamese graduates of Saint Cyr, France's National Military Academy, might have "excellent military knowledge" but they had "very little combat experience" while officers trained inside Vietnam made "excellent combatants but bad staff officers." As for officers who had served with the CSDF, CDPF, HHPF,

[59] "Cadre Training For The Vietnamese Army, 22 March 1954", 1-7; File: "MAAGV 320 Organization of the Army 1954"; Box: #2; RG: 472 Records of the United States Forces in Southeast Asia, Military Assistance Advisory Group Vietnam, Adjutant General Division; Archive: NARA II

and BXPF prior to 1955, "they were usually good in combat but lacked basic military knowledge."[60]

MAAGV's evaluation of the RVNAF's state in 1955 revealed vast combat readiness gap between the RVNAF and the PAVN. The evaluation concluded once more that should a "full scale Viet Minh [PAVN] invasion, Vietnamese forces [RVNAF] would not be capable at this time of reacting with sufficient speed and effectiveness" due to four important factors. First, the RVNAF would be tied down by "guerrilla and subversive actions" within South Vietnam. Second, the RVN government and military were too disorganized to expand military control and political influence beyond major urban centres. Thus, the RVN had left "a presently relatively complacent population aligning itself with the Viet Minh [DRVN] for its own physical salvation in the light of potential Viet Minh [PAVN] victory and... psychological exploitation of the situation." Third, the division and "hesitancy of the Free World to respond quickly and effectively" to the crisis in Indochina would encourage rather than discourage "Viet Minh aggression." Fourth, whether Indochina's political and military situation improved or worsened, the RVNAF, responsible for delaying a potential PAVN invasion so that "the Free World" could intervene on the RVN's behalf, would have to conduct highly complicated defensive operations. As the MAAGV evaluation put it succinctly on December 31, 1955:

> In measuring the Vietnamese capability to delay a full-scale Viet Minh aggression it is significant to note that effective delaying action would require command control and coordination of a relatively large force with associated flexibility to rapidly cope with developments such as the destruction of a key rear area bridge. This requires training which the [southern] Vietnamese have not had to date as well as an organized force in being, not one undergoing complete reorganization. All three of the Vietnamese Services [Army, Navy, Air Force] lack adequate experienced command and staff officers, have an urgent need for additional training and are incapable of autonomous logistic supply and maintenance activities, even assuming adequate supply of necessary material by the US. These inadequacies are even more pronounced in the Navy and Air Force than in the Army."[61]

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[60] General Cao Van Vien, *Leadership*, Indochina Monographs Series (College Park, MD: NARA II Library, 1983), 12-13

[61] "Section A: Summary Evaluation and General Comments/Summary Evaluation of Effectiveness of Forces as of 31 December 1955", 1-2; File: "MAAGV 370.2 Country Statement on MDAP [Mutual Defence Aids Pack] and

To reorganize the disorderly VNA and sectarian militias into the RVNAF land forces was no easy task for MAAGV and JGS even when it involved mainly regrouping South Vietnamese military units, relocating them to new areas of operation, and resupplying them. However, in the process of creating RVNAF land forces, MAAGV and JGS confronted the even more challenging task of training VNA and militia veterans to become commanders at all levels. The already enormous task of training the RVNAF land forces was further handicapped by a lack of bases and centres required for training. Further, there was no military educational curriculum to train officers and NCOs, no universal training doctrine, and qualified and competent instructors were tapped by combat units on operations. As ARVN Lieutenant General Dong Van Khuyen critically assessed, MAAGV and JGS were beset with the definite shortage of "experienced officers trained for high command and staff positions... and officers and NCOs trained in service branch specialties, particularly in logistics" and, when actual training commenced for RVNAF land force units, they were overwhelmed by problems as South Vietnam "did not have enough [training] facilities, training aids, qualified instructors, and adequate training programs, particularly at the regimental and divisional level. Above all, there were no unified training policies and regulations."[62] Before closely examining the records, reports and recommendations of MAAGV and JGS's Inspector General Staff, whose duties involved checking, monitoring and improving the training regimen and operational readiness of the entire RVNAF in order to increase its combat capabilities, we must explain MAAGV's and JGS's plans to train the RVNAF land forces to determine if MAAGV and JGS plan to train the RVNAF were being realized.

Non-NATO Countries"; Box: #7; RG: 472 Records of the United States Forces in Southeast Asia, Military Assistance Advisory Group Vietnam, Adjutant General Division; Archive: NARA II

[62] Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, 162

On October 8, 1956, MAAGV and JGS created the School Planning Board (SPB) which was responsible for all matters pertaining to training troops and educating officers. Between 1957 and 1963, the SPB reorganized over a dozen training centers: The Quang Trung Training Center; the Thu Duc's Inter-Arms School (renamed the Thu Duc Reserve Officer Candidate School in 1959); the Medical Training Center; the Intelligence School; the Political Warfare Cadre Training Center; the Armed Forces Languages School; the Military College (renamed the Command and Staff College in 1959); the Commando and Military Physical Training Center (later the Non-Commissioned Officer Academy); the Junior Military School; the Infantry School, the Ranger Training Center; the Logistic School; the Transportation School; the Engineering School; the Artillery School; the Amour School; the Martial Arts and Physical Education School; the Dalat's Inter-Arms Military School (renamed the Vietnamese National Military Academy, VNMA, in 1959); four additional basic training centers in the four Corps. Futher, each ARVN division, plus the Airborne Brigade and Marine Group, had its own training center to provide basic, unit, and specialized training, plus refresher and advanced courses for active soldiers, NCOs, and division commanders.[63]

Prior to 1959, three centres carried the burden of training new conscripts and volunteers for the RVNAF: the Quang Trung Training Center near Saigon; the Reserve Officer Candidate School (ROCS) at Thu Duc, Saigon; and the VNMA at Dalat in Central Vietnam. Quang Trung provided basic training, mostly for new conscripts and volunteers while the ROCS and VNMA offered basic training mostly for reserve and career officers. Men wishing to join the VNN and VNAF had to graduate from one of these three military schools first, apply to the VNN or VNAF near the end of their training period, and wait to be selected by recruiters. The Airborne Brigade and Marine Group training centers offered parachute and amphibious training to their new

[63] Ibid., 163-165

recruits, while the Command and Staff College furthered the military education of those earmarked to become staff officers. As the war's tempo increased in 1960, more troops had to be hastily trained for the frontlines at training centers in Corps I, II, III, and IV built to lessen the burden on Quang Trung. Starting in 1961, and for the war's remainder, conscripts and volunteers living in Corps I, for example, were trained at Corps I's Phu Bai Training Center.[64] However, reserve and career officer candidates, no matter where they were from, still had to respectively attend the ROCS in Thu Duc and the VNMA in Dalat.

The SPB of the JGS and MAAGV devised RVNAF training policy but the Central Training Command (CTC), staffed by JGS and MAAGV personnel and based at the ROCS, had to implement that policy. The CTC designed a three phase training process for all RVNAF commissioned or non-commissioned personnel. New recruits had to pass basic and specialized training before assignation to an RVNAF outfit where they undertook unit and specialized training. In basic training, also known as "boot camp", conscripts and volunteers underwent major personal, physical, and psychological transformations to accustom them to the austerity and obedience of military life. The six week program taught recruits to be disciplined, to tend to personal hygiene, enforced regular exercise to maintain a high level of physical fitness, inculcated individual initiatives and teamwork, provided technical knowledge, taught hand-to-hand combat and techniques, practiced military drills, parade marches, ran regular and combat obstacle courses, and combat tactics. Once they had completed the basic training program, depending on personal interests, individual aptitude, and demands of RVNAF units, recruits get specialized training. Those who chose the infantry as their military trade attended advanced infantry courses. Except for those who had already served in elite outfits in the French Indochina War, the new recruits had to volunteer, had to have either military and/or combat experience, and

[64] Ibid., 164

had to successfully pass airborne, ranger, or marine training courses. Meanwhile, soldiers, NCOs, and commanders of RVNAF's special operation force units were volunteers with prior operational experience in one of the mentioned elite formations. In theory and when the demand for troops on the battlefield was low, the RVNAF took three months to turn a civilian into a regular infantry soldier but more time was needed to become a specialist or a commando.[65]

The specialized training program normally took six weeks to complete, and offered various options, including training instructors, and communication and logistic personnel. Army Airborne and Marine Amphibious Warfare courses were offered in the RVN and the US. Meanwhile, Jungle and Swap Warfare and Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrol courses for elite and special forces were available at Duc My and Van Kiep training centers and at the Canungra Jungle Training Center in Australia. These courses were instructed by US Army Ranger and AATTV personnel. Advanced training courses in armour, artillery, intelligence, political warfare, and military medicine were also available at South Vietnamese training centres and military bases for selected RVNAF personnel. The Instructor's Course was designed to "train potential instructors in methodology and techniques, enabling them to prepare instructional materials and use training aids with effectiveness... [and] taught them the art of teaching, how to speak, make gestures in order to maintain the students' attention visually and aurally."[66] The Instructor's Course lasted six weeks and was only offered to officers with at least two years of service with their combat units. Nevertheless, as training grounds received more recruits and as the war escalated, DND and JGS staff sought to improve the quality of instructors and training lessons. Sometime this meant focussing on small details such as how instructors and students

[65] Ibid., 173-174
[66] Ibid., 184-185

could exchange "opinions on instruction with a view to find out a proper solution applicable to the teaching of enlisted men" who were "advanced in age" or no longer in their twenties.[67]

As another example of specialized training, the Jungle and Swap Warfare Course (six weeks long) and the Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrol courses (eight weeks) were available to select enlisted men, NCOs, and officers from all RVNAF's combat units. The instructors were a mixture of Vietnamese, American, and Australian servicemen who had graduated from the US Army Ranger Course, Canungra, or both. These counter-guerrilla warfare courses taught the trainees the techniques of long-range reconnaissance patrol and the "fundamentals of jungle and swap operations... exposed [students] to the actual conditions of combat operations conducted in jungle or swampy areas."[68] The Canungra Centre prepared soldiers physically and mentally to endure the stress of jungle warfare. Canungra's students could be surprised at any parts of their jungle warfare training with a 24-hour trek from the Wiangaree State Forest in New South Wales into southern Queensland. The newly selected students were always "cold, tired, and hungry" and the only "incentive to go on was the food and transport available, after a day and a night march, at O'Reilly's [quest house]," the destination of the 24-hour forced march.[69] The jungle warfare training course did not end with the 24-trek. For the remainder of their training period, students had to improve their stamina, master small unit combat drill and ambush/counter-ambush techniques, and practice escape, resistance, and evasion tactics behind enemy lines. Instructors at Canungra trained their pupils to shoot "from the hip without the loss of time it took to raise a rifle shoulder high" to cut down an enemy before he could fire in a close proximity firefight. As pupils patrolled through undergrowth, without warning, an instructor "tripped a wire

[67] "27 December 1957 Memorandum/Subject: The instruction improvement course and the question of raising enlisted men's cultural level", 1-2; File: #1-300 "MAAGV Vietnamese Translations"; Box: #1; RG 334: Records of Interservice Agencies, Military Assistance Advisory Group Vietnam, Adjutant General Division; Archive: NARA II
[68] Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, 185
[69] Anne Blair, *Ted Serong: The Life of An Australian Counter-Insurgency Expert* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002), 46

causing a simulated enemy to rise up in his face or to slide past on the outer edge of his line of visions."[70] Finally, to toughen muscles, build confidence, and familiarize them with jungle warfare, students at Canungra underwent a "battle inoculation" using live munitions to simulate real combat fire-and-manoeuvre tactics across open ground and jungle terrain "under live machine-gun fire."[71] The five-week course at Canungra finished with a ten-day endurance exercise.

The last example of specialized training was the Army Airborne Warfare course. "The sky," reminisced Command Sergeant Major Michael Martin, a MAAGV instructor at the Airborne Training Center, also known as the "Jump School", for "even more than the sea, is terribly unforgiving of even the slightest mistake."[72] Journalist Joe Kamalick found all of the trainees attending the Jump School were volunteers with combat experience. The candidates "underwent a special nine week basic training course", or advanced basic infantry training, where they learned everything from weapon training and combat tactics to marksmanship and packing up their own parachutes. If they passed this first phase, they undertook "a rigorous three week course of parachute training" which was "divided into three phases: ground week, tower week, and jump week." During "ground week" trainees focussed on their physical conditioning, exiting from an aircraft, and jumping and landing techniques while loaded down with, equipment and parachute gear using a 10-foot tower. During "tower week" students repeated "ground week" exercises but practiced jumping with full combat kits from a 34-foot tall tower. Paratroopers were expected to be sent on the most dangerous missions. However, it was quite unnatural to jump out of a perfectly good airplane under any circumstances, let alone under enemy fire. Thus,

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[70] Blair, *There to the Bitter End*, 14
[71] Blair, *Ted Serong*, 76
[72] Major Michael Martin, *Angels In Red Hats Paratroopers of the Second Indochina War: Mu Do, Elite Vietnamese Paratroopers and their American Advisors* (Louisville: Harmony House, 1995), 75

the three months Army Airborne Warfare Course was "more [about] psychological than physical" training for the students who had to overcome all their fears in order to advance to: "jump week," the graduation week for paratrooper candidates. Before these recruits received a Jump School Certificate with the Silver Basic Jump Wing Insignia and don the *Mu Do*, the Red Beret worn by paratroopers around the world, they had to make five qualifying jumps, loaded down with pack weapons and other gear, from transport planes flying at 1,200 feet where even the tiniest mistake could kill.[73]

Before being assigned to their new units, RVNAF soldiers, NCOs, and officers had to pass basic and specialized training courses. However, to sharpen fighting skills, training was to be a continuous business for all servicemen regardless of ranks and duties. Once they joined their new outfits, soldiers, NCOs and officers were expected to further their specialized, unit, and refresher training courses through their units. Between 1955 and 1959, unit training for RVNAF land forces was carried out in three phases. Phase I, ten to twelve weeks, involved unit training at the platoon, company, and battalion levels. Phase II involved field exercise at the regimental level, while Phase III, six weeks in total, involved field exercise at the divisional level. Aside from honing the fighting skills through vigorous and continuous exercises, unit training served a more practical purpose for recent graduates of basic and specialized training courses. Thanks to unit training, new enlisted men and officers would be introduced to the personnel and commanding staff, familiarized with equipment and maintenance schedules, and briefed about the peculiar tactical problems and operational demands confronting their formations. For example, soldiers joining an armoured unit operating in the Mekong River Delta needed further unit and specialized training to operate and maintain amphibious tanks and armoured vehicles

[73] Martin, *Angels In Red Hats Paratroopers of the Second Indochina War*, 50, 72-81

capable of traversing the Delta. However, their armour counterparts in the Central Highlands, a geographical area lacking major waterways, did not need to learn amphibious tactics. Instead, they had to be taught how to wage mechanized warfare in forested landscapes and on hilly terrain.

Since soldiers, NCOs, and officers had to live, train, and fight together, unit training and morale was an important priority for commanders who sought a high standard of unit cohesiveness and combat capability. In addition, unit training had to be based on after-action reports and lessons learned from operations so that commanders could better organize, train and adapt their units for future engagements against an enemy also seeking to improve its combat effectiveness. Furthermore, as of December 31, 1957, the JGS ordered "the use of live ammo to test the training of men" as an "effective means of determining the combat capabilities of the Unit."[74] Prior to 1960, unit training emphasized mainly on inter-arms cooperation and combat manoeuvres during the day and into the night in all weather conditions. After 1960, RVNAF ground force units reoriented unit training towards counter-guerrilla operations. Thus, regimental and divisional field exercises were suspended as unit training focussed on basic and advanced training for individual soldiers and manoeuvre operations for platoons, companies, and battalions. As RVNAF units went out on counter-guerrilla operations, their recall to base depended on operational success or failure or whether their combat losses exceeded fifty percent of authorized strength. Such units were required to undertake four weeks of refresher training aimed at rebuilding their combat capability and revamping fighting spirit. Refresher training began after a brief period of convalescence when troops could rest or take leave, units were replenished with equipment and fresh troops, and commanders could be debriefed. The four

[74] "31 December 1957, Memo/Subject: Use of live ammo in training", 1-2; File: #1-300 "MAAGV Vietnamese Translations"; Box: #1; RG 334: Records of Interservice Agencies, Military Assistance Advisory Group Vietnam, Adjutant General Division; Archive: NARA II

weeks long refresher training focussed entirely on combat tactics, especially counter-guerrilla tactics after 1959, with eighty-five hours allocated to individual basic training, twenty-nine hours to squad combat tactics, forty hours to platoon combat tactics, and over one hundred hours to company and battalion combat tactics. To complete refresher training, units undertook a three day field training exercise at the battalion-level where they faced a combined ARVN-US Army testing team in mock-up battle drills.[75]

During basic, specialized, unit, and refresher training courses, two methods were used to instruct servicemen: "Formal Instruction" and "In-Place Training." Formal instruction, taking place during basic and specialized training courses at training centers, combined class room lectures with field exercises where students applied the lessons they had learned. For example, a marksmanship course began in a classroom where students were introduced to the individual arms and taught how to disassemble, clean, and reassemble individual weapons. Students then would be taken to firing ranges to practice loading and firing their personal weapons. In-place training, provided by unit commanders and usually applied during specialized, unit, and refresher training courses, was designed "to enhance knowledge, foster mutual trust between commander and his subordinates, and develop leadership as well as combat and technical capabilities of the unit so that it could attain a high level of performance in every respect."[76] In-place training served to redress military problems derived from inspection reports produced by the Inspector General of MAAGV and JGS and after-action reports and lessons learned from combat operations. For example, if the Inspector General visited an ARVN unit which had failed to conducted field exercises with neighbouring CG and SDC units, the unit commander had to meet with commanders of nearby CG and SDC units to plan future joint exercises. If an after-action

[75] Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, 189-190
[76] Ibid., 191-193

report for an artillery outfit indicated there had been a friendly fire incident on a fire-support mission, the outfit's commander was required to investigate what went wrong to as to avoid future problems.

Training, for any military, is a continuous endeavour, but militaries have more time to train in peacetime than in wartime when operational demands and enemy actions complicate matters. For the RVNAF land forces, especially from 1960 forward, their in-place training schedule:

> was usually kept flexible in order not to interfere with combat activities; normally rest and recuperation periods were partially devoted to in-place training... a unit might take one day out of a three-day rest period, usually devoted to resupply and maintenance... a unit might also arrange for its subordinate components to take turns resting and training in-place in such a way that the entire unit went through the cycle within a specific period of time.[77]

So, if three rifle companies of an ARVN battalion were tasked with day and night-time patrols to support local CG and SDC units against guerrillas, the battalion commander had to schedule which company would patrol, which company would train to carry out the next patrol, and which company would rest and resupply before undertaking preparatory training for future patrolling missions. "Even when a unit was unable to suspend regular activities," ARVN Lieutenant General Khuyen concluded, "a resourceful commander could always arrange for in-place training for at least six hours every week."[78]

Good training was possible only if one had qualified instructors and "resourceful" personnel, especially NCOs and commissioned officers. The Non-Commissioned Officers Academy (NCOA) was located in the coastal city of Nha Trang. Attendees needed a junior high school diploma plus a desire to become squad leaders. The NCOA program, four and a half months long, was divided into two 9-week phases. In the first phase, students received formal instructions on basic and advanced combat tactics while the second phase sought to instil the

[77] Ibid., 194
[78] Ibid., 194

essential qualities expected in a leader of an infantry squad: Conducting squad training, disciplining troops, and raising squad's morale and leadership. Once they passed these two phases, candidates graduated with the rank of sergeant.[79]

To become an RVNAF officer, candidates required a high school diploma and had to demonstrate an aptitude for post-secondary education. Two RVNAF military schools trained junior officers, NMA at Dalat and ROCS at Thu Duc. To enter the NMA, volunteer candidates had to be single, 18 to 22 years old, possess Vietnamese citizenship, hold a first or second degree high school baccalaureate, pass an entrance exam, pass a fitness test, and have chosen "the military profession as a career." Between 1954 and 1956, the nine months NMA program was devoted entirely on military subjects. From 1957 to 1961, the NMA program extended from twelve months to two years, and by 1966, NMA cadets had to complete a four year program. Starting in 1957, the NMA added academic subjects including science courses. Furthermore, to enhance "the general knowledge of the army and various branches" of the RVNAF, cadets spent one to two weeks observing various military units either in training and/or in action against enemy forces.[80] NMA's graduates received the rank of second lieutenant and, if requirements were met, continued specialized, unit, and refresher training in their selected service branches.[81]

The ROCS also trained officer cadets but its graduates did not choose military as a career. Though some were volunteers, most ROCS cadets were conscripts possessing a first or second degree high school baccalaureate, a college or university degree, or were trained professionals who had been drafted. The ROCS program lasted ten and a half months. In Phase I, cadets received advanced individual training followed by basic combat tactics over twelve weeks.

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[79] Ibid., 175

[80] "6 January 1958, Memo/Subject: Program of Visits for 13th Regular Officer Class at DALAT Academy", 1; File: #1-300 "MAAGV Vietnamese Translations"; Box: #1; RG 334: Records of Interservice Agencies, Military Assistance Advisory Group Vietnam, Adjutant General Division; Archive: National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, MD.

[81] Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, 177; Vien, *Leadership*, 37

Lasting thirty weeks, Phase II offered formal instruction on small-unit tactics, topography, map reading and navigation, coordinating firepower, and general subjects such as military law and officer codes of conduct that might aid cadets as they advanced through their military careers. As the ROCS program "was designed to provide students with the capability to command an infantry platoon," its graduates received the rank of reserve second lieutenant. Failed cadets received the rank of aspirant with three options available to them; they could go through ROCS again to obtain the rank of reserve second lieutenant, prove themselves in combat and thus get promoted, or receive the rank of master sergeant and be sent to the NCOA.[82]

A second lieutenant, whether he graduated from the NMA or ROCS, had to undertake specialized, unit, and refresher training courses. To receive a promotion and a new command, he had to pass the Company Commander, Command and Staff Course, and Advanced Command and Staff courses. To register in the Company Commander Course, students had to hold the rank of second lieutenant, first lieutenant, or captain, be between the age of 20 and 36, and must have served as a platoon commander or assistant company commander for more than two years. The Company Commander Course, nine weeks long, included combat tactics at the company and battalion level, staff duties, responsibilities of each combat arm and technical service, combined arms operations, and the responsibilities of a commander and leadership. After completing the Company Commander Course, students should be capable of commanding a rifle company. The Command and Staff Course was mandatory for battalion commanders who, over thirty-six weeks, were given formal instruction, in-place training and "on-the-job training" with their battalions. Patterned after the US Army's Advanced Infantry and Command and Staff courses, the RVNAF Command and Staff Course educated students about combat tactics, staff procedures and techniques, and command and leadership at the regiment, division, corps, and army-level in

[82] Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, pp. 178-180

"conventional and unconventional warfare, pacification and rural development... combined arms and joint operations, political warfare, and international and domestic politics." To attend the Command and Staff Course, students had to have been a company-grade commander. After the Command and Staff Course, students should be capable of leading a battalion and/or a regiment and performing staff duties in a divisional, corps, and army headquarters. The Advanced Command and Staff Course was reserved for field grade lieutenant colonels and colonels who successfully passed the Company Commander and the Command and Staff course. For eight months, students of the Advanced Command and Staff Course were instructed in intelligence, political and psychological warfare, domestic politics, and international relations. The Advanced Command Staff Course became a foundation for a year-long National Defence Course taught at the RVN's National Defence College, established in 1967 to "respond to the need of training top-level executives in all areas of national defense which lay beyond the scope of the Advanced Command Staff Course." The National Defence Course focussed on "three key areas of interest: international politics, national resources, and national defence policies."[83]

Depending on RVNAF needs, in-country graduates would have opportunities to undertake "offshore training" in the US and the Jungle Warfare School ran by the Australian and British advisors in Malaysia. To obtain offshore training, applicants had to have fine military records, operational experience, be in good health, have a security clearance from the RVNAF's Military Security Service (MSS), taken the English Language Screening (ELS) and English Language Aptitude Tests (ELAT), and passed the English Comprehension Level (ECL) test forty-five to ninety days before offshore training began.[84] There were five forms of offshore training. First, formal courses were offered at various American service schools, including the

[83] Ibid., 181-183
[84] Ibid., 203

US Army Command and Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Second, there were formal education courses in medicine, engineering, and finance available to NCOs and officers who were qualified to undertake graduate and postgraduate studies at American universities. Third, technical "on-the-job" training courses were available at US military bases. Fourth, some specialized US military service schools and installations allowed RVNAF personnel to observe without having to register for formal courses or complete assignments. Lastly, there were orientation tours available to senior RVNAF officers "with the objective of familiarizing them with U.S. Army doctrine, organization and methods of operation and enhancing their knowledge."[85] For example, in January 3, 1958, DND organized a three week "study trip" to the Philippines for five NMA officers who were to observe "the organization and in particular the training program of the Baguio [Philippine National] Military Academy, noting points which might be of value in the future reorganization of the Dalat Military Academy."[86] The political purpose of offshore training was to establish a healthy rapport between the RVN and US governments. Militarily, MAAGV and JGS hoped that RVNAF personnel who graduated from offshore training would use their technical knowledge and enlightened ideas to help improve the organization, training and combat capability of the RVNAF.

But formal training for the Civil Guard and Self-Defence Corps personnel and units, which were supposed to coordinate their military and political efforts with ARVN outfits to maintain local security, did not begin until 1961. Training for CG and SDC focussed on the unit level, twelve weeks for the CG but only six weeks for the SDC. Between 1961 and 1964, MAAG and AATTV mobile training teams were dispatched throughout South Vietnam to train CG and

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[85] Ibid., 201

[86] "2 January 1958, Memo/Subject: Study trip to survey the organization of the BAGUIO MILITARY ACADEMY Philippines", 1; File: #1-300 "MAAGV Vietnamese Translations"; Box: #1; RG 334: Records of Interservice Agencies, Military Assistance Advisory Group Vietnam, Adjutant General Division; Archive: NARA II

SDC units. However, RVNAF training centers provided courses to CG and SDC personnel once more facilities were constructed and before the CG and SDC built their own training centers in each RVN province.[87]

Having established how MAAGV and JGS intended to train RVNAF land forces, we must critically analyze the records of the Combat Arms Training Organization (CATO), training reports from the MAAGV and JGS's Inspector General Staff, and memoirs of RVNAF personnel and advisors from MAAGV, the British Advisory Mission (BRIAM) and the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV) to illuminate the training obstacles faced by the RVNAF. Unlike his successor, Lieutenant General Samuel Williams, Lieutenant General John O'Daniel had little impact on RVNAF organization and even less on the training regimen because his tenure with MAAGV began and ended when RVNAF land forces were still fragmented VNA, CSDF, CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF units. Nevertheless, before retiring in 1955, O'Daniel pushed MAAGV to organize and train a general inspection team for the JGS. Feeling strongly about this matter, O'Daniel prepared a short paper entitled "Inspector General System" for President Diem before he left South Vietnam. The "Inspector General System" was designed to detect and correct deficiencies related to organization, training, logistic, leadership or other matters before they affected overall RVNAF combat capacity. As the US Inspector General system had been "based on the underlying principle that commanders, in order to arm themselves with unbiased information as to the status of things within their commands, must have an agency to collect this information without regard to the normal chain of command," O'Daniel hoped that Diem and his

[87] Lieutenant General Ngo Quang Truong, *Territorial Forces*, Indochina Monographs Series (College Park, MD: NARA II Library, 1984), 54

generals would initiate "an inspector general system in the Vietnamese Military Establishment."[88]

On December 27-28, 1956, with Williams in charge, MAAGV and JGS conducted a two day seminar that produced report on "Training Inspection" and "Logistic Inspection" as a guide for MAAGV and JGS inspection teams to monitor the progress of the organization, training and combat capability of all RVNAF land forces.[89] MAAGV and JGS inspection teams were already conducting visits throughout South Vietnam in 1956. A year later, however, MAAGV observed that JGS inspection teams remained under the command of individual RVNAF ground units. Therefore, JGS inspection teams were discouraged from producing honest post-inspection reports as negative reports could injure commanding generals. Yet, the purpose of having the inspection system in place was to "permit the Commanders to arm themselves with unbiased information as to the efficiency and propriety of operations within their Commands." Thus, MAAGV and JGS merged the inspection teams into the Inspector General staff attached to the JGS in order to jointly inspect the organization, training, and combat capability of the RVNA land forces with MAAGV's own Inspector General staff.[90]

MAAGV and JGS records suggested that the training of the South Vietnamese military forces did not begin once the VNA, CSDF, CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF were integrated into the RVNAF land forces. MAAGV's assessment of the "Strength, Composition and Organization" of RVNAF land forces in early 1956 stated that RVNAF ground units were being reorganized and

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[88] "29 September 1955Letter from Lt. Gen. O'Daniel to President Diem" with "Inspector General System" attached, 1-6; Folder 1: Vietnam 1954-1964; Korea 1950-1954; Box 8; Collection: John W. O'Daniel Papers; Archive: USAMHI

[89] "Seminar for Senior Officers of the Vietnamese Army/Subject: Training Inspection 27-28 December 1956/Annex: Logistic Inspection Checklist"; Folder 135: "Training Inspection & Logistic Inspection"; Box 1; Collection: Samuel T. Williams Papers; Archive: USAMHI

[90] "Organization for the Vietnamese Military Establishment", 1-3; File: MAAGV 370.2 Quarterly Activities Report/MAAGV/ 23 Sept. 1957"; Box: #12; RG 472: Records of the United States Forces In Southeast Asia, Adjutant Division; Archive: NARA II

trained to carry out "two principal missions": "(1) To establish and maintain internal security throughout Free [southern] Vietnam" and "(2) To provide limited resistance [delaying actions] to external aggression" till the arrival of allied forces.[91] However, reintegrating the VNA, CSDF, CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF into the RVNAF land forces had not begun due to South Vietnam's social, political, and military problems. MAAGV and JGS assessed that even after rebellious elements of CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF elements were neutralized in 1955, many VNA units were still tied down on security and humanitarian missions—assisting refugees from North Vietnam and fighting floods in the Mekong River Delta—or building roads. A January 21, 1956, MAAGV report stated that RVNAF reorganization and training had not started because a "major feature of this reorganization has been the welding of innumerable small, scattered units into a combat organization along division lines." Furthermore, because CG and SDC units were ill-equipped and lacked training, many ARVN units had to assume their territorial security duties. MAAGV and JGS hoped that as "these paramilitary units become better equipped and trained, their increased capability for assuming the major role in maintaining internal security will afford necessary relief of Army units for training. Simultaneously, this will add to Free Vietnam's potential for providing resistance to external aggression."[92] Nevertheless, because RVNAF ground units frequently were occupy, their organization, training, and morale suffered.

MAAGV observed that morale in the RVNAF was "steadily improving." This was notably so in "units such as airborne, armor, some territorial regiments, and those divisions which have been able to train without interruption, attitudes of purpose and esprit [de corps] are fairly high," even though there were many "social and economic difficulties confronting the

[91] "MAAGV 21 Jan. 1956 Country Statement For Vietnam Part I & II", 22; File: MAAGV 370.2 Country Statement on MDAP, Non-Nato Countries 15 January 1956; Box: #7; RG 472: Records of the United States Forces In Southeast Asia, Adjutant Division; Archive: NARA II

[92] "MAAGV 21 Jan. 1956 Country Statement For Vietnam Part I & II", 11, 22; File: MAAGV 370.2 Country Statement on MDAP, Non-Nato Countries 15 January 1956; Box: #7; RG 472: Records of the United States Forces In Southeast Asia, Adjutant Division; Archive: NARA II

soldier in his normal military life." Three problems, however, lowered RVNAF troop morale in 1956. First, RVN's civilian officials, many of whom had graduated from either the colonial or France education system and had worked for the colonial administration prior to 1954, considered themselves superior to their military counterparts, especially the foot soldiers, the majority of whom were of peasant stock. Second, RVNAF soldiers had "considerable difficulty" supporting their families thanks to low salaries and a shortage of dependent housing for soldiers' families. Above all, there was no social welfare system to assist RVNAF troops and their families, no means to find jobs for dependents of soldiers, no means to give medical care for troops and their families, and no way to educate soldiers' children. Yet, many RVNAF troopers of all ranks, unless they were too old, were ordered to extend their military service which began "to influence some military personnel adversely."[93]

As 1956 progressed, RVNAF land forces faced difficulties. For example, between June 1, and August 31, 1956, before the ARVN light and heavy divisions were combined into field divisions in 1957, three of the four ARVN heavy infantry divisions (the 1st, 2nd and 3rd) and one of the three ARVN light infantry divisions (the 12th) completed their "ten-weeks accelerated training program." The program undertook attacking, defending, and counter-attacking manoeuvres at the battalion and regimental-level in preparation for a potential PAVN conventional attack. During this period, MAAGV's Quarterly Activity Report, which synthesized reports from CATO and Inspector General Staff of both MAAGV and JGS, recorded which South Vietnamese military units underwent training and evaluated the overall training regimen of the RVNAF land forces. The report concluded that ARVN light and field divisions "received excellent training" in the mid-1956 field exercise. Though "many mistakes were

[93] Ibid., 21

made" by these formations, those mistakes "served to pinpoint to commanders certain deficiencies in training on which future emphasis can be placed." However, none of the ARVN divisions undertook further training to correct the problems that had surfaced in their field exercises. The ARVN 1st, 2nd, and 4th Heavy Infantry Divisions, for example, were "on operational mission" while the ARVN 3rd Heavy Infantry Division "was engaged in road building" and "very little training was conducted." The ARVN 12th Light Infantry Division underwent post-exercise training but even then one of its three regiments "was engaged in operations." Other ARVN divisions trained even less or did not train at all as they were either "engaged in operations" and/or "in getting their camps ready for occupancy." In other words, many South Vietnamese military bases were not ready to receive personnel and equipment let alone conduct training of any types. In fact, the only RVNAF land formation training on a regular basis was the Airborne Group which, having conducted its own field and jungle training exercises in mid-1956, continued again with "basic training."[94]

The military training and education of South Vietnamese officers progressed slowly also. The ROCS, for example, trained 355 artillerymen, 160 armoured commanders, and over 700 personnel in logistic and other support units. The ROCS, like all other South Vietnamese training centers, "operating on a limited scale" as there were not enough living quarters, classrooms, and indoor and outdoor training facilities spaces to accommodate trainees and instructors. The military education for career junior officers fared no better as the NMA faced "a shortage" of "civilian teachers" and "professors to teach academic subjects at the Military Academy." By mid-1956, the Ministries of Defence and Education in Saigon hired eight professors but only three began teaching at the NMA while the others awaited security clearances. The Military

[94] "Army Section Quarterly Activity Report, 1 June 1956 through 31 August 1956", 2-3 of "Training Assistance" section; File: MAAGV 370.2 Country Statement on MDAP, Non-Nato Countries 15 January 1956; Box: #7; RG 472: Records of the United States Forces In Southeast Asia, Adjutant Division; Archive: NARA II

College in Saigon offered "a short Staff Course for Company Grade Officers" to address the shortage of trained field commanders "necessary for the time being until such time as adequate instruction in staff procedures is included in branch career now being established."[95] By mid-1956 then, the RVNAF's military schools had advanced commanding courses for lieutenants (platoon commander) and captains (company commander) but not for battalion (major/colonel), regiment (brigadier/major general), and division (lieutenant general/general) commanders. Yet, by 1956 the RVNAF had already employed light and field divisions (which would be merged into field divisions in 1957), and each division's order-of-battle consisted of multiple regiments, battalions, companies, and other supporting arms, with each division being required to conduct joint operations with local CG and SDC units.

In the summer of 1956, a ten-week intelligence officer course was offered at the Nha Trang Training Center for intelligence companies from all of the ARVN divisions. The course ended on July 8 but it had to restart on August 28 as 30% of the students failed the course. All of the students who failed the course came from the ARVN 12th, 13th and 3rd divisions which had "a large percentage of soldiers whose basic language is other than Vietnamese."[96] The fact that commanding officers from the ARVN 12th, 13th, and 3rd infantry divisions would assign men as intelligence officers who either comprehended little Vietnamese and/or were possibly illiterate raises questions about the competence of officers serving in the infantry divisions.

CATO and Inspector General staffs of MAAGV and JGS found numerous elementary problems that needed to be resolved to improve combat capability and training. One critical training deficiency was the lack of accommodations for troops as many buildings lacked installed water and other utilities. In addition, there was the lack of "minimum training facilities"

[95] Ibid., 1-2
[96] Ibid., 1

and "construction of firing ranges complex", while JGS's Ranges Survey Committee, which was responsible for acquiring lands to be used by the RVNAF, found that military bases, not basic training centers, needed more firing range complexes.[97]

In 1957, MAAGV and JGS reorganized South Vietnam's military once more. The RVNAF light and heavy divisional system was merged into one field divisional system to give MAAGV and JGS better command and control over the RVN military formations. MAAGV found that many minor training problems—unclean weapons, uncharged radio batteries, other ill-maintained equipment—that led to major training obstacles could be prevented if troops looked after their weapons and equipment themselves. On January 19, 1957, MAAGV proposed that the JGS implement a Preventive Maintenance Program (PMP) to make all officers and soldiers accountable for their side arms, unit weapons, and military equipment. MAAGV defined Preventive Maintenance as "the systematic care, servicing, and inspection of equipment for the purpose of maintaining it in serviceable condition, and detecting and correcting minor deficiencies before they cause failure of the equipment." PMP's purpose was to "correct small troubles" so that "big troubles... [would] not appear" and that weapons and equipment were "made ready for use. Once used, it is made ready for further use." Therefore, every "trained operator and user of rifle, a truck, a radio, a hospital sterilizer, a bulldozer, a hand-shovel, a typewriter, a first aid kit, a tool kit, a testing device, a tent, a cartridge belt or any other piece of equipment should inspect it before, during and after operation."[98] To impose PMP, MAAGV and JGS would have to regularly inspect all RVNAF training centers, military bases, forward base of operations, and units to ensure they did not neglect preventive maintenance at the cost of

[97] Ibid., 4-5

[98] "MAAGV/Subject: Preventive Maintenance Program, January 19, 1957, to Lieutenant General Le Van Ty, Chief of Staff of the General Staff, Vietnamese Armed Forces", 1-6; File: MAAGV 400.5 Repairing 1957; Box: #14; RG: 334 Interservice Agencies, MAAGV, Adjutant General Division; Archive: NARA II

discipline, readiness, and combat capability. PMP was one of many ways to measure military discipline. Just as a military must make plan and train regularly to hone its fighting skills, its soldiers and commanders had to take care of themselves, their weapons, and equipment to meet any military emergencies in war and peacetime.

The man in charge of the day-to-day training, inspection, and evaluation of the organization, training, and combat capability of the RVNAF land forces was Deputy Chief of MAAGV, Training, US Army Major General Samuel L. Myers. From January to March of 1957, Myers and his staff conducted twelve inspection tours in South Vietnam. Their Training Visit Report Number 12, dated March 1-31, 1957, over eighty pages long, thoroughly covered the Capital Region of Saigon-Cholon, the four Corps, the 4th field division, the 12th and 14th light divisions in the Central Highlands, and the three military schools. Training Visit Report Number 12's objective was to report on deficiencies, progress in correcting deficiencies, and "statistics presented by the units have been filed as supporting documents to this report."[99] Myers and his staff sought to ensure that RVNAF soldiers, NCOs, and officers reported to MAAGV and JGS inspectors honestly about their training progress and how MAAGV and JGS could help them resolve their problems.

Myers's inspection staffs, made up of both MAAGV advisors and JGS staff officers, visited the 21st, 22d, and 23d Artillery Battalions, the 1st Engineer Group and 704th Ordnance Company in the Saigon-Cholon region. The 21st Artillery Battalion had received 81% of its personnel, 100% of its small arms and howitzers, 90% of its survey equipment, 27% of its signal equipment, 99% of its engineer equipment, 100% of its basic load and training ammunition required for training and firing exercises, and 70% of its vehicles. But its commanding officer,

[99] "HQ, MAAGV, Saigon, Vietnam: Training Visit Report Number 12 Dated 1-31 March 1957", 1; File: MAAGV Investigations, Inspections and Reports; Box: #11; RG 334: Interservice Agencies MAAGV; Archive: NARA II

Captain Ho Nhut Quan, had failed to conduct preventative maintenance on the trucks, many of which could barely transport "a basic load of ammunition." Quan also had neglected to store live ammunition properly; many were "largely in loose rounds, not boxed and should be boxed or exchanged" for safety reasons. While the standard of living for battalion members slowly improved, especially with the water and electricity systems fixed, unit training lagged behind because their base's "poor location" led to "overcrowding" and none was little land to build "training areas or [firing] ranges." Nevertheless, "Housekeeping and "maintenance of the unit is rated as Excellent. Training is Excellent. The unit has a Good Combat Potential."[100]

The 22d Artillery Battalion was considered by MAAGV and JGS inspectors as "a model for other ARVN units, particularly with reference to vehicle maintenance, equipment maintenance and storage." Inspectors attributed the battalion's high quality to the organizational skill, personal initiative, and strong leadership of its commanding officer, Captain Ngo Van Hien. Not waiting for orders from his superiors, Hien trained his battalion regularly to ensure his officers, NCOs, and artillerymen did not deviate from his "training charts" which tracked his men's training progress. He praised subordinates when they carried out their duties proficiently and punished the insubordinate and those who took training lightly. When ordered to undertake security missions, he rotated his battalion's three companies so that one would conduct the mission while the others prepared for potential operations. In the absence of security missions, Hien ensured that his troops maintained their individual weapons and unit equipment, and he tested his subordinates' personal weapons weekly. Hien took preventative maintenance so seriously that MAAGV and JGS considered his battalion as "the first Artillery unit seen in Vietnam that had all its vehicles and guns under cover in a single line gun park." This minor detail seemed trivial but it revealed a sense of cleanliness, orderliness, and discipline on the part

[100] Ibid., 2-3

of Hien and his gunners. In Vietnam's tropical climate, protecting vehicles and guns from the mixture of rain, heat, humidity, wind, and dust storms was vital as it prevented corrosion which could lead to the gun jamming, something no artillerymen wanted to happen in a firefight. To MAAGV and JGS inspectors, Captain Hien demonstrated "a great amount of professional skill and command supervision in the unit."[101]

As Training Visit Report Number 12 revealed, the entire RVNAF land force faced similar problems. Lands allocated for military bases, living quarters, training centres, and firing exercises were underdeveloped. There was a shortage of weapons, ammunition, and equipment needed for training and operations. As accomplishing security and/or humanitarian missions took priority, training was relegated to the backburner. RVNAF ground units that were bogged down by these complicated problems were most often led by incompetent commanding officers who lacked organizational skill, personal initiative and strong leadership. Those RVNAF formations that surpassed these difficult barriers were the ones usually led by competent leaders like Captain Hien, men who had organizational skills, took personal initiative, and demonstrated an inspirational leadership style.

