IMPACT OF PACIFICATION ON INSURGENCY IN SOUTH VIETNAM

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Whatever one's views about U.S. policy toward Vietnam or U.S. performance in that tragic conflict, in at least one area the U.S. consciously attempted not to overmilitarize or over-Americanize the war but rather to cope with its rural revolutionary and largely political dimension. This attempt has had many names; the most widely known (though hardly the most apt) is pacification.

From Diem's Agrovilles in the late Fifties through the Strategic Hamlet program of 1961-1963 and the Revolutionary Development program of 1965-1966, many promising though regrettably modest experiments were tried. But not until the so-called "new model" pacification program of 1967 was the effort made on a sufficiently large and comprehensive scale--and sustained consistently over a sufficient period--to provide any full-scale test of its potential in coping with rural insurgency. Moreover, it was the only one carried out when the tide was running in favor of, rather than against, the GVN (thanks to massive U.S. military intervention at horrendous cost), thus permitting a sustained expansion into enemy-held and contested rural areas. For these reasons, this paper will focus on the 1967-1970 effort.

Regrettably, the open literature on Vietnam pacification efforts in general and the 1967-1970 effort in particular is exceedingly thin. Despite the millions of words written about Vietnam since 1965, there is a notable dearth of systematic analysis of such key aspects as the pacification program. This aspect of the Vietnam tragedy has been consistently neglected in favor of the more dramatic aspects of the war. A survey of press and periodical reporting over three years 1966-1968 reveals only a dozen or so articles annually that even attempt to deal

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1 The most coherent analysis of one phase of Vietnam pacification is William A. Nighswonger, Rural Pacification in Vietnam, Praeger, 1966. But it covers only the period before the major "new model" pacification program got underway.
with pacification in the round. Most open sources available to the academic community seem quite impressionistic, particularly on the 1967-1970 period when commentaries on pacification almost invariably became caught up in the growing controversy about the war. An adversary proceeding developed—indeed a vicious circle—wherein the more the establishment attempted to show that progress was occurring the more the media and other critics attempted to show that it was all a house of cards.

Hence, this paper will be based primarily upon the author's personal experience and access to operational data during the period. This necessarily entails a certain parochial bias. However, in a conflict in which mistakes of policy and execution were almost the rule rather than the exception, the so-called "new model" pacification effort stands out as at least addressed to the key problems of coping with rural-based insurgency via techniques that indeed attempted to compensate for the destructiveness of the war. It was a unique wartime expedient, designed specifically to cope with rural insurgency as it had evolved by the late Sixties in Vietnam.

Moreover, most of the data on the impact of the current program is of comparatively recent origin, since it only began to gather momentum with the first Accelerated Pacification Campaign of November 1968-January 1969, and the cumulative results have become fully apparent only in 1969-1970.

**NATURE OF THE "NEW MODEL" PACIFICATION PROGRAM 1966-1970**

Since there is so little in the open literature, it seems worthwhile to summarize the 1967-1970 Vietnam pacification program as a prerequisite to assessing its impact.² It differed in many significant respects from previous such efforts, in Vietnam or elsewhere.

Conceptually, all Vietnam pacification efforts have been designed more or less to serve two central aims: (1) sustained protection of the rural population from the insurgents, which also helps to deprive the insurgency of its rural popular base; and (2) generating rural support for the Saigon regime via programs meeting rural needs and cementing the rural areas politically and administratively to the center. A secondary purpose has been to help neutralize the active insurgent

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forces and apparatus in the countryside. In essence, then, it is a civil as well as military process.

The 1967-1970 program differs from its predecessors less in concept than in the comprehensive nature and massive scale of the effort undertaken, and in the unified management which pulled together the great variety of sub-programs carried out for the first time on a fully countryside scale. It must also be seen as a product of the circumstances and constraints existing at the time. It came late in the day, and only after costly US military intervention had averted final collapse of a coup-ridden GVN and created a military environment in which the largely political competition for control and support of the key rural population could be attempted again. This was also facilitated by the increased stability at the center afforded by the Ky regime. But the deterioration of the never strong GVN administration and security apparatus in the countryside made it an uphill task from the start. It also entailed a painful build-up and deployment of resources, which took at least two years. All this necessitated crash effort, as did the time constraints uppermost in U.S. minds. Few expected that the U.S. public would sit still for a slow, methodical ten-year campaign.

Since by 1967 most available resources were in Vietnamese and U.S. military hands, since pacification required first and foremost the restoration of security in the countryside, and since what little GVN administration existed outside Saigon had become almost wholly military in character, it was also logical for the pacification program to be put under military auspices. On the U.S. side the result was a hybrid "Rube Goldberg" type of civil-military advisory organization called CORDS. Paradoxically, this resulted in far greater civilian influence on the pacification process than would otherwise have been likely.