The 23d Artillery Battalion was emblematic of the problems facing many units. One of its three battery companies was "used for local security," leaving the others "available for training." But they faced shortages of vehicles and signal and engineering equipment. When they wanted to carry out firing exercises, they found that too many units were using a too small firing range: "With the saturation of Quang Trung and Thu Duc ranges and the many units in the SAIGON area that desire to fire, the need for a range complex in the Capital Military Region becomes of paramount importance." However, the 23d Artillery Battalion's commanding officer, Captain Ho Van Phuoc, did little to improve his unit's overall combat readiness. MAAGV and

[101] Ibid., 3

JGS inspectors found that Phuoc took "a personal interest in maintaining unit equipment" and that the maintenance of the battalion's vehicles and artillery pieces was rated as "excellent." Yet, Phuoc neglected all other military matters. For example, while Phuoc requested for "storage facilities" for his weapons, ammunition, and other equipment he left live artillery shells in "direct sunlight," a serious hazard given Vietnam's unbearable heat. If an explosion had occurred, nearby artillery pieces, equipment and buildings would have been damaged or destroyed, all base activities would have been disrupted, and military and civilian personnel killed or wounded because Phuoc lacked the common sense to place live munitions in shaded areas until more appropriate storage facilities could be found. Furthermore, the battalion commander neglected the physical training of his troops and failed to conduct non-firing drills when firing ranges were occupied. In fact, the only thing he seemed to do right was "housekeeping" for which he rated "Excellent." Otherwise, Phuoc's 23d Artillery Battalion received a "Satisfactory" rating for training and a "Fair Combat Potential" rating.[102]

Visiting the 585th Territorial Battalion in Tay Ninh Province and the 587th Territorial Battalion in Thu Dau Mot Province, located in Corps III northwest of Saigon-Cholon, MAAGV and JGS inspectors found the organization, training, and combat capability of the two territorial battalions ranged from poor to excellent. The 585th Territorial Battalion had the necessary personnel and equipment. But as its companies were scattered on security missions, the battalion lacked an effective and consistent training regimen. Inspectors considered the battalion's outposts at strategic bridges to be properly manned and "maintained in excellent condition," though the inspectors did not evaluate whether or not these outposts could be defended. They did find that Major Dang Thien Ngon, the battalion commander, did not compel his company commanders to keep individual training progress records. Neither did the Major seem bothered

[102] Ibid., 4

that his battalion had "a serious shortage of training aids and training observed was ineffective." In fact, the easiest tasks of housekeeping and preventative maintenance were ranked as "Satisfactory." Meanwhile, Ngon's 585th Territorial Battalion received an overall rating of "Unsatisfactory in training" and MAAGV and JGS inspectors emphasized that "Combat Potential of this unit is Poor."[103]

The 587th Territorial Battalion, led by Major Nguyen Thanh Hoang, constituted a striking contrast to Ngon's command. Like the 585th, the 587th Territorial Battalion's companies had been scattered on security missions. However, the companies took turns carrying out security missions and training. On average, each soldier in the battalion undertook sixteen hours of training per week "in spite of security mission." The battalion's unit, specialized, and refresher training regimens were "one of the best supervised and administered training programs of any territorial battalion in ARVN." MAAGV and JGS inspectors noticed the impressive detailed training records kept from the battalion down to the individual level:

> Each company submits a weekly training report to the battalion which keeps unit progress of training records. Each individual is issued an individual training book which he carries with him in which a record of training accomplished is kept. Individual progress of training records are kept in the company. These records date back to the initiation of training.[104]

The 587th built its own "crude but effective [firing] range" using "local resources." To be fair, building a rifle range was not difficult compared to establishing a firing range for high calibre artillery and tank cannons. Nevertheless, this action reflected the battalion's initiative and creativity. As a result, MAAGV and JGS ranked the 585th Territorial Battalion "Excellent in maintenance and housekeeping and such training as can be done is being conducted in a Superior manner." While inspectors thought Major Hoang "should be commendable of his fine

[103] Ibid., 5
[104] Ibid., 12

leadership", nevertheless, they thought his battalion's combat potential was "still poor because of dispersal and limited training" given local security responsibilities.[105]

In Corps IV, the Mekong River Delta, inspectors visited two armour units, the 2d Reconnaissance Company and a Tank Company of the 2d Reconnaissance Battalion, both of which operated in the provinces of Can Tho and My Tho. The 2d Reconnaissance Company had been involved in "a pacification mission, namely controlling the lines of communication, and as a consequence is getting very little training done." In fact, only one third of its men were "able to accomplish any training on any given day." Although the unit was rated "Excellent" for housekeeping and maintaining weapons and equipment, it had an "Unsatisfactory [rating] in training" and "a Poor Combat Potential" rating. As for the Tank Company, its training rating was unsatisfactory and combat potential was poor because it had "no designated range for tank gunnery or maneuvers."[106]

In Corps II (Central Highlands), inspectors found that unit organization, training, and combat capability varied widely. Military bases, training centres, and firing ranges were being constructed. Units were on-call for security and humanitarian missions. There was a lack of consistency in leadership quality from unit to unit which affected the organization, training, and combat capability from the platoon-level up to the division. A number of military deficiencies were raised in a summative evaluation of all the RVNAF land forces stationed in the Central Highlands. First, weapons were scattered throughout the region, arms that could be used by either the RVNAF or the PAVN/PLAF. Second, firing range complexes were being built rapidly but more were required as artillery and tank units needed a proper area to conduct live fire drills. Third, equipment and ammunition storage had to be made more secure and moved closer to

[105] Ibid., 12
[106] Ibid., 15-17

support combat outfits. Four, commanding officers from the Corps-level down to the platoon-level had to adequately inspect their units, conduct more training, and properly maintain their units' weapons, ammunition, and equipment to ensure all formations were ready for combat. MAAGV and JGS "strongly urged" Corps II's staff "to form a training and logistic [inspection] team at once to get on the road to crack down on these unsatisfactory units and make them produce [results]."[107]

MAAGV and JGS inspectors also visited the ARVN 4th Field Infantry Division in Corps III and the 12th and 14th Light Infantry Divisions in Corps II. The 4th Field Infantry Division was "making very good stride in its progress towards training proficiency." The division's training facilities and firing range complexes were properly built and completed on time, while its personnel took preventative maintenance very seriously. MAAGV and JGS inspectors concluded that while the "full combat potential of the division cannot be realized until the 10th Regiment is relieved from pacification duties and is trained," the division's other formations had "a Good Combat Potential."[108] The ARVN 12th Light Infantry Division had been last visited by inspectors in November 1956 when the entire division "was actively engaged in basic combat training and showed every promise of accomplishing outstanding results." When inspectors revisited the division in March 1957, unit morale was low. First, two mysterious fires had "destroyed several hundred sets of family quarters and some barracks buildings," leading to the displacement of the majority of the division's personnel and their families. Second, two small security operations had been launched between November 1956 and March 1957 that had required the entire division, including both its support and combat units. Third, because MAAGV and JGS were reorganizing the RVNAF land forces for the second time in 1957, many of the division's officers and NCOs

[107] Ibid., 28-42, 44-53
[108] Ibid., 26

had been appropriated by other RVNAF support and combat outfits. Other personnel had been lost to "security and labour missions" and soon there was "no compulsion at any level to keep it in training." MAAGV and JGS concluded that the training regimen of ARVN 12th Light Infantry Division was "barely Satisfactory" which, unless it was fixed, would ensure the unit "will continue to have a Poor Combat Potential until more has been accomplished in the field of training."[109]

The last ARVN unit to be inspected in March 1957 was the 14th Light Infantry. This particular division is an interesting case study in the limits of leadership especially when it is confronted by seemingly irresolvable problems. The division commander, Lieutenant Colonel Le Huy Luyen, was considered by MAAGV and JGS inspectors as "a very fine officer, intelligent, energetic, [and] concerned with the welfare of his division and his anxious to train." Luyen's staff officers also "appeared to be able intelligent individuals. They have a basic knowledge of training and procedures. They know what is needed and if given a chance they should be able to produce a good division." However, while Luyen's division was rated as "Very Satisfactory in housekeeping, maintenance of arms and equipment and vehicles", it was "Unsatisfactory in training and has a Poor Combat Potential."[110]

This contradictory paradox of a unit commanded by competent officers but possessing poor combat capability could be blamed on the JGS. The 14th Light Infantry Division, recently returned from a major security operation, had been immediately relocated to a new base in the Quy Nhon area of Corps II, previously home to the ARVN 16th Division. Unfortunately, the 16th Division had not maintained the base since its arrival there in 1955. When the 14th Light Infantry Division showed up, it had to erect "tent camps" as temporary shelters to have all its personnel

[109] Ibid., 55, 61
[110] Ibid., 62

until base could be habitable with proper living quarters, training areas, and firing ranges. Without assistance from the 3d Engineer Battalion, men of the 14th Light Infantry Division "cleared the ground, levelled it, dug ditches, prepared foundations for the buildings, all with nothing but hand tools available in the division... [and] some power tools are available in QUI NHON. The division has erected a new building with what limited building materials they have available." These results reflected positively on the commanders and soldiers of the ARVN 14th Light Infantry Division. However, matters were compounded by "several logistic problems beyond his [Luyen's] control." For instance, the division received only 20% of its vehicles which hampered efforts to move building materials, weapons, ammunition, and other equipment to the new base. Furthermore, only 50% of its signal equipment were available. Housing complexes and firing ranges could not be built quickly because the division lacked bulldozers. Further, many battalions were ordered to conduct security missions within the vicinity. Therefore, when inspectors visited the 14th Light Infantry Division, its competent but overwhelmed officers and men had "done little or no training for many months." MAAGV and JGS recommended that the division commander "insure at least a third of the division is training all the time while construction is going on.[111]

But how could the division was expected to build its base, train its units, and conduct security mission simultaneously, especially after it had conducted a divisional-size security operation? That JGS senior staff members had mismanaged the replacement of one division for another in peacetime demonstrated that they were far from ready to command entire RVNAF in wartime. The division's authorized strength was 5,225 men but it actually had 5,028 men. If JGS had done a very poor job transferring a small ARVN 14th Light Infantry Division from one

[111] Ibid., 63

location to another, how could it expect to manage a 150,000-man RVNAF land force? Had the PAVN launched an assault on the RVN from without and the PLAF subverted it from within, only a forceful and timely intervention by US and allied military forces could have saved South Vietnam from being overrun in 1957.

Training Visit Reports in 1957 revealed that most, if not all, RVNAF ground units faced similar problems, notably the lack of space to build military camps, training facilities, and firing range complexes, plus the dilemma of having to reorganize, retrain, and prepare RVNAF units while fulfilling security missions simultaneously. But RVNAF units with competent and proactive leaders had better chances of resolving problems than incompetent and reactive leaders. This is not to say that competent RVNAF commanders would always succeed. As the 14th Light Infantry Division proved, sometime problems overwhelmed staff officers. However, based on the Training Visit Report, one can conclude that while competent leadership may or may not succeed, incompetent leadership almost certainly fails. The importance of having qualified leadership leading the RVNAF was the reason why the Training Visit Report concluded its inspection trip by evaluating the NMA at Dalat, the ROCS at Thu Duc, and Training Cent Number 1 at Quang Trung.

At the time of MAAGV and JGS inspectors' visit, the NMA at Dalat was upgrading its two year purely military program to a four year combined military and professional/career development program. However, this plan was not realized for many years due to the demand for officers in the late 1950s and the war's escalation after 1960s.[112] In 1957, the NMA was more a military school and less a military academy. NMA's candidates were taught military sciences and arts, mainly military history, a little about applied math, science, and engineering for military

[112] Lieutenant General Lam Quang Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century: A South Vietnamese General Remembers the Indochina War to the Fall of Saigon* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2001), 220-221

purposes (especially for candidates who selected the artillery, armour, navy, and air force as their professional arms), and nothing about the natural sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities that were taught at civilian universities. NMA's graduates received an officer commission of second lieutenant and were knowledgeable of military affairs but they received neither a college certificate nor a university degree that could help their careers if they returned to civilian life. ROCS graduates received a more rounded education than their NMA colleagues as most were already professionals, held college certificates, or had graduated from civilian universities in fields such as teaching, engineering, medicine, and business. MAAGV and JGS inspectors appeared very satisfied with NMA's infrastructure as well as with the physical, psychological, political, and military education of cadets. They were pleased to see that NMA instructors provided cadets with both theoretical knowledge and practical application of their military trades and professions, and that cadets studied, exercised, and trained on a daily basis. NMA cadets were also instilled with a strong sense of leadership, duty, and honour by their civilian professors and military instructors.[113] There were problems. Most library books provided by the United States Military Academy were in English and many NMA students did not comprehend English well. Still, MAAGV and JGS inspectors concluded:

> In summary it may be said that this military academy in spite of considerable handicaps, is making good progress. The cadets look and act like soldiers. The instructor personnel both military and civilian are intelligent, capable and very devoted to their work. In housekeeping, care of equipment, grounds with the exception of motor vehicles, the academy is rated Excellent. Motor vehicles, Unsatisfactory. In training, the quality observed on this visit was Superior. It is believed that this academy has a great potential if adequately supported and permitted to continue its work uninterrupted. Its development, with the goal of reaching a 4-year course of instruction designed to produce an officer with a university degree and well schooled in all military qualifications of a lieutenant should be of first priority.[114]

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[113] "HQ, MAAGV, Saigon, Vietnam: Training Visit Report Number 12 Dated 1-31 March 1957", 65-67; File: MAAGV Investigations, Inspections and Reports; Box: #11; RG 334: Interservice Agencies MAAGV; Archive: NARA II

[114] Ibid., 68

The ROCS in Thu Duc, also known as the Thu Duc Military School Center, hosted officers, NCOs, and soldiers who undertook specialized, technical, and advanced military training. Because the ROCS took in about 1,000 recruits annually (the NMA received 50 to 200 cadets per year in the late 1950s), this student body plus their instructors stressed the ROCS's infrastructure and logistic systems which in turn negatively affected the training regimen. There was not enough storage for the weapons and equipment used to train students, although small arms and ammunition were properly arranged so that logistic personnel could keep track of the ROCS's inventory. However, occasionally "a box of loose small arms ammunition was found," less than "20% of the equipment is serviceable," and much of "the heavy equipment, such as cranes, bulldozers, rock crushers, road rollers, etc., which is needed for specialist instruction cannot be used." The ROCS's "range construction, building completion and utilities maintenance and repair" were "painfully slow." A former ROCS instructor recalled that attendees were given theoretical knowledge and practical application of their military trades and professions in the classroom followed by hand-on instruction and exercises in the field.[115] ROCS instructors provided theoretical knowledge and practical application about artillery, armour, engineering, infantry, ordnance, quartermaster, signals and transportation. However, their efforts were hampered by the fact that while MAAGV wanted ROCS to apply "U.S. doctrine and U.S. methods of instruction," MAAGV failed to "translate American instructions and did not publish reference materials in Vietnamese language [which] reduces the capability of the School Center [ROCS] for reorientation of instruction using U.S. references." ROCS instructors were "well qualified," their lesson plans were "prepared in great detail," but the "most serious obstacle" was "the lack of range facilities for crew served weapons, for armor and the inadequacy of the

[115] Colonel Le Dinh Chau, *Chien Tuyen Tu Do ven Song Hong (At The Edge of the Frontline for Freedom)* (Garden Grove, C.A.: Nha Sach Tu Luc, 2002), 177

Artillery range." The lack of progress in firing range construction left the ROCS "without adequate facilities for small arms firing or sub-calibers firing" and ROCS's Armour School with "no place to teach or practice maneuver or gunnery and the present Artillery range is high unsatisfactory." Thus, while MAAGV and JGS found the school had progressed since their last visit, more had to be done to realize ROCS's full potential.[116]

At Quang Trung, MAAGV and JGS inspectors found that recruits were well housed and their basic and advanced individual training was taken seriously by instructors. Recruits started their day at 6 A.M. with physical training followed by breakfast, classroom instruction, and field exercises. Recruits were taught discipline, drills, communication, signal, navigation, map reading, and how to care for and fire their M-1 carbines and BAR machine-guns. Over the eight weeks "boot camp", which amounted to 336 training hours, recruits undertook physical training (57 hours of physical exercise, military discipline and drills, hygiene and first aid, and close combat), weapons training (126 hours of weapons training from how to use a bayonet to firing a rocket launcher), technical training (58 hours of training in relevant field craft such as map reading and navigation to signal and communication), and tactical training (95 hours of course and field work from ground and camouflage preparation to counter-guerrilla tactics). In advanced individual training, recruits could expect nearly 300 hours of weapon trainings (firing anything from a pistol to an 81mm mortar) and over 80 hours of tactical training at the squad and platoon level.[117]

Instructors supervised cadet daily firing practice using score cards as recruits recorded distances from targets they had hit. Recruits' firing results had "greatly improved" since

[116] "HQ, MAAGV, Saigon, Vietnam: Training Visit Report Number 12 Dated 1-31 March 1957", 76-81; File: MAAGV Investigations, Inspections and Reports; Box: #11; RG 334: Interservice Agencies MAAGV; Archive: NARA II

[117] "Annex I, II & IIB: Basic Military Training Program and Advanced Individual Training Program – Infantry", 3-5, File: MAAGV 353 Training (General) 1957; Box: #13; RG 334: Interservice Agencies, MAAGV, Adjutant General Division; Archive: NARA II

MAAGV and JGS inspectors had visited Quang Trung Training Center in November of 1956. In fact, prior to the second arrival of inspectors, Quang Trung initiated a "program of recording individual proficiency for all students" whereby each recruit carried with him "an individual proficiency report which is tabulated daily as each portion of training is completed" by instructors. Nevertheless, inspectors raised many concerns. While Quang Trung was fine now, they feared that as battlefield demands increased and more recruits were needed, Quang Trung would be overwhelmed if its accommodation spaces were not expanded, if training facilities could not be built speedily, if the Ministry of National Defence and JGS could not purchase land to construct firing ranges and, above all, if more qualified instructors to reduce the instructor per recruit ratio could not be found. If these long term problems were not addressed, Quang Trung would be unable to produce quality soldiers and NCOs. The consequence would be the lowering of the RVNAF's combat capability. Indeed, by 1957, Quang Trung already felt the pressure of more recruits and a shortage of qualified instructors, while more land was required for living quarters and firing ranges.[118]

As mentioned earlier, no matter which missions MAAGV and JGS intended to organize and train the RVNAF land forces for, RVNAF officers, NCOs, and troops had to be physically, mentally, and technically well trained. By mid-1957, the RVNAF's overall training regimen was imbalanced. RVNAF land force units tried to raise their combat capability but they still had to deal with poor military infrastructure, the need to carry out either security missions and humanitarian missions, and weak leaders unable to solve problems. The ARVN 13th Light Division stationed in Thu Duc, according to MAAGV and JGS inspectors, "made progress during the months of February and March 1957 in that it did begin a basic training program

[118] "HQ, MAAGV, Saigon, Vietnam: Training Visit Report Number 12 Dated 1-31 March 1957", 72-75; File: MAAGV Investigations, Inspections and Reports; Box: #11; RG 334: Interservice Agencies MAAGV; Archive: NARA II

which has provided a valuable foundation for division officers and NCOs in continuation and operation of its own training program."[119] Since its arrival at Qui Nhon, Corps II, in early 1957, the ARVN 14th Light Division faced multiple problems from a shortage of living quarters to the lack of training because firing ranges required repairs. MAAGV and JGS inspectors noticed in April 1957 that the 14th Light Division was involved in construction projects four days a week, although troops had done "some training" and "conducted a familiarization firing course with the M1 on the temporary ranges at QUI NHON... and PHU BONG.... It is expected that all units will be able to train on a full time basis on 1 June 1957." However, while inspectors were pleased with the slow progress the 14th was making, they felt that, "there seems to be no end to the obstacles placed in the way of this division." Having conducted a major operation in late 1956 then moving to a terribly maintained new base in Qui Nhon without a rest or refresher training, the 14th Light Division was ordered to conduct another security mission in support of the Civil Guard, which "will require the services of two battalions for an undetermined period.... This security mission will seriously restrict the amount of training that can be done by those two battalions. It further puts quite a drain on the manpower available within the division for the many construction problems that the division has."[120]

The ARVN 1st Field Division in Corps I was considered to be one of the very few units that was fairly organized, trained often, and had good commanders. The division, unconstrained by the need to construct base and firing ranges or to conduct security/humanitarian missions, was perhaps the only ARVN division in 1957 that had all of its constituent formations organized and trained well enough to conduct a ten day combat exercise in July. MAAGV's senior advisor to

[119] "13th Light Division Advisor Group, Thu Duc, Viet Nam/Memorandum For: Chief CATO Division, MAAGV Viet Nam/Subject: Training Visit Report No. 10/2 April 1957", 1-4; File: MAAGV 353 Training – Reports 1957; Box: #13; RG 334: Interservice Agencies MAAGV, Adjutant General Division; Archive: NARA II

[120] "Advisor Detachment, 14th Light Division, Qui Nhon/Subject: Report of Progress; Training 14th Light Division/3 April 1957", 1-2; File: MAAGV 353 Training – Reports 1957; Box: #13; RG 334: Interservice Agencies, MAAGV, Adjutant General Division; Archive: NARA II

the division, Colonel Keith H. Barber, reported to MAAGV and JGS in Saigon that "I personally feel that much good training was gained from the exercise but much more would have been realized" had the following deficiencies not occurred. Barber listed multiple problems arose in the manoeuvring exercise of the ARVN 1st Field Division including: "Lack of proper troops leading procedure by all echelons of command"; "The failure of the division command and staff, hampered by absences of key personnel, to function effectively"; "The artillery failed to maintain proper liaison with the infantry during the attack"; "The non-divisional units [possibly units from other divisions] persistently failed to maintain proper liaison with supported units"; "The division rear CP [Command Post] did not displace forward during the attack phase. This was inexcusable tactically and a failure to take full advantage of training opportunities."[121]

Nor did the 1st Field Division conduct any joint operational exercises with other ARVN divisions, CG and SDC units, or the VNAF and VNN. The RVNAF combat capability to confront a conventional attack from without was limited as many non-elite regular ARVN units faced various problems concerning their organization, training, and leadership, failures that affected even efficient units which carrying extra security duties. In fact, many of the ARVN units had not conducted proper specialized, unit, advanced, and refresher training despite MAAGV and JGS orders. None had conducted any joint exercises with CG and SDC units, let alone with the air force and navy which had their own organizational, training, and leadership problems.

In an "Internal Security" section of a MAAGV report, the authors mentioned that:

> The Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps (in villages throughout Free Vietnam) are of material assistance in supplementing the efforts of the Vietnamese Army in the accomplishment of the internal security mission. As these paramilitary units become better equipped and trained, their increased capability for assuming the major role in maintaining internal security will afford

[121] "CATO Advisor Detachment, 1st Field Division, Hue, Vietnam/Subject: First Field Division Maneuvers 9-18 July 1957/Date: 29 July 1957", 1-3; File: MAAGV/CATO 354 Maneuvers 1957; Box: #15; RG 334: Interservice Agencies, MAAGV, Adjutant General Division; Archive: NARA II

> necessary relief of Army units for training. Simultaneously, this will add to Free Vietnam's potential for providing resistance to external aggression.[122]

The report also noted that the CG and SDC were organized and trained to augment the ARVN regulars against internal threats. Thus, the RVNAF's land elements could counter both external and internal threats.[123] Second, while the report commented that CG and SDC units were reorganizing and retraining, it said little about the reorganization and training status of the CG and SDC, which left one wondering if the CG and SDC could augment ARVN regulars against an external attack. But the report left doubts if the CG and SDC units were properly organized, trained, and led to aid ARVN regulars to combat internal subversion. In fact, the CG and SDC formations were far from prepared to counter external attacks and internal subversion. The JGS, viewing the CG and SDC as instrumental "to defeat enemy local forces", thought they "should be organized into battalions and regimental-size units" and "sufficiently equipped" like ARVN regular units. The CG had better personal weapons and unit signal and communication gear, but the SDC had "obsolescent rifles and shotguns" and "drums, tocsins, flag signals and messengers."[124] Even when besieged by PLAF elements in the 1960s, many CG and SDC units, according to CIA Chief-of-Station, William E. Colby, "had to make do with ancient weapons, without shoes, and without communications even to advise when they were attacked, let alone vainly request reinforcement."[125]

The AATTV did not involve itself with CG and SDC organization, but it certainly played a major role in the basic training of CG and SDC personnel at the Hiep Khan Training Centre in

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[122] "MAAGV 21 Jan. 1956 Country Statement For Vietnam Part I & II", 22; File: MAAGV 370.2 Country Statement on MDAP, Non-Nato Countries 15 January 1956; Box: #7; RG 472: Records of the United States Forces In Southeast Asia, Adjutant Division; Archive: NARA II

[123] Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 70

[124] Truong, *Territorial Forces*, pp. 30-31

[125] William Colby with James McCargar, *Lost Victory: A Firsthand Account of America's Sixteen-Year Involvement in Vietnam* (New York: Contemporary Books, 1989), 61

Thua Thien province, Corps I.[126] The AATTV, staffed by professional soldiers, NCOs, and officers who were veterans of colonial wars, provided superior basic training to CG and SDC personnel. However, the CG and SDC personnel had done little unit training mainly because they were not well equipped. The CG and SDC, according to historian Ian McNeil, were "the poor relation of the ARVN when it came to the supply of clothing, weapons and equipment, the nature of the war was such at this stage that the greatest share of the fighting fell to them."[127]

Why were the CG and SDC so inadequately equipped? One reason: Bureaucratic infighting and inter-departmental rivalry. The CG and SDC were the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior while the ARVN was overseen by the Ministry of Defence despite the fact that the ARVN, CG, and SDC made up the RVNAF land forces. As such, the US Department of Defence (DOD) did not have the authority to support them through MAAGV which dealt only with the Ministry of Defence. The State Department, influenced and supported by professors specializing in post-colonialism at Michigan State University (MSU), was willing to subsidize the CG and SDC through the Ministry of Interior. Unfortunately, DOD and State Department/MSU argued about how best to mount counter-guerrilla warfare. Based on its long history of battling guerrilla forces, the US military had always relied on a combination of "carrots and sticks" to crush rebellions.[128] The State Department/MSU averred that counter-guerrilla forces must capture the "hearts and minds" of the people, who were the subject of contention by the opposing forces. Thus, the State Department/MSU viewed the CG and SDC as no more than "a rural police organization" that patrolled, protected, kept the peace, and influenced "hearts and minds" rather than fighting the guerrillas. But the RVN government and

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[126] Blair, *Ted Serong*, 79
[127] McNeill, *The Team*, 27
[128] Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1860-1941* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 2004), 3-18, and *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1942-1976*, 3-26

military rejected the notion of the CG and SDC as "a rural police organization" armed with batons, pistols and handcuffs, seeing them instead as paramilitary forces that should be "organized into company, battalion and regimental groups, and armed with rifles, automatic rifles and machine guns"[129] The State Department, holding the purse strings, sided with MSU's theoretical suggestions of "a rural police organization." Following MSU's unrealistic ideas, the State Department, through its United States Operations Mission Vietnam (USOMV), organized, funded, and equipped the CG and SDC, in Lansdale's words, "for keeping order in an American city and pathetically unready for the realities of the Vietnamese countryside." CG and SDC personnel "armed with whistles, nightsticks, and .38-cal. Revolvers, could hardly be expected to arrest a squad of guerrillas armed with submachine guns, rifles, grenades, and mortars; the Civil Guard squad would be dead or dispersed by the guerrillas long before they got close enough to be effective."[130]

Sir Robert Thompson, BRIAM's head, argued that if "in the initial stages [of the Vietnam War] we had had more Civil Guard and less [southern Vietnamese] Army, the [RVN] Government might have been more successful. Unfortunately, the tendency was the other way around."[131] Thompson may have had a point if the CG and SDC were well trained and cohesive units, properly equipped, and led by competent commanders, but this was not the case. As one of the political science scholars attached to MSU and USOMV, Robert Scigliano argued that even though the RVN government and military were aware of "a protracted dispute between Vietnamese and American authorities over the nature of the organization [CG and SDC]," they "did little to improve the efficiency or morale of the [Civil] Guard during this period [1957-

[129] Robert Scigliano and Guy H. Fox, *Technical Assistance In Vietnam: The Michigan State University Experience* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), 17
[130] Edward Geary Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars: An American's Mission to Southeast Asia* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1991), 353
[131] Sir Robert Thompson, *Make for the Hills: Memories of Far Eastern Wars* (London: Leo Cooper, 1989), 128

1959], using it as a dumping ground for inferior army officers." The CG and SDC, "poorly trained, poorly led, and lacking needed armament, transport, and communications," were "faced with the increasingly difficult job of maintaining security in an increasingly insecure countryside."[132]

Moreover, for the CG, SDC, and ARVN to conduct joint operations against threats from within or without the RVN, the organization, training, leadership, and combat capability of all RVNAF ground units had to rank very high. However, the quality of CG, SDC, and ARVN units varied from very poor to excellent. In fact, for the remainder of 1957, MAAGV advisors and their RVNAF counterparts struggled to construct base camps and firing ranges and to conduct unit, specialized, advanced and refresher training. Take for example the conflict between MAAGV advisor Colonel Armel Dyer and his ARVN counterpart Colonel Do Cao Tri at Pleiku in the Central Highlands of Corps II. It started with a three page memorandum entitled "Combat Readiness," sent to Tri on May 18, 1957, in which Dyer pointed out over forty issues that affecting ARVN units under Tri's supervision. Dyer bluntly informed Tri that "we in the 3rd Military Region (Corps II) must require every unit to train every week, and insist that nothing (housing construction, road repair, or operational missions) be used as an excuse for not training."[133] A combat-hardened VNA paratrooper from the French Indochina War, Tri fired back at Dyer through the JGS and MAAGV in Saigon. Looking into the matter for MAAGV, Lieutenant Colonel Vincent Usera asked Tri "why training and repair work could not be accomplished together by separating units so that one could train while the other worked and then rotate the units." Tri replied that he wanted "to do this [what Usera suggested] but Col Dyer was adamant on training to the exclusion of all other activities." Tri argued that he could only do

[132] Robert Scigliano, *South Vietnam: Nation Under Stress* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1964), 164
[133] "Memorandum To: Col. Do Cao Tri/Subject: Combat readiness/18 May 1957", 1-3; File: MAAGV/CATO 353 Training 1957; Box: #15; RG 334: Interservice Agencies, MAAGV, Adjutant General Division; Archive: NARA II

what Dyer advised him to "if the Ministry of Public Works would take over repair of roads and bridges and that someone at the Ministry of Defense should press for this."[134] In final rebuttal, Dyer contended:

> I have never advised, recommended, suggested, or implied that construction in the 3rd MR should be stopped, suspended, postponed, or curtailed. I fully accept the necessity for construction... I am currently ram-rodding two construction projects of my own.... The point that I have repeatedly attempted to make with Col Tri is that every unit must conduct training (some training), whatever its construction requirements, or any other requirements, may be. I have discussed this point with him both from the standpoint of military requirements in general and from the standpoint of military requirements in general and from the standpoint of the 3rd MR in particular. At best, Col Tri gives only lip-service to this point of view.... When I reported to Pleiku as Advisor to this Region, 15 Mar, training in the Region was non-existent. Although my efforts to correct the situation have resulted in some improvement... training overall is still "Unsatisfactory".[135]

Whether Tri or Dyer was right is beside the point. Rather, their dispute reflected numerous important chronic problems of South Vietnam's government, military, and society in the formative years of the Vietnam War. Firstly, the dispute mirrored the imperfect relationship between MAAGV advisors and their RVNAF counterparts, problems that only grew later when the PLAF and PAVN stepped up their attacks against the RVN government and military and the JGS failed to respond to MAAGV's satisfaction. Secondly, the Dyer-Tri dispute revealed the different priorities of RVNAF commanders versus MAAGV advisors. As his sole concern was the combat capability of Tri's ARVN unit, Dyer worried that if the PAVN attacked across the DMZ, the ARVN would fold and America would confront a Korean War scenario in Vietnam. However, Tri could not concern himself solely with the organization and training of his unit when his men lacked living quarters, training facilities, and ranges. Tri thus faced the dilemma that other RVNAF land force officers confronted in the late 1950s: Whether or not to conduct

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[134] "Memorandum To: Chief, MAAG Vietnam/Subject: Training of Engineer Units in 3rd MR/24 May 1957", 1; File: MAAGV/CATO 353 Training 1957; Box: #15; RG 334: Interservice Agencies, MAAGV, Adjutant General Division; Archive: NARA II

[135] "Memorandum For: Chief, CATO; MAAG, Viet-Nam; Saigon, Viet-Nam/Subject: Construction vs Training, 3rd Military Region/25 May 1957/ATTN: Lt Col RILEY", 2-3; File: MAAGV/CATO 353 Training 1957; Box: #15; RG 334: Interservice Agencies, MAAGV, Adjutant General Division; Archive: NARA II

security and humanitarian missions at the expense of raising the combat capability of their units. Thirdly, Tri raised an important point in his argument with Dyer: Why could the RVN's Ministry of Public Works not help the Ministry of Defence build infrastructure for South Vietnam's military, thus freeing up his unit for preparation for combat? The answer was simple. Like many other RVN civilian ministries, the Ministry of Public Works existed in name only as it lacked leadership and had a tiny budget as almost all US aid went toward the Ministries of Defence and Interior. In fact, since mid-1954, the Diem government had relied on its multiple intelligence services, its various police forces, paramilitaries, and especially the armed forces because they were more organized, better trained, had access to heavy equipment required for building and construction, were fairly led and well funded by the US and its allies, and could carry out multiple tasks quickly if not perfectly. Thus, the military assisted with the refugee crisis in 1954, conducted security operations against the militias in 1955, and built and repaired infrastructure that the RVN government hoped would benefit the economy and the military. Even if the Ministry of Public Works had taken over the construction and maintenance of South Vietnam's infrastructure, including those used by the military, sooner or later it would have required RVNAF assistance.

In 1958 and 1959, two years before the NFLSVN's formation and the PLAF stepped up attacks against RVN civilian infrastructure and strategic military installations, the organization, training, and combat capability of the RVNAF land forces varied widely from one unit to the next and from one commander to another. For unknown reasons, MAAGV records are largely lacking for 1958 and 1959. But the existing MAAGV records for those years revealed that no joint exercises were conducted by ARVN, CG, and SDC units to prepare against a PAVN offensive or a PLAF attack upon the CG and SDC. By 1958's end, anti-guerrilla warfare

instruction and training varied from six hours at the Quang Trung to one hour at service schools for NCO, junior commanders, and staff officers. Beyond basic individual training and advanced individual training, the "present ARVN training program does not include anti-guerrilla training for any units [unit training] other than the 6 hours of instruction presented in the Basic Infantry Course."[136] By 1959, the only RVNAF land force formations that seemed to be highly organized, well trained, commanded by competent officers, and with high combat potential were the 1st Airborne and 2nd Marine Brigades, and they too had organizational, training, leadership, and combat problems.

Very few RVNAF ground units conducted combat manoeuvres and joint operational exercises between 1956 and 1959 because many were too disorganized, inefficiently trained and ill prepared to practice combined operations with other formations. One of the only few RVNAF land force formations to carry out a combat manoeuvre exercise was the elite 1st Airborne Brigade. From December 8-17, 1957, the formation conducted "a group size maneuver" covering all phases of an airborne operation beginning with the preparation stage followed by "Planning, Marshalling [pre-operational training and replenishment], Air Movement, Landing, Reorganization, Establishment of an Airhead, Defence of Airhead, Link-up with armor and a subsequent attack of two days duration." Senior MAAGV advisor, Lieutenant Colonel Austin Triplett Jr., who evaluated the exercise, thought the preparatory Planning stage "went extremely well." Upon receiving its order on December 9, the Brigade initiated "preparations immediately and presented their concept of operation to the joint headquarters on 10 Dec." In the "Marshalling" stage, staff officers briefed their junior officers and NCOs who in turn briefed

[136] "Memo: Anti-Guerrilla Warfare/22 November 1958", 1; File: MAAGV 300 Letters – PC Subject: Reply to General Accounting Office Report, Far East Branch, Tokyo, Japan, 1958"; Box: #14; RG 472: Records of the United States Forces in Southeast Asia, Military Assistance Advisory Group Vietnam, Adjutant General Division; Archive: NARA II

their paratroopers. Each paratrooper "was given a detailed briefing on the mission" and "aerial photos of the DZ [Dropped Zone]... were given [to] each platoon leader." Equipment to be used in the manoeuvres was double "checked and rigged for dropping." To finish the "Marshalling" stage, each battalion "received half a day of parachute training conducted by the Airborne School personnel." Triplett considered the stage "superior." The next stage, "Air Movement", commenced early on December 14. Three factors concerned Triplett at this stage. First, the planes carrying paratroopers flew in a single trail and too close together, making them easy targets for anti-aircraft artillery batteries. Secondly, the troop transport planes were not well escorted by VNAF fighter planes. Thirdly, the 1st Airborne Brigade requested twenty transport aircraft but only eighteen planes arrived which forced "a last minute reshuffle of personnel" of four combat battalions and two support companies (mortar company and an engineering company) would have to be done by the Airborne Group staffs, who did so "quickly and efficiently."[137]

In the "Landing" stage, many planes missed the dropped zone but the paratroopers had an "excellent" jump as only 30% landed in the trees, injuring five and killing two. "The action of the men after landing was good." In the "Reorganization" stage, all of the combat battalions, especially the 5th Battalion which had fought at Dien Bien Phu, quickly secured their captured objectives effectively. Triplett was impressed by the speed of these assaults given that the paratroopers "were badly scattered" after their jumps. During the "Defense of Airhead" stage when "enemy" forces counterattacked, battalion commanders, company officers, NCOs, and paratroopers reacted very well. First, they narrowed and tightened their line to better defend it. Second, commanders effectively requested close-tactical-air strikes on enemy positions. When

[137] "Report On Airborne Group Maneuver, 20 December 1957", 1-2; File: MAAGV/CATO 354 Maneuvers; Box: #15; RG 334: Interservice Agencies, MAAGV, Adjutant General Division; Archive: NARA II

enemy attacks subsided, the paratroopers finished camouflaging their positions. When enemy assaults recommenced, the commanders, NCOs and paratroopers "responded to order quickly." Thirty tons of supplies was dropped into the battle-zone, the drop was accurate, and the paratroopers "recovered and moved [the supplies] by end of day light." The besieged paratroopers also linked up with an armoured column before nightfall and planned a combined arms offensive for the next morning. The manoeuvring exercise ended with the "Ground Attack" stage. In this final phase, there would be a two day tank-infantry offensive launched to prevent enemy forces from escaping. But 1st, 3rd, and 6th battalions were too cautious in their pursuit, letting many enemies escape. Above all, they moved too slowly. The 6th Battalion, for example, moved no more than four kilometres in six hours. There was much better coordination between commanders, paratrooper battalions, support units, tank units, and the VNAF close-air-support planes on day two. Indeed, the battalions now advanced too quickly. The 5th Battalion, for example, "succeeded in surrounding the enemy and captured the bridge before the enemy could reach it. During this attack the umpires lost control of the maneuver, and the attack went much faster than it should, however the results would have been the same."[138]

Triplett, his staff, and the exercise umpires concluded that "support given the Airborne Group by all supply agencies, prior to the operation was excellent. The troops displayed excellent discipline, stamina, and esprit de corps. Camouflage was superior, communications were excellent... the maneuver was a great success and much was learned." However, six "Major deficiencies" were revealed by the exercise: (1) The 1st Airborne Brigade and the VNAF needed to develop "a joint Air, Army doctrine on troop carrier operations [and fighter/bomber escorts]"; (2) operational orders had to be "brief... and not too detailed"; (3) companies must carry out more and better reconnaissance of their axis-of-advance; (4) paratroopers had to "be more alerted

[138] Ibid. 3

after jumping, many had minor malfunction and failed to realize it"; (5) heavy equipment and weapons such as the 4.2 Mortars needed to be better packed and more mobile; and (6) "Commanders must be bold and seek the enemy more quickly once contact has been lost, and not allow it to become broken once gained." In other words, some paratrooper companies and battalions did not engage, pursue, and finish off enemy forces aggressively enough during the defensive and attacking stages of the field exercise.[139]

Another deficiency was that the 1st Airborne Brigade, as a strategic reserve of the RVN military and government, had yet to conduct joint operational exercises with any of the ARVN non-elite divisions or CG and SDC units. This deficiency, no fault of the Brigade, reflected two larger problems. First, the Brigade was organized, trained, and had good combat potential but it could not carry out combined arms exercise with most other units because they were too unready for war. Second, as many RVNAF ground units were barely ready to conduct field manoeuvring exercises, they did not practice with other units. This failure ultimately affected the operational cooperation and coordination that would become more evident as we critically analyze the RVNAF land forces' combat capability when the PAVN/PLAF began attacking the RVN.

Another strategic reserve outfit with its own organizational, training, and combat capability problems was the 1st Marine Brigade. The officers and troopers of the 2nd Marine Brigade were combat-hardened veterans of the French Indochina War. All Marine officers had received basic and intermediate level training at the United States Marine Corps School in Quantico, Virginia, starting in 1958, while NCOs were trained in South Vietnam. The 2nd Marine Brigade recruited only volunteers with combat experience in one of the RVNAF land force formations. Their training emphasized physical and mental toughness, discipline, teamwork,

[139] Ibid., 4

taking personal initiative, weapons training, marksmanship, live fire exercise, preventative maintenance, combat swimming and boating, combined arms and amphibious warfare, small unit tactics and counter-guerrilla warfare, and they trained vigorously and continuously despite weather conditions. However, the 2nd Marine Brigade was not flawless. From 1955 to 1959, USMC advisors detected two serious problems that were holding back the 2nd Marine Brigade: Its logistic system and the "defensive psychology" of its commanders.

Until 1955, the logistic system of the 2nd Marine Brigade was taken cared by the FFEEC which trained brigade combatants but not supply personnel. Therefore, when the FFEEC left, the 2nd Marine Brigade found itself with competent combat commanders who were incompetent when dealing with logistics. This deficiency was problematic for, the 2nd Marine Brigade had to shelter its men and store their equipment, feed the Marines, equip them properly, and reinforce them while they were on operations. "The real problem," explained USMC advisor to the 2nd Marine Brigade Captain Breckinridge, "was the newness of it all. The Vietnamese officers simply possessed no base of experience or training in logistic matters." To solve the problem, UMSC advisors and their 2nd Marine counterparts selected officers, NCOs, and enlisted men who showed interest in logistics. These personnel were trained by USMC experts to deal with requisitioning, stockpiling, inventorying, maintaining, preventative maintaining, distributing, recovering, and repairing weapons, and other essential equipment. While progress was made between 1955 and 1959, the 2nd Marine Brigade continued to face the shortage of "such vital and common items as small arms and ammunition" in the late 1960s.

The "defensive psychology" of the 2nd Marine Brigade originated in the French Indochina War. Between 1950 and 1954, the FFEEC assigned Vietnamese marine units to defend FFEEC and VNA bases and to conduct security missions in surrounding areas even though Vietnamese

marines, like VNA paratroopers, were considered to be elite troops. However, starting in 1955, the 2nd Marine Brigade and 1st Airborne Brigade became strategic reserve forces with operational reach throughout South Vietnam. Therefore, to take on its new role as one of RVNAF's elite strike forces, the 2nd Marine Brigade's defensive mentality had to change. Given South Vietnam's long coastline and numerous rivers and marshes, the 2nd Marine Brigade had to be remade "into an aggressive amphibious strike force." To bolster the Brigade's offensive mindset, USMC advisors undertook many training steps. First, experienced combatants had to pass basic and advanced individual training. Second, the marines continued their unit, specialized, and refresher training at the Brigade. Brigade instructors and commanders, with USMC advisors, designed the training program to focus on "patrolling, ambushing, fire and maneuver, and night movement."[140]

In summing up the combat capability of the 2nd Marine Brigade, retired USMC Captain Robert H. Whitlow concluded "the interval between 1955 and 1959 was characterized by uncertainty, transition, and problem solving."[141] This conclusion could be applied to all RVNAF land forces from 1955 to 1959. The organization, training, and combat preparedness of the RVNAF land forces during those years was complicated, time consuming, and left many problems unresolved. Many RVNAF land forces were bogged down by humanitarian or/and security missions in 1955. When ordered to improve their combat capability, many RVNAF ground units arrived at military bases requiring repair or major construction. Military schools and training centers overflowed with fresh recruits but accommodation and instructors were in short supply while field training and live fire exercises were limited due to a shortage of land. Often, it

[140] Robert H. Whitlow, *U.S. Marines In Vietnam: The Advisory & Combat Assistance Era 1954-1964* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1977), 23-24; VNMC General Tran Van Nhat, *Cuoc Chien Dang Do* (The Unfinished War) (Westminster: Tu-Quynh Book and Music, 2003), 62
[141] Whitlow, *U.S. Marines In Vietnam*, 25

was left to commanders, junior officers, and NCOs to find the solutions. However, the quality of this corps of leaders varied widely, a situation which ultimately influenced unit effectiveness. Since many ARVN divisions were disorganized and untrained, they had difficulty conducting their own unit, specialized, and refresher training. As ARVN divisions had to resolve their organization and training problems first, most could not conduct joint operational exercises with other divisions. Worse still, almost all ARVN units did not bother to carry out joint operational exercises with CG, and SDC formations which had their own combat readiness problems. Before their problems could be resolved, many ARVN, CG, and SDC units were given humanitarian or security missions. Therefore, unit, specialized, and refresher training became a secondary priority.

By 1960, the only two RVNAF land units with a high level of organization, training, and combat capability were the 1st Airborne Brigade and the 2nd Marine Brigade. As a MAAGV advisor to the 1st Airborne Brigade in the early 1960s, H. Norman Schwarzkopf assessed that the outfit was "South Vietnam's best and most cohesive fighting force, six battalions and five thousand men. The Saigon government used it, along with the [2nd] Marine Brigade, as 'national reserve,' or all-purpose backup: whenever things went to hell in an important province in a battle involving regular army, the airborne or marines would be sent to the rescue—and this happened often."[142] However, as demonstrated in the December 1957 exercise of the 1st Airborne Brigade, battalion's performances were uneven. Cooperation between battalions and coordination between the 1st Airborne Brigade and the VNAF needed to be improved still. Furthermore, the aggressiveness of paratrooper units varied thanks to the competence of individual commanders. A former member of the VNQDD in 1940s and Vietnamese Marine starting in 1950, former

[142] General H. Norman Schwarzkopf and Peter Petre, *The Autobiography of General H. Norman Schwarzkopf: It Doesn't Take A Hero* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), 122

Colonel Hoang Tich Thong agreed with Withlow's assessments that the 2nd Marine Brigade had problems in the mid-1950s. Due to vigorous and continuous training carried out by South Vietnamese and USMC instructors, the 2nd Marine Brigade become a more offensive minded outfit ready to be deployed throughout the country as one of two RVNAF's strategic reserve strike forces. However, 2nd Marine Brigade's logistic problems were never completely resolved. Furthermore, Thong pointed out that unlike the USMC and the USN, the 2nd Marine Brigade and the VNN were never sure about roles, rarely conducted joint operational exercises, and barely coordinated their efforts even though the 2nd Marine Brigade fell under VNN command.[143] Like the 1st Airborne Brigade, the 2nd Marine Brigade did not conduct any joint operational exercises with other RVNAF ground units from 1955 to 1959 even though it was expected to support besieged ARVN, CG, and SDC units. This problem persisted. Even after the Easter Offensive of 1972, USMC advisors found that their "real task" was not to organize, train, and advise their counterparts in the VNMC (the expanded successor of the 2nd Marine Brigade). The VNMC had been "in heavy combat over fifteen years" and had "proven its capability by executing major troops movements by land, sea and air." "There is little we can teach them [southern Vietnamese marines] except, perhaps, how to better utilize their supporting arms," informed Colonel Joshua Dorsey to newly arrived USMC advisor Lieutenant Colonel G.H. Turley, and "to make the VNMC as logistically ready as money will allow."[144] Therefore, for two decades from the 2nd Marine Brigade in the 1950s to VNMC in the 1970s, though they upheld a high level of organization, training, and combat capability, South Vietnamese marines still had problems conducting and coordinating inter-arms operations and resolving their logistical problems.

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[143] Colonel Hoang Tich Thong, *Cuoc Doi Toi 1945-1975* (My Life) (Orange County: Published by the author, 1992), 270-271

[144] Colonel G.H. Turley, *The Easter Offensive: The Last American Advisors, Vietnam, 1972* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1985), 9

In the final analysis, the 1st Airborne and 2nd Marine Brigades upheld their high standards of organization, training, and combat capabilities compared to other ARVN, CG, and SDC units. Nevertheless, even they had organizational, training, and combat capability problems as the Vietnam War progressed. Unlike other ARVN, CG, and SDC units, however, the 1st Airborne and 2nd Marine Brigades kept their problems under control even if they could not completely resolve them. Three factors accounted for the successful organization, training and combat capability problems management of the 1st Airborne and 2nd Marine Brigades. First, the small size of the 1st Airborne and 2nd Marine Brigades reduced their issues to a manageable level. By 1959, the 1st Airborne Brigade had 5,000 paratroopers while the 2nd Marine Brigade mustered just over 2,200 marines. On the other hand, each ARVN division had over 10,000 soldiers—there were seven ARVN divisions in 1959, nine by 1962—the CG had nearly 70,000 guards, while the SDC had 48,000 personnel.

Secondly, like ARVN, CG, and SDC units, the 1st Airborne and 2nd Marine Brigades had to conduct humanitarian and security missions from 1955 to 1959. However, unlike ARVN, CG and SDC units, the 1st Airborne and 2nd Marine Brigades did not have to develop their military bases and training centers while carrying out humanitarian and security missions. Since they were nation-wide elite strategic reserve strike forces, the 1st Airborne and 2nd Marine Brigades received much attention and funding from MAAGV, the JGS, and the RVN government. This had both positive and negative effects. It was positive because the JGS and the RVN government supported the 1st Airborne and 2nd Marine Brigades well. But it was also negative because the JGS and RVN government neglected other ARVN, CG, and SDC units. In 1959, the strength of the RVNAF land forces exceeded 150,000 men. Combined, however, the 1st Airborne and 2nd Marine Brigades made up but five percents of the RVNAF ground units. Fighting the organized,

trained, and experienced PLAF/PAVN, demanded that all one hundred percent of RVNAF ground units—not five percent—be competent.

Thirdly, ARVN, CG, and SDC units were made up mostly of conscripted troops, NCOs, and officers who had little to no experience in organizing, training, and enhancing the combat capability of their units. By contrast, the 1st Airborne Brigade was made up combat veterans who had proven themselves in other ARVN, CG, and SDC units before becoming paratroopers. According to Schwarzkopf, these paratroopers were led by "officers and NCOs [who] were tough old pros who had been fighting communists since before Dien Bien Phu."[145] Before the 2nd Marine Brigade considered their applications, volunteer recruits coming from other ARVN, CG, and SDC units, regardless of rank, had to have combat experience. Like their counterparts in the 1st Airborne Brigade, volunteers for the 2nd Marine Brigade had to pass both the basic and advanced individual training courses before they could begin marine training. Once assigned to the 2nd Marine Brigade, these freshly minted marines, like their paratrooper counterparts, were led by veteran NCOs and officers of the French Indochina War who, starting in 1958, were re-trained by the USMC. The 1st Airborne and 2nd Marine brigades and their commanders resembled PAVN/PLAF commanders. They were all combat-hardened veterans of the French Indochina War who had gained experience in organization, training, and elevating the combat capability of their units by fighting the Japanese before 1945 and the French since 1946. The difference was that most of the PAVN/PLAF were organized, trained, and prepared for combat while most RVNAF land forces were unprepared. Therefore, until other RVNAF ground units could aspire to match the high level of organization, training, and combat capability exemplified by the 1st Airborne and 2nd Marine Brigades, the combat capability of the RVNAF land forces would not match that of the PAVN/PLAF.

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[145] Schwarzkopf, *The Autobiography of General H. Norman Schwarzkopf*, 122

Chapter 7
Combat Capability, 1955-1960: Part I

The organization and training of the RVNAF land forces by MAAGV and JGS from 1955 to 1959 had occurred place during a temporary military truce between the RVN and the DRVN. The military truce was no more than a transition interval from the French Indochina War to the Vietnam War. Taking advantage of this fictitious peace, the DRVN and the RVN prepared for war under relatively peaceful circumstances. The same cannot be said of its enemy. The transformation of the non-communist military and paramilitary forces from the French Indochina War into the RVNAF land forces was a violent process that involved the destruction of rebellious sects and their reintegration with the VNA and CSDF into South Vietnam's military. The development of the RVNAF land forces by the JGS, MAAGV, AATTV, and BRIAM that followed encountered intricate organizational, training, and combat capability building problems caused by the refugee crisis, sectarian conflict, guerrilla war, and the Diem government's inability to solve the RVN's social, political, and military problems. Confronted by a fierce and determined communist foe and seemingly endless organizational, training, and leadership problems, the RVNAF land forces made tactical gains that never amounted to strategic victory in the formative years of the Vietnam War.

Between 1955 and 1960, the RVNAF land forces, with VNN and VNAF aid, conducted nearly one hundred operations in support of the RVN government's civic actions and security missions. The first, Operation: PASSAGE TO FREEDOM, initiated in autumn 1954 and terminated next spring, involved the evacuation of North Vietnamese refugees and their resettlement in South Vietnam. The French, American, and South Vietnamese governments and

militaries led the way. However, religious organizations and the Red Cross also provided humanitarian assistance during the refugee crisis.[1]

The planning, organization, and execution of humanitarian missions in crisis situations were a daunting task. The evacuation of one million refugees to South Vietnam required the transportation, logistic, and security assets of the combined FFEEC, VNN, VNAF, VNA, CSDF, MAAGV personnel, the US Seventh Fleet's Task Force 90, and CIA's Civil Air Transport (CAT). Had the French and US militaries not assisted, two thirds of the refugees would have been stranded in North Vietnam. Task Force 90 alone shifted over 300,000 North Vietnamese refugees. But relocating refugees was a mere tactical gain rather than a decisive strategic victory for the future RVN government and military. Though difficult, relocating refugees from North Vietnam proved far less complicated than integrating them into South Vietnam.[2] In its struggle for political power and military control in Saigon from mid-1954 to mid-1955, the flight of refugees from North Vietnam scored a major propaganda victory for Diem's regime. The international press perceived the DRVN's communism as replacing the hated France's colonialism. "Hundreds of thousands of refugees were coming down from the Communist north, choosing freedom, however chaotic, and needing care," reported John Mecklin of the *Time*. Diem, according to Mecklin was, "a resilient, deeply religious Vietnamese nationalist who is burdened with the terrible but challenging task of leading the 10.5 million people of South Vietnam from the brink of Communism into their long-sought state of sovereign independence.

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[1] Florianne Truninger and François Bugnion, "The International Committee of the Red Cross and the Indochina War — From the Japanese defeat to the Geneva Agreements (1945–1954)" *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 34, Issue 303 (1944), 564-594

[2] Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years of the United States Army in Vietnam, 1941-1960* (Washington, D.C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1985), 227; George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: the United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 62-63; Robert D. Schulzinger, *A Time For War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 81; Mark Philip Bradley, *Vietnam At War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 79

No man in troubled Asia is confronted by more obstacles on the road to order and justice."[3] Dennis Warner, an Australian correspondent and Diem's biographer, praised Diem's handling of the refugee crisis as "the ultimate resettlement of these people [northerners] must now be listed as one of Diem's major achievements, even if it did not necessarily endear him to the Southerners, who sometime seem to regard the refugees as privileged 'foreigners.'"[4]

However, if the social, political and military developments in South Vietnam between mid-1954 and mid-1955 were closely scrutinized, three vital early signs foreshadowed the potential long-term problems that the arrival of so many northern and Catholic refugees engendered for South Vietnam. The first sign was the South Vietnamese military's involvement in the refugee crisis. The mission improved the image of the VNA as a national, not a colonial, army but only in the eyes of refugee northerners and Catholics not among southerners and Buddhists. Lieutenant Colonel William Bradford Rosson's June 5th, 1954, letter to a fellow officer revealed his scepticism about events in Indochina and their long-term consequences. Traveling Vietnam's length with MAAGV staff to coordinate the international relief efforts and "to reorganize the Vietnamese Army", Rosson was surprised to see that a "very large percentage of the population" was still "'sitting on the fence' waiting to see which side [DRVN or RVN] will get the final advantage" instead of wholeheartedly backing South Vietnam's government and military. To Rosson, the wait-and-see attitude of ordinary Vietnamese was influenced by their conviction that "the Viet Minh would absorb the Vietnamese in record time." Next, since "the entire Vietnamese government is absent in France or Geneva", they assumed there was no government in South Vietnam. Finally, what stood between the DRVN military and South

[3] John Mecklin, "South Vietnam: The Viet Nam's Diem: The hour is late, the odds are long", *Time: The Weekly Newsmagazine*, vol. LXV, no. 14 (April 4, 1955), 22, 24
[4] Dennis Warner, *The Last Confucian: Vietnam, South-East Asia, and the West* (New York: Penguin Books, 1964), 100

Vietnam was the VNA, but its "morale has fallen", "conscription is plagued by refusal to answer draft calls" and "operations... have been piece-meal and scattered."[5]

In 1954-1955, the VNA's "piece-meal and scattered" operations involved mainly moving northern Vietnamese from temporary refugee camps to permanent refugee settlements in South Vietnam and the transferring southern-based Viet Minh political and military cadres who wished to reside in the DRVN. The resettlement of northern refugees was part of the larger land reform and development programs of the RVN's national defence and security strategy. In 1955, Diem's government envisioned that its land reform and development programs would serve the long-term economic, political, and military goals of the RVN while strengthening the nation's security. Thus, we must closely examine the economic, political, and military aspects of the Diem government's land reform and development programs and their implications for the combat capability of the RVNAF land forces which spearheaded the Diem government's effort to conquer, control, and pacify South Vietnam from 1955 to 1963.

South Vietnam needed to become a developed, industrialized, and self-reliant country. Diem government's economic policy, first, sought to engender social harmony amongst the ethnicities, religions, regions, and classes in South Vietnam. Secondly, Diem's government believed that RVN sovereignty *vis-a-vis* both its enemy, the DRVN, and its ally, the US, could never be achieved unless South Vietnam became an economically viable and self-reliant nation-state. But the French Indochina War had left no part of South Vietnam untouched. Moreover, even if infrastructure remained intact or could be repaired, they still had to be manned. Once more, the protracted revolutionary war had not only left peoples divided, but a good portion of the rural population had fled their homes and farms for relatively more secure urban areas.

[5] "Letter to Billy, 5 June 1956", 1-2; File: Situation near the end of the war in Indochina, 5 June 1956; Box: #5; Collection: William Bradford Rosson Papers; Archive: USAMHI

According to Nguyen Anh Tuan, a former professor at the University of Saigon, there was "an increase in the existing imbalance between production and consumption" in South Vietnam's economy.[6]

The displacement of the rural population was by no means the only obstacle to the re-cultivation and industrialization of South Vietnam's countryside. "The sheer size of the landless peasantry, which exceeded that with land," historian Gabriel Kolko argued, "made the land question far more complicated than one of simple land distribution."[7] However, Diem's government chose land reform as a starting point for its policy to increase economic, development and industrialization of rural and urban South Vietnam. In his critical assessment of Diem's economic policy starting in 1955, Tuan has argued that South Vietnam's "agricultural resources offered the greatest potential [for] development." As a foundation of future economic development and industrialization, the Diem government emphasized "land development and reclamation, irrigation and canals, control of tidewater in inland waterways, introduction of new crops, and improvement in agricultural techniques." Diem did not neglect industrialization but saw it being "built upon... the agricultural base of the economy."[8] Unfortunately, as the Viet Minh had already implemented land reform policy in rural South Vietnam in 1945, Diem's program was perceived by small land owner and tenant farmers as favouring large and medium landowners, Vietnamese northerners and Catholics, and turning back the clock on land reform.

Between 1946 and 1954, Viet Minh cadres confiscated over 600,000 hectares of land from large and/or absentee landowners and redistributed them to impoverished peasants who

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[6] Nguyen Anh Tuan, *South Vietnam Trial and Experience: A Challenge for Development*, Ohio University Monographs in International Studies Southeast Asia Series, No. 80 (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies and Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1987), 41

[7] Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience* (New York: The New Press, 1994), 93

[8] Tuan, *South Vietnam Trial and Experience*, pp. 33, 39

often sheltered guerrillas and offered their children to serve in the VLA.[9] As for medium and small landowners, Viet Minh cadres forced them to reduce the rent price to tenant farmers by fifty percent. The Viet Minh's land reform policy prior to 1954 aimed to "tie the poor peasants closer to the revolution, and give them an incentive to pay taxes and send their children off to fight... [and] intended to show the poor peasants that the revolutionary government was the best guarantor of their personal dignity as well as their political and economic interests."[10] As Pierre Brocheux pointed out, the "official communist line" depicted the Diem government's land reform policy as favouring "the landlords, mandarins, and comprador capitalists." However, Brocheux asked rhetorically "was Ziem [Diem]'s policy so narrow?"[11]

More historians now agree that Diem's land reform policy aimed to improve the lot of South Vietnamese peasant farmers but that it encountered stiff resistance from the large and medium landowners who supported Diem. "To win the loyalty of the countryside," Marilyn B. Young suggested, "Diem's reforms would have to match or surpass the earlier [Viet Minh's land reform] program. And this created a larger problem: Diem's slender social base leaned heavily on the absentee landlords who crowded Saigon, awaiting armed support to return them—or at least their rent-collecting bailiffs—to the land."[12] In fact, one could argue that rather than matching or surpassing Viet Minh land reforms, the Diem government could have integrated it into the RVN's land reform of 1955. Was this possible? The answer is no. As one of the few scholars to have closely analyzed the conflict's economic aspects, Kolko agreed that the Diem government's economic policy benefited large and medium landowners rather than small

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[9] Kolko, *Anatomy of a War*, 92
[10] David W.P. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930-1975*, concise edition (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 67-68
[11] Pierre Brocheux, *The Mekong Delta: Ecology, Economy, and Revolution, 1860-1960* (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1995), 205
[12] Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: Harper-Perennial, 1991), 57

landowners and tenant farmers. However, Kolko argued further that the communists, the peasants who had benefited from the Viet Minh's 1945 land reform, and landowners were not the only groups opposing land reform. Diem had to deal too with the 112,000 South Vietnamese veterans and their families who also demanded free or cheap land from the new RVN government as a reward for their service to the old colonial authority from 1946 to 1954.[13]

Therefore, from mid-1954 to mid-1955, the unpopular Diem regime struggled against other non-communist political factions and paramilitary forces to become a government, President Diem, a political realist, supported the economic interests of big businesses and large landowners to gain their political support. Consolidating the regime's power base in Saigon and other urban centers in South Vietnam took precedence over satisfying rural needs. The Diem government passed Ordinance 2 in January and then Ordinance 7 in February 1955 to ensure that landowners reduced the rent price for tenant farmers by fifteen to twenty-five percent. Tenant farmers and their families were also compensated and could benefit from other social and economic programs which became part of the Diem government's pacification policy. However, a fifteen to twenty-five percent in rent reduction from the Diem government clearly paled compared to the Viet Minh's fifty percent rent reduction. So, when Ordinance 57 was passed a year later in October 1956, it did not solve the unequal landlord-peasant relationship in South Vietnam or gain political support for Diem. First, Ordinance 57 allowed small landowners and tenant farmers to resettle on undeveloped land in the Mekong River Delta. Second, it encouraged the building of factories in rural areas.[14] But the large landowners benefited most while small landowners and tenant farmers—lacking savings, farm equipment, beasts-of-burden, and insurance funds—could not afford to relocate to undeveloped lands. Therefore, many poor

[13] Kolko, *Anatomy of a War*, 93
[14] Philip E. Catton, *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 51-56

peasants were forced to labour for large landowners on rice paddies and in factories for low incomes. There was no promise that the conservative Diem's government would carry out radical land reform in favour of the small landowners and tenant farmers. In fact, there was no guarantee that meaningful land reform would encourage small landowners, tenant farmers, and poor rural masses to cooperate with the RVN government and military against the NFLSVN and PLFA given that many of them had regarded the Viet Minh's distributed land as their own.[15]

As the guerrilla war resumed, Diem's government and its military viewed land reform and development programs as means to strengthen RVN defence. The resettlement of Vietnamese northerners and Catholics in the Central Highlands and Mekong River Delta was a good example of how Diem used land reform and rural development to implant his influence while eliminating communist power in the countryside. Therefore, the Diem government's land reform and rural development programs, economically-driven, were also politically and militarily motivated. It was also an early important example of how RVNAF ground units were distracted from their organizational schedule, training regimen, and combat capability building process to meet political imperatives.

In terms, the northward migration from mid-1954 to mid-1955 did not compare to southward shift. Just one hundred thousand southerners went north. And while the majority of northern refugees were civilians, almost all heading north were Viet Minh political cadres and military personnel. Still, an estimated five thousand fervent Viet Minh guerrillas were ordered by the DRVN to "stay behind" to peacefully continue the political struggle to reunite Vietnam. However, should the reunification election mandated by the Geneva Agreements be violated, DRVN agents in South Vietnam were to prepare for armed struggle, to facilitate the infiltration

[15] Eric R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 197; Bernard B. Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams: A Political and Military Analysis* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), 310-311

of men and materials from North Vietnam, and to assist DRVN political and military efforts in the next phase of the long revolutionary war.[16]

Though the northward migration was small and less publicized, it had economic, political, and military implications South Vietnam. Diem's government relied on the ARVN to regroup, disarm, and transfer Viet Minh political cadres and military personnel to the DRVN and then to clear, secure, and build settlements in areas abandoned by the Viet Minh. Again using the ARVN, Diem's government moved Vietnamese northerners and Catholics into former Viet Minh's strongholds for two purposes. First, the RVN government and military wanted to prevent communist guerrillas from returning to their evacuated rural areas. Second, Diem's government and military wanted to implant political and military support in the countryside. Believing that Vietnamese northerners and Catholic villagers, having lived under Viet Minh political and military control, would influence their new South Vietnamese neighbours, the Diem government hoped to counter communist influence in surrounding villages. Economically, the new refugee settlement villages were to assist in the land reform and development of the countryside throughout South Vietnam.[17]

In spring 1955, ARVN conducted two large-scale evacuations of Viet Minh's political cadres and military personnel to be followed by the reoccupation of former Viet Minh's territories by Vietnamese northerner and Catholic settlers. Operation: FREEDOM was launched in Ca-Mau, the southern tip of the Mekong River Delta, from February 8th to March 12th, 1955, while Operation: LIBERATION was launched in Binh-Dinh, just south of the DMZ, from

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[16] Edgar O'Ballance, *The Wars in Vietnam, 1954-1980* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1981), 12-13; George McTurnan Kahin and John W. Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam* (New York: A Delta Book, 1969), 84; Rodger Swearingen and Hammond Rolph, *Communism In Vietnam: A Documentary Study of Theory, Strategy and Operational Practices* (Chicago: America Bar Association, 1967), 37-38; Thayer, *War By Other Means*, 17-19, 27

[17] Peter Hansen, "Bắ Đi Củ: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam, and Their Role in the Southern Republic, 1954-1959", *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3 (Fall 2009), 195

January 19th to June 1st, 1955.[18] Ca-Mau and Binh-Dinh were two designated areas where Viet Minh political cadres and military personnel were to convene and then be evacuated. The two ARVN commanders responsible for planning and implementing FREEDOM and LIBERATION were Lieutenant Colonel Duong Van Duc and Colonel Le Van Kim. FREEDOM and LIBERATION involved two ARVN divisions, their troops carefully instructed by Duc and Kim to treat Viet Minh personnel and local inhabitants with the utmost respect to counter Viet Minh propaganda that locals "would be pillaged and raped" by South Vietnamese soldiers backed by French and American imperialists.[19] In addition, intelligence gathering missions on enemy's strengths and popular attitudes toward the Viet Minh and the RVN in Ca-Mau and Binh-Dinh were conducted by South Vietnamese security services and military intelligence units.

FREEDOM and LIBERATION were part of a larger United States Information Agency (USIA) and CIA propaganda campaign to win over the international press, South Vietnamese peasants, Viet Minh guerrillas, and their families. USIA, CIA and ARVN personnel took great care to plan the two operations and train their men so as not to alienate the local population and Viet Minh personnel.[20] For example, in the Ca-Mau and Binh-Dinh regrouping centers, VNAF planes and ARVN troops distributed propaganda leaflets to Viet Minh guerrillas and their families about South Vietnam's promising future and their potential part in it. Former Viet Minh guerrillas who defected to the RVN government and military after 1954 led ARVN columns to convince local inhabitants that ARVN troops would protect them. Before departing for the DMZ, Viet Minh personnel spent time with families, were medically examined, and given hot meals

[18] Hồ Đắc Huân, *Thành-Tích Sáu Năm Hoạt-Động Của Chủnh-Phủ Việt Nam Cộng Hòa* (*The Performance of Six Active Years of the Republic of Viet Nam*) (Published in Saigon, RVN: the Ministry of Information, 1960/ Reprinted in Little Saigon, California: Van Loc Foundation, 2007), 859; Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars*, 233-236, 238-240
[19] Rufe Phillips, "Before We Lost in South Vietnam", in Harvey Neese and John O'Donnell, ed., *Prelude to Tragedy: Vietnam, 1960-1965* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 15
[20] Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars*, 232-233

and warm clothes for the colder weather of North Vietnam. ARVN political and psychological warfare officers also reminded them of rumours of famine, imprisonment, deportation, and execution of supposed traitors by DRVN security services, adding that DRVN officials blamed the southern Viet Minh for failing to defeat the sect militias.[21] USIA, CIA, and ARVN officers wanted to ensure that, "if Viet Minh regulars made the trip [to the DRVN] with lowered morale, so much the better."[22] By 1956, the USIA's manpower and operational budget in Vietnam included over twenty Americans, more than two hundred Vietnamese, and nine hundred thousand dollars, respectively.[23]

Operations FREEDOM and LIBERATION, according to Lansdale, "went down in Vietnamese history as a success."[24] Historian Cecil B. Currey also pointed out that CIA and ARVN propaganda had an effect as "sizeable units of Viet Minh combat forces and their dependents refused to board [trucks and ships heading for the DRVN]."[25] Though FREEDOM and LIBERATION were purely tactical successes, Lansdale's CIA team and Diem's government judged both missions on the basis of the initial public euphoria but did not delve more deeply to obtain a more honest picture. Rufe Phillips, a member of Lansdale's team, watched "amazement as the operation [FREEDOM and LIBERATION] progressed father south [of southern Vietnam] and how the people began coming out of their houses and voluntarily giving the [ARVN] soldiers water while vocally cheering them on."[26] Like Phillips, Lansdale judged the success of LIBERATION in Binh-Dinh based on its finale: The stoning of Viet Minh personnel as they left for the DMZ and the unusual welcome accorded to President Diem by villagers who "boosted

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[21] Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2006), 118-120
[22] Cecil B. Currey, *Edward Lansdale: The Unquiet American* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1998), 160
[23] Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 93
[24] Lansdale, *In The Midst of War*, 236
[25] Currey, *Edward Lansdale*, 161
[26] Rufe Phillips, "Before We Lost in South Vietnam", in Neese and O'Donnell, ed., *Prelude to Tragedy*, 15

him [Diem] up on their shoulders, so that all the crowd could see. A great cheer went up." Lansdale reminisced in his memoir that it was "a moment [Lansdale hoped] that all [Vietnamese] would remember—Diem, the foreigners, the [ARVN] troops, and the peoples."[27] Operations FREEDOM and LIBERATION destroyed remaining Viet Minh political cadres and military personnel while successfully restoring order, providing security, and re-establishing normalcy in the daily lives of the Binh-Dinh and Ca-Mau populations.[28]

However, contemporary MAAGV, JGS and CIA intelligence reports, performance evaluations of ARVN, and lessons learned from FREEDOM and LIBERATION revealed contradictory results. When he became the Deputy Assistant to the Secretary of Defence for Special Operations in 1958, Lansdale re-examined FREEDOM and LIBERATION more critically than he did later in his memoir. In a thirteen page memorandum entitled "'Pacification' in Vietnam", Lansdale described South Vietnam's various problems. "Bridges were blown, highways destroyed by cross-ditching, railroad lines sabotaged, the economy at a standstill (rice lands fallow, transport destroyed, and markets in ruins), and disease and hunger were rampant," assessed Lansdale. As "the Viet Minh withdrew openly, they left stay-behind organizations for cover political, psychological, and para-military operations. It was the evident Communist intent to continue domination of South Vietnam secretly." Worse yet, "80% of the [southern] Vietnamese civil service personnel" who lived and worked in Saigon were "largely inexperienced as minor functionaries under the French administrators" and had "no desire to accept government positions out in the 'wild', troubled countryside of the provinces." Lansdale concluded that while the RVN military was far from being well organized, vigorously trained, competently led, and highly motivated even though "nearly all field grade officers had college

[27] Lansdale, *In The Midst of War*, 241-243
[28] Hồ Đắc Huân, *Thành-Tích Sáu Năm Hoạt-Động Của Chủnh-Phủ Việt Nam Cộng Hòa (The Performance of Six Active Years of the Republic of Viet Nam)* (Saigon: The Ministry of Information, 1960), 860

educations," the ARVN was the "only nation-wide organization in the Vietnamese government" that possed discipline, cohesiveness, and was capable of "extending the administration of the government in Saigon over the provinces, including areas from which the Communist Viet Minh withdrawing under the Geneva Agreement."[29]

However, there were problems. VNA units, which had evacuated with FFEEC formations from North to South Vietnam in 1954, were disorganized, ill-trained, leaderless, and demoralized. Therefore, many of these VNA outfits were being reintegrated and reorganized into the RVNAF land forces. But they arrived in Ca-Mau, in Lansdale's opinion, "too late for training, with neither officers nor men understanding their mission. Thus, in the early days, there was little success, except for areas occupied by trained and well-motivated units. Some of the units simply moved into their designated areas and then sat idly. There were many incidents of stealing food, molesting of women, and similar misbehaviour by these untrained troops." Nevertheless, the VNA "attempted to organize some military government teams (GAMs), to establish local government under Army authority." However, the VNA, forced to carry out multiple missions simultaneously—fighting the CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF in Saigon-Cholon, securing refugee camps, and escorting Vietnamese northerners and Catholics to their permanent settlements—stretched its disorderly logistic system, demoralized troops, and inexperienced commanders to the limits. The consequences were unfortunate as "[GAMs] teams were undermanned and had little training for this duty [Operation: FREEDOM in Ca-Mau]." Lansdale concluded that "errors" from Operation: FREEDOM in Ca-Mau "were gradually corrected. The trained, indoctrinated units would immediately establish law and order, act as disciplined

[29] "'Pacification' in Vietnam" memorandum for the record by Colonel Edward G. Lansdale, Deputy Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, Special Operations, July 16, 1958", 1-2; Folder: 1201/Dept. Of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defence, Memorandum 1958-1961; Box: 42; Collection: Edward Geary Lansdale Papers; Archive: THIWRP

soldiers, and lend helping hands to the civilians in rebuilding ruined public markets, bridges, and dwellings. Army engineer units built bridges and roads."[30]

When LIBERATION in Binh-Dinh was launched on April 22nd, 1955, all VNA formations, especially paratrooper, marine, armour, and artillery units, were under tremendous pressure to finally defeat the militias. Nevertheless, following lessons learned from FREEDOM, VNA commanders and troops conducted LIBERATION in Binh-Dinh with "Not one single incident of misbehaviour was recorded in the entire operation" by USIA, CIA and MAAGV personnel.[31] The ARVN came out of FREEDOM and LIBERATION with at best a fifty percent quality performance rating. It had performed well in LIBERATION but poorly in FREEDOM. At worst, these operations revealed that the ARVN was incapable of carrying out different missions simultaneously, an essential skill in counter-guerrilla operations. To effectively combat guerrillas demanded that, from time to time, ARVN units support CG and SDC outfits during pacification campaigns while at other times ARVN formations conducted search and destroy operations against larger PAVN and PLAF units. Moreover, FREEDOM and LIBERATION did not enhance the combat capability building process of the RVNAF land force. Viet Minh political cadres and military personnel, ordered to adhere to the Geneva Agreements by the DRVN did not resist ARVN units. However, when PLAF and PAVN did fight back by 1960, the RVNAF's organization, training, and combat problems revealed themselves. If anything, FREEDOM and LIBERATION and efforts to neutralize the CDPF, BXPF, and HHPF rebels, while absolutely necessary, overstretched, weakened, and distracted the RVNAF land force from its organizational schedule, training regimen, and combat capability building process to counter the real threats posed by the combined PLAF and PAVN.

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[30] Ibid., 5-6
[31] Ibid., 10-11

The outcomes of FREEDOM and LIBERATION could not be evaluated on the basis of how ARVN units transported Viet Minh personnel to North Vietnam and then occupied Viet Minh-controlled territories. ARVN's search-and-destroy or/and clear-and-hold operations were a short-term tactical solution. The resettlement of Vietnamese northerners and Catholics in former Viet Minh strongholds to bolster Diem's government and the military in the countryside was a long-term strategic solution. One of these numerous operations took place in the fishing village of Binh-Hung. This small but strategically important village served as a model for MAAGV, USIA, CIA, JGS, and the Diem government to fill the political and military vacuum in the countryside after many Viet Minh units withdrew to the DRVN from 1954 to 1955.

Situated near the southern tip of the Ca-Mau peninsula, Binh-Hung's geography allowed its inhabitants maritime and commercial access to the Gulf of Thailand. The village's topography, complete with mangroves, muddy swamps, rivers, streams, and canals, favoured defenders over attackers. Binh-Hung was rich in rice production and salt and fresh water fishing industries, factors that made the village and its surrounding countryside strategically important to the Viet Minh's resistance against the JIA and the FFEEC. By controlling Binh Hung, the Viet Minh sustained a sizeable guerrilla base where guerrilla units recuperated, reorganized, retrained, and renewed their operations. The village's rice production and small fishing industries were vital as Viet Minh political cadres taxed rice farmers and fishermen, procured food and other material supplies, and recruited troops from the local population. Because of Binh-Hung's remote coastline, Viet Minh guerrillas received external assistance from Viet Minh agents operating in other colonized Southeast Asian countries. In fact, many beaches near Binh-Hung

were "known only to the Communist junks bringing in supplies occasionally or to smugglers from Singapore."[32]

When the Viet Minh's main force left in 1954, the stay-behind guerrillas reactivated their bases around the village. Because of its strategic importance to the communists, Diem's government and military permanently settled anti-communist Vietnamese northerners and Catholics there. Starting in the 1955, Binh-Hung was settled by nearly four hundred Vietnamese northerners and Catholics, including groups of anti-communist Chinese immigrants who had fled the CCP. The Diem government offered all settlers land plus household goods, farming equipment, livestock, and unlimited fishing rights. In return, the settlers would support Diem's government, help its military to eliminate guerrillas, and deprive the communists from receiving external assistance via the Gulf of Thailand. By mid-1959, Binh-Hung grew to twelve hundred people, its "houses strung out in a long line along the canal," surrounded by mud walls and guarded by "strong points for defense" against communist attacks. Generators provided electricity and light for the village while empty "artillery shell casings [were] hung from ropes; the casings are struck with a hammer as an alarm in case of Viet Cong attack." In 1962, a small helicopter landing pad was built outside of the mud wall to enable material replenishment, troop reinforcement, and the evacuation of wounded. By 1960, Binh- Hung was guarded by some eighty SDC and CG militiamen reinforced by over three hundred ARVN troopers. The RVNAF was armed with a combination of M-1 rifles, Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) machine guns, 60mm and 80mm Mortars, "home-made rifles, pistols, grenades, and long knives." But while these weapons were supplied by MAAGV, JGS and the CIA, communist guerrillas were

[32] MEMORANDUM, 9 February 1961 TO: "Holders of 'Binh Hung: A Counter-Guerrilla Case Study' dated 1 February 1961", 1-3; File #243: Edward G. Lansdale's speeches and writings; Box: #74; Collection: Edward Geary Lansdale Papers; Archive: THIWRP

reportedly "getting their U.S. weapons from combat with ARVN troops, picking them up after ambushes."[33]

Instructed by DRVN to carry out a political but not an armed struggle to reunify a divided Vietnam, from 1955 to 1959 communist guerrillas bombarded Binh-Hung's villagers and RVN political and military personnel with anti-Diem and anti-American propaganda, punctuated by occasional sniping, grenade tossing, mines, and booby-traps. However, starting in 1960, they launched large scale attacks on Binh Hung, part of a larger and protracted PLAF and PAVN plan to topple Diem's government. In response, Binh-Hung's garrison defended the village and sought to prevent communist guerrillas from roaming freely. Skirmishes between PLAF guerrillas and RVNAF units in and around Binh-Hung ranged from ambushes, well-coordinated attacks involving RVNAF land forces and VNAF bombers attacking PLAF bases, and major PLAF offensives that could only be repelled by artillery and close air support. By 1960, Binh-Hung's villagers were able to "cooperate with two nearby villages of Vietnamese against the Viet Cong [Vietnamese Communist was what the RVN and US officials called members of the NFLSVN and PLAF]." However, from 1955 to 1962, "the Viet Cong could move about more freely" during "the dry season" despite patrols and search-and-destroy operations regularly launched by RVNAF forces stationed in Binh-Hung. PLAF's guerrilla and main force units continued to receive men, weapons, ammunition, food, and other essential items through Binh-Hung. Sealing off coastal areas proved difficult as the small VNN had to allocate limited resources to control the lengthy South Vietnamese coastline.

In a visit to Binh-Hung in 1961, Lansdale's team encountered pessimism from villagers and militias. Bing-Hung's commander warned them that he and his men might not be alive the next time Lansdale returned: "It will really be war now.... Next year you will see somebody else

[33] Ibid., 4-6

here. Two hundred of us will be dead then."[34] After seven years, peace had not been restored in the village. However, as early as 1955, the Binh-Hung experience became a counter-guerrilla and pacification concept to top RVN and US officials who were convinced that "the BINH HUNG concept... could and should be used as a pattern for similar [counter-guerrilla and pacification] enterprises elsewhere in Vietnam."[35] The permanent resettlement of Vietnamese northerners and Catholics elsewhere in the Mekong River Delta and throughout the Central Highlands would be based on the Binh-Hung counter-guerrilla and pacification concept as Diem's government hoped to enhance government power and incite economic development in rural South Vietnam.[36]

The permanent resettlement of Vietnamese northerners and Catholics in former Viet Minh controlled territories in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam started in 1955. Again, ARVN units spearheaded refugee resettlement in evacuated Viet Minh areas. By 1956, these new settler villages and their surrounding hillsides were patrolled by SDC, CG, and ARVN units. Like Binh-Hung, these new settler villages served several purposes for Diem's government: Strategic, political, social, and economic.[37] The Central Highlands was strategically vital to both the DRVN and RVN given its location on the tri-border area that connected Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam. The tri-border area resembles a wilderness frontier with low valleys connecting rolling hillsides and rugged mountain chains. The Annamite, or Trường Sơn, mountain range of the Central Highlands covers 750 miles or 1,200 kilometers of South

[34] Ibid., 7-13
[35] "Letter, 9 October 1961, from Colonel Sidney V. Bingham Jr. to Brig. Gen. Lansdale", 1-2; File #842: Edward G. Lansdale U.S. Dept. Of Defence Office of Secretary of Defense Correspondence; Box: #36; Collection: Edward Geary Lansdale Papers; Archive: THWRP
[36] Brocheux, *The Mekong Delta*, 205
[37] Hồ Đắc Huân, *Thành-Tích Sáu Năm Hoạt-Động Của Chủnh-Phủ Việt Nam Cộng Hòa*, 352-356

Vietnam. The topography of the Trường Sơn mountain range is covered by pine forests and dense canopy jungles infested with tropical disease and teeming with wildlife.[38]

The tri-border area had many infiltration routes that were nearly impossible to seal off. Therefore, the DRVN regarded the Central Highlands as its main theatre of operation while the Mekong River Delta was secondary. The DRVN used PLAF units in the Mekong River Delta to draw, tie down, and distract South Vietnamese security forces while the PAVN infiltrated men, amassed supplies, and erected camps in the Central Highlands to bolster the PLAF and to fight the RVNAF if necessary. As a DRVN strategic assessment of the Central Highlands stated, the "destruction of the enemy's apparatus of oppression in the lowlands of Region 5 is a matter of great importance, not only in order to expand our control of the rural areas in order to gain manpower and resources, but also because it will have a very important effect in building and expanding our bases in the Central Highlands."[39] To PAVN planning staff, the stepping stone for any successful attack on the RVN was the Central Highlands. As the PAVN's official history indicated, when "the struggle movement among the local population in the lowlands suffered serious setbacks" from 1955 to 1957, Le Duan, a member of the Central Committee's Politburo, emphasized the need to carry out political and military struggles in "the cities, the lowlands, and the Central Highlands." However, Le Duan was certain that "the Central Highlands was a region of great political and military significance and value." Before the communist revolutionary struggle could descend to the villages and cities of lowland South Vietnam, Le Duan stressed it must began in the Highlands where "relatively secure areas to serve as base areas for our movement" could be built. As a political officer responsible for the tri-border area, Tran Luong

[38] Shannon McCune, "The Diversity of Indochina's Physical Geography", *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 4, French Indochina (Aug., 1947), 336-338; Eleanor Jane Sterling, Martha Maud Hurley and Le Duc Minh with illustration by Joyce A. Powzyk, *Vietnam: A Natural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 3-5

[39] Quoted from Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 202. See endnote #50, 453

concurred with the need to "expand the building of base areas in the Central Highlands and the western portions of the provinces of Central Vietnam. Establish production organizations [i.e., food productions and storages]... Form a number of full-time platoons and organize self-defence units in tribal communities and in villages to protect mass struggle movements, rescue cadre who have been captured by the enemy, eliminate enemy tyrants, and revive and expand our political organization."[40] By the 1960s, parallel to the "western portions of the provinces of Central Vietnam" came the infamous Ho Chi Minh Trail, the principal logistic and communication network between the PAVN and the PLAF during the Vietnam War. But difficult geography made the journey south for PAVN personnel and material arduous, while JGS and MAAGV attempts to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail using aerial bombardment and ground attacks only temporary disrupted reinforcement and infiltration.