Even though the U.S. made a major advisory logistic and financial contribution, the new model pacification program has remained primarily Vietnamese from the outset. With one or two minor exceptions, all operational programs were VN-staffed and managed. The Vietnamese-to-adviser ratio at the peak of U.S. involvement was over 100 to 1. Of course, this was made possible (especially on the security side) because the U.S. military and assumed during 1966-1969 the chief offensive role against the VC/NVA except in IV Corps — thus permitting the allocation of increasing RVNAF military resources to providing local security in the countryside. On the other hand, the very fact that pacification was essentially a Vietnamese enterprise entailed another series of constraints:

Some have criticized the pacifiers for adopting over-simplified massive quantitative approaches to a highly sensitive task. In my view, this was the only feasible
way to get early countrywide impact, given the extent of the need, the limited quality of the resources available, the GVN's limited administrative capabilities and the lateness of the day. It is worth remembering that effective countrywide pacification had eventually to encompass some 10,000 hamlets, 2,000 villages, 250 districts and 44 provinces. The GVN could not afford politically to neglect half the country, or ignore certain provinces, in order to concentrate on the rest. Moreover, some resources existed in all these provinces that might as well be utilized since they were not readily transferable. Providing sustained rural security on this vast scale was inevitably a manpower extensive matter, almost requiring simple mass approaches. We were vividly aware of a major weakness in previous pacification efforts: the securing troops stayed only briefly and then moved on, after which the hamlets often retrogressed.

It must also be borne in mind that pacification was a 99 percent Vietnamese program, and properly so, even though supported by the United States. We pacifiers, coming along late in the day, had to make do with some of the most poorly trained and equipped Vietnamese assets that no one else was really using. Moreover, we couldn't design programs beyond the capabilities of such Vietnamese administrative structure as was left by 1967, never strong but further degraded by terror and war. Lastly, it didn't take Tet 1968 and its aftermath to make us realize in the field that we didn't have five or ten years to get pacification moving. By 1967-68 the time seemed past for long-term programs or slow ollspit techniques.

We further realized that there was no one pacification technique that could of itself and by itself be decisive if we just put all our resources behind it. So as a practical matter we pulled together all the various programs then in operation—civilian and military—that looked as though they could make a contribution. To utilize all available resources we pushed multiple programs simultaneously, though according to a realistic set of priorities. In effect, we pragmatically sought to build the new model pacification on existing assets, as a concerted series of admittedly inefficient countrywide programs, which nonetheless seemed capable of gradual improvement to the point where they cumulatively offered hope of saturating the enemy and enabling us to build faster than he could destroy. Given the real-life circumstances of wartime Vietnam, the war's chaotic impact on a society still half-formed, and the elusive yet all-pervasive enemy presence, making quantity
substitute for quality was almost the only realistic approach. Indeed, I recall no highly efficient program in Vietnam -- no single American or Vietnamese effort that would be regarded as such by American standards.3

Providing Territorial Security. Pragmatically, the multi-faceted 1967-1970 pacification program is perhaps best described in terms of its components. A notable feature was the stress on sustained territorial security (local clear and hold) as the indispensable first stage of pacification. Earlier pacification efforts had partly founded on this lack, since the military -- regarding pacification as civilian agency business -- had never provided adequate security resources. Nighswonger finds this a major source of the failure of earlier programs. From his own experience he saw the "heart" of pacification as "protection of the peasant," and concluded as of 1966 that "a rural security system is only an urgent need, but not yet a reality in Vietnam."4 This was recognized in the imaginative Revolutionary Development program of 1966-1967. Its cutting edge -- the 59-man RD Cadre team -- was designed as an armed para-military force to provide protection as well as other help to the hamlet. Also relevant was the allocation of 40-50 ARVN battalions to provide temporary security in selected RD campaign areas in the 1967 pacification plan.

But large-scale pacification required full-time sustained protection at the key village/hamlet level on a scale far beyond that which could be provided via these expedients. The pacification planners saw the long-neglected Regional and Popular Forces as the logical force-in-being on which to build. They were all locally recruited, and the bulk of them volunteers (partly in order to avoid the draft). RF served only in their own province and PF in their own village area. Placing the RF/PF advisory effort under the new U.S. civil-military pacification management plus the RVNAF reorganization plan in 1967 marked the beginning of a truly integrated civil-military pacification program on a major scale. At long last, primary responsibility for local protection of the rural population devolved upon local forces recruited from this population itself.

The RF/PF were re-equipped and upgraded, their command clearly placed under province and district, and their numbers greatly increased. They expanded by more than 100,000 in 1968 alone, and now number some 510,000 men in over 1500 RF companies and 600 PF platoons. The Tet shock of 1968 led to revival of another local security mechanism, the part-time People's Self-Defense Forces (PSDF). These have grown to over three million, with some 500,000 weapons. Though PSDF have often engaged the enemy, their most useful role is probably less in local defense than as a means of engaging the population politically in anti-VC activity.

4Nighswonger, pp. 70, 130, 147.
Two other pacification sub-programs were designed to help cut into insurgent strength. A revitalized Chieu Hoi program aimed both at inducing VC to rally and then at employing them productively. Ex-VC ralliers are now used in a wide variety of military as well as civil pacification roles. The GVN’s Phung Hoang (Phoenix) program aimed at neutralizing the clandestine VC politico-administrative apparatus, which many regard as the key to VC insurgent capabilities. It taxes, proselytes, propagandizes, and terrorizes the rural population; recruits and controls VC local forces; and administers VC-controlled areas. To date Phung Hoang has been a small, poorly managed, and largely ineffective effort, though some attrition of the VC infrastructure has taken place.