The Central Highlands was strategically important to the RVN government and military as well. Many RVNAF senior officers and JGS staff members had fought alongside FFEEC mobile groups tasked with patrolling Central Vietnam. Some had participated in the bloody fighting north of Hue City in a strip, twenty miles long by three hundred yards wide, that journalist Bernard B. Fall had called the "Street Without Joy." Many Vietnamese personnel had been wounded or captured when the infamous FFEEC Mobile Group 100 was annihilated between Kontum and Ban Me Thout in late 1953.[41] Persistent insecurity in the lowlands of Central Vietnam had been the direct result of Viet Minh strength in the highlands and the FFEEC's inability to weaken it. Like their DRVN opposites, RVN civilian and military officials were mindful of the history of the Central Highlands, notably as an impregnable natural redoubt when General Tran Hung Dao's forces had descended from the mountains to butcher Mongol

[40]Merle L. Pribbenow, translated, *The Military History Institute of Vietnam's The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 47-48
[41] Bernard B. Fall, *Street Without Joy* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1994), 144-173, 185-250

invaders in the fifteenth century and Phan Dinh Phung and his followers had resisted France in the nineteenth century.[42] Like the Mekong River Delta, the RVN erected a "human wall" in the Central Highlands to counter infiltration and to repel DRVN conventional attacks.[43] Further, the Central Highlands filled with untapped natural resources—minerals, rubber, coffee plantations, forestry, plus fertile farmland—and it was a popular holiday vacation and tourist destination. Thus, the region was economically important to the RVN's overall Gross National Product (GNP).[44]

However, the economic development of the Central Highlands, including the repair of old road and rail networks and the building of new communication and locomotive systems, was also designed to enhance national security. All highways and settlements in the Central Highlands were constructed to revamp trade but also to provide a means for the RVN "to rush reinforcements from the coast to the 'human wall' by truck should the need arise."[45] For example, the beautiful tourist city of Dalat and its surrounding plateaus, covered by "signature pine trees, rolling hills, and waterfalls," was one of the most advertised vacation spots by the RVN's Ministry of Tourism.[46] However, Dalat was also the home of the National Military Academy which educated South Vietnamese cadets for future military and political duties. As had been done in the Mekong River Delta, Diem's government intentionally inserted new villages of Vietnamese northerners and Catholics to project RVN military strength and spread RVN political influence beyond the large towns and cities of the Central Highlands. In 1956,

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[42] Phạm-Văn-Sơn, *Việt-Sử Tân Biên: Tran Le Thời-Đại, quyển II* (History of Vietnam: Tran Le and the Middle Age, book 2) (Saigon: Co Xuat Ban Dai Nam, 1956; Glendale: Dai-Nam republished, year: n/a), 225-276; Phạm-Văn-Sơn, *Việt-Sử Tân Biên: Việt-Nam Cách-Mạng Cận-Sử, Việt-Nam Kháng Pháp Sử, 1885-1914, quyển VI* (History of Vietnam: The Vietnamese Revolution in Modern History, 1885-1914, History of Vietnam's resistance against France, book 6) (Saigon: Co Xuat Ban Dai Nam, 1956; Glendale: Dai-Nam republished, year: n/a), 123-191

[43] Catton, *Diem's Final Failure*, 58-59

[44] Hồ Đắc Huân, *Thành-Tích Sáu Năm Hoạt-Động Của Chủnh-Phủ Việt Nam Cộng Hòa*, 362-366

[45] Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 72

[46] Eric T. Jenning, *Imperial Heights: Dalat and the Making and Undoing of French Indochina* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 254

Dalat was home to 13,368 refugees from northern Vietnam.[47] By 1960, 125,000 refugees lived in the Central Highlands.[48]

Unlike the more ethnically homogenous Mekong River Delta, however, the Central Highlands was home to "a handful of tribes belonging to what is culturally the oldest stratum of the Indo-Chinese peoples." To the lowland Vietnamese, the indigenous highlanders were either derogatorily referred to as savages (*nguoi moi*) or collectively as Montagnards or highlanders (*nguoi thuong*). According to French anthropologist and ethnographer Georges Condominas who conducted field research amongst the tribes in Central Vietnam from 1950 to 1970, lowland Vietnamese perceived the Montagnards as a race that possessed "ferocity, anarchic independence, nomadism… magic powers. Such sinister fame has been aggravated by reports of the world these people live in, which is said to be inhabited by wild beasts and infested with deadly fevers and malefic spirits."[49] Not without reason, the Montagnards distrusted all Vietnamese regardless of their political allegiances as the Vietnamese were more dangerous colonialists than the French imperialists. American anthropologist Gerald C. Hickey went to South Vietnam in the 1960s to conduct research for his doctoral dissertation and the RAND Corporation. A Montagnard tribal elder told Hickey, "The Vietnamese talk equality, but they don't mean what they say. In their hearts they want to dominate us. They are colonialists. The French were bad at the mouth, but in their hearts they were good."[50]

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[47] Jenning, *Imperial Heights*, 255
[48] Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 72
[49] Georges Condominas, *The Story of a Montagnard Village in the Central Highlands of Vietnam* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 3-4
[50] Gerald C. Hickey, *Window on a War: An Anthropologist in the Vietnam Conflict* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2002), 66-67

To ease the infiltration of DRVN men and materials into the RVN through the tri-border region, PAVN and PLAF cadres tried to persuade the Montagnards to join their cause.[51] However, since the sole objective of PAVN and PLAF units in the tri-border area was to prevent the disruption of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, PAVN and PLAF logistic personnel could pick their paths. This allowed them to avoid Montagnard villages altogether unless the inhabitants were actively aiding the RVN government and military, in which case they would have to be neutralized. Preventing infiltration along the Ho Chi Minh Trail was very important, but it was not the only concern South Vietnam government had in central Vietnam. While security of the Central Highlands was vital to South Vietnam's defence, its development could contribute much to RVN's economic growth. However, to secure and develop the Central Highlands, the RVN needed Montagnard cooperation. Having populated former Viet Minh strongholds with ardently anti-communist Vietnamese northerners and Catholics, RVN forces used these new villages as bases to spread political and military control over the Central Highlands. Like Binh-Hung, these villages were defended by a combination of SDC, CG, and ARVN units. The JGS and MAAGV also secretly introduced US Army Green Berets into the tri-border region to train and advise anti-communist Montagnard partisans. The Montagnards also had help from the Civilian Irregular Defence Group (CIDG). Tasked with defending Montagnard villages, the CIDG also conducted anti-infiltration operations with SFOD teams in South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos to disrupt the Ho Chi Minh Trail.[52] Additional SFOD teams and RVNAF's special force units, the Studies and Observations Group (SOG), were inserted along the Laotian-North Vietnamese border and

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[51] Pamela McElwee, "'Blood Relatives' or Uneasy Neighbors? Kinh Migrants and Ethnic Minority Interactions in the Trùông Sôn Mountains", *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 3, issue 3 (Fall 2008), 94

[52] ARVN Special Force Lieutenant Colonel Phan Ba Ky, *Luc-Luong Dac-Biet giua Nhung To-Chuc Chien-Tranh Khong-Quy-Uoc cua Quan-Luc Viet-Nam Cong-Hoa* (Special Forces and Unconventional Warfare Operations of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces) (Irvine: Nam Van, 2006), 97-104; Robert K. Brigham, *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army* (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 2006), 5; Shelby L. Stanton, *Green Berets At War* (New York: Ivy Books, 1985), 45-47

into northeastern Cambodia where they set up eavesdropping posts and conducted long range reconnaissance patrols to provide advanced warning if PAVN divisions mobilized for a southward attack.[53]

Seeking long-term political support, military assistance and cooperation on developmental projects in the Central Highland, Diem's government dealt with the Montagnards as it did with the sects. Using a combination of coercion and persuasion, the Diem government integrated former FFEEC-organized, trained, and led Montagnard anti-guerrilla forces into the RVNAF and assimilated Montagnards into South Vietnamese society instead of meeting their desires for social, military, and political autonomy.[54] The disrupting effect of the Diem government's assimilation policy was revealed by Major Nguyen Van Nghiem, one of many officers charged with implementing the Diem government's assimilation policy. As Nghiem recalled:

> The [southern] Vietnamese government wanted to assimilate them [the Montagnards] quickly.... President Ngo Dinh Diem signed a decree denying the montagnards' land title. The montagnards had only the rights to receive the products of their crops. Land was reserved to settle hundred thousand Vietnamese from lowland. The montagnard officers and officials were forced to change their names into the Vietnamese names. Their languages were not allowed to be taught to their children in the elementary schools. Educational officials had received the order to burn and destroy the montagnard textbooks. Ministry of Justice closed all the custom courts on the highland despite the difference in the social organizations between the Montagnards and the Vietnamese.... The montagnards suffered very much with this unfair policy. In 1957, leaders of four biggest tribes, Bahnar, Jarai, Rhade, and Koho, formed a political organization BAJARAKA in order to struggle against the [southern] Vietnamese government. Not only all of them were arrested and imprisoned but all important montagnard officials were moved to work in the lowland too.[55]

The Bajaraka Movement, supported by different tribes, was easily crushed by the ARVN. The ARVN destroyed Bajaraka paramilitary forces because tribal militias were disorganized, had few

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[53] John L. Plaster, *SOG: The Secret Wars of America's Commandos in Vietnam* (New York: Onyx, 1998), 17-20

[54] Le Dinh Chi, *Nguoi Thuong Mien Nam Viet Nam* (The Montagnards of Southern Vietnam) (Gardena: Van Moi Publishing House, 2006), 625-631

[55] Major Nguyen Van Nghiem's Private Papers on the Montagnards of the Central Highland, South Vietnam. *Van De Dong Bao Thuong Viet Nam Tu 1954 – Den Nay* (*Issues of the Vietnamese Indigenious Populations from 1954 to the Present Day*), 2

arms, could mobilize neither internal nor external assistance, and lacked leadership because tribal chiefs were bitterly divided over their movement's means and ends.[56]

However, Diem's government victory over the Bajaraka Movement in the late 1950s in the Central Highlands resembled its tactical—not strategic—success against the sects in the Mekong River Delta. Gerald C. Hickey, who witnessed 23rd Division's suppression of Bajaraka demonstrators, noted: "The Bajaraka Movement was forced underground, but Diem's attempts to crush ethnonationalism among the highlanders had failed."[57] At best, the Diem government had forced the sects and dissident tribes underground. At worst, the RVN left its less dangerous political and military opponents with no choice but to join its more dangerous communist enemy. This occurred when the Diem government crushed the remnants of the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang (Viet Nam Nationalist Party or VNQDD) and Dai Viet Quoc Dan Dang (Greater Viet Nationalist Party or DVQDD) in central Vietnam's coastal lowland provinces.

As ARVN units engaged the sect militias in the Saigon-Cholon area and the Mekong River Delta region, more ARVN formations were dispatched to the RVN's northernmost provinces to suppress the VNQDD and DVQDD. The VNQDD and DVQDD were handicapped by the lack of organization, discipline, and support in the countryside despite their popularity in towns and cities. Both parties had been effectively crippled by the French colonial police and military in 1930s long before Diem's government hammered them in the mid-1950s.[58] However, neither the French nor Diem's government could completely wipe out the VNQDD and

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[56] Le Dinh Chi, *Nguoi Thuong Mien Nam Viet Nam*, 636-644; Thayer, *War By Other Means*, 145-151

[57] Hickey, *Window on a War*, 68

[58] Hoang Van Dao, *Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang: Lich Su Dau Tranh Can Dai, 1927-1954* (Viet Nam Nationalist Party: The Historic Struggle, 1927-1954) (Garden Grove: Tan Viet Publishing House, 2006), 118-127; Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858-1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 315-316, 334, 339; David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 377-378; Peter Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 201-206; Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 217-223

DVQDD. As during the colonial regime when VNQDD and DVQDD members went underground or went over to the VCP and the Viet Minh, remaining VNQDD and DVQDD members joined the NFLSVN after the RVN defeated them in Quang Tri, Quang Nam and Thu Thien provinces. The DVQDD, for example, was 1,000 marquis strong in 1954. However, poorly organized, isolated, without support from inside and outside of the country, and leaderless, DVQDD rebel units were overwhelmed by the ARVN in August 1955.[59]

By finally destroying the CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF in the Mekong River Delta and the VNQDD and DVQDD in central Vietnam, the RVN had won multiple tactical victories. But their foes, seeking a united front which eventually became the NFLSVN in 1960, communist officials in North and South Vietnam opened up their political organization, military arsenals, and leadership positions to the defeated non-communist factions. As early as October 1955, the 8th Plenum of the Party Central Committee in Hanoi ordered the southern Party Regional Committee to adhere to the DRVN's united front policy:

> We must clearly understand that the groups that are now opposing Diem, such as the Hoa Hao, the Binh Xuyen, and the Cao Dai in Nam Bo [southern Vietnam], the Dai Viet Party in Quang Tri, and the Nationalist Party (Quoc Dan Dang) in Quang Nam are doing so for their own benefit and status, but that they also oppose us and that all of them have committed cruel acts against the people. But they are now opposing Diem, so we must win them over by fully exploiting the contradictions... In winning them over and cooperating with them we must principally endeavor to win over the infrastructure, while also establishing ties with and win over the upper-echelon groups that can be won over or with whom we can establish ties. We must not win over or establish ties with the chieftains, who have committed many crimes against the people.[60]

Therefore, the communists welcomed the foot soldiers but not their leaders of non-communist political and armed factions into their ranks. From 1955 to 1959, Diem's government used its internal security intelligence services, municipal and national police forces, and the ARVN to arrest, imprison, and kill communist cadres and guerrillas as well as non-communist dissidents

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[59] Carlisle A. Thayer, *War By Other Means: National Liberation and Revolution in Viet-Nam, 1954-60* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), 39

[60] Quoted in Thayer, *War By Other Means*, 51-52

and bandits.[61] While the mostly leaderless non-communist rebels lacked organization and weapons, disciplined communist guerrillas refused to fight back as they had been ordered by the DRVN to employ only political means despite southern commissars' constant requests to retaliate militarily as they believed the policy of reunification by peaceful means was naïve. Therefore, ARVN, CG, and SDC units were able to operate "effectively" in the countryside only because communist guerrillas limited their military action to assassinating village chiefs, sabotaging roads and bridges, raiding unprotected convoys, and protecting political cadres and hidden arm caches from South Vietnamese troops.[62]

A JGS and MAAGV's Intelligence Summary, dated January 2nd, 1957, confirmed that communist political cadres and military personnel were strictly obeying DRVN's directive to fight when it was absolutely necessary. "The Viet Cong, according to captured documents," stated a JGS and MAAGV Intelligence Summary, "are presently interested mainly in survival. To do this, they have received instructions to lay low, reorganize, propagandize with legal limits [i.e., organizing student bodies, labour forces and unions to go on strikes], infiltrate government posts including the army, preach peaceful coexistence, strengthen their cells and try to take over dissident forces by infiltrating and using such slogans as 'People's Liberation Front.'"[63] Communist agents were so successful that by late 1958, for example, JGS and MAAGV intelligence sections had uncovered that 151 of 500 CG troops stationed in the Cai Be district of Dinh Tuong province in the Mekong River Delta were enemy agents. By late 1959, the

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[61] Hồ Đắc Huân, *Thành-Tích Sáu Năm Hoạt-Động Của Chủnh-Phủ Việt Nam Cộng Hòa*, pp. 860; Tran Van Dai et al., *Quan su 4: Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa Trong Gai Doan Hinh Thanh, 1946-1955* (Military History 4: The Formative Years of the RVNAF, 1946-1955) (Taiwan: Dai Nam Xuat Ban Publishing House, 1972), 391-458

[62] Thayer, *War By Other Means*, 139-145; Anthony James Joes, *The War For South Viet Nam, 1954-1975* (London: Praeger, 2001), 49-50

[63] "Intelligence Summary No. 1-57, 2 January 1947", 3; File: MAAGV Intel. Summaries 1957; Box: #11; RG 472: Records of the United States Forces In Southeast Asia, Adjutant Division; Archive: NARA II

supposedly pacified village of Binh Ninh fell under the control of enemy agents posing as village councilors before they were imprisoned by the ARVN.[64]

DRVN and NFLSVN agents also penetrated higher up the chain-of-command and southern society, gathering intelligence and wreaking havoc on South Vietnam's government from within.[65] Reporting on the aftermath of the ARVN's "supposed destruction" of the sects, the JGS and MAAGV pessimistically concluded that the last "vestiges of Cao Dai armed dissident strength have reportedly joined mixed dissident Viet Cong units in the Plaine Des Joncs area." JGS and MAAGV's intelligence officers could not conclude for "sure what the present status of the Hoa Hao strength is, nor what proportion has been infiltrated by Viet Cong cadres." Noting that HHPF strength had been reduced from 1,300 to 800, the reduction had not happened because the ARVN had killed or captured those 500 men even though the RVN's political and military integration policy had lead to "desertions [of HHPF personnel] to the National Government [RVN]." Rather, JGS and MAAGV believed the numerical figure reflected "such thing as: splintering of Hoa Hao factions, escape into Cambodia of some units, joining with the Viet Cong of other Hoa Hao units."[66]

RVN operatives arrested, imprisoned, re-educated, and killed former Viet Minh members suspected of loyalty to the DRVN or who were unwilling to be integrated into the RVNAF. The Anti-Communist Denunciation Campaign, which lasted from the 1955's beginning of 1956's end, and the Study Campaign which started in 1957, instituted propaganda, political indoctrination, and psychological warfare campaigns against Viet Minh cadres who remained in

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[64] Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*, 95

[65] Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 39, 253 and 274; Larry Berman, *Perfect Spy: The Incredible Double Life of Pham Xuan An, Time Magazine Reporter & Vietnamese Communist Agent* (New York: Collins, 2007), 51-81, 115-154

[66] "Intelligence Summary No. 1-57, 2 January 1947", 3; File: MAAGV Intel. Summaries 1957; Box: #11; RG 472: Records of the United States Forces In Southeast Asia, Adjutant Division; Archive: NARA II

the RVN after 1954. Seeking to cleanse South Vietnam of communism, the Anti-Communist Denunciation Campaign and Study Program took place "in villages, hamlets, schools, government offices, military units, or private groups." The RVN government organized anti-communist rallies in cities and towns where "a speaker would present facts about the Communist doctrine and the subterfuges and crimes of the Communists." Former Viet Minh and communist defectors were "used to denounce Communist atrocities" and "took the oath of allegiance to the Nationalist [Diem] government." South Vietnamese were encouraged to burn DRVN and NFLSVN flags and "actively tracked down underground Communist cadres, a large number of these cadres were arrested, and many documents, weapons and military supplies kept in caches were seized."[67]

The Anti-Communist Denunciation and Study campaigns produced mixed results. Certainly, the campaigns captured or forced communist cadres in South Vietnam deeper underground. Since their movements and political activities were strictly monitored by RVN's security forces, communist cadres had to protect themselves and their followers and hide their war materials and communication networks.[68] RVN official records indicated that 94,000 former Viet Minh cadres defected to the RVN while over 5,600 ex-Viet Minh guerrillas surrendered. However, Diem's government never released statistics indicating how many former Viet Minh revolutionaries had been jailed, executed, or sent to "re-education camps."[69]

However, the Anti-Communist Denunciation and Study campaigns also damaged Diem's government. First, it was extremely difficult to "distinguish between anticolonial patriotism and

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[67] Major General Nguyen Duy Hinh and Brigadier General Tran Dinh Tho, *The South Vietnamese Society*, Indochina Monograph Series (College Park, M.D.: NARA II Library, 1978), 45

[68] Thayer, *War By Other Means*, 81-82, 114-117; George McTurnan Kahin and John W. Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam* (New York: A Delta Book, 1969), 108; Pribbenow, *The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam*, 15-16

[69] George McTurnan Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1987), 96

actual membership in the Communist Party."[70] However, the RVN's SSPS, municipal and national police forces, CG, SDC, and ARVN which executed the Anti-Communist Denunciation and Study campaigns suffered greatly from organizational, training, and leadership problems. Such deficiencies made the task of finding former Viet Minh personnel who remained loyal to the DRVN and separating them from ex-Viet Minh guerrillas who were genuine patriots and nationalists incredibly daunting.[71]

The second backlash of the Anti-Communist Denunciation and Study campaigns derived directly from the first. Lansdale concluded that the "vast majority of the Vietminh who fought the French during the 8 years of the Indo-China War" were "convinced non-Communists, who were most resentful at having to serve under [Vietnamese Communist] Party members of lesser military ability. Thus, after Geneva, some Vietminh leaders and units deserted… swore loyalty to Diem… their backgrounds were well-known to officials in the Presidency."[72] Lansdale's conclusion had merits. However, some former Viet Minh defectors were DRVN agents spying on the RVN. One of the famous DRVN's covert agents—his activities were unknown until 1981—was ARVN Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao. A northerner and a Catholic, two personal factors propelled Thao's career in the Diem government and military. During the French Indochina War, Thao had been a Viet Minh intelligence officer. After 1954, Thao moved to South Vietnam and swore allegiance to the Diem government. From 1960 to 1961, he was Nhu's right hand man in the implementation of the Strategic Hamlet Program, one of RVN's comprehensive counter-guerrilla strategies that will be discussed shortly. Thao "deliberately propelled the program ahead

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[70] Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*, 97

[71] Robert Scigliano and Guy H. Fox, *Technical Assistance In Vietnam: The Michigan State University Experience* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1967), 14-23

[72] "'Pacification' in Vietnam" memorandum for the record by Colonel Edward G. Lansdale, Deputy Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, Special Operations, July 16, 1958", 6; Folder: 1201/Dept. Of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defence, Memorandum 1958-1961; Box: 42; Collection: Edward Geary Lansdale Papers; Archive: THIWRP

at breakneck speed in order to estrange South Vietnam's peasants and drive them into the arms of the Vietcong." From 1962 to 1963, Thao conspired with SPSS director Tuyen to overthrow Diem. After RVNAF senior officers toppled the Diem government, Thao spearheaded a faction consisting of elite RVNAF land force units to oust General Nguyen Khanh after he overthrew the RVNAF generals who had gotten rid of Diem.[73] Thao was not the only DRVN agent who rallied to the RVN to spy for the communists and bring down the non-communist government in South Vietnam. However, Thao's case was the most famous as no other DRVN agents, excepting journalist Pham Xuan An,[74] managed to so deeply penetrate the RVN chain-of-command.

But the Anti-Communist Denunciation and Study campaigns so effectively alienated most South Vietnamese classes, including the RVN security establishments that DRVN's agent provocateurs were but one of many factions opposing Diem. Therefore, the third backlash engendered by the Anti-Communist Denunciation and Study campaigns involved the negative impact they had on innocents who happened to have family members who had served in the Viet Minh prior to 1954. The Anti-Communist Denunciation and Study campaigns turned Vietnamese southerners against each other in an orgy of politically motivated faulty accusations based on personal and family vendettas. The result was a vicious cycle of indiscriminate violence against supposed "communist sympathizers" whose relatives had served in the Viet Minh but whose political allegiances were never clear. In the Mekong River Delta province of An Xuyen, for example, the Anti-Communist Denunciation and Study campaigns in 1956 led to the surrender of 8,125 communist agents, the denunciation of 9,806 suspected communist agents, and the identification of 29,978 supposed communist sympathizers. However, there were little evidence

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[73] Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 39, 274, 300, 317; Former Minister of Justice of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam Truong Nhu Tang with David Chanoff and Doan Van Toai, *A Viet Cong Memoir: An Inside Account of the Vietnam War and its Aftermath* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 42-62

[74] Thomas A. Bass, *The Spy Who Loved Us: The Vietnam War and Pham Xuan An's Dangerous Game* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), 1-5

against the accused agents and/or sympathizers other than their relatives had served in the Viet Minh or they might have aid to Viet Minh fighters, acts that the majority of the Vietnamese had committed during the French Indochina War.[75]

When the Anti-Communist Denunciation and Study campaigns prompted more opposition, the Diem government passed Decree 10/59 in 1959, mercilessly punishing those who had been affiliated with the Viet Minh. The decree allowed RVN security personnel to arrest and punish communist cadres, suspected communists, and communist sympathizers. In a nation-wide atmosphere of fear and paranoia, neighbours denounced each other to protect themselves from being charged themselves for alleged sympathy and aid to the communists, crimes that were punishable by imprisonment and/or death. In his study of Dinh Tuong province in the Mekong River Delta, historian David W.P. Elliott found that "Decree 10/59 created an atmosphere of terror in the countryside of My Tho [another Mekong River Delta's province] and exacerbated the corruption and authoritarianism of local officials" just as it did in Dinh Tuong.[76] In 1959, when the Rand Corporation interviewed twenty-three captured communist guerrillas, it found that the Anti-Communist Denunciation and Study campaigns had spurred new support for the NFLSVN and PLAF:

> The explanation is not that the cadres were exceptionally gifted but the people they talked to were ready for rebellion. The people were like a mound of straw, ready to be ignited.... If at that time the Government in the South had been a good one, if it had not been dictatorial, then launching the [NFLSVN] movement would have been difficult.

The US National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) a year later concurred, adding there were "indications of increasing dissatisfaction with the Diem government have probably encouraged the Hanoi regime to take stronger action at this time."[77]

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[75] Kahin, *Intervention*, 96-98
[76] Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*, 102-104
[77] Neil Sheehan et. al., *The Pentagon Papers: The Complete and Unabridged Series as published by the New York Times* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), 69-70

The Anti-Communist Denunciation and Study campaigns imprisoned numerous former Viet Minh revolutionaries suspected of being VCP members and spies for the DRVN. However, like its political and military integration policy toward the sects, Diem's government tried to integrate ex-Viet Minh guerrillas into the RVNAF land force units recognizing that while they were untrustworthy, their valuable insider knowledge of communist organizations and operations and their popularity amongst the peasants could bolster South Vietnam's security. But many ex-Viet Minh guerrillas despised the Diem government and the VCP equally. In fact, many non-communist members had left the Viet Minh because communist cadres had dealt unfairly with those of different social and political backgrounds. ARVN Major General Lu Lan, who had begun his military career with the VLA, for example, recounted the pervasive patriotic sentiment and nationalistic feeling engendered when the Viet Minh promised to win back "independence, liberty, and happiness" from the French.[78] ARVN Lieutenant Colonel Tran Ngoc Chau, Lan's classmate at the VNMA and lifetime friend,[79] also had begun his fight for his country with the VLA. Chau remembered:

> It was the bourgeoisie, the mandarins, and the aristocrats of Vietnamese society that formed the backbone of Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945. They were all dedicated to an independent Vietnam free of the French.... I fought as a volunteer with Ho Chi Minh's forces for five years. Like thousands of others, I received no pay, not even a uniform during the first two years. We had one rifle for every three soldiers, a submachine gun for every twelve soldiers, and a light machine gun for every platoon, usually about forty men. We had no artillery, no tanks, and no air support, and most of us had less than a month of training. But in every village, we were given water, food, and shelter. Even in the French-controlled cities, people took great risks to support us and give us medicine, gifts, and admiration.[80]

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[78] General Lu Lan, "The People's War or War on the People?", in Neese and O'Donnell, ed., *Prelude to Tragedy*, 131

[79] Trang Ngoc Chau with Ken Fermoyle, *Hawks, Doves and the Dragon: Memoirs of Tran Ngoc Chau*, this unpublished memoirs and private papers of ARVN Lieutenant Colonel Chau was made available by the courtesy of General Lu Lan and his daughter Lu Anh-Thu to this author during the research trip in Washington, D.C., in July 2004

[80] Tran Ngoc Chau with Tom Sturdevant, "My War Story From Ho Chi Minh to Ngo Dinh Diem", in Neese and O'Donnell, ed., *Prelude to Tragedy*, 182-183

Like many other VLA soldiers, Chau and Lan left the Viet Minh when VCP cadres purged resistance fighters they considered to be class enemies because they came from landowning classes or the urban middle and upper classes.

Lan's decision to defect to the non-communist side stemmed mainly from his discovery that the Viet Minh was led by the VCP. But his mandarin background also had made him a class enemy to the party. "This was my first encounter with the concept of the proletariat and class struggle," Lan wrote.[81] Lieutenant Colonel Chau defected to the non-communist side because he distrusted communist doctrine and was skeptical that the VLA's chance of defeating the FFEEC. However, Chau worried for his life and the lives of family members still served in the VLA. "Considering all these factors," he wrote, "I decided to leave the Viet Minh." Thinking of his brothers and sisters still serving the VLA, "I decided not to tell them of my decision. I simply walked into the office of the province chief in Quang Nam, who was an old friend of my father's, and announced my defection."[82]

The case of ARVN General Lam Quang Thi's distant cousin, Lam Quang Phong, summed up why many Vietnamese joined the VLA to resist the FFEEC and then defected to join the RVNAF after 1954. The story of ARVN Special Force Commander Lam Quang Phong was told by Thi:

> [Young] Vietnamese mistook the Viet Minh for genuine nationalists whose only goal was to get rid of French colonialism, many followed them... Lam Quang Phong, my distant cousin, was a case in point.... When the Viet Minh declared war against the French in 1945, he [Phong]... joined the *maquis*.... He was feared by the French, who had even put a price on his head. However, since he descended from a *bourgeois* family and refused to become a member of the Communist Party, and because his fame as a military commander was viewed as a threat to the party hierarchy, the Viet Minh... to use the French to get rid of him... They [the Viet Minh] did not want to execute Phong themselves because it would create dissension in his regiment where his men still remained loyal to him.... The French general let Phong go.... As the French general had correctly predicted, Phong was tried for treason and sentenced to death by a Viet Minh popular tribunal. He was saved from execution by the mothers of the men in his regiment who staged a demonstration in front of

[81] Lan, "People's War or War on the People?", in Neese and O'Donnell, ed., *Prelude to Tragedy*, 133-134
[82] Chau, "My War Story From Ho Chi Minh to Ngo Dinh Diem", in Neese and O'Donnell, ed., *Prelude to Tragedy*, 184

> the headquarters of the Administrative Committee of the Resistance.... In 1954, after the Geneva agreements, Phong rallied to the Vietnamese National Army. He attended the United States Command and General Staff College and eventually rose to the rank of colonel in ARVN's Special Forces.[83]

However, not all former VLA fighters advanced very far in their military careers after being integrated into the RVNAF as Diem's government did not trust them. Many former VLA guerrillas who had gone to the DRVN were re-infiltrated back into South Vietnam to lead the NFLSVN and its PLAF units.[84] For those former Viet Minh resistance fighters who joined the DRVN and NFLSVN, they felt the Diem government's repressive measures could only be resisted by armed struggle.[85]

By 1959's end, the Diem government's repressive acts against all political adversaries, communist or not, alienated not only the rural masses but also the urban elites who had supported Diem in 1955. Middle and upper class Vietnamese, educators, scholars, literati, artisans, and intelligentsia had taken on leadership positions within the various communist and non-communist nationalist parties opposed to French colonialism. These Vietnamese elites had not spoken for the entire Vietnamese population, but their thoughts, writings, actions, and memories were inspirational calls to-arms for the Vietnamese people against imperialism, colonialism, political tyranny, social injustice, economic inequality, and religious persecution.

In early 1960, a group of nationalists, composed of university professors, intellectuals, activists, physicians, lawyers, and others, drawn from all regional and religious backgrounds, gathered in secret at *l'Hôtel de Caravelle* in Saigon. They sought to ignite a meaningful dialogue between the people and the government in order to turn the war around without publicly

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[83]Lieutenant General Lam Quang Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century: A South Vietnamese General Remembers the Indochina War to the Fall of Saigon* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2001), 20-22
[84] Captain Francis J. "Bing" West, Jr. (USMC, Retired), *The Village* (New York: Pocket Books, 2003), 3-8, 102-104
[85] Tang, *A Viet Cong Memoir*, 37-41

discrediting President Diem.[86] Their six page *Manifeste de Caravelle* did not demand that Diem relinquish power. Rather, they asked the government to reform itself in four specific areas: "la Politique", "l'Administration", "l'Armee" and "les Affaires economique et socials." *Le Groupe Caravelle* asked that political power be shared with the legislative and judicial branches rather than being concentrated in the RVN's executive branch. Press freedom should be respected while the rights of non-communist political opposition to voice their opinions should not be violated in the name of national security. *Le Groupe Caravelle* also asked Diem's government to rely on the merit, ingenuity, and resourcefulness of South Vietnamese professionals rather than bureaucrats originally from North Vietnam or those connected to the Ngo family. As for needed military reforms, *le Groupe Caravelle* feared that selecting unqualified senior commanders based on political loyalty to Diem's government rather than military competence would reduce RVNAF combat capability and compel South Vietnamese to perceive that the military was protecting the RVN state, not its citizens. Finally, *le Groupe Caravelle* warned that without meaningful political, administrative, and military reforms the RVN's economy and society could not advance.[87] To sum up, *Le Manifeste de Caravelle* said:

> You should, Mr. President, liberalize the regime, promote democracy, guarantee minimum civil rights, recognize the opposition so as to permit the citizens to express themselves without fear, thus removing grievances and resentments.... When this occurs, the people of South Vietnam, in comparing their condition with that of the North, will appreciate the value of true liberty and of authentic democracy. It is only at that time that the people will make all the necessary efforts and sacrifices to defend that liberty and that democracy.[88]

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[86] Bui Diem with David Chanoff, *In The Jaws of History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 94; Nguyen Tran, *Cong va Toi: Nhung Su That Lich Su, Hoi Ky Lich Su Chinh Tri Mien Nam Viet Nam 1945-1975 (Actions and Crimes: Historical Truth Memoir of the Political History of South Vietnam, 1945-1975)* (Los Alamitos, California: Xuan Thu, 1992), 324-325; General Tran Van Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung: Hoi Ky Chanh Tri (Viet Nam Witness: A Political Memoir)* (Los Alamitos: Xuan Thu, 1989), 145-146

[87] "Saigon, le 26 Avril 1960, Monsieur le President de la Republique du Vietnam", 1-5; Folder: 885/Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defence, Correspondence, Conein, Lucien, 1959; Box:37; Collection: Edward Geary Lansdale Papers; Archive: THIWRP

[88] Bui Diem, *In The Jaws of History*, 94

When Diem's government ignored their constructive proposals, *le Groupe Caravelle* turned to the media and publically called for the complete reforms of Diem's government.[89]

But the Diem government's policies toward its communist and non-communist adversaries also alienated segments of the RVNAF's officer corps who believed such policies would lose the war. RVNAF land units had neutralized communist cadres and guerrillas who had remained in South Vietnam after 1954. However, the continued hunting, imprisoning, and killing of partisans pushed many to join the NFLSVN. Even worse, once Diem's government ordered RVNAF ground forces to implement unpopular and counterproductive counter-guerrilla policies, South Vietnamese often refused to cooperate with the military as they viewed it as the protector of Diem's government rather than people. Once Diem's government had lost its legitimacy in the eyes of the people, so too did the RVN military. Unhappy with this vicious cycle and a government which stubbornly refused to step down, compromise with the opposition, or to reform itself, many reputable commanders of some of the finest RVNAF outfits rebelled against Diem's government on November 11, 1960. The breakdown in the civil-military relations prompted this attempted coup d'état did not occur in a vacuum.

The failed leadership in the RVNAF land force was created by poor training and a politicization of the officer corps brought on by the practice of promoting or demoting officers solely on the basis of their political loyalty to the Diem government rather than their experience, training, scheduled promotion, and leadership potential. According to ARVN Lieutenant General Dong Van Khuyen, promotion "was restricted, hard to obtain, highly opportunistic; it often did not bear any relation to military needs. Promotion to the rank of general was often dictated by

[89] Nguyen Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 324-325

political requirements."[90] The politicization of the RVNAF affected units too. Major General Nguyen Duy Hinh and Brigadier General Tran Dinh Tho critically appraised the RVN's imbalance civil-military relations, emphasizing that as "the coup d'état became a popular tool of power groups... [it] became such a fearful obsession for all South Vietnamese leaders that their main effort was to prevent them by appointing close and loyal friends to sensitive posts such as the CMD [Capital Military District or Saigon-Cholon], major units, military regions and armed services."[91] Diem's most trusted officers and loyal formations—the paratroopers, marines, armour, artillery, helicopters and fixed wing transport aircraft, and river patrol craft—were stationed in and around Saigon-Cholon both to defend the city against communist attacks but also to protect Diem's government against a coup.

While Andrew F. Krepinevich wrongly regarded the focus on conventional warfare as being RVNAF's fundamental problem,[92] most scholars have concurred that politicization of the RVNAF officer corps was a greater weakness as officers promoted for their political loyalty rather than military merit produced incompetence. No one defended this line of argument more vehemently than Neil Sheehan of *The New York Times*. As he noted in his study of Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann's career at MAAGV/MACV:

> Vann wrote, "... commanders at all levels who do nothing can still retain their command, and even advance, while those who are aggressive may be relieved if they suffer a setback or sustain heavy losses." The ARVN officers also did not understand the purpose of their existence. "Petty jealousies among battalion and regimental commanders take precedence over, and detract from, the primary mission of closing with and destroying the enemy. Regimental and battalion commanders obey orders that suit them, ignore or change those that do not." If the advisors were to fulfill their mission of winning the war with the ARVN, the magnitude of these failings had to be recognized and adequate measures taken to overcome them. "[93]

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[90] Lieutenant General Dong Van Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, Indochina Monograph Series (College Park, M.D.: NARA II Library, 1978), 86
[91] Hinh and Tho, *The South Vietnamese Society*, 63
[92] Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr. *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 24
[93] Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and American in Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 91

Sheehan's argument was reasonable and widely shared. President Diem "was not especially interested in fighting the Vietcong insurgency," argued Stanley Karnow, as his "priority was to reinforce his military and police machinery, which would defend him against his rivals in Saigon, whom he believed were plotting his overthrow."[94] "He [Diem] chose safe rather than competent officers for critical posts," George C. Herring maintained, promoting them "on the basis of loyalty rather than merit and constantly shuffled the high command."[95] Historian Ronald H. Spector and political scientist D. Michael Shafer understood why Diem needed to control the army through political means but recognized its cost. Spector saw "favoritism and corruption," "personal loyalty" to Diem's government and "ambitious rivals" as chronic problems which crippled the ARVN. "The [South Vietnamese] army suffered from an acute shortage of officers, particularly those qualified for higher command," Spector stated, a problem made worse because experience with General Nguyen Van Hinh, the VNA's Chief of Staff, and the sects led Diem "to value political reliability in senior officers far more than military expertise."[96] Shafer criticized U.S. policymakers' "naïve assumptions about the supposedly apolitical nature of modern military," but concluded that Diem's political "manipulation left it [ARVN] incapable of fighting effectively."[97] These critics raised an important question: How did Diem's politicization of the officer corps negatively affect RVNAF land force's military performance? Gabriel Kolko best summed up the conventional answer: "While many other factors also explain the ARVN's weaknesses, its intrinsically political nature meant that the army

[94] Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 252
[95] Herring, *America's Longest War*, 71
[96] Spector, *Advice and Support*, 278
[97] D. Michael Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms: The Failure of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 256-257

would ultimately be incapable of ever successfully fighting either an unconventional or a regular war."[98]

There is force behind these arguments about the politicization of RVNAF, but no one has thoroughly explained its causes or effects. Significant questions remain unanswered. Was the Diem government the main reason why the RVNAF was politicized, or did VNA and ARVN officers play key roles in the process also? Could Diem—or any statesmen in an underdeveloped country—remain in power without loyal military supporters? How was politicization of the officer corps linked to the lack of training and respect for line infantrymen? Why did politicized paratroopers and marines fight well while politicized infantry formations became increasingly demoralized? Why did the RVN's politicized military fare poorly against the communists while politicized armies in other Third World states mercilessly crushed insurgents? The answers to these questions lay in the historical interactions between the Diem government and the military it inherited when Vietnam was divided in two and the southern half became an anti-communist bastion.

The elimination of the three most dangerous armed political factions, the CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF, left the RVNAF as the only organized institution able to challenge Diem's authority. The factions had been neutralized militarily, but Diem's government integrated some of their elements into the RVN's new military apparatus. However, the opportunity cost was significant as no RVNAF land force unit replicated the quality of the sect militias or enjoyed their popularity among the peasants. By destroying the militias, Diem's government wrecked the strongest anti-communist military organizations in South Vietnam and created a political power vacuum which the communists sought to fill. Only after the factions had been eliminated did the communists have significant successes in the areas those groups had controlled previously. The

[98] Kolko, *Anatomy of a War*, 88

only political-military element left capable of challenging the power of Diem's government was the one it would not and could not destroy, the RVNAF. As the war escalated, the RVNAF became just as politically dangerous to Diem's government as the sects had been. Therefore, the RVNAF had to be kept in check internally even if this meant marginalizing competent commanders with questionable loyalties, deliberately splintering the military's cohesion, and weakening its operational competence. Corruption and politicization of the officer corps crippled RVNAF land forces, but no South Vietnamese leader, civilian or military, could have survived without the backing of the armed forces. The Diem government politicized the RVNAF officer corps, but so too did the VNA senior officers who built the RVNAF.

Not every officer was politicized, nor did politicization necessarily produce military incompetence. Some of the most politically conscious commanders were not necessarily loyal to the Diem government and came from the RVNAF's best units, the paratroopers, marines and rangers, who were dreaded equally by the communists and Saigon politicians. The elite corps had enough able officers with nationalist political views and so little patience with incompetence that selection on political grounds had no desirable effect on combat quality. However, elite forces did not constitute the whole RVNAF. While special units and their commanders performed well in combat, they operated effectively only in conjunction with good regular formations, a commodity in short supply. The real cost of politicization was the damage it inflicted upon regular formations. South Vietnamese elite forces were good while other units ranged from mediocre to bad. This rendered the RVNAF land forces, as a whole, ineffective. Yet politicization was not the only reason for the RVNAF's poor performance. Soldiers were ill trained, underpaid, and lacked respect while elite troops enjoyed top-rate training, high salaries, and the latest weaponry. Such differences were revealed on the battlefield where RVNAF elite

ground units often overran communist guerrillas who had annihilated ARVN, CG, and SDC non-elite units, and politically as paratrooper and marine commanders led military coups while infantry officers remained passive.

The Diem government gained, maintained, and lost power on the basis of support from its American allies and its backers in the RVNAF's officer corps. "In the years before 1965," wrote Lieutenant General Dong Van Khuyen, "corruption was not yet an issue in the RVNAF"[99] because Diem's government was more puritanical than successive administrations while the US initially invested less money into South Vietnam's economy at the start of the conflict.[100] The *Pentagon Papers* said nothing about corruption, but criticized Diem's government as "authoritarian," "moralistic," "inflexible," "bureaucratic," "suspicious," and "rigidly organized." There was an "overcentralized family oligarchy," "[Diem] trusted only his family members," "[he] professes to believe in representative government and democracy" but was "convinced that the Vietnamese are not ready for such a political system and that he must rule with a firm hand, at least so long as national security is threatened."[101] Corruption was not a great problem in the RVN before 1963, but the politicization of RVNAF originated with the struggle for power in post-colonial Saigon between Diem's faction, the VNA and the sects. Diem and the VNA tried to convince the French and then the Americans of their own legitimacy and their rivals' incompetence. Even before the VNA destroyed the sect militias, a showdown occurred between Diem and the VNA's Chief-of-Staff General Nguyen Van Hinh demonstrated that the army was a political rival that Diem could not crush. The confrontation was the first of many clashes between civilian and military leaders in South Vietnam, one of its major structural weaknesses.

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[99] Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, 346
[100] Kolko, *Anatomy of a War*, 223-230, 283-299
[101] Sheehan, *The Pentagon Papers*, 70-71

The Diem-Hinh struggle, which "stemmed from personal antipathies" as much as it was political, foreshadowed the disastrous RVN's civil-military relations. As Diem and Hinh did not like or respect each other, each interfered in the other's business. Indeed, Lansdale told Hinh to "stop trying to play the politician and start acting like a general" and told Diem "stop trying to play the general and start acting like a politician."[102] A nationalist, Diem hated the French as much as the communists. Hinh, a French citizen married to a French woman, had been a lieutenant-colonel in the French Air Force before serving as Chief-of-Staff to Emperor Bao Dai's VNA. One of Hinh's confidants, Lieutenant General Tran Van Don, attended the first meeting between the President, the General, and other high-ranking VNA officers. "Before you men were in the French army," Diem said, "now you are in the Vietnamese army. I will endow you with a sense of nationalism in order to serve the Vietnamese army." "Hearing this," General Don commented, "Nguyen Van Hinh's pride was hurt."[103] Diem had addressed these words not just to Hinh but to the entire military.

By perceiving former VNA personnel as pro-French, Diem's government failed to understand the diverse social backgrounds, economic circumstances, military conditions, and political beliefs of VNA men who had joined the RVNAF. Hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese had served in France's military and wars for various reasons including a hope their service and sacrifice would produce Vietnam's independence.[104] But in February 1930, Vietnamese colonial soldiers at the Yen-Bay garrison, northwest of Hanoi, had joined with the VNQDD in a failed

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[102] Lansdale, *In The Midst of War*, 171-172
[103] Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 117
[104] Henri Eckert, "Double-edged swords of conquest in Indochina: *Tirailleurs Tonkinois, Chasseurs Annamites* and militias, 1883-1985," in Karl Hack and Tobias Rettig, ed., *Colonial Armies in Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 2006), 126-153; Colonel Pham Van Son, ed., *Quan Dan Viet-Nam Chong Tay Xam (1847-1945), Quan Su III* ("The Military Struggle of the Peoples of Vietnam Against the French Conquerors (1847-1945); Military History III") (Taiwan: Dai-Nam Publishing House, 1971), 359-444; ARVN Lieutenant Colonel Le Van Duong, ed., *Quan Luc Viet Nam Cong Hoa Trong Gai Doan Hinh Thanh 1946-1955* ("The Development of the Republic of Viet Nam Armed Forces, 1946-1955") (Taiwan: Dai-Nam Publishing House, 1972), 33-218

uprising to overthrow France's colonial authority.[105] When the French colonial army neutralized the Yen-Bay garrison and smashed the VNQDD, two thousand Vietnamese, including the VNQDD leader, Nguyen Thai Hoc, were dead.[106] The VNQDD's role in the Yen-Ben revolt has been studied,[107] but not the participation of the Vietnamese colonial troops. But a case can be made that like the VNQDD, DVQDD, CDPF, HHPF, BXPF, VCP, and Viet Minh, the Vietnamese colonial military establishment represented, albeit one far less radical than the VCP and much more conservative than the Constitutionalist Party of Vietnam,[108] a path toward achieving Vietnam's independence. In other words, Vietnamese should fight for France and France should free Vietnam for the military service and sacrifice its peoples made *au nom de la France*. Emperor Duy-Tan, for example, was dethroned and exiled by the French for his anti-colonial activities during WWI. However, volunteering for the French Foreign Legion during WWII and was promoted to lieutenant-colonel in 1945,[109] and believed "the only way Viet-Nam could become independent was to show France that its men could fight."[110] Therefore, when Vietnamese soldiers in the French military were reorganized into the VNA and when the VNA and other auxiliary forces were integrated into the RVNAF, the non-communist military establishment was as political as the non-communist political parties and factions.

To recapture the spirit of nationalism that it felt was being hijacked by the communists and to instil a sense of duty among servicemen, Diem's government severed all RVNAF symbolic and technical ties to the VNA and FFEEC. Vietnamese serving in the FFEEC or VNA

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[105] Martin Thomas, *The French empire between the wars: Imperialism, politics and society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 227
[106] Douglas Porch, *The French Foreign Legion: A Complete History of the Legendary Fighting Force* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992), 508-510
[107] Hue Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 221-223
[108] Neil L. Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 98
[109] General Tran Van Don, *Our Endless War Inside Vietnam* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1978), 37
[110] Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 329

were given six months to choose between French citizenship and new RVN citizenship. Many Vietnamese officers with French names were requested officially to Vietnamize their names. The RVNAF was given "a new system of rank insignia" to replace those of French military origin but not before Diem ordered RVNAF officers to participate in a "French insignia burning ceremony, held at the Joint General Staff headquarters" reported by the pressed and watched by the peoples.[111] However, the new RVNAF style aped "U.S. patterns," rank insignia were worn on the collar in "U.S. style," while equipment was standardized with training conducted according to "U.S. methods" with "U.S. manuals and aids."[112] Thus, while Diem's government laboured to demolish all French vestiges in its military, it adopted the façade of another foreign military power. According to Bernard B. Fall, Diem's policy demoralized RVNAF's personnel:

> It is not impossible that one of the causes of the relatively low combativity of the present-day South Vietnamese troops can be traced back to the fact that their seniors who fought with (but not *for*) the French at Dien Bien Phu, had been depicted to them for eight years as "valets and mercenaries of the colonialists"... while... the Indian, Pakistani, or Moroccan national armies look back with great pride upon the traditions of military valor which their fighting men acquired while dying for Britain or France.... That pride in past achievements is alive in their uniforms and insignia (often unchanged from colonial days), in the battle streamers of their unit flags, and in the traditions of their regiments.
>
> At least the Communist Viet-Minh forces can look back upon twenty years (as of 1964) of successful achievements, including several major military victories over a powerful enemy.... The South Vietnamese Army... was deliberately made to turn its back on eighty years of military association with France, in the course of which Vietnamese performed heroically as air aces, won the Legion of Honor at Verdun, and valiantly served on battlefields of three continents.[113]

While Fall's assessment had merit, he ignored the fact that unlike India, Pakistan, and Morocco where fighting men and civilian leaders had controlled their national revolutions, South Vietnamese commanders and politicians were struggling to create an independent nationalist state. As a British Military Attaché in Saigon observed, far from imitating anyone, Diem's government was obsessed with giving the RVNAF a Vietnamese identity. "A typical Vietnamese attitude towards foreign aid which was expressed to me by one of their most competent Generals

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[111] Hinh and Tho, *The South Vietnamese Society*, 35-36
[112] Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, 8
[113] Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 328-329

is that while they realize they have got to face their own peculiar problems, they must at the moment cut their cloth in the way recommended by the supplier." "Later on," the Attaché continued, "especially if supplies from that source become less important, they will choose their own style. They feel that there is good to be found in the methods followed by the Americans, the French, the Japanese and ourselves [British] and in due course they intend to take what they consider to be the best of all four suppliers."[114]

If Diem was insensitive to VNA service and sacrifice, Hinh increased Diem's suspicion of the officer corps. As a career officer commanding the single strongest body in South Vietnam's political arena, Hinh, harboring his own political ambitions, pursued a military government model that resembled Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's Turkey or Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt.[115] The officer corps was divided over Hinh's grand design, fearing it would cause instability and leave the RVN at Hanoi's mercy.[116] Despite this lack of support in the fall of 1954 when Saigon was verging on anarchy, Hinh made this public and prescient criticism of Diem:

> To the Communist system we must oppose on our side a clear, precise and simple system. At present this system does not exist, it is limited to the personality of the Chief of Government who has no link with the masses, but it is the masses who count.... Mr. Diem, who has been absent from Viet Nam for too long, returned to us with the point of view of a mandarin, with ideas either twenty years out of date or imported directly from abroad. I am the first to recognize his perfect honesty which gives him all of his prestige in the eyes of the Americans. But if he takes nothing for himself, he always considers corruption as the best means of government and he distributes jobs among his family. He has no popular support except for a section of the Catholics (but not all of them) and people from the north...[117]

Hinh would not be the last official, civilian and military, in the RVN to argue that an open social, political, and economic apparatus could flourish in a faction-riddled post-colonial country. Hinh had the respect of soldiers, but could he win over more sophisticated civilian

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[114] *Secret & Guard*, Despatch No. 36, British Embassy, Saigon, August 20, 1960, 37, FO 371/152778/206419, The National Archives of the United Kingdom (UNKA), London, England

[115] General Ton That Dinh, *25 Nam Binh Nghiep (25 Years of Military Service)* (San Jose: Chanh Dao, 1998), 50; Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars*, 172

[116] Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century*, 84

[117] Ellen J. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), 357

officials? Could a French citizen and officer, even though of Vietnamese origin, unify non-communist Vietnamese nationalists against the communists in an anti-French country?

Diem had hurt Hinh's pride privately before a few subordinates, but Hinh had discredited the President publicly before millions of Vietnamese, not to mention American observers. Diem, while recognizing Hinh's military competence, sacked him for his renegade politics. General Tran Van Don thought Hinh was a commander of "credibility, authority and very imposing. Although Hinh had graduated from a French military school, he spoke Vietnamese fluently. The majority of officers in the Vietnamese army, the French army [and] American advisors working beside the French army praised and respected Hinh."[118] The MAAGV Secret Security Information report of 1954, however, called him "pro-French, being a French citizen with a French wife."[119] Hinh was an able officer who later fought in France's Algerian War after Diem expelled him from Vietnam.[120] But while Hinh represented the most political tendencies within the VNA and the RVNAF officer corps, "He was always concerned with the development of the National Army, and that was the highpoint of his leadership," wrote ARVN Brigadier General Ton That Dinh, a Diem loyalist who admired General Hinh, "when he specially fought against the French Head Quarters for several years so the [Vietnamese] National Armed Forces would have more opportunities to operate independently." Dinh thought that Hinh wanted the military to improve by reassessing its successes and failures and teaching the lessons to junior and senior officers.[121] Only such an approach, combined with firm training, could have made RVNAF land forces effective.

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[118] Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 85
[119] File: MAAGV 350.09 Intelligence 1954, Secret Security Information; Box 2; RG 472; Archive: NARA II
[120] Fall, *Two Viet-Nams*, 459
[121] Dinh, *25 Nam Binh Nghiep*, 49

General Tran Van Don believed that while Diem recognized Hinh's military merit and disliked his political disloyalty, he dismissed him because Hinh had "a French citizenship while maintaining a critical post in the Vietnamese army."[122] In fact, Hinh had forced the issue.[123] Provincial Premier Nguyen Tran held that Hinh was fired as Chief-of-Staff and expelled from Vietnam because:

> The National Army under the leadership of General Nguyen Van Hinh... a French Air Force officer, with French citizenship.... Making Hinh head of the National Army was no different then having France directly command that army.... In the first month [after Geneva] Hinh did join Prime Minister Diem on inspecting tours of every province... in the second month, Hinh began to criticize Diem, allowing army vehicles to circle the Independence Palace with speakerphones denouncing him as a dictator, a feudalist, family rule. Hinh forced all officers to sign a petition in support of Hinh to be sent to Bao Dai as if he had earned the respect of the army.... On 11 September 1954, after two of Hinh's Staff Officers were arrested for conspiring a coup d'état, Diem determined to terminate the responsibility as Chief-of-Staff of Hinh and forced Hinh to leave Viet Nam.[124]

Lansdale's assessment of Hinh's chances of becoming the future leader of the RVN concurred with Tran's: "He [Hinh] didn't have a prayer of being able to lead the Vietnamese nationalists. They looked upon him, correctly, as a French career military officer who had been placed and kept in command of the Vietnamese military forces by the French."[125] Ultimately, Hinh was driven out by France and Emperor Bao Dai, both under pressure from the Americans as their man was Diem, not Hinh.[126]

"As a result of the Hinh trouble," *the Pentagon Papers* indicated on September 1954, "Diem started looking around for troops upon whom he could count." Diem replaced Hinh as

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[122] Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 118

[123] Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams*, 245, 459; Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled. Volume II: Vietnam At War* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1967), pp. 859, 861; Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 235, 238; Frances Fitzgerald, *Fire In The Lake: The Vietnamese and The Americans in Vietnam* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2002), 79; Arthur J. Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans: Nationalism and Communism in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 271-272; Robert Mann, *A Grand Delusion: America's Descent Into Vietnam* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 180

[124] Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 100-101

[125] Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars*, 171

[126] Chinh Dao, *Cuoc Thanh Chien Chong Cong* (*The Anti-Communist Crusade*) (Houston, Texas: Van Hoa, 2004), 170-182; Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 111-122; Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams*, 245, 459; Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled. Volume I: From Colonialism to the Vietminh* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1967), 859, 861; Sheehan, *The Pentagon Papers*, 58

Chief-of-Staff with General Nguyen Van Vy, a former paratrooper in the French army. Given the "strong camaraderie among parachutists," VNA/ARVN paratroopers revered General Vy but Vy rejected Diem's promotion on the grounds that he was junior in rank to Hinh and proposed to join Hinh in Da Lat.[127] Angered by this act of insubordination and the veiled threat, Diem dismissed Vy. Enjoying the backing of his paratroopers but neither the French nor the Americans, Vy too was easily fired and exiled in France. While Vy was detained by CDPF commanders and held up at gunpoint by Nhi Lan, a Cao Dai supporter of Diem, a brigade of paratroopers commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Do Cao Tri threatened to attack the Independence Palace. Diem defused the situation without bloodshed.[128] While this incident introduced the paratroopers to Saigon's politics, it never diminished their combat effectiveness. Colonel Tri had become a lieutenant general before he died in a helicopter crash on 23 February 1971 in Operation Lam Son 719, an incursion in Laos to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Tri had gained a reputation as a most able and aggressive field commander in ARVN but he was also a corrupt, politicized, and womanizing senior officer.[129]

The clash between Vy and Diem was the first example of the conflict between the paratroopers and the President. The paratroopers, backed by the marines, came close to toppling the Diem regime on 11 November 1960, in the Rebellion of the Paratroopers. This failed coup d'état stemmed from the personal ambitions of some officers, perhaps supported by anti-Diem officials within the French and US governments.[130] But it stemmed primarily from frustration

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[127] Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 118-119; Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 102; Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century*, 85-86
[128] Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 124-126; Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 123-130; Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century*, 187
[129] Nguyen Tin, *Major General Nguyen Van Hieu, ARVN* (Lincoln: Writers Club Press, 2000), 58-59; Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century*, 177, 180, 229, 250, 256
[130] Chin Dao, Nguyen Manh Quang, Pham Xuan Tich, Nguyen Kien Hung and Phan Lac Giang Dong, *Nhin Lai Bien Co 11/11/1960* ("Looking Back On The Event of 11/11/1960") (Houston, Texas: Van Hoa, 1997), 7-11; Dinh, *25 Nam Binh Nghiep*, 199-204

with Diem's prosecution of the war and the incompetence of senior officers.[131] Crack units felt embittered at being sacrificed for a government that was so disliked by its people whose grievances then were exploited by the communists.[132] "The event of 11/11/1960 was the very first wave of opposition by force of arms of the military and people of South Vietnam," observed Chin Dao, a Vietnamese *émigré* scholar and former ARVN officer, "against a weakening regime which confronted North Vietnamese aggression, and simultaneously, more dangerously, was gradually losing the trust of the masses at all levels."[133]

After his conflict with Hinh, Diem searched for senior officers he could "count on."[134] He attempted to do so by picking people whose background he trusted, by building a new spirit of Vietnamese nationalism, and by improving the character of the Vietnamese people through a political movement, the Can Lao Party. Military promotions bore little relation to military needs or performance.[135] While some officers rose or fell from grace because of their professional quality, certainly at the field grade, advancement usually depended on political beliefs or membership (being a member of the Can Lao Party, pro-Diem, or both), religious faith (Catholicism), and place of birth (Tonkin or Annam).[136] "A Can Lao Party apparatus," wrote ARVN Lieutenant General Lam Quang Thi, born in the Mekong Delta was "established within the Army.... Many unit commanders at regiment level and above were also members of the Can Lao Party. It was a well-known fact that to advance under Diem's regime, one had to be a member of the Can Lao Party, a Catholic, and a resident of Central Viet Nam."[137] A more sympathetic witness as a lawyer and politician from Hue, Le Trong Quat thought that while

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[131] Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 345; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 122
[132] Bui Diem, *In The Jaws of History*, 95; Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 170-172, 209-216; Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century*, 92
[133] Dao, *Nhin Lai Bien Co 11/11/1960*, 7
[134] Sheehan, *The Pentagon Papers*, 59
[135] Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, 86;
[136] Dinh, *25 Nam Binh Nghiep*, 76-78, 85-91
[137] Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century*, 93

Diem had good reasons for sympathizing with refugees, especially Catholics from North and Central Vietnam, Diem did not necessarily favor Vietnamese from Tonkin and Annam over those from Cochinchina. Thus, Diem's General Staff were predominantly southerners.[138] In any case, Diem's political appointees commanded military units in the field while competent but less trusted senior officers held desk jobs that lacked military or political significance.[139]

The RVNAF's politicization mirrored that of the RVN under the Diem administration with incapable men manning critical posts because they proclaimed loyalty for the President.[140] These problems emerged because Diem had limited knowledge about how to create an effective administration or military while any weaknesses were masked because the enemy was quiet. By the time the RVN's foes began to stir, the weaknesses were entrenched. "By 1960 Diem's policies were generating all the destructive consequences the nationalists had been predicting. The government had become," wrote Bui Diem, "in essence, a family-run oligarchy. Both the civil administration and the army had been undermined by the corruption, jealousy, and demands of personal loyalty Diem used to maintain his control."[141] Diem's government, powerful enough to crush internal dissidents but not the communists, was losing popular support. The consequences were clear to the rebel South Vietnamese paratroopers and their commanders. They hoped to make the Diem government change its attitude through the threat of force.

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[138] Le Trong Quat, *Viet Nam Di Ve Dau? Huyen Thoai Va Su That, II* ("What Is The Future of Vietnam? Myth and Reality, Vol. II") (San Jose: Papyrus, 2003), 669

[139] Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled, Volume II*, 985-987; David Halberstam, *The Making of the Quagmire: America and Vietnam During the Kennedy Era* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988), 71; Ellen J. Hammer, *A Death In November: America in Vietnam, 1963* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 125-126; Chinh Dao, *Cuoc Thanh Chien Chong Cong* ("The Anti-Communist Crusade"), 340; Brigadier General Ly Tong Ba, *Hoi Ky 25 Nam Khoi Lua: Cam Nghi Cua Mot Tuong Cam Quan Tai Mat Tran* (Memoir of 25 Years of Fire and Ash: Reflections of A Battlefield General) (San Marcos: Ly Tong Ba, 1997), 70

[140] Major General Hoang Lac, "Blind Design", Neese and O'Donnell, ed., *Prelude to Tragedy*, 65-67; Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 258-272, 305-322, 335-348; Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms*, 254-258

[141] Bui Diem, *In The Jaws of History*, 94

In August 1960, three months before the revolt, the British Ambassador and Military Attaché in Saigon thought that despite the discontent, the RVNAF felt much loyalty towards Diem and "probably no organized movement of opposition within its ranks."[142] In fact, the officer corps disliked Diem's governance and strategy but were split about how best to deal with these problems. Thus, on the day of the coup, Diem and Nhu delayed the rebel paratroopers via telephone negotiations that promised reform while Madame Nhu secretly contacted Lieutenant Huynh Van Cao's armour formations, Colonel Nguyen Khanh's paratroopers, Colonel Tran Thien Khiem's 21st Infantry Division, and General Le Van Nghiem's infantry units to relieve the besieged Independence Palace.[143] The rebel paratroopers failed because they lacked organization and determination and had committed a political act without a precise objective. Naïve but honourable, they aimed not to overthrow Diem's government but to alter its policies.[144] Had these trained and determined soldiers wanted to oust Diem, they easily could have taken the poorly guarded Independence Palace.[145] "If the coup leaders had ordered artillery fire," Lieutenant General Lam Quang Thi thought, "I was certain the presidential guard unit would have capitulated, President Diem would have been captured, and South Viet Nam's military and political future, for better or for worse, would have taken a dramatically different turn."[146]

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[142] *Secret & Guard,* Despatch No. 36, British Embassy, Saigon, August 20, 1960, 21, 47, FO 371/152778/206419, NAUK

[143] "Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Durbrow) to the Department of State, *Saigon, November 11, 1960—5 p.m.*" in John P. Glennon, Edward C. Keefer and David W. Mabon, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1986), 634-636; Lac, "Blind Design", in Neese and O'Donnell, ed., *Prelude to Tragedy*, 68; Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 328; Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 153

[144] "Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Durbrow) to the Department of State, *Saigon, November 11, 1960—3 p.m.*" in Glennon, Keefer and Mabon, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 1, 633-634; Halberstam, *The Making of A Quagmire*, 20; Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 326-330; Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 151-155; Bui Diem, *In The Jaws of History*, 95; Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 252

[145] Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 328

[146] Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century*, 98-99

Instead, the rebels dug in for thirty-six hours until loyal forces arrived to rescue Diem.[147] This was a demonstration, not a coup.

A group of southern Vietnamese *émigré* scholars and former ARVN officers have speculated about alleged secret channels between anti-Diem factions within the French and American governments and the rebel paratrooper leaders.[148] Yet, by 1960, French policy was irrelevant to Vietnam. Had the paratrooper colonels procured active US support, they might have launched a real coup. Still, their honourable but vague aims would have been tested by political chaos in Saigon and the tenacious threats posed by Hanoi. Generals Tran Van Don and Ton That Dinh believed the US was using ARVN as leverage against Diem, a strategy that Dinh believed harmed the Diem-Kennedy relationship.[149] Whether Washington and the American Embassy consciously utilized ARVN against Diem or not, their policy of neutrality gave that appearance.[150] Neither stopping the rebels nor wanting them to topple Diem, they instead pressed both sides to compromise to prevent a civil war that would aid the communists. Nonetheless, American sympathy with the rebel paratroopers and a hope that Diem would learn a lesson were evident during and after the coup. The US Navy and Army Attachés, MAAGV, diplomats, and CIA officials stationed in Saigon warned Washington of the crisis just before it happened.[151] No American documents suggest that any Americans had any early knowledge of events. When Nguyen Dinh Thuan, Diem's Secretary of State, contacted the Embassy to discern its stand on the crisis, Ambassador Elbridge Dubrow stated "three times" his hope the "Revolutionary Committee and President Diem could get together and agree to cooperate as Civil War could

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[147] Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 155-154; Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 328; Bui Diem, *In The Jaws of History*, 95
[148] Dinh, *25 Binh Nghiep*, 193-199; Chinh Dao, *Nhin Lai Bien Co 11/11/1960*, 7
[149] Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 154; Dinh, *25 Binh Nghiep*, 193-199
[150] Spector, *Advice and Support*, 370
[151] "Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Durbrow) to the Department of State, *Saigon, November 11, 1960*" in Glennon, Keefer and Mabon, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States,* vol. 1, 631

only benefit Communists. I added I hoped committee would not have too unreasonable demands so that they and President could get together." When the rebel paratroopers, together with the press, later contacted the head of MAAGV/MACV, Dubrow instructed Lieutenant General Lionel C. McGarr "to impress following on revolutionary group. We hope revolutionaries will keep President Diem in active role because of his prestige both in Vietnam and abroad. Beyond that, we cannot give them any advice, and their problems must be worked out by them. However, we support strongly united stand against Communists." The US continuously insisted on "the reestablishment of unity in the country in its fight to maintain its freedom."[152]

Privately, however, Washington thought Diem needed a lesson. It reminded Saigon that "much of dissatisfaction which was expressed openly during unusual circumstances of crisis was focused on certain members of President's family. Painful as it may be, we believe these criticisms cannot be ignored." Washington advocated "dramatic action in a number of fields calculated to strengthen the regime's popular support… [the] unfortunate implications of Can Lao influence on ARVN has certainly been made abundantly clear."[153] "This stance differed considerably from the American position in 1954 during the crisis with General Hinh," observed Ronald H. Spector, "when Washington had made it unequivocally clear that the United States stood firmly behind Diem."[154] In fact, the lessons learned were not those the US wanted. RVNAF generals and colonels discovered that as the US neither encouraged nor discouraged coups, any subsequent successful effort would need American backing in advance. Diem learned that no Americans could be relied on. The only US official he really trusted, Lansdale, informed the Secretary of Defense (Gates) on 12 November 1960 that:

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[152] Ibid., 631-638
[153] "Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Durbrow) to the Department of State, *Saigon, November 11, 1960—5 p.m.*" in Glennon, Keefer and Mabon, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States,* vol. 1, 654
[154] Spector, *Advice and Support*, 370

> The revolt undoubtedly has taught a lesson to Diem. He might well read this lesson as teaching him to mistrust large segments of the armed forces and possibly, the utility of the way MAAG advisors are placed with Vietnamese units. After all, officers and men in the revolt were quite close to the American military. Thus, it is possible that he will tend to take even close personal command of the armed forces and do some shaking by his own personal direction.... Of course, the lesson we would like him to learn is that he should change some of his ways, since some of his people felt strongly enough about it to take up arms against him. This is normally a task for the Ambassador, when it comes to conveying U.S views on such delicate internal matters to a Chief of State. However, it is most doubtful that Ambassador Durbrow has any personal stature remaining. Diem must feel that Durbrow sided with the revolters emotionally.[155]

The 11 November 1960 Rebellion struck Diem in the heart for the rebels were not his political enemies but people he respected.[156] In retrospect, Nguyen Tran, a supporter of Diem, concluded:

> The coup d'état of Nguyen Chan Thi should have served as an impending warning sign for President Diem because the paratroopers were favored by him above [all other ARVN units] and symbolized the strength of the regime with their destruction of the Binh Xuyen and their fight against the communists.... In the face of an important event such as this, the President should have reassessed and fixed the flaws of his policies, so that the regime could become progressive, stronger and longer lasting. However, he did not learn the lesson.[157]

The spiritual leader of 11 November 1960 was Colonel Vuong Van Dong, a paratrooper from Tonkin,[158] who denounced "the Diem government [as] not effective enough in dealing with present situation."[159] It was managed by Colonel Nguyen Chanh Thi. From a humble peasant family in Hue, he was one of the ARVN's most competent and respected officers, personally picked by Diem to command the President's best soldiers.[160] Thi dealt patiently with Diem and his family, convinced that Ngo's authoritarian rule was better than Hanoi's dictatorship.[161] As a commander of shock units, he thought his men served a noble cause which was being compromised by Ngo's irresponsibility.[162] Diem's most competent and unscrupulous provincial

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[155] "Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Durbrow) to the Department of State, *Saigon, November 11, 1960—5 p.m.*" in Glennon, Keefer and Mabon, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States,* vol. 1, 653
[156] Thi, *Twenty-Five Year Century*, 98; Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 151
[157] Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 330
[158] Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 252
[159] "Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Durbrow) to the Department of State, *Saigon, November 11, 1960—5 p.m.*" in Glennon, Keefer and Mabon, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States,* vol. 1, 632
[160] Major General Nguyen Chanh Thi, *Viet Nam: Mot Troi Tam Su* ("Viet Nam: Heaven Confined") (Los Alamitos: Xuan Thu Publishing House, 1987), 45-53; Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century*, 98; Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 151; Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 330; Dao, *Nhin Lai Bien Co 11/11/1960*, 15-23
[161] Dao, *Nhin Lai Bien Co 11/11/1960*, 26-27
[162] Thi, *Viet Nam: Mot Troi Tam Su*, 77-83; See Nguyen Chanh Thi's reminiscence in Chinh Dao, *Nhin Lai Bien Co 11/11/1960*, 28-29

chief, Nguyen Tran, claimed that had Diem dissolved his government in favour of a more popular one, Diem could have succeeded.[163] Neither *le Groupe Caravelle* nor the paratroopers intended to overthrow Diem: indeed, they needed him as head-of-state given his anti-colonialist, anti-communist, and nationalist credentials. Thus, *le Groupe Caravelle* hoped to avoid a public challenge to the President and the paratroopers encircled instead of attacking the Independence Palace. Their political and military pressure was intended to make Diem act against his own corrupt and incompetent allies. Instead it reinforced Diem's paranoia.[164] On 12 November 1960, Washington instructed its Embassy to urge the RVN government to "avoid acts of retribution which would deepen existing divisions."[165] Diem's administration, ignoring this lesson, denounced *le Groupe Caravelle* as men "renowned for a reputation of liberalism but out to destroy the course of the nationalist revolution."[166] Using the pretext of national security, the Diem government ordered their arrests along with the captured ARVN rebels who were either imprisoned or sent into exile.[167] Hanoi threatened Diem. Now, so did Saigon.

If Diem had learned anything from the paratrooper revolt, it was not about the need for far-reaching social or political reforms. Instead, he could trust no one but his family, not even those whose nationalism was above suspicion. Some American and South Vietnamese civilian and military officials thought Diem was capable of change. But Diem listened only to those he most trusted, a group that declined in number as his administration was besieged by communists, nationalists, the RVNAF, and the US from 1960 to 1963.[168] "When it [Paratroopers' Rebellion]

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[163] Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 330
[164] Spector, *Advice and Support*, 371-372
[165] "Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Durbrow) to the Department of State, *Saigon, November 11, 1960—5 p.m.*" in Glennon, Keefer and Mabon, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States,* vol. 1, 654
[166] Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 325
[167] Bui Diem, *In The Jaws of History*, 94-95; Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 323-326; Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 145-146; Fitzgerald, *Fire In The Lake*, 119; Hammer, *A Death In November*, 154-155
[168] Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century*, 134-135; Rufus Phillips, "Before We Lost in South Vietnam", 30-31, Lac, "Blind Design", 76-78, Bert Freleigh, "Counterinsurgency in South Vietnam: The Real Story", 97-101, Chau, "My

failed," wrote Rufus Phillips, a member of Lansdale's covert team, Vietnamese distrust of Americans became pervasive on all sides, and Ngo Dinh Nhu became even more influential with Diem, his brother."[169] The Americans had been frustrated by their inability to budge Diem before the coup attempt; they were more so afterwards as their leverage had vanished. Realizing that "small strategically placed troops could topple the regime,"[170] Diem narrowed his definition of loyalists and recruited more loyal opportunists into the military, making the government even more incompetent.[171] RVNAF senior officers ensured that in the next coup they would be better organized, more determined, and sure of Washington's backing. As Lieutenant General Tran Van Don, the mastermind of the 1 November 1963 Coup d'État, recollected: "A successful coup d'état required the participation of Generals, Colonels, Officers commanding forces in the Capital and after that the support of Generals from other zones."[172] However, South Vietnam's countryside was soon set ablaze as the DRVN ordered the NFLSVN to move from political to armed struggle and the PAVN aided PLAF attacks against political and military targets throughout the RVN.

War Story from Ho Chi Minh to Ngo Dinh Diem", 198-199, John O'Donnell, "Life and Times of a USOM Prov Rep", 227-228, in Neese and O'Donnell, ed., *Prelude to Tragedy*

[169] Phillips, "Before We Lost in South Vietnam," in Neese and O'Donnell, ed., *Prelude to Tragedy*, 24

[170] Bui Diem, *In The Jaws of History*, 95

[171] Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 330; Halberstam, *The Making of the Quagmire*, 75 Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 233; Hammer, *A Death In November*, 135

[172] Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 191

Chapter 8
Combat Capability, 1960-1963: Part II

Five years after leaving South Vietnam, Lansdale returned in late 1960 for a brief stay. Still with the CIA, Brigadier General Lansdale was attached to the Office of the Secretary of Defense. This trip to South Vietnam was a fact finding mission for the new administration of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy. As a Senator from Massachusetts, Kennedy both had questioned and supported Eisenhower's policy in Vietnam. In a 1954 speech, Kennedy had criticized US aid to France in Indochina as "dangerously futile and destructive." Kennedy believed France had caused the conflict by refusing "to grant the legitimate independence and freedom desired by the peoples of the Association States [Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam]." Kennedy understood that "without the wholehearted support of the peoples of the Associate States, without a reliable and crusading native army with a dependable officer corps, a military victory, even with American support, in that area [Indochina] is difficult if not impossible... that the support of the people of that area cannot be obtained without a change in the contractual relationship which presently existed between the Associated States and the French Union."[1] Two years later, Kennedy perceived US involvement in Vietnam to be an absolutely critical means to convince American foes and friends that "we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty."[2] In the August 1st, 1956, "America's State in Vietnam" speech, Kennedy argued that American security depended "in considerable measure upon a strong and free Vietnamese nation" and that

[1] "Kennedy's Speech to the United States Senate, Washington, D.C., April 6, 1954" taken from Theodore C. Sorensen, "*Let The World Go Forth": The Speeches, Statements, and Writing of John F. Kennedy, 1947 to 1963* (New York: Dell, 1988), 372
[2] Ibid., 12

"Vietnam represents the cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia, the keystone in the arch, the finger in the dike."[3]

Two important military and diplomatic concerns preoccupied the Kennedy administration as it shaped US policy in Vietnam. First, Kennedy's administration feared that the USSR and PRC would perceive any US indolence in Indochina as a sign of weakness. If so, those nations would aid communist allies and spread communist ideology by political and military means to a point where the US could not contain them unless it used nuclear weapons in an apocalyptic nuclear war. Historian Lawrence Freedman has argued that "when it came to the fundamental issues of foreign policy his [Kenndy's] strategy was dominated by a determination to avoid the nuclear cataclysm that he feared above all else without giving ground in the Cold War."[4] Second, as the Kennedy administration was concerned by how America's enemies would perceive US passiveness over Vietnam, it also feared how America's allies might react if South Vietnam fell to the communists. Seeking to avoid a nuclear holocaust while not retreating from the threat of communism, Kennedy's administration believed that America's interest "is best served by preserving and protecting a world of diversity in which no one power or no one combination of powers can threaten the security of the United States." American security depended on "neither Russia nor China could control Europe and Asia" and US support for "the independence of nations so that one bloc cannot gain sufficient power to finally overcome us."[5]

However, it was clear to the Kennedy administration that America had not only to demonstrate to the USSR and the PRC that it would go to war to defend its interests and those of

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[3] Quoted in George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: the United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 53

[4] Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), xii

[5] Quoted in John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 201

its friends, it had to prove to its allies that America was a trustworthy partner. Walt W. Rostow, Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs, pointed out that the fear of America's allies losing faith in US promise to defend the free world against the USSR and PRC convinced Kennedy that "America's power and influence had to be used to save Southeast Asia.... What would happen if we let Southeast Asia go?" Kennedy believed the loss of:

> confidence in the United States would be worldwide. Under these circumstances, Khrushchev and Mao could not refrain from acting to exploit the apparent shift in the balance of power. If Burma fell, Chinese power would be on the Indian frontier: the stability of all of Asia, not merely Southeast Asia, was involved. When the communist leaders had moved—after they were committed—the United States would then react. We would come plunging back to retrieve the situation. And a much more dangerous crisis would result, quite possibly a nuclear crisis.... Having decided that the costs of failing to hold Southeast Asia out-weighted the burden of meeting the challenge, Kennedy then had to choose between the broad tactical options Taylor [Special Military Advisor to the President] and I [Rostow] had put to him: to go directly to the source of the aggression or to strengthen the hand of those under attack.[6]

Kennedy's Vice President, Lyndon Baines Johnson, agreed that Kennedy "regarded our commitment to Southeast Asia as a serious expression of our nation's determination to resist aggression... [and] determined to keep the promises we had made." In a December 14, 1961, letter to President Diem, Kennedy wrote "we are prepared to help the Republic of Viet-Nam to protect its people and to preserve its independence. We shall promptly increase our assistance to your [Diem] defense effort."[7]

Yet the first real problem the Kennedy administration faced in Southeast Asia was Laos, not Vietnam. As Eisenhower's administration had perceived that South Vietnam's guerrilla war was fuelled by political agitation and military supplies coming from North Vietnam via Laos along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, it believed that Laos was the key to victory in the Vietnam War. If the Ho Chi Minh Trail could be neutralized, communist guerrillas could be isolated in South Vietnam and defeated. Before leaving the White House, President Eisenhower met with

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[6] W.W. Rostow, *The Diffusion of Power, 1957-1972: Men, events, and decisions that shaped America's role in the world – from Sputnik to Peking* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), 270-271

[7] Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston), 54-56

President-elected Kennedy. Kennedy was sceptical that America would succeed in Indochina given the strength of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialist forces globally. Furthermore, as a former naval officer in WWII, Kennedy was not ignorant of military affairs. Having observed UN forces in Korea and the FFEEC in Indochina, it was clear to Kennedy, as it was to Eisenhower, that for "the United States to intervene unilaterally and to send troops into the most difficult terrain in the world, with the Chinese able to pour in unlimited manpower, would mean that we would face a situation which would be far more difficult than even that we encountered in Korea." Kennedy wanted to neutralize Laos for while the political and military situation in South Vietnam was not good, it was more "favourable compared to those in Laos."[8] While Eisenhower did not advise Kennedy to fight in Laos and supported the new President's decision to seek neutral status for that landlocked country, Eisenhower also said the US must make "a very strong move, if necessary putting American troops into Laos itself" should the USSR and PRC violated Laos's neutrality.[9] However, after Cuban exiles failed in 1962 at the Bay of Pigs to topple Fidel Castro's communist government, Kennedy described CIA and Joint Chiefs plans to directly intervene in Laos as "unprepared, incompetent, or both."[10]

But the DRVN continued to infiltrate men and materials to bolster PAVN and PLAF units in the RVN. To counter this infiltration, the Kennedy administration conducted covert operations spearheaded by CIA paramilitaries and US and RVN special forces, working in conjunction with the Royal Laos military.[11] Supplemented by the Khmer Republic Armed

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[8] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 322-323

[9] Fred I. Greenstein and Richard H. Immerman, "What Did Eisenhower Tell Kennedy about Indochina? The Politics of Misperception", *The Journal of American History*, vol. 79, no. 2 (Sep., 1992), 584

[10] Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 127

[11] Brigadier General Soutchay Vongsavanh, *RLG Military Operations and Activities in the Laotian Panhandle*, (College Park, MD: NARA II Library, 1981), 1-30; Norman B. Hannah, *The Key To Failure: Laos & the Vietnam*

Forces, also armed and trained by the US, these units sought to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail running south from Laos to Cambodia.[12] Yet the DRVN continued to use the Ho Chi Minh Trail, so much so that as BRIAM's head Sir Robert Thompson recalled, we "renamed the Ho Chi Minh trail the Averell Harriman Expressway,"[13] while the US Ambassador to the RVN, Frederick Nolting, referred to it as "the Harriman Memorial Highway."[14]

Averell Harriman was the chief negotiator representing the Kennedy administration at the Geneva Conference on Laos between May 1961 and July 1962. Diem warned Kennedy, Harriman, and the US delegate in Geneva that "Laos must be saved at all costs. Otherwise, the situation in South Vietnam will become untenable. The loss of Laos will open all doors to mass infiltration or invasion of South Vietnam."[15] In a 1965 interview, Harriman said that he had supported the Kennedy administration's policy to neutralize Laos and defended his initiatives at the Geneva Conference. In Harriman's opinion, as the US had a very disadvantageous diplomatic and military position in Laos, it had just three policy alternatives. First, it could abandon Laos altogether as the Pathet Lao communists were strong. The second alternative was "to introduce a large American expeditionary force to hold the line," something Eisenhower had hesitated to do and Kennedy ruled out. The last alternative was "to attempt to work out some plan for neutralization which would permit the Lao to live their own lives without any interference from either side. The President [Kennedy] decided to go that route, but unfortunately it was very

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War (New York: Madison Books, 1987), 3-83; Timothy N. Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam: U.S. Military Aid To The Royal Lao Government 1955-1975* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 14-61

[12] Lieutenant General Sak Sutsakhan, *The Khmer Republic at War and the Final Collapse* (College Park, MD: National Archives and Records Administration II Library, 1980), 6-8, 18-22, 32-38; Vongsavanh, *RLG Military Operations and Activities in the Laotian Panhandle*, 31-33

[13] Sir Robert Thompson, *Make for the Hills: Memories of Far Eastern Wars* (London: Leo Cooper, 1989), 132

[14] Ell J. Hammer, *A Death In November* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 31

[15] Quoted in Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 127

difficult to get the communists, the neutralists, and the Pathet Laos to stop fighting because they were gaining [grounds in their civil war]."[16]

In July 1962, the USSR and PRC forced the DRVN to sign the neutrality agreement in Geneva. However, the RVN delegate in Geneva refused to sign as the RVN doubted that Laotian neutrality would be respected by the DRVN, the PRC, and the USSR. The International Control Commission (ICC), staffed by diplomatic personnel from India, a neutral country, Poland, a communist country, and Canada, a pro-Western country, were divided and powerless to enforce Laotian neutrality. Second, if Laos's neutrality was violated, the South Vietnam-Laos-Cambodia border region would be exposed to communist infiltration which, given the difficult terrain, would be impossible to check. When Harriman, humiliated that Diem had ordered his delegate not to sign the treaty to neutralize Laos, met Diem in Saigon, Ambassador Nolting called the meeting "stormy" for Harriman, a staunch Democrat, opposed Diem's authoritarianism. Harriman, believing that Diem's government was "a death horse in the long run", had proposed that Kennedy support the RVN but not necessarily Diem and his family.[17] As Diem's Secretary of State, Nguyen Dinh Thuan, recalled, Harriman and Diem "took a violent dislike of each other from their first meeting in 1961." After the 1962 Geneva Conference on Laos, they hated each other. As political scientist Ellen J. Hammer has pointed out, "Harriman's open hostility to President Diem" would take on "much greater consequences by 1963"[18] as the State Department began to think that replacing Diem's regime with a more popular government was a vital step towards winning the war.