Civil Programs. The other major aspect of the "new model" pacification effort has been the many civil programs aimed primarily at: (1) revival of at least modestly functioning rural administration; (2) rural economic revival to provide pragmatic incentives to the farmer; and (3) other essential rural services—medical, educational, refugee care, a civil police presence, and the like. Many of these programs were inherited from the U.S. aid mission but were integrated into a comprehensive pacification scheme by the GVN Central Pacification Council and CORDS on the U.S. side.

Perhaps most significant has been the concerted GVN/U.S. effort to restore village/hamlet self-government—abolished by Diem in 1956. A series of GVN decrees and pragmatic steps were taken 1967-1970, e.g. election of hamlet chiefs and village councils, creation of autonomous village budgets, reservation of local taxing powers and use of local tax revenues to the village. Moreover, for the first time in history, GVN decree #045 of 1 April 1969 placed local security forces and police under the Village Chief's authority, and lodged responsibility for framing local level self-help plans in the village itself. Also in 1969, the GVN granted each elected village council a million piaster village self-development fund under control of the village council.

The RD Cadre program, which grew to a peak of 47,000 men in some 750 59-man teams, and its associated New Life Development (later Village Development) program under the RD Ministry were used largely to strengthen local government and assist in self-help projects. Another facet of the effort to restore functioning local government has been the continuing purge since late 1967 of corrupt or ineffective military district and province chiefs, which has touched most provinces and districts in South Vietnam.

A major parallel effort, given high priority from 1968 on, was to revive the economy of the rural areas, which for years had been carrying the chief brunt of the war. War-induced boom conditions and greater security were enhancing the urban sector while the rural sector was ever more depressed. A combination of techniques was introduced to close this

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urban-rural gap—changing the terms of trade between urban and rural sectors by increasing prices paid the crop producer, large-scale introduction of new IR-5/8 rice strains, accelerated import and distribution of fertilizer, expansion of protein and free grain output, and not least re-opening and upgrading of key roads and waterways—utilizing military engineers and U.S. contractors. Rural taxes were abolished, along with a web of economic and resource control restrictions. Water pumps and tractors were introduced in large numbers. In June 1970 a far-reaching land reform program finally passed the National Assembly, and the GVN is laying plans to distribute 200,000 hectares of land per year for the next several years.

Other pacification programs also gathered momentum in 1967-1970. Greatly increased resources were devoted to refugee care and more recently resettlement. The AID-supported hamlet school and teacher-training program was continued and broadened. There was a major effort to improve rural hospital and dispensary facilities. The GVN’s feeble propaganda capabilities were strengthened, but more important the widespread use of radio (and even some TV) in rural areas gave the GVN a virtual monopoly of mass communications. The effort to provide a civil law and order capability through strengthening the feeble National Police was also stepped up, and in 1969 police again began being stationed in the village.

Two other distinctive features of 1967-1970 pacification were unified civil-military single management (for the first time), and a massive scaling up of resource inputs. Total pacification funding by the U.S. and GVN rose almost threefold from roughly $582 million in 1965 to over $1.5 billion scheduled in 1970 (dollar equivalents), including military outlays (the largest single is RF/FF funding). By 1970 roughly half of the real cost of pacification was borne by the GVN. Unified management of these outlays and of the multiplicity of pacification activities in several thousand villages and hamlets was feasible only by creating stronger central management at Saigon, region, province, and district levels.

Once again, the purpose here is not to represent pacification 1967-1970 as an efficient, high-impact program; it made no such pretense. Like most things in Vietnam, it has been cumbersome, wasteful, poorly executed, only spottily effective in many respects. The aim is rather to describe the major differences between it and previous programs in management style, size, and program emphasis. Nonetheless, GVN and U.S. efforts in 1966-1970 did manage to convert some innovative but small-scale experiments into a coherent, integrated, civil-military program on a big enough and consistent enough scale to gradually produce significant impact on Viet Cong prospects in the countryside. Whatever its fault, the 1967-1970 program at least stands out as one of the few innovative efforts to cope with an atypical revolutionary conflict undertaken by the GVN and the U.S.
PACIFICATION MEASUREMENT SYSTEMS

Aside from a handful of in-depth studies of local situations (of which few are based on recent evidence), the most extensive body of available data on the effects (good or bad) of the major 1967-1970 pacification effort lies in the statistical and other reports developed for operational management purposes by the pacifiers themselves. These measurement systems were another notable feature of the "new model" pacification program. Despite their many limitations, they represent a comprehensive attempt at systematic collection of relevant pacification data mostly from the village/hamlet level—perhaps the most innovative on any facet of the Vietnam War.

Given the nature of the problem—keeping periodic track of the changing situation in some 44 provinces, over 250 districts, over 2000 villages, and over 10,000 hamlets—stress had to be laid on relatively simple quantitative techniques. A similar problem was faced in keeping track of the multitude of small-scale pacification assets—now over 1500 RF companies and 6000 PF platoons, numerous thinly spread national police and RD teams, etc. The systems had to be designed realistically for input by relatively unskilled field advisers—since one of the principles adopted was to have all possible inputs made at the lowest possible level (hamlet if possible)—and then not to permit them to be changed as they travelled up the line.