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[16] "Harriman and Schlesinger Interview", 8; File: "JFK-LBJ Kennedy (John F.) Library Oral History Interview, Schlesinger, 1/17/65, Sect. A"; Box: 475; Collection: W. Averell Harriman Papers; Archive: Library of Congress (LOC), Washington, DC

[17] Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1986), 635-636

[18] Hammer, *A Death in November*, 31

It was in this context that Lansdale returned to South Vietnam on behalf of the incoming Kennedy administration. From January 2-14, 1961, Lansdale inspected key urban centers and strategic rural areas. Lansdale realized the situation was far graver than what he and other top officials had thought. Just one year after the NFLSVN's creation, the PLAF already had made important political and military gains. "The Communist Viet Cong hope to win back Vietnam south of the 17th Parallel this year [1961]," wrote Lansdale, "and are much further along towards accomplishing this objective than I had realized from reading the reports received in Washington." Meanwhile, the RVN and RVNAF had lost the initiative. "The free Vietnamese, and their government, probably will be able to do no more than postpone eventual defeat – unless they find a Vietnamese way of mobilizing their total resources and then utilizing them with spirit." In 1960, Lansdale reported, the PLAF "infiltrated thousands of armed forces into South Vietnam, recruited local levies of military territorials and guerrillas, and undertook large scale guerrilla and terroristic operations." Lansdale noticed that NFLSVN reliance on force while neglecting to do "sound political work at the grass roots level" did not win them peoples' hearts and minds, this did not really matter. RVNAF ground units were incapable of fighting of PLAF units and defending the peoples let many South Vietnamese peasants "now under their [communists'] thumb are unhappy about it, but too terrified to act against these new rulers." Unlike the RVN, which were only slowly learning from its political and military mistakes, the PLAF and NFLSVN were "working hard to rectify this error [using military coercion without political persuasion], and now have political cadres in the field." Thus, by early 1961, the NFLSVN and PLAF "dominate[d] much of the 1st and 5th Military Regions [respectively, North and West of Saigon, and the Mekong River Delta], as well as being active in spots in other regions." Furthermore, the RVNAF could not combat NFLSVN cadres and PLAF guerrillas who

were "able to infiltrate the most productive area of South Vietnam and to gain control of nearly all of it except for narrow corridors protected by military actions and for a few highly-localized spots where loyal paramilitary forces (Civil Guards and Self-Defense Corps) have undertaken inspired counter-guerrilla actions or where villagers works closely with the military." A combination of PLAF main force units and PAVN battalions held "the initiative and most of the control over the region from the jungled foothills of the High Plateau north of Saigon all the way south down to the Gulf of Siam, excluding the big city area of Saigon-Cholon." In the Laotian-Cambodia-Vietnam border areas, replete with PAVN forward bases and PLAF safe-havens, the ARVN could not cut off infiltration routes. "Unlike the Philippines or Malaya," argued Lansdale, "the Communists cannot be cordoned off at the country's borders and then dealt with as an internal security problem alone. The borders of Vietnam are long and include some of the most difficult terrain in the world to patrol." Thus, Lansdale concluded that although "the pacification campaigns of 1955-56 cleaned up what the Communists had left behind to some extent, there were remnants remaining which the Viet Cong have since exploited and augmented greatly over the past 5 years [1956-1961]."[19]

Reporter John Dominis noticed the insecurity in the countryside. "By day Saigon," said Dominis, "is safe enough. But no one willingly sets his foot outside town after dark." RVNAF land force units could patrol routes and control rural areas during the day, but after nightfall "furtive little bands of Communist guerrillas, dressed in black peasant pajamas or faded khakis, splash through the marshes of the Mekong Delta or dart silently along jungle paths of South Vietnam, pursuing their intent, murderous missions." The fictitious peace in Laos did not help

[19] "Vietnam: Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from Brig. Gen. Lansdale, OSO/OSD, 2-14 January 1961", 1, 5, 7, 11; Folder: 1201/Dept. Of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defence, Memorandum 1958-1961; Box: 42; Collection: Edward Geary Lansdale Papers; Archive: The Hoover Institution for War, Revolution and Peace (THIWRP), Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA

the RVN war effort. "With the disintegration of the West's position in Laos," Dominis argued, "most areas along the South Viet Nam border are now held by the Pathet Lao, and the Ho Chi Minh Trail has become an almost thoroughfare through which Communist reinforcements pour into Diem's beleaguered country."[20]

As the Station Chief in Saigon from 1959 to 1962, William E. Colby assessed that the CG and SDC were targeted most by PLAF units as they were less organized, poorly equipped, lacked training, and had mediocre commanders. Yet, such units constituted the first line of defence in the countryside. "What in reality were the front-line forces therefore had to make do with ancient weapons, without shoes, and without communications even to advise when they were attacked, let alone vainly request reinforcement. Little wonder that their morale was abysmal," reminisced Colby, as "their nightly maneuver was limited to closing the barbed wire around their pathetic fort and waiting for morning in hopes that Communist guerrillas would ignore them as they went about the organization, exhortation, and direction their fellow villagers."[21]

It was clear to RVN and US civilian and military officials as well as to journalists and international observers that security in the South Vietnam's countryside was deteriorating. As a British Military Attaché in Saigon reported in August 1960:

> Until about December [1959] it rather appeared that the Government [of South Vietnam] might have broken the back of Viet Cong activities. During the period of the elections in September a large number of [ARVN] troops had been deployed in the danger areas and there was practically no trouble at all.... From about the middle of December the situation started to deteriorate steadily, and about the middle of January the Viet Cong virtually took over the district of Mo Cay in Kien Hoa Province for the best part of 48 hours.[22]

Further the former RVN ambassador to the US, Bui Diem, recollected:

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[20] John Dominis, "South Viet Nam: The Firing Line", *Time Weekly Magazine*, vol. LXXVIII, no. 5 (August 4, 1961), 18

[21] William Colby with James McCargar, *Lost Victory: A Firsthand Account of America's Sixteen-Year Involvement in Vietnam* (New York: Contemporary Books, 1989), 61

[22] Secret & Guard, Despatch No. 36, British Embassy, Saigon, August 20, 1960, 31, FO 371/152778/206419; The National Archives of the United Kingdom (NAUK), London, England

> The NLF [National Liberation Front or Viet Cong to US and RVN] was formally inaugurated in December of 1960. For the previous years, Vietminh troops had been infiltrating into South Vietnam across the demilitarized zone and down what would eventually be called the Ho Chi Minh Trail. As an outsider, I did not know the details of these developments or what their full significance was. I did know that as 1960 merged into 1961, the guerrillas had made serious inroads into the life of the countryside. Prior to that, it had been easy to get around in rural areas. You could drive from place to place without fear of attack. But by 1961 ambushes and mine explosions were everyday occurrences. One drove carefully or not at all. In the cities, too, public order was threatened. Street demonstrations were becoming commonplace, and an omnipresent atmosphere of tension seemed to have taken hold.[23]

Following the failed November 11, 1960 coup d'état, Lansdale found Diem's government under attack by non-communist opponents. Many had legitimate grievances, others were "simply being destructive." Furthermore, the RVN faced daily psychological assaults by the DRVN and NFLSVN. As Lansdale emphasized in his report to Washington, "he [Diem] has now had nearly 7 years of venomous attack by the Communists who know that he is a major obstacle which must be destroyed before they can win. This is a daily psychological attack on him in his own country, in his own language, and listened to by his own people." With the latest failed coup d'état, the missed assassination attempt (according to Lansdale's source, the November 11, 1960 coup began with "bursts of heavy machine gun fire into his [Diem's] bedroom in an obvious try at liquidating him in his bed"), and the US Embassy's tacit support of rebellious elements of the RVNAF, Lansdale stated, "President Diem feels that Americans have attacked him almost as viciously as the Communists, and he has withdrawn into a shell for self-protection." Lansdale concluded his report with a "can-do" attitude. The relationship between Diem's government and the Kennedy administration, like the guerrilla war rampant in South Vietnam's countryside, could be salvaged for "Ngo Dinh Diem is still the only Vietnamese with executive ability and the required determination to be an effective President." Lansdale believed that if "the 11 November coup had been successful... a number of highly selfish and mediocre people would be squabbling

[23] Bui Diem with David Chanoff, *In The Jaws of History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 96-97

among themselves for power while the Communists took over."[24] Through his CIA network of informants, Colby found out during the coup d'état that rebel paratrooper commanders "had not thought the matter through to any kinds of specific actions they wanted Diem to take." The paratroopers, wrote Colby, "wanted to convince Diem to make substantial changes in the Government and military structure to better confront the Communist attack against South Vietnam." However, they lacked political plans and military solutions own until "the arrival of several volunteer political leaders from the Caravelle group and its supporters.... In short order they established a council and began issuing the appropriate political declarations to give form to the paratroopers' revolt."[25]

Lansdale recognized that some Caravelle group members and paratroopers had revolted against Diem, not out of political ambition, military glory, or personal vanity, but rather to reform Diem's government so that it could defeat the NFLSVN and check the DRVN. Therefore, Lansdale proposed that Kennedy's administration work with Diem's government to channel "the energies of the malcontents, the frustrated, [and] the patriots on the outs" into "constructive political work" so that disenfranchised and disenchanted southern Vietnamese peoples, intellectuals and soldiers would not "explode into destructive political work." Until a "constructive" opposition formed, Washington must "support Ngo Dinh Diem until another strong executive replace him legally.... We have to show him by deeds, not words alone, that we are his friends. This will make our influence effective again." Lansdale reminded Washington that the RVN was a developing country plagued by chronic political, military, social, and economic problems that could not be solved overnight. In Lansdale's words, if "the next

[24] "Vietnam: Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from Brig. Gen. Lansdale, OSO/OSD, 2-14 January 1961", 4, 8; Folder: 1201/Dept. Of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defence, Memorandum 1958-1961; Box: 42; Collection: Edward Geary Lansdale Papers; Archive: THWRP
[25] Colby, *Lost Victory*, 77

American official to talk to President Diem would have the good sense to see him as a human being who has been through a lot of hell for years – and not as an opponent to be beaten to his knee – we would start regaining our influence with him in a healthy way.... The next time we become 'holier than thou', we might find it sobering to reflect on the DRV. Do the Soviets and the Chinese Communists give Ho Chi Minh a similar hard time, or do they aid and abet him?" Most importantly, Lansdale concluded that South Vietnam was an important front in the struggle against Asian and global communism. "The U.S. should recognize that Vietnam is in a critical condition and should treat it as a combat area of the cold war, as an area requiring emergency treatment." Lansdale shared the belief held by the majority of the officials in the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations that if:

> Free Vietnam is won by the Communists, the remainder of Southeast Asia will be easy pickings for our enemy, because the toughest local force on our side will be gone. A Communist victory also would be a major blow to U.S. prestige and influence, not only in Asia but throughout the world, since the world believes that Vietnam has remained free only through U.S. help. Such a victory would tell leaders of other government that it doesn't pay to be a friend of the U.S., and would be an even more marked lesson than Laos.[26]

The Kennedy administration took Lansdale's report on South Vietnam seriously.[27] To buy more time to plan a long term Vietnam policy, Kennedy authorized a 20,000-man increase for the ARVN and activated South Vietnam's ARVN Ranger units specializing in counter-guerrilla operations. In addition, 68,000 troops were added to the CG while the SDC gained 40,000 men. The VNN and VNAF also expanded. MAAGV received another hundred advisors, then 16,000, and finally 20,000 by 1963, to guide the expanding RVNAF. To conduct clandestine warfare in Cambodia, Laos, and North Vietnam, Kennedy dispatched 400 special force soldiers to lead ethnic groups in South Vietnam and Laos against PAVN's infiltration

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[26] "Vietnam: Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from Brig. Gen. Lansdale, OSO/OSD, 2-14 January 1961", 10, 4, 8, 1, 3; Folder: 1201/Dept. Of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defence, Memorandum 1958-1961; Box: 42; Collection: Edward Geary Lansdale Papers; Archive: THIWRP

[27] Colby, *Lost Victory*, 110

routes into the RVN.[28] As Lawrence Freedman has argued, "Kennedy was in charge during some of the most frightening and dangerous days of the cold war" and "when it came to the fundamental issues of foreign policy his [Kennedy's] strategy was dominated by a determination to avoid the nuclear cataclysm that he feared above all else without giving ground in the cold war."[29]

Kennedy, not keen to commit American troops to an Asian land conflict, hoped that a combination of American weaponry, civilian and military advisors, and South Vietnam's military could win the Vietnam War. The Kennedy administration's Vietnam policy, according to Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, had two pillars. First, "the fall of South Vietnam to Communism would threaten the security of the United States and the Western world. Second, "only the South Vietnamese could defend their nation, and that America should limit its role to providing training and logistical support."[30] Kennedy's way of averting a direct confrontation with the USSR, the PRC, and their allies, which could lead to a nuclear war, without giving ground to the communists amounted to a "limited partnership" with American friends and allies in the Cold War.[31] To ensure South Vietnam's situation would not deteriorate, Kennedy sent many top advisors to the RVN on multiple fact finding missions from 1961 to 1963. The official reports of Kennedy's trusted civilian and military advisors plus their memoirs, when corroborated with political, military, and provincial reports drafted by MAAGV advisors working with RVN personnel in the countryside, provided a detailed picture not only of the RVNAF's combat capability but also South Vietnam's security situation in the two years that

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[28] John M. Newman, *JFK and Vietnam: Deception, Intrigue, and the Struggle for Power* (New York: Warner Books, 1992), 105-107; Colby, *Lost Victory*, 108; Herring, *America's Longest War*, 94
[29] Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars*, xii
[30] Robert S. McNamara with Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 29
[31] Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 198-236

preceded the first important turning point of the Vietnam War—the November 1st, 1963, coup, which overthrew Diem's government and cast the RVN into political chaos that, without US direct intervention, almost certainly would have spelled RVN defeat by 1965.

Using its own counter-guerrilla warfare experience in Vietnam plus "Vietnamese and French counter-insurgency operations, British experience in Malaya and Burma, Philippine operations against the Huks, and Greek, Russian, Chinese and German concepts [in WWII]", the joint RVNAF-MAAGV Study Group published its "Tactics & Techniques of Counter-Insurgent Operations" (TTCOIN) in 1960 and revised three times through 1961.[32] TTCOIN began by defining the communist threat faced in South Vietnam. The communist threat to the RVN was of an intertwined "politico-military-psychological-economic nature which cannot be resolved by military means alone – only by a coordinated and cooperative use of all of the elements of national power." To effectively counter communist guerrilla forces, TTCOIN recommended the coordinated:

> use of additional military, political, social, economic and psychological power or actions with the objective of truly winning over and motivating the population down to hamlet level with a common purpose – thereby gaining their active support... the assistance and cooperation of the population is as necessary to overall success against the Communist threat as is breath to life itself. With the population unafraid and willingly supporting the GVN [RVN], the VC [PLAF] guerrilla will not be able to use the people against the government and the population will then be willing to give its government, the military and political intelligence of enemy plans and actions which it so badly needs.

However, before the RVN government could send pacification units into rural areas for extended periods of time, the military had to secure the countryside. "From the purely military point of view," stated in TTCOIN, "the solution hinges on the capability of the Armed Forces both

[32] "Tactics & Techniques of Counter-Insurgent Operations, MAAG-Vietnam", page 1 of Preface by Lieutenant General Lionel C. McGarr, Chief of MAAGV, US Army; RG 319: Office of the Chief of Military History Vietnam War Refiles; Archive: NARA II

regular and paramilitary, to protect the very lives of the people in far flung villages and hamlets – to include government functionaries – from Communist assassination and intimidation."[33]

TTCOIN's description of how guerrilla warfare was waged and its advice to best counter partisan forces, while logically sound, were theoretical nevertheless. An analysis of how the RVNAF actually had performed from 1960 to 1961 found improvement in the organization, equipment, logistics, communications, training, and command of the RVNAF whose land force units "conducted training and field operations in both conventional and counter-guerrilla warfare. Recently, emphasis has been on ranger-type training and large scale CI [Counterinsurgency] Operations."[34]

However, RVNAF performance between 1960 and 1961 was not perfect. First, RVNAF ground units, finding themselves on the defensive—guarding villages, bridges, and other political and military infrastructure—became less aggressive in taking the battle to PAVN and PLAF sanctuaries. "The reluctance to get out of static bunkers and off roads must be overcome," TTCOIN urged. "Future operations must be characterized by fast, mobile, aggressive small units capable of combining into larger, coordinated units under a single commander." Second, South Vietnam's "geographical limitation… [which] has hindered the 'hot pursuit' of the VC as they cross respective boundaries", combined with the lack of an unified chain-of-command within the RVN government, military and other security agencies led to the lack of coordination of their military operations that resulted in "the re-entry of the VC [PLAF] into the area[s]" that were supposedly cleared by RVNAF units. At TTCOIN warned, "unity of command and integrity of units must be maintained to defeat the VC with the minimum forces available." From 1955 to 1957, when the VNA disintegrated and the sectarian militias were integrated into the RVNAF,

[33] "Tactics & Techniques of Counter-Insurgent Operations, MAAG-Vietnam", 4-6; RG 319: Office of the Chief of Military History Vietnam War Refiles; Archive: NARA II
[34] Ibid., II B 1

the Diem government's most feared non-communist rival was South Vietnam's military. Therefore, the Diem government politicized RVNAF's officer corps. However, after the failed November 1960 coup d'état by supposedly loyal officers, Diem splintered the RVNAF chain-of-command to control it from within. This bought time for Diem's regime to identify and neutralize disloyal officers, but it was disastrous militarily. With so many South Vietnamese regular and paramilitary units with uneven levels of military competence involved in a nation-wide counter-guerrilla war effort, the last thing the RVNAF needed was a fragmented chain-of-command. As TTCOIN observed accurately, "duplication and overlap in command channels is certain to cause confusion. Past separation of military and civil chains of command has resulted in duplication of effort, loss of coordination, and division of authority and responsibility."[35]

The third problem plaguing the RVNAF in 1960-1961 was "Faulty Planning." TTCOIN found that JGS operational areas for RVNAF land force units were "unrealistically large, precluding encirclement and allowing the VC to escape." Tactically, RVNAF ground formations failed "to use unconventional tactics and proper security, have resulted in loss of tactical surprise." Politically, the RVN government and military failed "to plan civil-military follow-up action has detracted from ARVN victories by allowing VC resurgency in cleared areas." Fourth, RVNAF's actionable intelligence, information that could be used immediately against the PAVN and PLAF, was inadequate. The intelligence failure derived from too many intelligence channels operating in the absence of a unified intelligence center to process, analyze, and disseminate intelligence so that RVNAF units could execute operations against enemy dispositions. CG and SDC units, with no intelligence capabilities of their own, relied on the ARVN whose intelligence units and personnel were lacking in both quantity and quality. However, the lack of qualified intelligence personnel mirrored the larger shortage of qualified officers and NCOs throughout the

[35] Ibid., II B 2, 3, 5

RVNAF. This was true especially at the small unit levels, a problem caused mainly when competent commanders and NCOs were withdrawn from non-elite units to lead new elite counter-guerrilla outfits "without first programming and training sufficient new NCOs to replace them."[36]

Fifth, the low quality of NCOs and officers also affected the military's relationship with peoples in the rural areas where skirmishes between the RVNAF forces and PAVN/PLAF outfits regularly occurred from 1958 onward. TTCOIN judged fairly that in "some areas of Vietnam, the local population, largely due to VC [PLAF] terrorist tactics and reprisals against persons known to be loyal to the Government, is apathetic or actively hostile to GVN [RVN] forces. CI [Counterinsurgency] operations conducted in such an area are greatly handicapped by this lack of popular support." However, TTCOIN recognized that many RVNAF units did not "place stress on positive relations of the soldiers with the populace among whom they are operating. Thoughtless, unsympathetic and occasionally brutal actions by soldiers against the people they are supposed to be supporting tend to drive the people away from cooperating with ARVN."[37]

In 1962, for example, while patrolling with a unit from the ARVN's 7th Infantry Division in the Mekong Delta, *The New York Times* correspondent David Halberstam noted the indiscipline among soldiers due to indifferent leadership:

> The conduct of ARVN troops in villages had become one of the major conflicts between the Government and the population. Too often troops had stolen chickens or molested the people. It was generally agreed that the presence of American advisers had helped to keep the troops in line.... Troops themselves were mostly peasants, not city boys from Saigon raised in an atmosphere of insidious comfort and affluence.... They passively accepted fraudulent operations and corrupt officers.[38]

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[36] Ibid., II B 4
[37] Ibid., II B 5
[38] David Halberstam, *The Making of A Quagmire: America and Vietnam During the Kennedy Era* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988), 48, 54

High-ranking RVNAF officers agreed that such problems mirrored RVNAF land force's larger quandary. Peasants identified PLAF guerrillas not as "Communists" but as the "Viet Minh" or the "Resistance" who had liberated Vietnam from the French, while associating RVNAF land forces with an FFEEC remembered for "mischievous acts" such as arson, rape, and pillage.[39] RVNAF junior officers tolerated harsh behaviour toward peasant-farmers, but such behaviour was encouraged by some senior officers. ARVN Brigadier General Huynh Van Cao, Commander of Corps IV, encouraged the threat and use of force to intimidate the population into supporting the RVN. There were no "carrots" but only "sticks" in Cao's counterinsurgency technique. On 19 June 1962, while inspecting strategic hamlets with Brigadier General Tam in the Tay Ninh province just above Parrot's Peak, the intrusive Cambodian territory northwest of Saigon, and in the presence of personnel of USOM (U.S. Operations Mission), an agency responsible for American assistance overseas, Brigadier Cao bluntly stated:

> In the past, we failed to be concerned about the people until we found the communists had begun to win them over. Now the idea of serving the people has taken hold. There are, however, two extremes: too severe or too lenient. Neither extreme provides basis for proper organization so the people can protect themselves. To give the people everything they want is not good leadership. In this backward country we have to lead, not follow, the people. They have to recognize our capabilities as leaders so they will follow us.... Consider how brutal and lacking in similar considerations the VC are. You know how inhuman they are. If a person is proven by documented evidence to be a VC, we must reserve for him the proper punishment. The point is to be strong and realistic about behavior with the enemy.... Cu Chi [West of Saigon] was once famous for supporting the VC, so we did not hesitate to fire on persons helping VC in order to prevent this assistance. Many people are obliged to support the VC and we must give them good reason to refuse by shooting some of them. They can then tell the VC they will be killed if they help. At Cu Chi last year people had to go with the VC for road sabotage. There was no punishment. Now they will be shot by our troops. So they can choose to die dishonorably on the road or honorably at home. As a result, the Cu Chi population does not participate and the VC must themselves carry out their activities. [Strong] leadership has been the secret of success at Cu Chi.[40]

In the French Indochina War, the notorious FFEEC Eurasian Colonel Jean Leroy, commanding elements of the CDPF and HHPF, had proven far more effective in counter-

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[39] Lieutenant Genearl Dong Van Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, Indochina Monograph Series (College Park, M.D.: NARA II Library 1978), 295

[40] File: Evaluation and Analysis Division (MACJ3-05), Special Projects Group, Org & Tng Div, U.S. Army Section, Memorandum For Record, 25 June 1962, 472-0062-14-4; Box 1; RG 472; Archive: NARA II

guerrilla warfare than the ARVN 7th Infantry Division in pacifying Ben Tre province, south of Saigon.[41] Sir Robert Thompson observed that asking inhabitants in PAVN and PLAF-controlled rural areas to aid the RVN was "merely asking them to commit suicide." Thompson advised RVNAF land force formations never to carry out "a punitive raid into fully controlled enemy territory." Rather, they should conduct "show the [RVN] flag" operations with "psychological rather than military" purposes to tell rural inhabitants that RVN forces had "not forgotten them" and would "return as soon as it is in a position to do so." In Thompson's words, the intent of "show the flag" operations was "to encourage the people to welcome the future return of the [RVN] government not, as so frequently the case in Vietnam, to make them hope that the government forces never show their faces in the area again."[42]

Sixth, TTCOIN recognized that, while sound, the RVNAF's "Dual Mission" of maintaining "an effective posture against external attack from the North and West" and counter-guerrilla warfare had made the RVNAF less flexible and less able "to concentrate all forces against the guerrilla threat, which at present is concentrated in the South."[43] Though the organization, training, and combat capability of communist forces in Vietnam was critically analyzed in chapter two, it is important to briefly assess the organization, training, and combat capability of the PAVN and PLAF in 1960 in order to better evaluate whether or not the organization, training, and combat capability of the RVNAF land force units had been appropriate.

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[41] Colonel Leroy, "Le fief de Bentré", in Philippe Héduy, *La Guerre d'Indochine 1945-1954*(Paris: Société de Production Littéraire, 1981), 246-247; Chau, "My War Story From Ho Chi Minh to Ngo Dinh Diem", in Harvey Neese and John O'Donnell, ed., *Prelude to Tragedy: Vietnam, 1960-1965* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 191-192

[42] Sir Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency* (St. Petersburg, Florida: Hailer Publishing, 1966), 114

[43] "Tactics & Techniques of Counter-Insurgent Operations, MAAG-Vietnam", II B 5; RG 319: Office of the Chief of Military History Vietnam War Refiles; Archive: NARA II

The PAVN and PLAF still followed the principles of revolutionary guerrilla warfare that began with the "use of propaganda and political warfare to establish a base among the population." Small PAVN and PLAF units conducted operations to ensure the broadening of their "political base, and the organization of small groups of guerrillas and establishment of secure areas." Once PAVN and PLAF units had a foothold locally, they worked to expand "guerrilla operations and political bases." Once their political and military foundations were consolidated, PAVN and PLAF formations stepped up their "guerrilla and political activities on all fronts, plus activation of more regular conventional type units." When enemy forces had been softened by continuous guerrilla and conventional actions, PAVN and PLAF would launch a "general conventional type attack by regular forces against the National Army [RVNAF land units]." To execute these five intricate and overlapping phases of revolutionary guerrilla warfare, PAVN and PLAF forces formed "three different types of... military forces: Regular [PAVN], Regional [PAVN/PLAF], and Militia [PLAF]."[44] PAVN officers, NCOs, and troops were trained in the DRVN but PLAF members went to North Vietnam for training. Whether serving in the PAVN or PLAF or both, officers, NCOs, and soldiers received both military and political education. PAVN and PLAF tactics and operations were similar to those of the VLA. Operational planning and pre-operational exercise were "drawn up in great detail and usually rehearsed." PAVN and PLAF units operated either at night or early in the morning. They saturated potential fields of battle with spies to gather intelligence about terrain, weather, and the RVN's government and military. They encouraged defections amongst RVN officials and troops and enlisted support from the inhabitants. Their targets were "carefully selected and reconnoitered" as PAVN and PLAF outfits sought out "the most vulnerable targets, usually the poorly trained paramilitary units, the isolated villages, security posts and government officers,

[44] Ibid., II C 1

while avoiding contact with ARVN units." PAVN and PLAF formations dispersed when approaching the battlefield, secured their axes of advances, concentrated when attack orders arrived, and struck their enemies using operational deception, battlefield surprise, and with lightning speed to "inflict losses on the GVN [RVN] forces, capture weapons and materiel and convince the people that GVN cannot protect them and will be eventually defeated." Once these objectives were achieved, PAVN and PLAF units withdrew "rapidly, dispersing into small units and even as individuals if necessary."[45]

The TTCOIN concluded that in 1961 communist forces had the military upper hand. "RVNAF has the strength, weapons and logistics support required to launch and prosecute an organized, phased CI [Counterinsurgency] campaign," stated TTCOIN. However, "RVNAF operations have been predominantly defensive in the past," which passed the initiative to the PLAF and PAVN, who enjoyed "freedom of action in most of South Vietnam." Operationally, PAVN and PLAF units had "gone into third and fourth phase [of the communist revolutionary warfare] activities in practically all areas in Vietnam." They could step up their operational tempo not only as RVNAF land force units were passive but also because PAVN and PLAF units successfully applied "guerrilla tactics, small mobile forces, use of terror, ability to avoid disadvantageous engagements, ability to coerce popular cooperation, and convenient supply areas and sanctuaries [in and outside of southern Vietnam]." If RVNAF land forces were to contest the PAVN and PLAF for the political and military support of South Vietnam's rural inhabitants, they must undertake "coordinated military-civic action, must seize the initiative and force the VC on the defensive, both militarily and psychologically." PAVN and PLAF units "must be harried and kept off balance, on the move, and occupied with self-preservation" before

[45] Ibid., II C 3-4

for RVNAF land force units could "separate the VC from the people, isolate and destroy them." To recapture the countryside required that RVNAF land forces not only understood the theory and practice of counter-guerrilla warfare, they also had to make "energetic corrective action [of pass mistakes], strengthening of individual initiative, and continued improvement of the officer and non-commissioned officer corps."[46]

As RVN's rural security deteriorated after the NLFSVN's formation and PLAF units stepped up their attacks, the DRVN infiltrated PAVN personnel, supplies, and even PAVN outfits into the RVN through Laos and Cambodia. However, in South Vietnam's Central Highlands, PAVN reinforcements encountered hostile Montagnards, particularly the Rhade and Jarai tribesmen of Darlac, the RVN's largest province situated in the South Vietnam-Laos-Cambodia tri-border areas. Tribesmen had received paramilitary training and had formed strike forces led by the Green Berets, the CIA, and RVNAF Special Forces. On February 14, 1962, a mixed unit made up of Green Berets and RVNAF special forces was inserted in the Jarai village of Buon Enao, northeast of Ban Me Thout, Darlac's provincial capital. American and South Vietnamese commandos led Jarai warriors in anti-infiltration patrols against PAVN units and supplies moving down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Buon Enao became a military base where Green Berets, RVNAF commandos, and CIA paramilitary personnel, with the consent of Montagnard chiefs, organized tribesmen into Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) units. Funded and equipped by US special forces, the CIA, RVN, and CIDG units, familiar with local terrain and skilled in mountain and jungle warfare, disrupted PAVN's infiltration routes in Darlac. The successful Buon Enao experiment led to the creation of more CIDG units in South Vietnam's Central Highlands.

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[46] Ibid., II D 1

The Buon Enao experiment plus past historical practice—Vietnam's southward expansion in the seventeenth and eighteenth century had produced autonomous communities able to defend themselves—motivated Diem's government to launch the strategic hamlet program. Saigon hoped to wrest control of the countryside from communist guerrillas, indoctrinate rural inhabitants to fight for the RVN, and develop the rural areas to benefit South Vietnam's economy.[47] Nor was this practice unique to Vietnam for as Sir Robert Thompson noted, "strategic hamlets" had been erected in "many rural areas particularly frontier and mountain regions... for centuries as a means of protection against border raiders, local bandits and even man-eating tigers."[48] The successful organization of Buon Enao's villagers into CIDG rangers, mountain scouts, and militias motivated other Montagnard villages in Darlac to form their own CIDG units. These Montagnard self-defense villages mutually supported each other when one or more villages fell under attack. If all villages came under attack, depending on the scale and intensity of the assault, US and RVNAF special and regular forces provided besieged CIDG units with firepower and manpower.[49] But while the strategic hamlet program was based on the Buon Enao experiment, many other guerrilla wars were closely followed by CIA Station Chief Colby and Nhu.[50] "As I described developments at Buon Enao and some of the other experiments we were conducting," reminisced Colby, "Nhu looked beyond their potential contribution to defense against the Communists to how they could constitute the basis for a new Vietnamese social and political community, built up from the rural areas to replace the elites left over from French colonial times."[51]

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[47] Colonel Hoang Ngoc Lung, *Strategic and Tactics*, Indochina Monograph Series (College Park, MD: NARA II Library, 1983), 23-29
[48] Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, 123
[49] Shelby L. Stanton, *Green Berets At War: U.S. Army Special Forces In Southeast Asia, 1956-1975* (New York: Ivy Books, 1985), 45-47
[50] Colby, *Lost Victory*, 85
[51] Ibid., 99

As the strategic hamlet program unfolded, Diem's government and the CIA asked Britain and Australia to send civilian and military advisors, many of them veterans of the Malayan Emergency, to assist the MAAGV, JGS, and RVNAF land forces to re-conquer and pacify South Vietnam. Britain sent BRIAM, led by Sir Robert Thompson, the former Secretary of Defense of the Federation of Malaya during the Emergency. Australia dispatched the AATTV, led by Colonel Francis Peter Serong. He had created the Jungle Training Centre (JTC) where Australian battalions had trained for the Malaya Emergency, assisted in the organization and training of the Burmese army, and had toured Southeast Asia as a military attaché. The ten-man, mostly civilian, BRIAM was to provide strategic advice about the RVN's counter-guerrilla policy and strategic hamlet program. The thirty-member AATTV directly assisted MAAGV and JGS by organizing and training ARVN soldiers, Rangers, CG, SDC units, and the Dong Da Training Centre.[52] As Diem was not blind to the problems the RVN faced, prior to BRIAM's arrival, Diem planned for Thompson "to visit Vietnam to see how far the lessons of Malaya could be applied."[53] As Thompson and other BRIAM members soon learned, "the insurgency in Vietnam was on a much greater scale than that in Malaya." Second, the RVN government and military lacked trained and experienced civilian and military officials to deal with the communist guerrillas. Third, and perhaps most important, there was little to no coordination between the RVN government and military in counter-guerrilla operations and pacification campaigns within a province and/or between provinces.[54]

Constructing a particular strategic hamlet involved various military and political actions. Surrounding vegetation was cut down to prepare protective barriers and to give hamlet defenders

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[52] Anne Blair, *There to the Bitter End: Ted Serong in Vietnam* (Australia: Allen & Unwin: 2001), 27; Ian McNeill, *The Team: Australian Army Advisers in Vietnam, 1962-1972* (London: Leo Cooper, Secker & Warburg, 1984), 23-28

[53] Thompson, *Make for the Hills*, 122

[54] Ibid., 127-128

clear fields of vision. Second, hamlet workers built watchtowers and strong-points and encircled the strategic hamlet with bamboo fences, barbed wire, ditches or moats, earthen mounds, and rows of booby traps and sharp stakes to stop or slow communist attackers.[55] Inhabitants were issued ID cards and their movements between hamlets were "controlled by requiring persons leaving to sign out and in."[56] The next goal was "to unite the people and involve them in positive action on the side of the government." This was done via "the development in the social, economic and political fields… [such as] the provision of schools, clinics, markets, improved agricultural methods, water supplies, electricity, radio programmes, newspaper and improved communications, so that there is constant contact with the outside world, followed finally by local elections to village councils and national elections to a national legislature."[57] In theory, these strategic hamlets would become an "oil spot" or "strength line" of RVN power and influence before RVNAF land forces entered regions completely dominated by PLAF and PAVN formations.[58] This was what had happened it Buon Enao and the CIA hoped to repeat that experience throughout South Vietnam. "The greater security provided by organized and armed communities should begin in the safer area and spread outward to the less secure area like ink on a blotter (or oil on cloth)." Colby argued further, "the process would add strength to strength in strategic offensive conducted by a series of simple tactical defensive measures."[59]

Strategic hamlets were first and foremost physical barriers against guerrilla attacks. As Mark Moyar correctly pointed out, the "principal strength of the strategic hamlet was not its

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[55] Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 156
[56] "Special Project Group, MAAGV, Memorandum for the Record, Visit to Phuoc Tuy Province, 17 May 1962", 4; File: Province Study – Phuoc Tuy Province – 15 May 1963; Box #13: Historians Background Material Files; RG 472; Archive: NARA II
[57] Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, 124-125
[58] Philip E. Catton, *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 90-91
[59] Colby, *Lost Victory*, pp. 91

fortification but its defender."[60] In an inspection tour of Quang Duc province located on the Vietnamese-Laotian-Cambodian tri-border areas of Corps II, MAAGV advisor Captain Walter C. Evans observed that the "real combat defenses of the Hamlet are not the physical installations or its geographical location, but the abilities and actions of its own trained and armed security force – Its Militia. If these men are committed to the fight, and, in common with the other residents… the Hamlet may be considered truly 'Strategic'." Furthermore, Evans contended the "Strategic Hamlet must offer its residents the chance of a reasonable livelihood… preferably better, than did his [their] former home." Only when the peoples felt secure and benefited from social and economic life in their defense villages would the "essential, unique attributes of the true Strategic Hamlet" revealed: "[The] commitment of the majority of its residence to resist the Viet Cong."[61] Above all else, the survival of the strategic hamlets depended on the abilities of the ARVN, CG, and SDC to patrol the areas between strategic hamlets, to harass and break-up large concentrations of PLAF and PAVN main force units targeting the strategic hamlets, and to reinforce besieged strategic hamlets with firepower and manpower.

MAAGV and JGS, starting in 1962, closely monitored the organization, training, and combat capability of the RVNAF land forces and the effectiveness of the strategic hamlets. Their reports, private papers of MAAGV advisors, and other primary sources in English and Vietnamese produced by American and South Vietnamese servicemen provide historians with a diverse view of South Vietnam's complicated security situation from 1962 to 1963. Challenging both the orthodox and revisionist interpretations of the formative years of Vietnam War, the materials neither lead one to conclude, as orthodox historians did, that Diem's government and

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[60] Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 156

[61] File: "Province Study – Quang Duc Province", 1-3; Box #13: Historians Background Material Files; RG 472; Archive: NARA II

military crumbled under political and military attacks from the PLAF and PAVN. Nor do they lead one to concur with the revisionist premise that the PLAF was verging on defeat when Diem's administration was overthrown. Instead, one can conclude that the communist and non-communist Vietnamese were locked in a military and political stalemate in 1962-1963. However, documents about one province could reveal that the RVN government and military were clearly in control of that province while documents from another province clearly indicate the NLFSVN and PLAF were winning. The formative years of the Vietnam War revealed all the complexities of guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare. Political, military, and security situations varied not just from one part of the RVN to the next, but also from one province to another, from one township to the next, and from one strategic hamlet to the next.

In May 1962, MAAGV and JGS inspectors toured the coastal province of Phu Yen, in Corp II, Central Highlands. Corps II, commanded by Brigadier General Ton That Dinh and his MAAGV senior advisor, Colonel Wilbur Wilson, faced a combination of PAVN regular and PLAF main force units which, using safe-havens and reinforcements coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, easily defeated local CG and SDC forces. Therefore, Dinh and Wilson resorted to pre-emptive attacks and probing operations to keep communist main forces from concentrating their units to overrun the strategic hamlets. US special force commandos also led Montagnard tribesmen on operations to disrupt the Ho Chi Minh Trail.[62] As inspectors reported, "military probing and security operations continue with principal objectives to locate and identify VC, and to provide security to operations of civic action teams in the development of strategic hamlets." MAAGV and JGS inspectors noticed that while "construction and organization of strategic hamlets continues at a rapid pace," progress was hindered by shortages

[62] File: "Province Study – Quang Duc Province", 1-2; Box #13: Historians Background Material Files; RG 472; Archive: NARA II

of bamboo trees and barbed wire to fence off the strategic hamlets. There were also shortages of trained and armed SDC personnel. In the Phu Thu district, SDC instructors and personnel "had no weapons but were training with bamboo poles." CIA officer Lucien Conein arranged for 800 carbines to be delivered to Phu Yen but 4,600 more were needed. While SDC units had won praise for a well organized exercise which involved moving civilians into a neighbouring strategic hamlet before taking up their defensive positions, MAAGV and JGS recognized that SDC forces stood little chance against disciplined PAVN and PLAF main forces. MAAGV and JGS found the coordination and cooperation between ARVN, CG, and SDC, and province chief, commanders, and advisors in II Corps to be "excellent" and "effective", which meant that ARVN and CG units would always seek to rescue strategic hamlets in Phu Thu district. However, as PAVN and PLAF main force formations dispersed as they moved towards their targets before concentrating for an assault, Phu Thu's strategic hamlets would not hold out until CG and ARVN reinforcements arrived unless they were properly armed and equipped with radios.[63] In June 1962 alone, MAAG and JGS intelligence recorded eighteen incidents where company-size PAVN and PLAF units entered remote villages in Kontum province, Corps II, to collect money, food, intelligence, and new recruits, disperse propaganda leaflets, conduct indoctrination, execute RVN government officials, and terrorize inhabitants. In those cases, SDC and CG units either were overwhelmed or fled without a fight, returning to their villages only after the communists had left.[64] No ARVN formations had rescued the embattled CG and SDC units. Instead, they escorted them back to their strategic hamlets after PAVN and PLAF outfits had departed.