In fact, the most controversial of the pacification measurement systems—the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES)—initiated in January 1967 was designed specifically to overcome the flaws inherent in previous more subjective efforts to assess what was really happening in the countryside—largely narrative reports based on Vietnamese sources that had proved consistently overoptimistic. So HES was designed to be prepared monthly by U.S. district advisory teams, using a standard format questionnaire as to physical changes in the hamlet. The HES assessed monthly a matrix of 18 specific security and development indicators according to a simplified scoring system involving five letter ratings. At Saigon level, automated data processing is used to save clerical costs and as a memory bank. As a result, data can be analyzed and compared month by month for the last three and a half years by individual hamlet, village, district, province, region, and SVN as a whole. Functional categories can also be separately analyzed.

For example, D.W.P. Elliott and W. A. Stewart, Pacification and the Viet Cong System in Dienbienphu: 1966-67, The RAND Corporation, RM-5788, January 1969. See also Nishiwongere, on Quang Nam province 1964-1965. Perhaps the most systematic current study of the impact of the war on a sample of 18 villages is the continuing work by S. L. Popkin of Harvard for SEADAG (see below).

7 See Colonel E. R. Brigham, "Pacification Measurement," Military Review, May 1970, for a short analysis of the HES. He was chief of the CORDS Research and Analysis Division during the evolution of HES.
HES has been frequently evaluated and critiqued by civilian contract analysts; with their help a revised and updated version called HES/70 came into use in 1970 (after an extensive trial period). It involves a more detailed and objective uni-dimensional question set, including 25 monthly questions on village/hamlet security and additional 114 quarterly questions covering all pacification matters. Instead of the adviser doing the rating, he simply answers the questions; all scoring is done centrally by a mathematical weighting formula not known to the field. During the 1969 trial period, it showed consistently lower security ratings (about 4-6 percent) than the old HES.

CORDS also designed over a dozen specialized data reporting systems, all closely related to each other and to HES for comparative purposes. They include PSDF, Chieu Hoi, National Police, Refugee, RD Cadre, and Territorial Forces management information systems, a Pacification Data Bank, Rural Information System, Self-Help Project Monitoring system, Terrorist Incident Reporting System, and the like. Now a system is being designed to help carry out and monitor land reform. Monthly narrative reports on a standard format from U.S. province advisory teams have also been required since 1967; they provide an additional source of useful insights as they are deliberately problem-oriented. They were used primarily to identify matters needing attention by higher echelons.

Lest all this seem like too much reporting for its own sake, it was designed for management, not just progress reporting. Consistent emphasis has been placed on problem identification and analysis, not just results. It is impossible to manage a multi-faceted pacification program effectively in thousands of villages and hamlets without such reports and measurement systems. But the point of importance to this paper is that they provide what one analyst has described as a "gold mine" of raw data on various facets of pacification impact.

In the absence of much else, any assessment of pacification impact must rest heavily on the validity of these CORDS measurement techniques. Much ill-informed criticism has been levied at HES in particular, but most seems to challenge HES for what it doesn't even claim to be—a measuring of popular attitudes—rather than analyzing it for what it is. As with so much involving Vietnam, few critics have taken the time to study what they deplore. Other critics really seem to be complaining less about the HES itself than about the way in which its aggregate scores have often been used in simplistic fashion to advance the notion of "progress." Unfortunately, there is much in this. When HES data is used by officialdom and the media without suitable qualification to claim that "x percent of SVN population is now secure," it is not surprising that such oversimplification contributes to the Vietnam credibility gap. At any rate, CORDS field briefings on pacification included many relevant qualifiers which were usually ignored in media reporting. Moreover, it is too little recognized that the HES has consistently shown regression and "churning" in rural areas (a fact unduly obscured by use only of overall aggregates). For example, HES provided the only quantifiable and detailed assessment of the sharp drop in rural security following the VC Tet Offensive in 1968.
There are obviously many limitations on the overall utility of pacification measurement system data. Perhaps most significant, they do not provide other than indirect inferences as to what the population of the countryside really thinks -- about the GVN, the VC, security, and the like. In general, periodic physical status indicators are the chief output, first because these are the easiest to measure, and second because of the indispensable need for simplified, standardized procedures if the whole village/hamlet spectrum were to be covered -- and with relatively unskilled U.S. advisers as the chief source of input. It is often forgotten that these were designed as U.S. reporting systems precisely to avoid the kind of overly optimistic Vietnamese reporting which had characterized earlier efforts. For the same reasons, emphasis was placed on generating detailed factual reporting rather than subjective evaluations. While some fudging of figures to show progress has inevitably occurred, particularly when Vietnamese sources are used, a much larger source of perturbation has probably been the frequent shifts in U.S. advisers.

Yet those who have consistently used pacification measurement data have found it generally reliable within its limitations. For example, the analysts in the Systems Analysis Office under the Secretary of Defense have used it regularly for what are in the author's judgement the most impressive "in-house" analytical critiques of pacification performance produced in the last few years. Indeed, one criticism that can be levied is not that the mountain of raw data now available is distorted or inaccurate, but that so little of if has yet been analyzed in depth. In a real sense Vietnam has been the most extensively commented on but least solidly analyzed conflict in living memory. Both the establishment and its critics can be faulted on this score. Even CORDS itself places greater stress upon systematic collection than upon its exploitation for management purposes. Since most of this data is unclassified, or will doubtless become so, its full exploitation may have to be left to the academic community.