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[63] "Special Project Group, MAAGV, Memorandum for the Record, Visit to Tuy Hoa, Phu Yen Province, in Connection with Operation Hai Yen II, 23 May 62, dated 25 May 1962", 1-3; File: Province Study – Phu Yen – 26 January 1963; Box #13: Historians Background Material Files; RG 472; Archive: NARA II

[64] "Memorandum: VC Activity in Kontum Province, 8 July 1962", 1-3; File: CH Army Sec - CG II Corps 1 Jan – 31 July 1962; Box: #2; Collection: Wilbur Wilson Papers; Archive: USAMHI

Despite the aggressiveness and effectiveness of some RVNAF commanders and MAAGV advisors in Corps II, PAVN and PLAF political and military activities did not cease. From 1962 to 1963, MAAGV inspector Captain Walter C. Evans, who visited Quang Duc province on the Vietnamese-Laotian border, observed that "Quang Duc, being a vast jungle area with sparse population, does not have the Viet Cong activity normally associated with a [Mekong River] Delta Province. The Viet Cong initiated incidents in this Province average only about five (5) incidents a month. The peak of Viet Cong activity comes after the rice harvest during the months of October and November. Most incidents consist of harassing actions against Strategic Hamlets and propaganda."[65] Wilson's private papers have revealed that his greatest concern was the lack of organized, trained, and competent CG and SDC outfits. In many memoranda to Brigadier General Ton That Dinh, Wilson believed that ARVN units were overstretched on both search-and-destroy and security missions—not to mention that many ARVN infantry units had to guard engineering units building roads and railways throughout the Central Highlands.[66] ARVN formations lacked time to recuperate, replenish, and undergo refreshment training, vital requirements if operational capabilities were to be maintained. Worse yet, since RVN counter-guerrilla success depended on how well the ARVN, CG, and SDC operated together, the ARVN, acting as a rapid reactionary force in support of the CG and SDC, had carried out little to no joint operational training with regional and village paramilitary forces.[67] As Wilson indicated, ARVN, CG, and SDC trained together on "Village Alert and

[65] File: "Province Study – Quang Duc Province", 1; Box #13: Historians Background Material Files; RG 472; Archive: NARA II; "Memorandum: Analysis of Viet Cong Activity in Corps II Tactical Zone, 13 December 1962", 1-2; File: Memoranda to MACV; Box: #2; Collection: Wilbur Wilson Papers; Archive: USAMHI

[66] "Memorandum: Military Road Requirements II Corps Tactical Zone, 10 December 1961", 1-6; File: Memoranda to CG II Corps; Box: #1; Collection: Wilbur Wilson Papers; Archive: USAMHI; "Memorandum: Engineering Construction Deficiencies in II Corps Tactical Zone, 30 October 1962", 1-3; File: Memoranda to MACV; Box: #2; Collection: Wilbur Wilson Papers; Archive: USAMHI

[67] "Memorandum: II Corps Operational Capability to Counter Viet Cong Actions, 22 July 1962", 1-3; File: CH Army Sec - CG II Corps 1 Jan – 31 July 1962; Box: #2; Collection: Wilbur Wilson Papers; Archive: USAMHI

Warning System", which involved ARVN personnel training the CG and SDC to use the ARVN communication system.[68]

But how then would ARVN and CG units support and reinforce besieged strategic hamlets defended by SDC units? Only through inter-arm operations training could ARVN, CG, SDC, MAAGV, and JGS personnel determine what strategies and tactics would succeed on the battlefields where chaos reigned supreme. It was precisely this concern that provoked Wilson to push Dinh to organize and train more personnel for the CG, SDC, and Montagnard scout outfits.[69] In a 1962 year-end assessment memorandum for Dinh, Wilson provided a balanced analysis of Corps II's security situation. Emphasizing the need to improve training centers for ARVN, CG and SDC officers, NCOs and troops, and unit training, Wilson stressed:

> 1962 has largely been a training and planning year for II Corps, I will be the first to agree that II Corps operations have become increasingly effective during the course of the year. Training accomplishments in II Corps during 1962 include the smooth functioning of the Corps Training Center at Duc My, the training of the Civil Guard at Duc My and Kontum, the establishment and functioning of the Self-Defense Corps (SDC) Training Centers in the various provinces, and on site training currently taking place in units of the Corps. I am firmly convinced that the operational effectiveness of II Corps units during 1962 can be directly attributed to the excellent training that units have received.[70]

However, Wilson informed Dinh that more needed to be done to improve the Corp's defensive posture, starting with the organization and training of the CG and SDC. Wilson concluded:

> 1963 must be an operational year for II Corps tactical units. I visualize that the Civil Guard and the Self Defense Corps (SDC) will assume the static security mission that are necessary for key installations. If this is accomplished tactical units of the Corps will be available to conduct continuous, around the clock, day after day, week after week operations against the Viet Cong during 1962.[71]

In mid-1962, MAAGV advisor Major William A. Smith and Captain Bich, an officer in General Huynh Van Cao's staff and a representative of the JGS, discussed Phuoc Tuy province

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[68] "Memorandum: Village Alert and Warning System, 12 December 1962", 1-2; File: Memoranda to CG II Corps; Box: #1; Collection: Wilbur Wilson Papers; Archive: USAMHI

[69] "Memorandum: Effective Employment of Montagnard Scout Companies, 19 July 1962", 1-4; File: CH Army Sec - CG II Corps 1 Jan – 31 July 1962; Box: #2; Collection: Wilbur Wilson Papers; Archive: USAMHI

[70] "Memorandum: 1963 Combat Posture of II Corps, 23 November 1962", 1; File: 1963 Combat Posture of II Corps; Box: #2; Collection: Wilbur Wilson Papers; Archive: USAMHI

[71] Ibid.

in Corps III. When MAAGV and JGS inspectors had visited the province in August 1962, many strategic hamlets were still in the planning stage. Some were under construction but few were completed. In Chan Than district, for example, just four out of forty planned strategic hamlets had been completed. In Vung Tau district, only nine out of twenty-six strategic hamlets were under construction. Only Long Dien district, one of six in the province, had progressed as planned as seventeen strategic hamlets were finished while fifteen more were under construction. Three reasons were listed for this dismal result, including "the lack of transportation for movement of materials from Saigon to the province." Second, only sixty Civic Action personnel were available to build one hundred and sixty strategic hamlets, "a small number considering the number of hamlets scheduled for completion." Third and most importantly, while the strategic hamlet concept was clear to top RVN government and military officials, the civilian and military personnel who actually had to plan and build the strategic hamlets were confused. In a surprise visit to Dat Do district which had twenty-six planned strategic hamlets but only ten were being built and none were done, MAAGV and JGS inspectors found that villagers had to spend six work days building their strategic hamlets with materials on their properties but "without compensation." Further, told to string their barbed wire fences as temporary barriers against guerrilla attacks, the locals did not think that was necessary until after their moat, parapet, and wooden fence perimeter had been made secure. Meanwhile, their strategic hamlets were completely indefensible.[72]

Phuoc Tuy was defended by 1,200 SDC personnel, seven CG rifle companies, one armoured company, one administrative and logistic company, and four ARVN ranger companies. The 1,200 SDC personnel, parcelled out twenty at a time at each strategic hamlet, had no

[72] "Strategic Hamlet Division, MAAGV, Memorandum for the Record, Visit to Phuoc Tuy Province, 9 August 1962", 1-2; File: Province Study – Phuoc Tuy Province – 15 May 1963; Box #13: Historians Background Material Files; RG 472; Archive: NARA II

"training at the present time." Fortunately for the inhabitants of Phouc Tuy province, PLAF activities included only "sabotage, ambushes, assassination, kidnappings, cutting of water mains, and distribution of propaganda." As MAAGV and JGS inspectors reported, "no VC [PLAF] attacks or ambushes have been conducted during the past six months, except for the following: (1) On 6 May an outpost was surrounded by an estimated VC company but no actual attack was made. Close air support was requested which arrived and strafed the area approximately one hour after the request was made. (2) Three bridges were damaged by sabotage and the interprovincial road #23 cut... on 13 May." Luckily, only the strategic hamlets near Long Hai had faced PLAF "disturbances" but these assaults had been fought off by the ARVN, CG and SDC.[73] For the moment, Phouc Tuy was relatively secure, not because the strategic hamlets were strong or the combat capabilities of the ARVN, CG, and SDC. Instead, NFLSVN cadres and PLAF units had opted not intensify their attacks against RVN targets in Phouc Tuy.

Tay Ninh province, located on the Cambodian border in the Mekong River Delta and home to a major PLAF base, was defended by a combination of ARVN, CG, and SDC formations. But all of them were "understrength, particularly in officers and NCO's, and are committed to static security missions for the most part." There seemed to be little to no offensive operations in the province as of mid-1962. For example, ARVN ranger units, designed for offensive counter-guerrilla operations, were "used in strategic hamlet operations and in other tactical operations." Whether or not these "tactical operations" were defensive or offensive, MAAGV and JGS inspectors did not indicate. However, PLAF units roamed the countryside at will and attacked strategic hamlets defended by ill-trained, under motivated, and poorly led SDC defenders. Even well defended strategic hamlets fell as there were not enough search-and-

[73] "Special Project Group, MAAGV, Memorandum for the Record, Visit to Phuoc Tuy Province, 17 May 1962", 1-3; File: Province Study – Phuoc Tuy Province – 15 May 1963; Box #13: Historians Background Material Files; RG 472; Archive: NARA II

destroy operations and patrols to keep PLAF guerrilla units from organizing into more dangerous main forces. In Bo Tuc district in early 1962, for example, an ARVN ranger company (115 men) considered to be well trained, highly motivated, and commanded by experienced officers, together with one Civil Guard company (67 men), guarded a bridge and a settlement for 150 families. But a PLAF main force "completely destroyed this post" after all roads leading toward Bo Tuc were "closed by VC action and to open the road would require a regimental-size operation of 5 days duration." Meanwhile, the nearest other outpost, Bau Co, was twenty kilometres away and had just one CG company. Although the VNAF parachuted in supplies and ARVN helicopters carried in reinforcements, by then the PLAF had overrun Bo Tuc, taking food, money, intelligence, weapons, ammunition, and prisoners before dispersing into the Vietnamese-Cambodian jungle border areas.[74]

Surprisingly, no other outposts in Tay Ninh were destroyed by PLAF main force units despite considerable PLAF advantages. MAAGV and JGS estimated that in almost every village of Tay Ninh the PLAF had "its squad of VC village militia of 12 to 15 men. There are about 50 of these squads in the province. They were not well trained." However, the NFLSVN had seven PLAF main force companies, one reserve main force company, one regional battalion which fought alongside village guerrillas and main force units, and one PAVN Engineer Company, all "well-armed with machine guns, mortars, and 57mm recoilless rifles." Furthermore, communist forces could retreat to two defensible sanctuaries, Duong Minh Chau, and across the Cambodian border. If so, why did nothing happen after the PLAF's victory at Bo Tuc? There are two possible answers to this mystery. First, MAAGV and JGS believed the NFLSVN and PLAF were patiently building up their forces in Tay Ninh for all PLAF companies were operating along

[74] "Special Projects Group, MAAGV, Memorandum: Visit with Province Chief, Tay Ninh Province, 29 May – 1 June, dated 5 June 1962", 4; File: Province Study – Tay Ninh Province – 12 April 1963/Historians Background Material File; Box: #14; RG 472; Archive: NARA II

Highway 19 connecting Binh Duong province (southeast of Tay Ninh) and Tay Ninh, an area that MAAGV and JGS considered one of "the rice bowl[s]" of the Mekong River Delta. Furthermore, VNAF's aerial reconnaissance and intelligence analyses of the Cambodian side of the border indicated that NFLSVN and PLAF personnel were cooperating with "Cambodian tribes... engaged to grow food in return for rice and money." Secondly, thanks to the PAVN, the NFLSVN had no problems arming the PLAF but "a document captured recently shows that these sources [rice] provide only one-fifth of VC needs and that they are facing a big problem in providing for their forces."[75]

Like Phuoc Tuy, Tay Ninh was relatively secure because communist guerrilla and main force units, preparing for future operations, kept a low profile. But while the PLAF's action at Bo Tuc had proven PLAF combat potential, it had little impact on RVN preparations in Tay Ninh. When MAAGV and JGS inspectors toured Tay Ninh, Major Marvin L. Price contradicted himself in his June 1962 inspection report of strategic hamlets. Claiming his visit was concerned "primarily with the progress of hamlet security and the effectiveness of the communications within the hamlets," Price stated, "time did not permit gathering all the information of interest within each hamlet, such as: activities of civic action teams, detailed listing of community projects (schools, dispensaries, common houses) and state of training and equipment of local militia or Republican Youth." Yet, Price concluded "it was obvious that a great deal of progress has been made in recent months which has not been reflected by the few field trips that it has been possible to coordinate." Price, not properly assessing enemy's activity and inactivity, concluded:

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[75] "Special Projects Group, MAAGV, Memorandum: Visit with Province Chief, Tay Ninh Province, 29 May – 1 June, dated 5 June 1962", 2-3; File: Province Study – Tay Ninh Province – 12 April 1963/Historians Background Material File; Box: #14; RG 472; Archive: NARA II

> The various hamlets reflect the initiative and imagination of the local leaders and it is not suggested that the operations are without difficulties. This program, as all other programs, illustrates the unity of effort and forward planning of governmental agencies – or the lack of these necessary factors. The overriding impression of this visit was that, in every case, the desirable elements of a sound concept for rehabilitation were present. What is being done is being done well – and increased support could carry this program ahead rapidly and successfully."[76]

Price left Tay Ninh to inspect Operation SUNRISE in Binh Duong province without realizing that Highway 19, which connected the two provinces, was crawling with PLAF main force companies.

Price's inspection report also revealed two important realities about RVN counter-guerrilla policy. First, far from winning "hearts and minds" of South Vietnamese peasants, RVN government and military officials in the countryside were implementing a counter-guerrilla policy that used very large sticks and had very small carrots. Second, RVN government and military officials, believing their counter-guerrilla policy was working, thought more of the same, not a policy change, was needed. Brigadier General Huynh Van Cao was Corps III commanding general when Price inspected Tay Ninh. Indeed, Cao and his staff had accompanied Price's inspection staff in mid-1962. But Cao's speech at the MAAGV-JGS conference in Tay Ninh laid bare the RVN's sticks and carrots counter-guerrilla policy. Cao asserted that because strong leadership with high ideals was required, the people should unite to support uncompromising leadership. A strong leader, according to Cao, faced "two extremes" when dealing with subjects, either treating them "too severe or too lenient." Cao recommended that neither "extreme provides basis for proper organization so the people can protect themselves. To give the people everything they want is not good leadership. In this backward country we have to lead, not follow, the people. They have to recognize our capabilities as leaders so they will follow us. Unification of leadership is important. Leaders must carry out instructions without

[76] "Special Projects Group, MAAGV, Memorandum: Inspection of Strategic Hamlets, Tay Ninh Province, 18 June 62, dated 25 June 1962", 1-2; File: Province Study – Tay Ninh Province – 12 April 1963/Historians Background Material File; Box: #14; RG 472; Archive: NARA II

excessive discussion and argument. Leaders will be lacking in some ways, but they must be obeyed in order to avoid useless discussion." Given how Diem's government had silenced non-communist opposition since gaining power in 1955, Cao's words on strong leadership echoed the example set by Diem. The remainder of Cao's speech, unapologetic and explicit, touched on the reality of RVN's counter-guerrilla policy:

> Kind treatment of a captured enemy is a good policy, but must be carried out with discretion. Consider how brutal and lacking in similar considerations. Consider how brutal and lacking in similar considerations the VC are... how inhuman they are. If a person is proven by documented evidence to be a VC, we must reserve for him the proper punishment.... We must organize the people to fight and oblige them to fight. We must urge the population to kill VC to establish the fact that the VC is their enemy.
>
> Cu Chi was once famous for supporting the VC, so we did not hesitate to fire on persons helping VC in order to prevent this assistance. Many people are obliged to support the VC and we must give them good reason to refuse by shooting some of them. They can then tell the VC they will be killed if they help. At Cu Chi last year people had to go with the VC for road sabotage. There was no punishment. Now they will be shot by our troops. So they can choose to die dishonourably on the road or honourably at home....
>
> The first complaint about the strategic hamlet program is that people must leave their daily work to participate. This reason is used to justify slowness of construction. Don't be so utopian as to suspect that all will participate willingly. Villagers are selfish and lack community spirit. We know the best way to have a good life is to participate in community activities, but the villagers do not understand this. Many people with plenty of money refuse to help in supporting dispensaries and schools. We must convince the people of their duty to be good citizens – and that we ask less of them than does the VC. We must make a clear comparison between their lives and their existence under the VC....
>
> If the people expect to benefit from the community they must support it.... Sometime... you may have to punish individuals who refuse to participate. Some people believe we do not need a fence, since the loyalty of the people will make it unnecessary. This is utopian. The fence gives us many advantages, including carrying out the population census. To have the people build the fence organizes them against the VC....
>
> Another point is to separate friend from enemy and reward or punish accordingly. Uniform treatment would be unjust, as some people help the VC while others are fighting them. In Phuoc Tuy, people who had relatives with the VC were given one month to get them back. If they failed, they were placed under firm control in a separate location. Thus, the VC knew their families were potential hostages. Persons not supporting the regime, or obviously disloyal, will not be allowed to benefit from social improvements in the hamlet.
>
> ...
>
> The national government has many resources but we do not use them properly. We lack leadership at the lower level.
>
> Do not hesitate to hurt people who are not our friends. Perhaps this is not wise but it is necessary.[77]

[77] "Special Projects Group, MAAGV, Memorandum: Remarks of Brig Gen Cao (Govt Delegate in the Southeastern Region) and Brig Gen Tam (Inspector for the Strategic Hamlet Committee), Tay Ninh, 19 June, dated 25 June 1962", 2-3; File: Province Study – Tay Ninh Province – 12 April 1963/Historians Background Material File; Box: #14; RG 472; Archive: NARA II

Cao's speech could have been dismissed had he been a lowly lieutenant rather than the head of Corps III which covered eleven RVN provinces and the national capital region. With Cao encouraging South Vietnamese officers and American advisors to apply an iron fist counter-guerrilla policy, one suspects that the "winning hearts and minds" counter-guerrilla policy was simply a propaganda phrase for America's media and public consumption. Instead, the real RVN counter-guerrilla policy was the application of 'sticks and carrots' with more stick to kill enemies and cow sympathizers. Cao's 'sticks and carrots' counter-guerrilla policy was practiced by other Corps as well. In Corps II, special forces personnel were authorized by Saigon to unleash the criminal underworld of South Vietnamese society against communist guerrillas operating in Montagnard tribal areas. Shelby L. Stanton, a former US special force commander, recalled that South Vietnamese commandos and Green Berets transformed criminals into hit-men in terror squads that captured, tortured, and killed communists and their sympathizers:

> He [Diem] emptied the Saigon jails of city thugs, violent criminals, and military deserters and gave them to Special Forces in a special "noncontract deal." These unsavoury characters were shipped to remote Special Forces camps, where they were ordered shot if caught escaping. The Special Forces soldiers were tough enough to win the respect of these hoods and kept most of them in line. They were turned into valuable gunhands who were naturally adept at counter-terror tactics against the VC. They mutilated Viet Cong dead. They paid shopkeepers by leaving a round of ammunition on the table, which forced Special Forces soldiers to pay debts to local merchants with team funds and lecture them on civilized warfare. Privately, Special Forces welcomed this tough approach to waging guerrilla war.[78]

Stanton's description of the hidden association between RVN and US special forces and the criminal underworld was not unique in the history of war generally or conflict in Vietnam specifically. French military intelligence and colonial police had organized and trained the Binh Xuyen organized crime syndicate as anti-communist paramilitary forces operating in Saigon-Cholon. In 1958, three years after Diem's government wiped out the BXPF and its criminal networks in Saigon-Cholon, Diem, his brother Nhu, and SSPS intelligence chief Dr. Tran Kim

[78] Stanton, *Green Berets At War*, 51-52

Tuyen "abandoned its moralistic crusade and took steps to revive the illicit opium traffic." They, Saigon's secret service and intelligence community, plus selected military officers and units, were either complicit or directly involved as middlemen for the Laotian poppy fields and Corsican gangsters who had worked with the BXPF and the FFEEC during the French Indochina War. Military vehicles, planes, and boats were used to transport opium shipments to Saigon's harbour where Corsican gangsters collected the products and paid Diem's government a handsome fee. Diem, Nhu, and Tuyen used the opium money to conduct clandestine operations against the NFLSVN and DRVN inside South Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and North Vietnam. However, narcotic funds soon circulated amongst RVN civilian and military officials involved in the drug trafficking.[79] In time, several important officials within the Diem government and military were sharing the wealth generated from narcotic trafficking, but so too were their subordinates, wives, families, and friends.[80] Thus, when US counterinsurgency policy, with its emphasis on security, political and military assistance, social and economic development, and good government,[81] failed to conjure the desired results in Vietnam, the US and RVN turned to the underworld for assistance. BXPF members could use illegal means while the RVN's police and military technically were bound by the state's imperfect legal and justice system. Furthermore, BXPF operations were deniable and BXPF members were expendable. As historian Alfred W. McCoy has argued, the Kennedy administration's "modern counterinsurgency planning with its computers and game theories had failed to do the job... it was time to go back to... the Binh Xuyen bandits."[82]

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[79] Alfred W. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade: Afghanistan, Southeast Asia, Central America, Columbia*, revised ed., (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 2003), 203-207
[80] Lieutenant General Lam Quang Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century: A South Vietnamese General Remembers the Indochina War to the Fall of Saigon* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2001), 321-325
[81] D. Michael Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms: The Failure of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 79-103
[82] McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, 209

Corps IV, which covered the RVN's sixteen southern most provinces, was the most difficult theatre of operation for the PAVN to support the PLAF logistically. Yet, the security situation did not always favour the RVN. In Kien Hoa province, for example, 106 strategic hamlets were to be constructed but only 14 were complete with 25 others under construction by June 1962. Further, the strategic hamlets currently being built had:

> practically no physical security such as barb wire or bamboo fences. There has been no relocation of families. There is a serious lack of funds (1 million piasters is supposed to be coming from Saigon) for the construction of hamlets. USOM [US Operations Mission] radios have not been installed in the province; there are no communications at District-Village level. Medical support such as medical chests and technicians has been received from Saigon, however, there are still only 3 Doctors and 5 Medical Assistants for over 560,000 people in the province.[83]

Given Kien Hoa's poorly built and ill defended strategic hamlets, the province's security completely depended on 5,000 SDC personnel, one CG company for each of Kien Hoa's eight districts, two administrative companies, five organic companies, and three elite ARVN ranger companies, the latter operating as "an air mobile striking force whenever helicopter support becomes available." However, the Kien Hoa provincial study said nothing about the quality of the ARVN rangers and the CG and SDC personnel nor whether the various forces had conducted joint operational exercises together. However, the study's assessment of enemy military and political strength in the province and how the local population perceived the foe were startling. Kien Hoa was one the NFLSVN's "priority areas because of the preponderance of food supplies." In addition, with access to the South China Sea, the PLAF could receive supplies from Cambodia that enabled the NFLSVN to hide "numerous caches of supplies and [build] several well constructed training camps [for the PLAF]." Above all, potential NFLSVN and PLAF strength in Kien Hoa rested on the lack of operational initiative and aggressiveness by RVNAF ground units which conducted few military operations, plus the sympathy and support, passive

[83] "Special Projects Group, MAAGV, Memorandum: Visit to Kien Hoa Province, 14 June 62, dated 19 June 1962", 1-2; File: Province Study – Kien Hoa Province – 22 October 1963/Historians Background Material File; Box: #12; RG 472; Archive: NARA II

and active, given to the communists by Kien Hoa's population. As the Kien Hoa provincial study concluded:

> Another explanation of VC activity is the preponderance of VC sympathy among the great number of educated people in the province. The majority of the populace are Buddhists with about 50,000 Catholics and a lesser number of Cao Daists. The majority are cooperating with VC because of VC pressure; of the approximately 150 villages in the province at least 100 have active VC militia units from squad to platoon size. There are approximately 1,200 active VC (territorial and province) personnel in the province. In addition there is one regular VC Bn [Battalion] Hqs [Headquarters] (516th) and one regular VC company.[84]

The history of the French Indochina War showed that it had never been easy for the guerrilla-based VLA to build its main force units from 1946 to 1954. Therefore, for the NFLSVN to organize, train, and activate one regular PLAF battalion and another company just two years after the NFLSVN's founding was quite impressive. However, the NFLSVN in Kien Hoa had not ordered the PLAF to attack the strategic hamlets or to combat the ARVN, CG, and SDC. Well trained and armed and receiving money, food, clothing, and intelligence from Kien Hoa's population, the NFLSVN and PLAF, not the RVN, held the political and military initiative in the province. Kien Hoa's inadequate strategic hamlets would have collapsed under any real PLAF pressure. Indeed, for most of the RVN's provinces from 1960 to 1963, their security relied less on the strategic hamlets and RVNAF land forces than NFLSVN decisions to order PLAF units into battle. What really stood between the NLFSVN/PLAF and South Vietnam's population were the ARVN, CG, and SDC. Yet, the quality of the ARVN, CG and SDC varied widely. Even worse, MAAGV and JGS recognized that RVNAF land force units had not operated well together. As a JGS strategic hamlet inspector stated, "more needed to be done toward establishing effective liaison, communication and cooperation between hamlets... and the

[84] "Special Projects Group, MAAGV, Memorandum: Visit to Kien Hoa Province, 14 June 62, dated 19 June 1962", 3-4; File: Province Study – Kien Hoa Province – 22 October 1963/Historians Background Material File; Box: #12; RG 472; Archive: NARA II

importance of mobile defense concept as applied to strategic hamlets and an active or passive defense based upon the relative strength of local forces."[85]

From 1960 to 1963, RVNAF land force units struggled to defend the strategic hamlet program throughout rural South Vietnam. The ARVN, CG, and SDC did not perform well in the field. Their most notorious failure, the Battle of Ap Bac of 2 January 1963, had little significance militarily. But it illustrated the flaws of the RVNAF land forces in joint and combined armed operations and gave the PLAF a major psychological victory for despite being outnumbered in manpower and firepower it inflicted heavy losses while suffering few of its own.[86] At 0700 hours on 2 January 1963, the PLAF's 216th Regional Main Force Battalion and 514th My Tho Provincial Force, 300 to 500 armed communists,[87] using good intelligence and selecting their ground well,[88] shot down five helicopters, immobilized three M-113 APCs, and inflicted heavy casualties[89] on the 900 men serving in 7th Division's 11th Infantry Regiment and 7th Company M-

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[85] "Special Projects Group, MAAGV, Memorandum: Remarks of Brig Gen Cao (Govt Delegate in the Southeastern Region) and Brig Gen Tam (Inspector for the Strategic Hamlet Committee), Tay Ninh, 19 June, dated 25 June 1962", 1; File: Province Study – Tay Ninh Province – 12 April 1963/Historians Background Material File; Box: #14; RG 472; Archive: NARA II

[86] "Liberation Press, News Agency of the South Vietnam Liberation National Front, No. 17, Full Account of the Ap Bac Battle, February 10, 1963", 1-12; Folder #8; Box #23; Collection: Neil Sheehan and John Paul Vann Papers; LOC; Nguyen Duc Phuong, *Chien Tranh Viet Nam Toan Tap: Tu Tran Dau (Ap Bac – 1963) Den Tran Cuoi (Sai Gon – 1975), A Complete History of the Vietnam War: From the first battle (Ap Bac – 1963) to the last battle (Sai Gon – 1975)* (Toronto, Ontario: Lang Van, 2001), 66-74; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 203-265; Halberstam, *The Making of A Quagmire*, 67-81; Dave Richard Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet: U.S.-Vietnam in Perspective* (San Rafael: Presidio Press, 1978), 37-38; Pribbenow, *The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam*, 119; Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1966), 131, 296

[87] General Cao Van Vien, *Leadership*, Indochina Monograph Series (College Park: NARA II Library, 1983), 54; Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet*, 32

[88] Phuong, *Chien Tranh Viet Nam Toan Tap*, 62-62; Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet*, 32; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 206-211; Pribbenow, *The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975*, 119; Halberstam, *The Making of A Quagmire*, 72; Vien, *Leadership*, 55

[89] File: "Battle of Ap Bac After Action Report – Dan Chi 129"; Box 14: Historians Background Files; RG 472; Archive: NARA II; Phuong, *Chen Tranh Viet Nam Toan Tap*, 62-64; 67-68; Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet*, 35; Ba, *Hoi Ky 25 Nam Khoi Lua*, 24-91; Brigadier General Ly Tong Ba, "Tran Ap Bac: Thu te va huyen thoai" (*"The Battle of Ap Bac: Myth and Reality"*) in Le Khac Anh Hao, ed., *Nhom Nhung Nha Van Quan Doi: Nhung Tran Danh Khong Ten Trong Quan Su, A Compilation of Writings by Military Writers: The Unknown Battles in History* (Vancouver: Nguyet San Viet Nam, 2003), 146-157; private papers and unpublished studies of ARVN Brigadier General Ly Tong Ba and Graduate Student Phan Vu, *The Vietnam War: A Free Vietnamese's Viewpoint*, mailed to

113 APC, plus two CG battalions.[90] The attack broke down as soon as it started much to the astonishment of 7th Infantry Division commanders and their US advisors who had expected an easy victory. Instead, they were stunned by the tenacious resistance of an enemy who previously had fled whenever it faced helicopters and APCs.[91] At the headquarters of the 7th Infantry, ARVN Colonel Bui Dinh Dam, a good staff officer but a poor operational leader and a reluctant political appointee as divisional commander,[92] broke down in the heat of battle. He was informally replaced by Brigadier General Huynh Van Cao,[93] a Diem loyalist and recently appointed commander of Corps IV whose primary task was to defend the Independence Palace against an ARVN coup d'état,[94] and Senior US Advisor Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann.[95] By 1800 hours, the ARVN 8th Parachute Battalion had dropped into Ap Bac, seeking to salvage the situation. The paratroopers earned the respect of outside observers. Journalist Neil Sheehan, a critic of US and RVN conduct the war, noted:

> In contrast to the regular ARVN, the Saigon airborne were hardy soldiers. The French parachute officers had been the doomed knights of the colonial army, romantic men who exalted comradeship and a brave death as somehow redeeming whatever stupidities accompanied their lot. Their Vietnamese men-at-arms who stayed behind kept the memory, and these paratroops tried to react with the pluckiness of their French ideal.[96]

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this author by General Ba; Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century*, 101; Halberstam, *The Making of A Quagmire*, 74, 76; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 228, 236

[90] Halberstam, *The Making of A Quagmire*, 72-73; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 204-205; Vien, *Leadership*, 53

[91] Vien, *Leadership*, 53, 55; Halberstam, *The Making of A Quagmire*, 72; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 206; Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet*, 32-33; File: Evaluation and Analysis Division (MACJ3-05), Lessons Learned Number 14, Summer 1962; RG 472, Archive: NARA II; File: Evaluation and Analysis Division (MACJ3-05), Lessons Learned Number 26 – M113 Operations, 18 January 1963; RG 472; Archives: NARA II; Ba, *Hoi Ky 25 Nam Khoi Lua*, 55-91; Ba, "Tran Ap Bac: Thu te va huyen thoai", in Hao, ed., *Nhom Nhung Nha Van Quan Doi*, 146-157; private papers and unpublished studies of ARVN Brigadier General Ly Tong Ba and Graduate Student Phan Vu, *The Vietnam War: A Free Vietnamese's Viewpoint*, mailed to this author by General Ba; Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century*, 101

[92] Vien, *Leadership*, 53; Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet*, 30; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 203, 207; Halberstam, *The Making of A Quagmire*, 71

[93] Vien, *Leadership*, 54

[94] Quat, *Viet Nam Di Ve Dau?* vol. II, 671; Nguyen Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 328; Phillips, "Before We Lost in South Vietnam", in Neese and O'Donnell, ed., *Prelude to Tragedy*, 42; Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 276; Halberstam, *The Making of A Quagmire*, 69-70; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 76-78; Vien, *Leadership*, 53; Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled, Volume II,* 1003-1004

[95] Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet*, 35-36

[96] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 262

This they did. Despite a botched landing that spread confusion, the paratroopers reassembled swiftly under fire and advanced on Ap Bac. Without effective artillery or aerial support, however, they could not close with an enemy which held a powerful fire position.[97] Under the cover of darkness, the communist fighters withdrew from Ap Bac.[98] On 3 January 1963, exactly 24 hours after the battle commenced, the 8th Paratroop Battalion swept the hamlet, finding 45 enemy dead and capturing 36 POWs at the cost of 63 dead and 109 wounded from the 7th Infantry and two Civil Guard units, plus three dead and six wounded American advisors.[99]

Many things had gone wrong at Ap Bac, but the central errors were a lack of basic training and especially leadership among ARVN regulars and CG troops. In the words of David Halberstam:

> What else was happening made a dismal scene as well. All the flaws and lack of training came back to haunt the Government troops as the Vietcong stood and fought. The reserve troops that the now-crippled helicopters had ferried in suffered heavy casualties as they spilled out of the aircraft. Those who survived were almost immediately pinned down in paddies by heavy fire from the treeline, for the enemy, well armed and well camouflaged, had a clear field of fire.[100]

This was not the first time a distinction in quality was noticed between ARVN elite and regular troops. The British Military Attaché, while impressed by South Vietnamese paratroopers, marines, and rangers, had raised concerns about ARVN competence. As he noted in January of 1960, "matters were brought to a head when the camp of the 32nd Regiment, 21st Division, near Tay Ninh [less then 100 km Northwest of Saigon] was attacked at night, the [PLAF] rebels getting away with about 300 rifles." In March, PLAF guerrillas successfully raided a rubber

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[97] "Subject: Record of Events of Duc Than 1, 7th January Division Operation from 020630 Jan to Present Situation by US Army Infantry Captain Richard G. Ziegler", 1-2; Folder #3; Box: #83; Collection: Neil Sheehan and John Paul Vann Papers; Archive: LOC; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 262; Vien, *Leadership*, 262; Phuong, *Chien Tranh Viet Nam Toan Tap*, 64

[98] Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire*, 76; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 262-264; Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet*, 37; Vien, *Leadership*, 54; Phuong, *Chien Tranh Viet Nam Toan Tap*, 64

[99] U.S. Army Major David M. Toczek, *The Battle of Ap Bac, Vietnam: They Did Everything but Learn from It* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), 65-115; Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 186-205; Phuong, *Chien Tranh Viet Nam Toan Tap*, 64; Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet*, 37; Vien, *Leadership*, 54

[100] Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire*, 74

plantation 90 km northeast of Saigon and a rice factory near Can Tho, 150 km southwest of Saigon, "without serious intervention from the security forces [ARVN and Civil Guard]." Then two Battalions of 2nd Division, "regarded as crack [regular] troops," met disaster in An Xuyen, 200 km southwest of Saigon, when one company was "cut up in an ambush" and another was "overrun at night." One company from the 23rd Infantry Division was "badly cut up in an ambush not far from Sadec [about 100 plus km Southwest of Saigon]." When that company could not free itself, the two reinforcement battalions sent to extract it had "reactions [that] were quite incredibly feeble." On the other hand, a ranger company ambushed by a roughly equivalent communist force "extricated itself and completely dispersed its opponents, claiming 41 killed," while a marine battalion scored "some notable successes" in Kien Hoa Province, 200 km southwest of Saigon.[101]

Regular ARVN infantry formations performed so badly compared to their elite counterparts, the British Military Attaché concluded, due to inadequate training and a shortage of qualified leadership. The quality of training within ARVN "varies considerably" when the standard should have been universally fixed. Above all, ARVN's training exercises "tend to lack realism."[102] Americans appreciated those points more slowly. Only in 1962 did the US Army Acting Chief at MAAGV/MACV, Brigadier General H.K. Eggleston, push U.S. Advisors to instill greater individual combat initiative in senior and especially junior ARVN officers:

> THE SMALL UNIT LEADER MUST DISPLAY THE HIGHEST QUALITY OF PERSONAL INTEGRITRY AND LEADERSHIP. Since most VC contacts are between small RVNAF units encountering small VC units, [South Vietnamese] junior leaders must seize the initiative from the VC and take whatever actions is required to defeat him on the spot. These actions include but are not limited to: maneuver against the VC for subsequent destruction, pursuit, or direct frontal assault to close with the enemy and destroying him in hand to hand combat if necessary. This type

[101] *Secret & Guard*, Despatch No. 36, British Embassy, Saigon, August 26, 1960, 31- 37, FO 371/152778/206419; NAUK
[102] Ibid., 38

> of action calls for the highest qualities of leadership on the part of junior leadership and must be developed by training and proper supervision.[103]

From 1954 to 1975, ARVN NCOs were selected on the basis of education and military experience while senior officers, earmarked for Staff College in the RVN, France, or the US, were chosen from field and combat tested commanders. More precisely, in practice, VNA NCOs became ARVN NCOs or officers, VNA officers were promoted fast while almost all junior officers were new men. ARVN junior officers were chosen essentially on the basis of formal education and academic achievements.[104] As the public school system did not exist in rural areas before 1963, most ARVN junior officers came from metropolitan areas. ARVN General Cao Van Vien concluded that some "criticism arose that the armed forces were under the control of the educated urbanites—the rich people—and that such selection lacked a popular base. This criticism was partly true, especially during the formative years [1954-1963] of the Vietnamese Armed Forces."[105] This sociology negatively affected the camaraderie between urban officers and peasant soldiers, but the real problem was the elitist hierarchy within the ARVN.

Between the First and Second Republics of Vietnam, the top graduates from the National Military Academy in Da Lat and the Reserve Officer School in Thu Duc were selected by the paratroopers, marines, rangers, armour, artillery, or the navy and air force. The least successful ones, many of them ill-trained and unmotivated conscripts and draft-dodgers, went to the infantry and territorial forces (Civil Guard, Regional Force, Popular Force, etc.).[106] These officers were underpaid, received inadequate training and political education, and were looked

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[103] Evaluation and Analysis Division (MACJ3-05), Lessons Learned Number 16, 19 June 1962; Box 1; RG 472; Archive: NARA II

[104] Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, 30-40, 173-189, 201-207; Vien, *Leadership*, 37

[105] Vien, *Leadership*, 38

[106] Chau, "My War Story from Ho Chi Minh to Ngo Dinh Diem," in Neese and O'Donnell, *Prelude to Tragedy*, 188; Lieutenant General Ngo Quang Truong, *Territorial Forces*, Indochina Monographs (College Park, MD: NARA II Library, 1984), 48-54; *Secret & Guard*, Despatch No. 36, British Embassy, Saigon, August 20, 1960, 27, FO 371/152778/206419; NAUK

down upon by officers commanding more prestigious units.[107] In an after action report/letter written by MAAGV Armour advisor Major Jack A. Macslarrow on January 3, 1963, Macslarrow pointed out that "troops of the 17th Civil Guard Battalion displayed poor battle discipline under enemy fire. Only fifty percent (50%) of the personnel returned fire against the Viet Cong when contact was established [at Ap Bac]."[108] Furthermore, as Ap Bac demonstrated all too well, RVNAF land force units still had problems operating jointly and with sophisticated military equipment supplied by the U.S. military. This should not have come as a surprise as few ARVN, CG, and SDC units had trained together since 1955.[109] In mid-1960, a British Military Attaché assessed the Parachute Brigade as outstanding and thought four out of seven ARVN Divisions were good. But the 21st Division was of "pretty poor quality," the 23rd Division was in "a very bad state," on the verge of collapse and being rebuilt, while the 7th Division was rather "mediocre."[110]

That so many basic problems existed six years after RVNAF ground units began forming cast a poor light on Diem's government, RVNAF generals, and US advisors. Many armies suffer from such flaws but learn to overcome them. But learning to coordinate arms and units and fire and movement is not easy. It requires training and practice, and most RVNAF land outfits simply lacked both by January 1963. Units had rarely cooperated in actions, nor had many faced a tough fight. Many armies had been humiliated by their foe and learned to better fight another day, notably the US Army in Tunisia in 1943 or the Indian Army in the Arakan in 1944. The RVNAF

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[107] Chau, "My War Story from Ho Chi Minh to Ngo Dinh Diem," in Neese and O'Donnell, *Prelude to Tragedy*, 188; Truong, *Territorial Forces*, 48-54; *Secret & Guard*, Despatch No. 36, British Embassy, Saigon, 27, FO 371/152778/206419; NAUK

[108] "US Army Advisory Detachment, Dinh Tuong Sector, My Tho, Vietnam, 3 January 1963, Maj. Macslarrow's letter to ARVN Maj. Tho", 1-2; Folder: #11; Box: #38; Collection: Neil Sheehan and John Paul Vann Papers; LOC

[109] "Annex 'B': Air Support Operation 'Duc Thang 1/TG; 7th Infantry Division (ARVN) by USAF Major Herbert L. Prevost, ALO, 7th Div, 15 January 1963", 1-14; Folder: #11; Box: #38; Collection: Neil Sheehan and John Paul Vann Papers; LOC

[110] *Secret & Guard*, Despatch No. 36, British Embassy, Saigon, August 20, 1960, 46-47, FO 371/152778/206419; NAUK

land force was completely incompetent. The problem was that it had not improved much between 1960 and 1963.

This failure stemmed partly from RVNAF land force's politicization. Politicization created disunity in RVNAF's chain-of-command and crippled its strategic flexibility. Politically reliable officers were less inclined to take military risks as they could lose politically if they were too aggressive and suffered high casualties. Thus, many shrunk from real combat which crippled their ability to improve their responses to enemy challenges. By not selecting for professional competence, one reduced the number of officers who understood the need to treat training or combat performance seriously. Politicization also made it hard for RVNAF to change course quickly and to reverse systematic inertia. Yet politicization did not automatically cause poor combat quality.

Institutional factors also caused Saigon to ignore the training problems affecting officers and soldiers of non-elite infantry units. Ronald H. Spector observed, as far back as 1954, that RVNAF troops and officers received little time to train and prepare for war, least of all combined arms operations. "Virtually all the divisional and regimental commanders were new to their units and did not know their men or their subordinate officers. Few had ever commanded anything larger than a battalion. All lacked experience in the use of artillery and other supporting arms."[111] These failures were understandable in ARVN's early years, but not six years later. Yet in 1960, MAAGV/MACV reported ARVN non-elites still received "improper or inappropriate training." Their individual training was "frequently superficial or incomplete." As Spector assessed:

> Few South Vietnamese officers shared, or even understood, the American officers' belief in coordination, teamwork, loyalty to superiors and subordinates, skill, and delegation of authority. Yet these ideas were fundamental to the U.S. style of military operations. Nor did the Vietnamese officers see their government or the army as an entity; they viewed each in terms of their own

[111] Spector, *Advice and Support*, 278

particular bureau, agency, or battalion, independent of, and usually in competition with, other agencies and units.[112]

Yet anyone in Washington reading advisors' reports before 1960 and as late as 1962 would have thought the ARVN was a decent force experiencing growing pains. The US advisors in Vietnam had faith in their way of doing things and took basic competence for granted. US advisors did not fully appreciate what was happening until 1962-1963 for several reasons. While they saw problems in RVNAF land force training, they misunderstood their significance. They thought RVNAF land force could play to its strengths, firepower and mechanization, and therefore assessed the RVNAF by its ability to handle such issues. But the RVNAF also put its best men into these areas. Because South Vietnamese officers could operate ships, planes, and armor, Americans assumed they could effectively lead formations in battle when, in fact, RVNAF land forces were incapable of, and sometime unwilling to, conduct serious combat at or below the battalion-level. In effect, both the RVNAF and the Americans had abandoned a central part of the army, the infantry in the field, which was precisely the force which had to do most of the fighting against the PLAF and PAVN. Americans underrated the significance of the weakness of regular RVNAF units in classic light infantry work because they doubted those units would be exposed. The Americans were not interested in a light infantry war but in forcing the enemy to fight against a US-style conventional warfare. When PAVN and the PLAF opted to play their own battlefield game, the RVNAF ran into trouble. Moreover, until Ap Bac, US advisors, including John Paul Vann, underrated the quality of the PLAF and PAVN while overrating the impact of APCs and helicopters. As a result, the US advisors failed almost as badly at Ap Bac as had the ARVN officers. Thus, US advisors did little to help ARVN overcome its weaknesses piror to 1963. Indeed, they indirectly encouraged ARVN to focus its attention on

[112] Ibid., 344-345

the wrong thing. Although the argument of Krepinevich and others about American preoccupation with conventional operations did not inadequately explain ARVN problems from 1960-1963, it exposed the American failure to see the problems and to appreciate the need to address them.