More recently CORDS has been experimenting with poll-type survey techniques, using trained Vietnamese teams in semi-structured interviews of a cross-section sampling of the rural population to determine trends in rural attitudes toward pacification and related subjects. Once this technique is fully developed, and results become available, they should offer useful insights.

PACIFICATION IMPACT ON INSURGENCY

It is still premature to attempt more than an interim assessment of the impact of the "new model" pacification program. Though the improvement of the GVN position in the rural areas since the low point of 1965 is clearly visible, its real depth and extent and its ultimate lasting quality are still untested. But here an important distinction must be made. Much more can be inferred about the short-term impact of pacification on the current VC insurgency than about its longer-term effect in helping create a socio-political environment in which future insurgency would not flourish again.
Even over the short-term, however, it is hard to assess the relative extent to which undisputed changes in the countryside can be properly attributed to the pacification program as opposed to other factors. How much is attributable to the shield provided by the allied effort in the "big unit" war, which largely drove the VC/NVA main forces from most populated areas? How much did VC/NVA exhaustion from their heavy manpower losses in their 1968 Tet and follow-on offensives weaken the insurgency's rural base? These two factors did much to create the conditions in which the rapid pacification surges of late 1968-1970 became possible. Or how much did systematic VC tactics of coercion and terrorism eventually alienate the rural population? How much did such factors as peasant perceptions as to who was winning affect rural actions and attitudes? All such factors undoubtedly had (or will have) some impact. Thus in an unconventional conflict like Vietnam the relative impact of pacification versus other political, military, or psychological factors is exceedingly hard to sort out.

Third is the difficulty of distinguishing between the southern-based VC insurgency itself, and North Vietnam's input—especially through the NVA. For analytical purposes at any rate, we cannot dismiss this by calling Vietnam a "civil war." Hanoi's chief contribution in 1965-1970 has been well-trained regular forces. Their relative role in proportion to that of the southern VC has steadily increased to the point where over 70 percent of the VC/NVA main force units and combat support are estimated to be NVA. Vietnam has become more and more "an NVA war" as VC military strength has declined. By the same token, what began as an externally supported insurgency in the south has by now become largely an internally supported "invasion" from the north. Clearly pacification has had much more impact on the faltering VC insurgency than on the NVA main force threat, which could be sustained almost indefinitely by infiltration from the north.

Last is the sheer difficulty previously mentioned of drawing adequate inferences from the mass of statistical data available. It is infinitely easier to quantify the physical changes in the situation in the countryside than to assess the impact of these changes on—to use the once fashionable cliché—the hearts and minds of Vietnam's peasants. In terms of popular reactions, to what extent are any positive effects of pacification (improved security, economic revival, etc.) offset by the negative effects of how the GVN and U.S. have conducted the war? To what extent have coercion, corruption, or arbitrary use of power by GVN administrators taken the bloom off the rose? Is peasant alienation from VC terror and exactions significantly greater than his alienation from similar GVN actions in many cases? Is the farmer fatalistic about all the destruction, or would he rather have harsh peace even under VC control than the continued destructiveness of the U.S. style of war? One can only pose these questions. No adequate basis for inference is yet available—nor may it ever be. But then in what field of analysis are data on behavior and attitudes as satisfactory as those on quantitative change?

Despite all these caveats, however, some at least tentative inferences can be drawn. In general, the thesis of this paper is that the 1967-1970
pacification program probably played a major—though difficult to measure—role in reducing the VC insurgency to its present straits. Indeed the consolidation of GVN local control over the countryside, the consequent drying up of the insurgency's population base and expansion of the GVN's, the attrition of the VC politico-administrative apparatus, the large number of ralliers under the Chieu Hoi program, and the civil aspects of pacification—restoration of local government autonomy, rural economic revival, local economic and social development, and the like—may have contributed as much over the period to damping down the insurgency as the "big unit" casualties inflicted over the same period. The evidence to support this thesis will be assessed under several headings.

**Effect on Active Insurgent Strength.** The pacification program described in this paper has contributed materially to the cumulative attrition of most components of VC active strength. First, the local pacification security forces (principally RF/PF but also the National Police, RD Cadre, and PSDF) have consistently inflicted more casualties on VC guerrilla and local forces—and taken more in return—than ARVN itself (unfortunately, the gross casualty figures do not permit distinguishing between VC and NVA or between guerrilla, local force, and main force casualties). Their activities, as well as their sheer growing presence at the local level, have greatly inhibited VC recruiting, taxation, propaganda, logistics, and even terrorism.

Next, the Chieu Hoi program has facilitated the rallying of over 160,000 **hoi cham** (about two-thirds military) since it began in 1963, over 132,000 of these during 1966-1970 to date. Though many of these are very low-level people, and some no doubt rallied more than once, the cumulative total must have put at least a crimp in the VC. And the great bulk of these are from III and IV Corps, where the indigenous VC insurgency was largely centered.

Third, even the feeble Phung Hoang program has, according to the U.S.-designed reporting system, led to neutralization of over 40,000 mostly low-level VCI during 1968-1970. Of course, over half of them rallied, were captured, or were killed in the course of military and police operations of one kind or another. But the important point is that the growing if belated focus on neutralizing the VC politico-military apparatus as well as insurgent military strength has probably seriously reduced insurgent capabilities. The most recent published figures indicate that the VCI are now carried at about 70,000.

Whether or not the above figures are wholly accurate, the point is that the cumulative impact of these pacification-type programs has contributed materially to the reduction of insurgent strength to a point where, without continued infusion of NVA personnel (and now reportedly political cadre), most professional observers estimate that it would be difficult for the VC insurgency to survive as a major threat to the GVN.

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It may be an interesting indicator of the extent to which pacification is hurting the VC that they are increasingly targeting pacification-type activities. During the three-day April 1970 "high point," for example, nearly half of enemy attacks were against pacification targets. VC documents clearly indicate greater 1970 concern over pacification and direct greater efforts to combat it. Of course, all this may be partly because harassing pacification is a cheap way to keep the pot boiling during a phase of protracted war.

**Effect on Insurgent Population Base.** Pacification programs, in conjunction with other factors, have had a similar effect on the VC-controlled rural population base, as systematically measured by the HES. It has been officially admitted that at the low point of end-1964, only 40 percent of South Vietnam's population was under government "control"—a sometime thing in those days—and over 20 percent admittedly under VC control. Even when HES was first instituted in January 1967, only some 62.1 percent of a total 16.3 million people were yet rated as even "relatively secure," some 18.5 percent as contested, and still 19.4 percent as admittedly VC-controlled. Besides which, a high percentage of this increase in "relatively secure" population in 1965-1967 did not occur because of increased security in the countryside, but rather as a result of refugee movements and the accelerated urbanization taking place. However, these factors can be removed from the calculation by looking at only rural HES scores. In January 1967 only some 46.3 percent of rural population was rated as relatively secure. Even at the end of 1967 less than 50 percent of the rural population was so rated, and this dropped further as a result of the Tet 1968 Offensive, which was faithfully reflected in the HES. But the June 1970 figures (from the revised HES/70, which is much more sensitive to enemy activity and VCI presence) rate over 91 percent of SVN's 17.9 million population as "relatively secure," 7.2 percent as contested, and only 1.4 percent or 256,000 rural people as VC-controlled. The great bulk of this VC-controlled population is concentrated in less than a dozen of 44 provinces. The 1969-1970 gains have been mostly in the key rural areas.

Whatever one's prejudices as to the precision of these figures, there is little doubt that GVN domination of the countryside has expanded rapidly since late 1968 at the expense of the VC-controlled population base, with inevitable effect on VC recruiting capabilities. Of course, GVN general mobilization in 1968, which led to the build-up of RVNAF and para-military forces to over 1.1 million men, has also operated to sop up manpower which might otherwise be available to the VC.

**Effect on Rural Security.** A mass of quantitative data, mostly from the hamlet/village level, in the HES and other data banks provides overwhelming evidence that the physical security provided the bulk of the rural population has expanded considerably since the 1965-1966 low point. HES security scores for rural population show an increase in relative security (ABC categories) from 53.2 percent at end of 1967 to 90.5 percent at end-1969. For those who are unwilling to accept so-called
"C" hamlets as even relatively secure, even A-B population has risen to about 75 percent as of June 1970.

Increased security in most populated areas, though still spotty in some cases, is also amply evident. There is a direct correlation between increases in local GVN security forces and resulting improvement in security indices. Improved security can also be directly inferred from the decline in the overall incident rate. From statistics compiled by MACV it is clear that the number of battalion-sized attacks and even lesser incidents was down significantly in 1969 from 1968 and has declined even further in 1970. Terrorism is still high, especially in March-May 1970, but the overall terror, sabotage, etc. trend is down from 1968 to 1970. But it is worth repeating that the overall decline in the intensity of the war is owing to many other factors besides pacification.

Equally significant, the war has become largely localized. Analysis of the 1970 incident rate and HES statistics show clearly that both the military war and terrorism now impact mostly on a few key areas. Leaving aside the big unit war in the almost unpopulated jungle and mountain areas along the borders, insurgency-type activity or VC incursions into populated areas are largely concentrated in the three provinces of southern I Corps; Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Pleiku and Kontum in northern II Corps; and four provinces in the Delta, Kien Hoa, Vinh Binh, An Xuyen, and Kien Giang (the last mostly because it is along the border). In most populated areas of the other 33 provinces the intensity of conflict and even terrorism has radically declined—in some cases to sporadic harassment.

The number of refugees who are increasingly returning to the countryside (with help from the GVN refugee resettlement program) is another gross indicator of improved rural security. Excluding those from Cambodia, the number of refugees on the rolls has declined from some 1.5 million in February 1969 to around 217,000 by mid-1970. The return to villages has continued in 1970.