"Whether due to espionage, poor leadership, lack of communication, or inadequate training, in the early months of 1960 the South Vietnamese Army had shown itself clearly unequal to the task of coping with the steadily growing insurgency," concluded Spector.[113] The politicization of its officer corps, the lack of training for lesser elite formations, RVNAF inexperience in combined arms warfare, and the inability to match the two punching power of the PLAF and PAVN caused it to suffer at Hanoi's hands. These problems only grew after November 1963 when Washington escalated the war and Hanoi responded in kind, leaving General Thieu in Saigon even more vulnerable than Diem. Meanwhile top political and military officials in Washington, unclear why things were going so wrong, so quickly, and seemingly so suddenly, became increasingly frustrated by their inability to budge Diem. By 1960, US officials hoped a coup d'état would teach a fearful Diem to reform his regime. By 1963, they had concluded he must go. Whereas in 1954 there had been a variety of choices for non-communist nationalist leadership in South Vietnam, by 1963 the RVNAF was the only option other than Diem and the only lever left to the Americans. They thought they could use it to make the machine work exactly as they wanted, without counter productive effects. This mistake reveals the Kennedy Administration's ignorance of the nature of civil-military relations in an underdeveloped state.

As the RVNAF's organization, training, and combat capability underwent serious re-evaluation and assessment, the PLAF and PAVN did not pause so that the RVNAF could have

[113] Ibid., 347-348

time to recover. In mid-1963, the United State Operations Mission Vietnam (USOMV) inspected rural South Vietnam to assess the security situation. The USOMV concluded there was a battlefield stalemate. In Corps IV, the USOMV visited fourteen provinces. In Long An, the USOMV reported that the provincial leadership and administration approached the strategic hamlet program with good organizational, planning, and implementation skills. In addition, they got "out among the population and know how to work with the people and win their sympathy." However, "the training and arming of hamlet militia" remained the main problem in Long An. In Kien Tuong, USOMV personnel were disappointed that "no progress in the strategic hamlet program in Kien Tuong province [was made] due to an almost lack of understanding of the program or interest in it on the part of the province chief."[114]

In Dinh Tuong, where the Battle of Ap Bac had occurred, USOMV staff found progress had "been slight.... In some areas, good hamlets have be constructed, but has been offset by mistakes in other areas, such as Ap Bac." Kien Hoa was faced with "a difficult situation" but USOMV thought "progress has been excellent... due primarily to the excellent leadership of the province chief and his understanding of the necessity to win the support of the population for the government and for the strategic hamlet program. He has proceeded slowly and concentrated on the quality of his hamlets." In Vinh Binh, progress had "also been excellent despite the fact that a great number of hamlets were built too quickly in the early months of 1963." However, due to the lack of organization, training, and arms allotted to CG and SDC units, many Vinh Binh strategic hamlets had "became vulnerable to the Vietcong." While the USOMV was pleased that both MAAGV and JGS had increased the quantity and quality of the CG and SDC manpower

[114] "An Evaluation of Progress in the Strategic Hamlet – Provincial Rehabilitation Program by Director/USOM Joseph L. Brent and Assistant Director for Rural Affairs/USOM R.C. Phillips, May 1, 1963, Attachment I: Progress in the Strategic Hamlet Program – IV Corps Area", 1; File: 1079 Defense Office of the Secretary of Defense Correspondence, Phillips, Rufus; Box: #40; Collection: Edward Geary Lansdale Papers; Archive: THIWRP

and firepower, USOMV warned that without "at least a battalion of ARVN" reinforcing the CG and SDC of Vinh Binh, militias and village defenders still remained vulnerable to PLAF attacks. In Vinh Long, while the strategic hamlet program had started well, the province had spiralled almost into the abyss because the new provincial chief and his administration did not trust the population which "made it difficult to develop any such [self-defense] spirit in the hamlet. This province cannot possibly be cleared [of NFLSVN and PLAF] in 1963." In Kien Phong, USOMV reported that progress had "been excellent... due to the vigor and administrative skill of the province chief." However, in An Giang, there had "been little progress in this province in the last 6 months with the exception of Tri-ton district." The security of An Giang, like in many other provinces throughout South Vietnam, were more fictitious than real: "The security situation seems to be good but this is mainly due to the Vietcong having concentrated their efforts in other provinces." In Kien Giang, a "great deal of progress was achieved in the first 6 months from April 1962, but has slowed down in recent months. Provincial administration of the program is not strong."[115]

In Chuong Thien, the progress achieved in 1962 had disappeared by 1963 as the "provincial administration has been weak and adequate military [RVNAF land force] support had been lacking.... A true spirit of self-defense is lacking. It appears that at the present time, the Vietcong are in the ascendancy in this province and are making progress." In Ba Xuyen:

> minimal progress has been achieved... within the last 6 months after some advancement during the first months of 1962. Military support has been lacking and the province administration appears weak in its administration of the program, although the province chief seems both interested and determined to carry it out. There appears to be a confusion of priorities within the province and, in general, the lack of military support (necessary to the success of the program in this area) has greatly hindered progress.[116]

[115] Ibid., 2-3
[116] Ibid., 4

Phong Dinh's strategic hamlets were "completed in name only and many lack adequate defenses." Lastly, An Xuyen's security situation had "definitely deteriorated... and the Viet Cong are in the ascendancy in every area except the one controlled by Father Hoa [head of the Catholic community, which was naturally anti-communist]." Worse yet, RVNAF land force's offensive operations against PLAF's base in the U Minh Ha swamp and forest:

> turned out to be a defeat for the government with most of the population in these hamlets now under the tacit control of the Vietcong. The hamlets established by the Navy will probably suffer a similar fate. Most of the hamlets do not have adequate security and are inhabited by people how are hostile to the government. The only real progress in this province is in Father Hoa's area where recently a number of families came and asked for protection. Of the hamlets listed as complete in the province, perhaps only 5% have adequate security and even in these, morale is very low. The main problem in this province is that adequate military support of the program does not exist and that the program is over-extended into areas where the hamlets cannot be protected.[117]

In Corps III, the RVN's most important Corps as it was there that the NFLSVN and PLAF had to make progress to win the war, the defense situation also varied. Once the PLAF had stepped up its offensive operations, RVNAF land force units struggled to re-conquer the countryside before they could protect US personnel who were implementing the strategic hamlet program. USOMV stated that by 1963 "Military operations invariably take precedence over hamlet construction operations, often hindering the latter."[118] After visiting thirteen provinces, the USOMV listed nine failures that constituted "hindrances to the [strategic hamlet] program... [and] have had their impact on progress over the past six months." The "points" that were "obstructive to the [strategic hamlet program and long-term counter-guerrilla] effort" were:

> (1) Failure to understand the "minuteman" role and home defense potential of "hastily-trained" hamlet militia;
> (2) Failure to understand the need for sturdy hamlet fortifications in areas not currently under VC influence;
> (3) Failure to understand the importance of hamlet classification, establishment of a valid hamlet inter-family and block system, hamlet intelligence network, etc;

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[117] Ibid., 5

[118] "An Evaluation of Progress in the Strategic Hamlet – Provincial Rehabilitation Program by Director/USOM Joseph L. Brent and Assistant Director for Rural Affairs/USOM R.C. Phillips, May 1, 1963, Attachment II: Progress in the Strategic Hamlet Program – III Corps Area", 2-7; File: 1079 Defense Office of the Secretary of Defense Correspondence, Phillips, Rufus; Box: #40; Collection: Edward Geary Lansdale Paper; Archive: THIWRP

(4) Reluctance to trust the people to the extent of issuing arms, ammunition and radios essential to their own defense (Binh Duong);
(5) Continued reliance in some areas on static defense posts and grandiose offensive military operations which serve only to provide targets for the VC in the one instance and often warn him of an incoming attack in the other. (Successful examples of the opposite approach exist along Route 15 (Bien Hoa-Phuoc Tuy) and in Binh Tuy Province);
(6) Failure in concept of the importance of dovetailing hamlet economic planning and development into the first phases of the program;
(7) Failure to realize the importance at the outset of free hamlet elections, free hamlet self-help determinations, etc;
(8) Failure in liaison such as working out of operational agreements with bordering provinces, thereby denying the VC the opportunity of border refugee;
(9) Failure in some instances to demand the highest standards of conduct by the military in military-civilian relationship.[119]

Thus, the ARVN, CG, and SDC in Corps III in mid-1963 were not well organized, had received no standardized training, were unevenly armed, and combat capability varied widely. Worse yet, they did not conduct joint operational exercises together. The quality of the strategic hamlets in Corps III also varied from one province to another. There seemed to be little to no coordination between the RVN government and military throughout Corps III which cut back the number of military operations against the NFLSVN and PLAF and reduced pacification operations. Secondly, PLAF units took advantage of this confusion by moving from one province to another. Lastly, while the PLAF and NFLSVN controlled their areas by gaining active support from the people, in RVN-dominated areas the inhabitants were not forced to actively support the RVN's cause. In a joint JGS and MAAGV's "Estimate of the Situation (3d quarter 1963) dated October 7th, 1963, the report indicated that security within Corps III varied among the provinces, that the organization, training, and combat capability also varied within the ARVN, CG and SDC, and finally that the ability of the strategic hamlets to withstand PLAF's attacks varied.[120]

[119] Ibid., 1
[120] "MAAGV, Corps III, Saigon, Vietnam, Subject: Estimate of the Situation (3d quarter 1963)", 1-119; File: Estimate of the Situation; Box: #2; Collection: Wilbur Wilson Papers; Archive: USAMHI

In Corps II, counter-guerrilla efforts proved longer lasting than in any other areas of South Vietnam due to three factors. First, the Central Highlands was home to many Montagnards who, while not necessarily anti-communist, were rather anti-Vietnamese. Since the NFLSVN was mostly Vietnamese, the Montagnard tribes resisted the NFLSVN even if they still disliked the RVN's interventionism and assimilation of their traditional village society. Secondly, many Catholic refugees who had been resettled in the area were natural allies of Diem's government and foes of the NFLSVN and PLAF. Thirdly, the NFLSVN and PLAF worked with the DRVN and PAVN to build up forward logistical and operational bases in the Laotian and Vietnamese border areas. While the PAVN and PLAF operated together against the ARVN, CG, and SDC, the PLAF conducted guerrilla actions to buy time for the PAVN to mass forces on the Laotian side of the Central Highlands. Nevertheless, Corps II faced serious problems by 1963. In Khanh Hoa province, MAAGV and JGS intelligence estimated communist "strength at between 200 and 800 in the province, but there has been relatively little Vietcong activity.... It is difficult to evaluate the hamlets in this province because they are subject[ed] to no great degree of Vietcong pressure." In Binh Dinh province, while the provincial administration and military establishment were striving to improve the security situation in the process they neglected social and economic developments. "Security is not enough," the USOMV contended, "particularly in Binh Dinh where most of the population is extremely poor."[121]

Finally in Corps I, responsible for South Vietnam's northern-most provinces, the security situations in each province varied. But the PLAF and PAVN had stepped up their assaults on Corps I's strategic hamlets and other RVN targets more vigorously throughout 1963. One

[121] "An Evaluation of Progress in the Strategic Hamlet – Provincial Rehabilitation Program by Director/USOM Joseph L. Brent and Assistant Director for Rural Affairs/USOM R.C. Phillips, May 1, 1963, Attachment III: Progress in the Strategic Hamlet Program – II Corps Area", 1-5; File: 1079 Defense Office of the Secretary of Defense Correspondence, Phillips, Rufus; Box: #40; Collection: Edward Geary Lansdale Papers; Archive: THIWRP

possible explanation for this escalation was that Corps I was much closer to the DRVN, allowing Hanoi to replace PAVN and PLAF losses more quickly than in more distant regions. The security situation of Quang Ngai province was improving in every aspect. The province's strategic hamlets, completed on schedule, were of high quality thanks to the effective "cooperation and coordination between the province and the [ARVN] 25th Division", which was rated by USOMV as "very satisfactory." Combined PAVN and PLAF efforts to overrun many Quang Ngai's strategic hamlets failed. As USOMV staff concluded:

> The best proof of progress lies... in the strong resistance staged against the VC by many hamlets during the recent widespread Vietcong offensive in this province. Such resistance and the cooperation the regular ARVN troops received from teh population would not have been possible unless the strategic hamlets were offering the population something they felt was worth fighting for. If the training and arming of hamlet militia can be speeded up and if more tangible assistance can be gotten to the population, ultimate victory seems sure.[122]

But in Quang Tin, the provincial chief and his deputy "tend to view the strategic hamlet program primarily in military terms: an objective to be achieved through command procedures with a minimum of persuasion and explanation. Consequently, the local population are for the most part reluctant participants in the strategic hamlet program." While the province did not face NFLSVN propaganda attacks or PAVN and PLAF military assaults, USOMV worried how the province's inhabitants would react if the PAVN and PLAF began military and political operations there. By mid-1963, when USOMV visited Quang Tin, "only about 1/3 of the 201 strategic hamlets are completed in accordance with the six criteria and it is difficult to say how many hamlets have developed only adequate spirit of self-defense, probably very few." Quang Nam was replacing its old provincial administration as of mid-1963. In the process, however, the province's security and defence were being tested by PAVN and PLAF "raids and harassment

[122] "An Evaluation of Progress in the Strategic Hamlet – Provincial Rehabilitation Program by Director/USOM Joseph L. Brent and Assistant Director for Rural Affairs/USOM R.C. Phillips, May 1, 1963, Attachment III: Progress in the Strategic Hamlet Program – I Corps Area", 1; File: 1079 Defense Office of the Secretary of Defense Correspondence, Phillips, Rufus; Box: #40; Collection: Edward Geary Lansdale Papers; Archive: THIWRP

which are fairly frequent." Prior to mid-1963, the provincial chief and his military chief neither understood nor implemented their provincial strategic hamlet program properly. Strategic hamlets were poorly built. Many inhabitants had to relocate to poorly built strategic hamlets without compensation for their lost properties. As the USOMV noted, "provincial officials do not appear adequately concerned about the damaging psychological effects." Thus, "the population [of Quang Nam] seems to give moderate support to the program, but there is not much evidence of any real enthusiasm."[123]

As for Thua Thien, USOMV reported "this province has displayed a limited appreciation of the importance of the strategic hamlet program and not much aptitude for its execution." The strategic hamlet program miserably lagged behind other provinces in Corps I because the provincial chief, until mid-1963, was not interested in building strategic hamlets or securing his province at all. Only when USOMV visited Thua Thien did its provincial chief began implementing the strategic program. Even then, he and his staff did so cautioning for fear of angering Diem's government. Surprisingly, USOMV indicated that Thua Thien had "had little Vietcong activity, although there were 6 reported incidents in March, one being an unsuccessful attack on the Hue power station." USOMV personnel also noted that "quality of the hamlets is difficult to evaluate in this province." While the "attitude of the people toward the strategic hamlet program is moderately favourable, but this attitude is not often put to the test" because the NFLSVN, PLAF, and PAVN were not active in Thua Thien, whose peasants had yet been forced either to defend or abandon their strategic hamlets under enemy attacks.[124]

On the DMZ, Quang Tri's provincial security situation was far better than Thua Thien's. Yet, like so many other provinces throughout South Vietnam, Quang Tri was quiet not due to

[123] Ibid., 2-3
[124] Ibid., 3

RVN governmental competency or the high level of RVNAF combat capability but because the NFLSVN, PLAF, and PAVN were operationally inactive. USOMV reported that Quang Tri's provincial chief was "active and moves about the countryside learning first-hand the needs and sentiments of the population.... [However] his staff was not very aggressive. The local population is favourably disposed to the program, but the intensity of their resistance to the Vietcong is difficult to gauge, because VC actions against the hamlets have been limited." Furthermore, while provincial and military coordination and cooperation slowly improved and the liaison between the ARVN 1st Division and other CG and SDC units had "not been satisfying but are improving," Thua Thien's major problem in mid-1963 was "the training of hamlet militias [CG and SDC]; training which can be accomplished only long after hamlet defenses are completed."[125] This was wishful thinking as no RVNAF land force units since 1955 were able to prepare for combat without interference by the RVN government, which expected its military to conduct both military operations and civic and humanitarian actions, and/or the PAVN and PLAF. In September 1963, two months before Diem's ouster, MAAGV and JGS in Saigon received monthly reports from all forty-four RVN provinces on six topics: General Situation, Enemy Situation, Friendly Situation, Ratio of RVN forces to PLAF and PAVN forces, Status of Strategic Hamlet Program, and Problem Areas. Like the USOMV provincial reports, results were quite variable.[126]

By 1963, Saigon viewed Hanoi as the lesser of its threats; the greater one was Washington. The traumatic Buddhist Crisis of 1963 shocked South Vietnamese, Americans, and

[125] Ibid., 4
[126] File: "Area Study – III Corps – 30 September 1963", 4-98; Box: #14 Historians Background Material Files; RG 472; Archive: NARA II

the world, speeding up the collapse of Diem's government.[127] Buddhist monks and their faithful,[128] driven by genuine grievances against Diem plus their own political ambitions, violently took to the streets, provoking harsh retaliation from Nhu's secret police. "Thich Tri Quang's militant, politicized brand of Buddhism later caused the United States incredible grief," argued Robert J. Topmiller, "but in 1963, Americans viewed him as a heroic figure and a symbol of American resolve to force concessions from Diem."[129] As the forces of Buddhism, Washington, and ARVN converged on Saigon, the Ngo brothers discussed a separate peace with the DRVN, a still mysterious event.[130] Fredrik Logevall has argued that it is almost impossible to determine why the two sides talked and what they hoped to gain. He averred that Hanoi chose to negotiate because the ground war was going well for the communists, while Nhu hoped to increase Diem's leverage over Washington.[131] Gareth Porter, conversely, has maintained that Nhu hoped for leverage over Washington but even more so against Hanoi as the insurgency in the South had failed to reach its original expectation—victory.[132] While Logevall doubted "Nhu and his brother could long have survived in power following any kind of deal with Hanoi,"[133] the first scholar to examine the links, Francis X. Winters, was more hopeful:

> The tantalizing question of the prospects for a stable alliance between Ho and Diem, which the two began to explore in July 1963, will remain a matter of permanent speculation. Amid the many formidable indications of the eventual failure of such federal cooperation, there remains one slender hint that they might have succeeded in such a sudden shift of tactics. That hope lay in an ardent aspiration for independence that they shared.[134]

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[127] Francis X. Winters, *The Year of The Hare: America In Vietnam, January 25, 1963 – February 15, 1964* (London: The University of Georgia Press, 1997), 29-39; Robert J. Topmiller, *Lotus Unleashed: The Buddhist Peace Movement In South Vietnam 1964-1966* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 2-6
[128] Winters, *The Year of The Hare*, 29-39
[129] Topmiller, *The Lotus Unleashed*, 4
[130] Winters, *The Year of The Hare*, 160; Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 6; Gareth Porter, *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 119-127
[131] Logevall, *Choosing War*, 7-12
[132] Porter, *Perils of Dominance*, 119-127
[133] Logevall, *Choosing War*, 7
[134] Winters, *The Year of The Hare*, 160

Neither PAVN nor the PLAF brought down the Diem regime—Washington and the RVNAF did. The Buddhist crisis of 1963 led directly to Diem's demise while the Thieu junta survived Buddhist crises for several years later. Why? There are many answers. After Diem fell, the situation rapidly became so chaotic that the Americans could not abandon Saigon. Ironically then, Diem was destroyed because his regime was more powerful than those which succeeded him. Another answer was Washington's idealism—the fundamental belief in the betterment of the world through America's liberal and democratic principles as well as its rigid worldview and inflexible foreign policy.[135] A third answer was American ignorance, ethnocentrism, and frustration. They were convinced that things were going wrong and that a quick and radical solution was the only way out. Here temptation entered the equation as many of Diem's subordinates called constantly for American support for a coup. Kennedy administration officials, aware of Diem's mistakes but unable to budge him, as well as disenchanted ARVN and RVN officials believed that Diem was the problem. In fact, he, like RVNAF generals and colonels, was the victim of a normal post-colonial state in the Third World, except that while other such countries enjoyed a period of peace that allowed their societies, politics and economies to blossom, the First and Second Republics of Vietnam were attacked by a deadly foe.

The various conspirators believed that once the Ngo family was deposed, the ARVN's promotional systems could be de-politicized, commanders would be rewarded for their military merit, and all paramilitary forces could be brought under one, unified and centralized chain-of-command. The generals also wanted to abolish the political nepotism of the Diem regime, reopen

[135] Logevall, *Choosing War*, XIII-XXIV, 375-413; Winters, *The Year of The Hare*, 166-173, 190-199, 224-236

Buddhist pagodas, and release political prisoners.[136] A fervent civilian supporter of ARVN generals' actions on 1 November 1963, Bui Diem, hoped for a democratic future:

> Ideally replacing Diem would allow us to start over, instituting the type of government that had been denied the nation for the last nine years.... My own political philosophy had a very simple basis. I just did not believe that you could successfully force your ideas on others. For whatever reasons in my nature, I bridled at the attempts of others to impose their will on me. That was what had given me my instinctive dislike of the Communists. I knew that behind Ho Chi Minh's suave charm was a world-class manipulator whose method of managing human beings was manifest in the people's committees and in Vo Nguyen Giap's iron fist. That was also the reason I found Diem so unappealing..... I saw democracy was the political expression of these predilections, and constitutionality was a protective framework for them.[137]

Watching the 1 November 1963 ARVN coup d'état unfold on television from Staff College in the U.S., Lieutenant General Lam Quang Thi thought the RVN could turn the war around, gaining popular backing for the new government:

> Although I was convinced that President Diem and his brother had to be removed from power, I didn't believe they deserved to die, especially under such demeaning circumstances.... Nevertheless, I was so excited by the success of the coup d'état and the great opportunity for the new government to rally the Army and the people to defeat the Communist insurgency that I wanted to go home at once to offer my services to the new government.... I was frustrated to learn that many officers who had participated in the coup had been promoted and were given important commands while I was stuck in the United States.[138]

After returning from the U.S. and witnessing ARVN coup and counter-coups, however, Thi rethought the wisdom of liberalism and democracy for underdeveloped state:

> Taking advantage of the chaotic political situation in Saigon, the VC attacked or harassed a record number of small outposts within the division's tactical area.... It was during that night that I realized the impact of ideological division and political turmoil on the military situation in a country ravaged by Communist insurgency. I realized that we were caught in an insurmountable dilemma; I saw no end to the vicious circle that plagued our country. I was aware that political stability could exist only in truly democratic countries but a developing country at war could never be truly democratic. Even our neighboring countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Taiwan, and South Korea, which had no war, had never seen democratically elected government.[139]

Ambassador Bui Diem and Thi, like other ARVN generals of 1 November 1963, the paratrooper colonels of 11 November 1960, *le Groupe Caravelle*, and VNA General Nguyen Van Hinh in

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[136] Dinh, *25 Nam Binh Nghiep*, 401-445; Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 182; Kahin, *Intervention*, 146-181
[137] Bui Diem, *In The Jaws of History*, 100, 103-104
[138] Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century*, 110
[139] Ibid., 128

1954, all advocated a liberal democratic system as a third alternative to Ho Chi Minh's communism and Ngo Dinh Diem's despotism. George McT. Kahin argued:

> The key members of the new government's MRC—Generals Minh, Don, Dinh, and Kim—together with Prime Minister Tho, wanted to move as rapidly as possible towards transferring the struggle for power in the South from the military to the political level. And they believed that a reformed South Vietnamese government with a substantially expanded popular base could compete successfully with the NLF [VC] on the political level. They were convinced they could not win a military decision on their own, and they did not want the United States to attempt to do so for them. They saw the ouster of Diem and Nhu as an opportunity to expand Saigon's popular support and offer fresh possibilities for settling outstanding issues through peaceful means.[140]

Fredrik Logevall has a similar interpretation for why ARVN generals brought down the Diem's regime:

> It was not that they [ARVN Generals] sought to abandon the conflict against the Vietcong, or even that they no longer saw any use for military action; rather, they saw it as imperative to expand the political base of the Saigon government and offer new initiatives for solving outstanding problems through nonmilitary means. Doing so would not be easy, they conceded, but they felt certain that they could negotiate with the NLF [VC] from a position of strength by building a rapport with those groups alienated by the Ngos—students, urban professionals, members of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects, and, most important, the Buddhists. Junta leaders believed strongly that these groups had been attracted to the NLF not out of a commitment to communism but because the NLF was seen as a symbol of opposition to the Diem regime.[141]

A more liberal society and political system were necessary to defeat the communists politically or militarily. It was Diem's most trusted men who turned against him on 1 November 1963, not unsurprisingly as those he did not trust had no power to threaten him. Those attacking Saigon were the beloved units and commanders of the President, the paratroopers and marines led by Catholic Tonkinese and Annamites, and the armored units which had rescued the President on 11 November 1960.[142] The conspirators selected Catholic officers to lead the coup for three reasons: first, to demonstrate to the people of South Vietnam that Catholic Tonkinese and Annamites were not the problem, Diem was; second, to show that Diem was corrupt and that his government lacked support; and third, to recapture popular support from the communists by

[140] Kahin, *Intervention*, 183
[141] Logevall, *Choosing War*, 65
[142] Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 208

symbolically demonstrating a united effort of the army on behalf of people of all backgrounds and beliefs against the Diem regime.[143] The coup was supported by Washington, the people in Saigon, and ARVN colonels and generals which ensured there could be no going back.[144] At the order of "Big" Minh, Diem and Nhu were executed in a M-113 APC in Cholon on 2 November 1963.[145]

The Coup d' État of 1 November 1963 was ARVN's great contribution to this phase of the war. The ARVN, like the Diem government, could crush its internal foes but not its far more dangerous external rivals. But the army neither stabilized Saigon nor de-politicized the officer corps as the colonels and generals wrestled for power. Military training and combat exercise ceased as units were distracted by political turmoil in Saigon, allowing the communist insurgency to spread in South Vietnam. Increasingly, RVNAF land force units, without training or clear orders, to re-conquer territory from their enemy, with disastrous consequences. These units were defeated more often from 1963 to 1965 than between 1960 and 1963. Between the assassinations of Nhu and Diem and the landing of US Marines in Da Nang in 1965, ARVN commanders fought each other for the position of head-of-state in Saigon while the PLAF seized the countryside. As Lieutenant General Lam Quang Thi, later responsible for improving the education of ARVN officers at the NMA, recalled:

> The situation in Viet Nam appeared helpless after the overthrow of Diem. President Diem's downfall created a political vacuum that the generals were unable to fill.... The generals who succeeded him, in fact, had been trained by the French to be leaders of small units. They lacked the education and political background to assume President Diem's job. It was during that time [1963-1965] that I saw the urgency of improving the education of the cadets at our military academy to better prepare them to assume leadership roles in the army as well in the administration, because in developing countries, the army had always played a primary role in the conduct of national affairs.[146]

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[143] Ibid., 213-275
[144] Tran, *Cong va Toi*, 443-446
[145] Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung*, 229-238
[146] Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century*, 128-129

As D. Michael Shafer concluded, "With the kingpin [Diem] gone, the palace politics system flew apart, flinging the once carefully counterbalanced factions into violent confrontation."[147] Shafer was both right and wrong. Diem had intensified the politicization of the military apparatus in South Vietnam. But even before he came to power, Saigon was riddled by political factions such as the Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Binh Xuyen, and VNA. The army could have taken power in 1954, but it had been blocked because Washington had backed Diem. In the chaotic years 1963-1965, any ARVN general or colonel could have ruled, but Air Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky became the Prime Minister and ARVN General Nguyen Van Thieu became the President. Why? The premier Western scholar on Vietnam, Alexander Woodside, made a very convincing case that:

> Superficially, it seemed to be a Vietnamese encounter with the operations of an American neocolonialism that ultimately lost both its stamina and the consistency of its world-view. The United States did not perfectly control any Saigon government between 1954 and 1975. But it is also true that no Saigon government ever survived without enormous American economic and military aid. And no Saigon government whose behavior the U.S. government seriously distrusted remained in office for very long.[148]

Diem brought stability out of the chaos of post-colonial, factional-riddled, Saigon, from 1954 to 1958. Despite his inability to crush the PLAF and PAVN from 1958 to 1963, Diem's external enemy did not destroy the First Republic. That was accomplished by ambitious ARVN officers and idealists in Washington. Diem's regime had made many mistakes, but it also had some achievements to its credit. Unfortunately, these all were associated entirely with him. When he fell, so did the state.

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[147] Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms*, 271

[148] David Joel Steinberg, ed., *In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History* (Honolulu: University of Hawii Press, 1987), 365

Chapter 9
Conclusion

Even though the conflict ended over thirty years ago, debates about the Vietnam War continue, especially when the US ponders using military force again to achieve a political objective. The so-called "Vietnam Lessons" have been the topics of incessant television interviews, newspapers, popular writings, and scholarly works. Readers are welcome to draw their own "Vietnam Lessons"—if there is one—from this dissertation but the following conclusion is the inevitable outcome of questions that have been raised, research that has been done and arguments that have been made about the neglected history of South Vietnam's society, politics and military. I close my dissertation with this conclusion, as I had begun my introduction, by placing the early history of the RVN military in the overall historiography of the Vietnam War.

By reconstructing the formative years of the RVN government and armed forces, I hope that my scholarship has revealed one of the missing pieces to the puzzle of the Vietnam War. I cautiously say 'one' for other pieces are missing still; three seem necessary to better our understanding of that conflict. First, the political and military dimensions of the conflict, naturally, have been the starting point of previous scholarly works while the economic aspect has been ignored. Yet, the study of the RVN economy could answer questions as to why corruption, which thrived in RVN's society, government, and military, affected the war's outcome. Second, like other conflicts, the Vietnam War has produced much popular jargon. For Americans and non-communist Vietnamese, the Vietnam War was about 'winning the hearts and minds of the South Vietnamese peoples.' For Russians, Chinese, and communist Vietnamese, the conflict was a 'people's war.' Though there have been public debates and academic writing about the 'people' little scholarship has been devoted to a social history of the Vietnamese themselves who

were caught between RVN and DRVN firing lines. Third and lastly, the Vietnam War remains a history of Vietnamese great men rather than the Vietnamese people. Even though this thesis sheds light on a forgotten military, it hopes to inspire other scholars to research about other unwritten aspects of the Vietnam War, in particular, and Vietnamese history, in general.

Based on numerous English, French and Vietnamese sources, and using the post-revisionist historical approach to study the Vietnam War through an RVN perspective but also including the points of views coming from the US, DRVN, PRC, and USSR, I have set out to answer to the following questions. What were the political and military forces that became the RVNAF? How did the RVNAF reorganize and train to deal with the regular threat posed by the PAVN and the irregular threat posed by the PLAF? Above all, how did the RVNAF adjust itself to the intensified political and military activities of the DRVN and the NFLSVN in the formative years of the Vietnam War? The answers to the aforementioned have led me to the following conclusions.

From 1946 to 1954, the VNA, CSDF, CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF were born out of the Vietnamese revolution. Many non-communist nationalist political factions rose against the French with the Viet Minh in 1945 and their military forces fought alongside the VLA against the FFEEC until 1950. The ideas of nationalism, independence, and patriotism unified communist and non-communist nationalists in their fight against France's domination after 1945. The question of what Vietnam's future ought to be once its sovereignty had been regained divided patriot Phan Boi Chau, moderate Phan Chu Trinh, nationalist Nguyen Thai Hoc, communist Ho Chi Minh, monarchist Bao Dai and conservative Ngo Dinh Diem. While the VCP was one party unified by strong leadership and unaffected by internal divisions, Vietnamese nationalists came from many parties led by weak leaders and riddled by internal factionalism.

Non-communist nationalist forces coexisted and defeated the VLA in Cochinchina due to their power, the willingness to work temporarily with the FFEEC, and the fact that the VLA effort was concentrated on the Red River Delta, leaving VLA elements in the Mekong River Delta isolated and vulnerable. The political and military situation changed once the FFEEC abandoned Tonkin. Before 1954, the VLA operated in the Red River Delta, drawing support from its Chinese safe-havens. In post-1954, the DRVN, eastern Laos, and north-eastern Cambodia became forward bases of operations allowing the PAVN and PLAF to project their conventional and unconventional military capabilities into RVN's Central Highlands and the Mekong River Delta. As long as their bases were left untouched, their total effort could be thrown against RVN land forces operated in South Vietnam. The PLAF represented the guerrilla potential and the PAVN reflected the conventional capability of DRVN. Thus, the RVN's only chance of survival depended on its land force being organized, trained, and prepared to counter both threats either sequentially or simultaneously. Relying on the disorganized, ill-trained, and poorly led non-communist Vietnamese military and paramilitary forces, the MAAGV/JGS decision to give the South Vietnamese conventional warfare and counterinsurgency capabilities was sound. The VLA, PAVN, and PLAF were not simply waging a guerrilla war but instead fought a true total war of prolonged attrition against the FFEEC, RVNAF, and MAAGV with all available means—military, political, diplomatic, economic, and psychological. Guerrilla warfare thus was but one of the tactics used by communist revolutionary forces. Therefore, the question is not whether RVNAF, particularly its land forces, should have been developed for one type of warfare or another. Rather, could the RVNAF assess and fix its weaknesses to meet the PLAF and PAVN's strengths in time to avoid embarrassment and defeat? The answer was simply that the RVNAF could not and the reasons for this failure were political, military, and social.

Though non-communist nationalist forces seemed strong, they suffered from inherent weaknesses that led to their defeat. The willingness of the VNA, CSDF, HHPF, CDPF, and BXPF, to resist the VLA in Cochinchina from 1950 to 1954 led the US government and military to believe that a stand against communism in South Vietnam was possible. Unfortunately, the VNA, CSDF, HHPF, CDPF, and BXPF shared little political interests except a common enemy, the VLA. Different beliefs and circumstances brought these non-communist nationalist factions together. Without a strong leader to unite them, they turned on each other. Hatred of communism was not enough for the RVN to defeat DRVN and NFLSVN. The RVN needed a civil-military apparatus of equal strength, but none of the factions in Saigon could provide that. Once the FFEEC left, Diem found his faction stronger than any other non-communist factions in South Vietnam, primarily because of US assistance. But his regime was still weaker than Vietnamese communism which was also supported by the USSR and PRC. While the CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF were militarily indispensable to Diem, they were also a political thorn in his side because of their ambition and unpredictability. Hence, they were defeated and integrated into RVN's new civil-military system. The destruction of the CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF by the VNA and their military integration into the RVNAF was both a political necessity and tragedy for Diem. Until late in the Vietnam War, no other elements of the RVNAF matched their effectiveness against the communists in irregular warfare. While many members of the CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF joined the RVNAF, more were killed or rallied to the PLAF which then seized political control over the areas they used to dominate.

By using the VNA to smash the CDPF, HHPF, and BXPF, Diem left its successor, the RVNAF, in a powerful position. Diem could only control the military by dividing it. This was fine with the VNA given the weaknesses of the CDPF, HHPF and BXPF, but a catastrophe for

the RVNAF when it was confronted by PLAF or PAVN. While the PAVN and PLAF were militarily and politically cohesive, RVNAF's politicized commanders and ill-trained regular soldiers serving in the ARVN, CG, and SDC were ineffective as a whole. To make matters worse, RVN government and military neglected the regular line infantry formations, not to mention the CG and the SDC which the PLAF and PAVN consciously and systematically targeted because they knew they could crush them, simultaneously wreck their morale, and discredit Diem's government in the eyes of peasants, the urban population, and the Americans. This they did in many small engagements where often even the reinforcement of elite units could not turn things around. More often than not, the survival of ARVN, CG, and SDC units depended on whether the PLAF or PAVN decided to attack them or not. The same can be said of the pacification of RVN's provinces. Most were 'pacified' not because of the popular support of the South Vietnamese peasants for the Diem government and military or the strength of the RVNAF, but because the PAVN and the PLAF cautiously waged low-intensity war to topple the RVN government so as to avoid a full confrontation with the US military.

The problem in the RVNAF's combat capability was politicization combined with its other institutional aspects. RVN's politicized civil-military system kept RVNAF from assessing, adapting, and overcoming the two punch capability of the PLAF and PAVN. Because officers were selected for their political loyalty instead of military merit, they concerned themselves more with political events in Saigon than military disasters in the countryside. They took basic issues of military training and competence for granted and they failed when ordered against an enemy who put war at the highest order of state's priority. In addition, humanitarian missions in 1955 and security missions in 1956 delayed the RVNAF organization by two years. Against the PAVN and PLAF whose personnel had gained valuable military experience since 1946, the

young RVNAF wasted too many precious years resolving its military problems. When the RVNAF was finally organized and commenced training in 1957, many units found unfit military bases, without the right training equipment, proper training grounds, and usable firing ranges. Yet, many RVNAF units were forced to divide times between building barracks and roads, security missions, and training. These were problems that overwhelmed even the most competent of RVNAF commanders. Worse yet, none of ARVN, CG, and SDC units conducted joint exercises which were crucial in future counter-guerrilla operations against the joint PLAF and PAVN. Most writers tend to blame RVNAF's failure on training, doctrine, or politicization. In fact, no single one of these problems was the central one. The real point is that all were necessary conditions, and they all worked together.

From 1960 to 1963, the RVN government and military was not verging on collapse. Instead, they suffered from serious problems in political stability and military quality. Diem's government pursued a sound counter-guerrilla strategy against the PLAF at the village level but executing it in a mediocre fashion because a weak and incompetent RVNAF was plagued by problems, some of which—social instability and a war torn society—were beyond its control. Furthermore, Diem's draconian counterinsurgency policy not only killed communist guerrillas, it also alienated non-communist Vietnamese. Diem's iron fist stick and carrot counterinsurgency method ensured the RVNAF that the manpower of the NFLSVN and PLAF would never be depleted as alienated opponents of Diem flocked to the DRVN's communist ally in South Vietnam for protection and revenge. In 1963, the PLAF and PAVN threatened disastrous military and political consequences for the RVN. However, the communist threat was not yet fatal because the DRVN and NFLSVN chose to prosecute a low-intensity conflict to wear down the RVN government and military while frustrating their American backers. DRVN and

NFLSVN leaders feared that a high-intensity war would give justification for a direct and full American intervention that could potentially prolong the war beyond Hanoi's control and with unforeseen consequences.

RVN's survival depended on how the DRVN and NFLSVN prosecuted the war from 1960 to 1963 and less on its unpopular government and weak military. Furthermore, RVN's survival also depended on America. Facing military setbacks like the Battle of Ap Bac and the political isolation of Diem's government, the US turned to the RVNAF for leadership. The RVNAF's early history showed that it was an institution lacking neither ambitious men nor hatred for the Ngo family. In fact, RVNAF conspirators were a combination of all Diem's old enemies in the VNA, including old aristocrats, Bao Dai supporters, and nationalist officers he was no longer willing to trust. Neither the PLAF nor the PAVN overran Saigon on 1 November 1963. The RVNAF did and, by default, ultimately in the service of the DRVN and NFLSVN. Far worse than Diem's oppressive government, was the re-emergence of social instability, factionalism, and political anarchy in Saigon. Diem's government was far from perfect. It caused many problems. Yet it had overseen some real achievements which possibly could have been the basis for a stable, strong, and lasting non-communist state in South Vietnam. This phenomenon in South Vietnam was due in part to the DRVN's and NFLSVN's naive belief that they could topple the US-backed RVN government and military by prosecuting a low-intensity revolutionary war. DRVN and NFLSVN leadership were caught in a dilemma. Having won the French Indochina War but betrayed by the USSR and PRC at Geneva and lacking committed support from both communist powers, the DRVN and NFLSVN could only wage a revolutionary war against the RVN with its limited resources. Fortunately for the RVN from 1960 to 1963,

DRVN and NFLSVN's limited resources could only support a low-intensity war that put them and the RVN and the US in a stalemate rather than an early communist victory.

Whatever the RVN government and military achieved in their nation-building process, those small improvements declined thanks to November 1st, 1963. The coup effectively killed opportunities for military and political reform while exacerbating the RVN's political and military problems as the DRVN, the NFLSVN, and the US increased their involvement in RVN affairs. This historic event marked the first of many turning points in the long fight against Vietnamese communists by Vietnamese non-communist nationalists as civilian leaders were ousted, propelling a military junta into the seat of power.

Many critics assume that the RVN, because it was illegitimate, corrupt, and incompetent regime, thus lost. Communists succeeded not because they had the only legitimate cause, but also because they were experienced and aimed to destroy their rival non-communist nationalists, who lacked the same organizational skill, unity, and were beset by multiple, intricate and irresolvable political, military, social and economic problems. The RVN was not just unusually weak: the DRVN was unusually strong. The RVN failed because of its own weaknesses, in the context of a power competition with an unusually dangerous foe, one whose own legitimacy can be questioned. A weak RVN could have prevailed against a strong DRVN had the RVN had more time or if the DRVN had been more hesitant.

There was no guarantee that had the US dispatched land forces into Cambodia and Laos or invaded North Vietnam, that the DRVN and NFLSVN would have ceased hostility against the RVN. The FFEEC's occupation of the Red River Delta did not bring peace to Cochinchina, only a military stalemate between it and the VLA. Worse yet, a US invasion potentially would have unnerved the PRC which might have sent the PLAF to fight the US in Vietnam as it had in

Korea. Inevitably, such unilateral military action would certainly provoke fierce criticism and opposition amongst the American public at home and allies abroad. At best, the war's expansion might have bought a little more time for the RVN but it could never guarantee South Vietnam's survival. Ultimately, RVN's seemingly endless political, military, and social problems had to be resolved by South Vietnam's political leaders, military commanders, and people but only in the absence of constant PAVN and PLAF attempts to destroy whatever minimal progress RVN made politically, militarily, and socially. The RVN was plagued by many problems and the DRVN and NFLSVN, unquestionably, were amongst those problems.

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