Effect on Rural Participation in GVN-Sponsored Activities. It is at least partly relevant that popular participation in GVN programs, organizations, and activities of one sort or another has soared in recent years. No doubt to some extent this is a function of GVN pressure or coercion—or at least a matter of the peasant doing what he is told to do. Moreover, such participation does not necessarily equate to active commitment, though it would be equally wrong to argue that it has no such meaning at all. At any rate, the rural population is becoming heavily engaged in the business of local government, defense, self-help, etc., particularly since the Tet Offensive of 1968. Significant on this score are the rapid increase of GVN military and para-military forces (excluding PSDP) from 700,000 in April 1968 to about 1.2 million men today, and the rising enrollment in the part-time Popular Self-Defense Force—all since May 1968—to between 3 and 3.5 million (though in urban as well as rural areas).
Increased popular participation in GVN-sponsored local elections also may be relevant at least to popular acquiescence in the governmental process. While there has unquestionably been some fudging of the results in local cases, the extensive statistics available since 1967 on voter registration, participation, number of candidates are considered generally reliable by professional observers in the field. In May 1965 only 3.8 million (of 4.2 million registered voters) voted in the provincial and municipal elections. In September 1966, 4.3 million of 5.2 million voted for the Constituent Assembly. The proportion of the 5.87 million registered voters voting in the 1967 national elections was 83 percent. The proportion voting in the 1970 provincial and municipal council elections of 28 June 1970 dropped to 72.5 percent (as usually happens in local vs. national elections), but the number of registered voters had risen to 6.1 million. The number of candidates for each seat (3.5 in the 1970 elections) has also increased. New faces are much in evidence; in I Corps the number of new candidates who won in village/hamlet elections increased to 30 percent in 1970 from 20 percent in 1969. The 1970 provincial and municipal council elections in I Corps produced 60 percent new faces since 1967. At the lowest level some 961 villages and 5344 hamlets elected local administrations in 1969, bringing total elected local governments to 2048 out of 2151 villages and 9849 out of 10,496 GVN-dominated hamlets. Some of these local elections were in name only, but given the sheer looseness and inefficiency of the GVN at all levels few would contend that local elections were mostly rigged. While difficult as yet to quantify, the GVN's continuing efforts to restore local autonomy at the grass roots level have apparently stimulated greater rural popular interest in local government.

Effect on Socio-Economic Conditions in the Countryside. Here again, mostly quantitative indices must be relied upon. It is difficult to translate into meaningful impact all the AID-type statistics on hamlet or other schools built, teachers trained, fertilizer distributed, rural dispensaries and province hospitals constructed, refugees cared for, wells dug, roads and waterways opened and repaired, tractors imported, markets built, self-help projects completed, or plasters and dollars spent. But there is little question that the range of services and assistance provided the rural population in GVN-controlled areas, mostly through the pacification program, has increased dramatically by 1969-1970 over 1965-1967. The net impact of priority measures to revive the rural economy has been to reverse the long decline in agricultural production, and according to a recent U.S. economic study, to make many Delta farmers the "new rich" of Vietnam. By June 1970 there were an estimated 3400 tractors in the Delta (IV Corps), a doubling over fifteen months as a result of agricultural development loans and sheer private spending. Of course, increased agricultural income is far from evenly distributed, and against all the improvement must be offset the continued difficulties posed by military operations, GVN inefficiency and corruption and the like.
Effect on Rural Attitudes Toward VC and GVN. So far this tentative analysis of pacification impact has stressed mostly quantifiable factors. It is far harder to assess systematically the effect on rural attitudes and commitment to the contending sides. Yet even here there is a growing body of evidence that the farmers are turning against the VC, even though they may not look with favor on the GVN. The decline in VC popular support has been noted by many observers, and attributed to a variety of causes. It can also be documented in numerous rallier interviews. Some point to how increased VC use of coercion, forced conscription, high taxation, and terror have alienated farmers in many areas. Statistics indicate that more than three-fourths of terrorist victims 1967-1970 have been ordinary civilians. The widespread destruction in the Tet and May 1968 Offensives generated a particularly noticeable anti-VC backlash. Others like Popkin point to a drastic decline in the appeal to peasants of life in VC-controlled areas, as opposed to materially improved conditions in those under GVN domination. Yet others contend that the farmers are increasingly coming to believe that the GVN is winning, and in pragmatic fashion are gravitating toward the side that has the "mandate of heaven."

But in terms of generating positive rural political support for the GVN, the evidence is much more spotty. And this may be the heart of the matter. To Popkin, one of the few scholars who has addressed this issue, "the central problem of pacification is how to translate economic resources and military power into village control." He sees this as "a political and not a technical problem," and renders the tentative verdict based on 1966-1967 and 1969 field observations that:

In the term's most common meaning—physical security, governmental presence and economic benefits—most of South Vietnam is pacified. But this only means that the concept has always been inadequate, for peasants that have endured decades of mobilization and brutalization are no longer necessarily willing to act as passive subjects to be ruled from afar.

In effect Popkin sees pacification as succeeding in its proximate aims but by no means yet achieving positive rural support for the GVN. He recognizes that the Thiếu regime is attempting to build a GVN rural political base through methods already described. But to him:

Saigon's greatest vulnerability has always been that though there is often resentment or mistrust of the Viet Cong, there is very rarely any positive feeling toward the GVN. And until positive links are made with the peasant population, until they identify with

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and feel represented by the government in Saigon, the potential for the Viet Cong to make a comeback will remain.

He grants that the new pacification programs in the village "have begun to energize a long dormant village political structure," but sees Thieu as hemmed in in his attempts to move further in this direction by the ARVN, which regards its still dominant role in rural administration as a base of political power which it will be reluctant to relinquish.

What support Thieu may get from the people is likely to be irrelevant unless ARVN is reformed. For the essence of the conflict is not between a traditional peasant and a modernizing state but between a newly modern, politically sensitive peasantry and a state that is jealous of its own power and prerogatives.\footnote{"Pacification Politics." The author's own observations in Vietnam 7-19 July 1970 would tend at least partially to confirm his thesis of the growing clash of interest between elected village councils and the military province and especially district chiefs who are reluctant to share local power.}

Popkin's critique is perhaps the most perceptive and up to date yet available, and based on actual field research in 18 villages. Yet to what extent should a wartime program like pacification be measured in terms of what must essentially be a longer term political process lasting perhaps a decade? It seems too much to expect that in only three years or so even the major pacification effort finally launched in Vietnam should have achieved more than restoration of relative local security in most areas, a considerable degree of economic revival, and re-establishment of at least a semblance of popularly based local administration—with a substantial degree of popular acquiescence and perhaps some support. Thus Popkin's verdict seems a bit premature. If pacification is looked on as mainly aimed at suppressing insurgency and creating a climate within which the longer-term political process can have its inning, then Vietnam pacification may have been (as indeed Popkin grants) largely successful.\footnote{For a view that the extent of popular support for a government, or its shift from an insurgency to a government, is not a reliable indicator of success, see Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf, Jr., Rebellion and Authority, Markham, Chicago, 1970, pp. 87-89. Their is the only
Indeed, Popkin himself sees the conflict which will now determine ultimate ARVN viability as one between the peasantry and ARVN rather than between the GVN and VC. Other observers would rate the ARVN's political power as less of a fearsome threat to Thieu. In a real sense he has more control over it than anyone else, through his power to promote and reward as senior general as well as president. In any case, ARVN is not very cohesive as a political power center. It is increasingly being redeployed toward the borders away from populated areas anyway.

Moreover, the decentralization of power has gone further than Popkin suggests. Some 70,000 village/hamlet officials have been educated at Vung Tau on their new responsibilities (and harangued by Thieu himself to exercise them). Greater decentralization has occurred in 1970 (e.g. autonomous village budgets, new provincial councils) and more is planned for 1971 (e.g. election of province chiefs as called for in the 1967 constitution). Though local autonomy still exists more on paper than in reality in many areas, and a natural conflict of interest is emerging between the new village leaders and the military men who dominate at the district and province, the trend is in the right direction.

If Thieu survives, he will almost certainly push decentralization further for his own political purposes. Moreover, despite the natural conflict of interest between ARVN and the newly emerging rural groups, there is less of a conflict inherent in the relations between these groups and the central government. It is easier to envisage a sharing of power between village at the local level and the GVN at the center than between local civilian and military leadership groups. In any case the related diffusion of power now taking place between the executive, legislative, and now increasingly judicial branches will operate to limit the impositions of the center on the village. Neither Thieu nor ARVN are any longer as much free agents as they used to be.

**TENTATIVE CONCLUSION**

In sum, the gathering weight of recent evidence is that the 1967-1970 "new model" pacification program, with all its flaws and weaknesses, has contributed materially to an at least short-run improvement in the GVN's ability to cope with rural insurgency. There is no doubt that the position of the GVN vis-a-vis the VC in the countryside has grown
much stronger—militarily, economically, and administratively—since 1965-1966. The dramatic physical improvements in most areas are highly visible, and the trends are further confirmed by the systematic CORDS measurement systems, despite their limitations. The weight of evidence also shows that the VC position has drastically declined in all areas of Vietnam and is still a major threat in only about 8-12 provinces. Moreover, despite U.S. withdrawals, GVN capabilities to push the pacification process further still appear to be growing, and those of the southern VC (though not necessarily the NVA) on the wane.

It should also be borne in mind that pacification's contribution to these results was achieved via programs that have been primarily Vietnamese staffed and run from the outset, though extensively subsidized and logistically supported by the U.S. Even so, the direct U.S. dollar input to pacification in probably the peak year 1970 is only about $777 million out of the many billions still being spent, which makes pacification probably more cost-effective than most major wartime programs in Vietnam. Nor have pacification programs generally entailed the sort of counterproductive side effects on rural attitudes characteristic of many aspects of the "big unit" war. Indeed, many of them (refugees, village development and self-help, etc.) were designed partly to compensate for these.

What is less apparent, and far less subject to measurement, is how lasting the change in the countryside or the degree of positive rural commitment to a still feeble GVN. In the author's view, the war and its consequences (e.g. pacification) have stimulated what amounts to a rural revolution in Vietnam—politically, socially and economically. But the extent to which this revolution will benefit the GVN's cause over time is still unclear. Definitive evidence may not be available for years. Moreover, the VC—though greatly weakened—is still a force to be reckoned with. Indeed, despite the growing evidence as to pacification's short-term impact on rural insurgency, such other factors as new NVA offensives, political changes in Saigon, or the terms of a negotiated settlement may so affect the final outcome in Vietnam that no real test of pacification's ultimate impact may ever be feasible.