5-1-1976

World revolution and American response: counter-insurgency in Vietnam

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WORLD REVOLUTION AND AMERICAN RESPONSE:
COUNTER-INSURGENCY IN VIETNAM

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY
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DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
MAY 1976
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Chapter I

Introduction

This study will attempt to descriptively and analytically examine the American foreign policy doctrine of counter-insurgency in the context of its emergence and development during the Vietnam war. Accordingly, this will entail an examination of the conceptual origins of counter-insurgency, its theoretical and substantive components, and the various attempts to operationalize the doctrine from the Kennedy to the Nixon administrations. Importantly, it should be emphasized that this work is not a historical review or examination of the American military role in Vietnam, but seeks only to microscopically focus on the militarily and politically significant "concept" of counter-insurgency. This concept is one which presents itself as an isolated yet integral aspect of that war.

In respect to the guiding framework of analysis this basic position of this paper is as follows. In light of the Third World's strategic economic importance to the United States and the International Capitalist System, it is vitally important for the United States that status quo regimes favorable to its interest (i.e., continued economic domination and exploitation) remain in power. In this context the violent outbreaks of anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and revolutionary nationalism in the post World War II era represented a serious challenge to the United States and International Capitalists System's continued domination of the Third World. Accordingly, American military, strategic and
political officials found it necessary to replace French military aggression in Vietnam with the specific purpose of developing a military strategy capable of defeating what they viewed as the new powerful weapon of not only the Communist and Vietnamese revolutionaries, but other poor, oppressed peoples of the Third World—namely, "guerilla warfare." In the course of that intervention the United States has devised a new kind of military strategy and warfare characterized as counter-insurgency. The explicit function of counter-insurgency being to challenge all outbreaks of violent revolutionary nationalism by those peoples who have resorted to guerrilla warfare as their means of achieving national liberation.

In regards to the organizational structure of this study, it will consist of three main chapters. Chapter Two will entail an examination of the conceptual origins of the counter-insurgency doctrine. In doing so it will focus on the subtle and underlying factors which provided the initial impetus for the necessary emergence and development of the concept of counter-insurgency. This chapter puts into focus the role of counter-insurgency warfare in the context of United States global military and political policies.

Chapter Three will make a more substantive examination of the counter-surgency doctrine in respect to its operational implementation. This entails a review of the various tactical attempts to operationalize the doctrine as far as its policy makeup and revisions are concerned. Moreover, this chapter will call attention to the three Presidents; Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon's unique tactical handling of the doctrine and strategy.
Next, Chapter Four will shift to a more detailed examination of the actual technical operations of military warfare and strategy. In that theories and policies interact with the operational tools used to carry them out, this chapter will examine that relationship between counter-insurgency strategy and its tactical weaponry. As such, this will necessarily focus on the changes in military tactics and the subsequent revisions range from manpower to geophysical to mechanized and electronic warfare. The final chapter of this work will simply be a summary and conclusion.

As a final note, we should add that this study will be carried out in and with the use of library resources and materials. Primary and secondary resources will be used with particular emphasis on those of key personalities and official governmental agencies and documents. The data used will range from historical to the contemporary and will draw upon a variety of texts, journals, newspapers, and congressional hearings.
Neither ideas nor actions are conceived and manifested within a vacuum of meaningless significance. Essentially, they are conscious conceptions and responses to particular problems and concerns within a more fundamental context or situation. More specifically, the broad contextual or situational needs of problems provide the fundamental nexus in which particular methodological tactics are utilized or conceived. The importance of understanding the contextual or situational basis of events and ideas is critical to this study of counter-insurgency in Vietnam. For we can only understand these developments if we have a clear perception of the context in which they were manifested. In reference to the Vietnam war then, it becomes quite appropriate to ask, why counter-insurgency in Vietnam? What underlying factors, conditions, needs or more broadly asked, in what context or what were the situational concerns that led the United States to embark on its military adventure in Vietnam?

In answering that question we must first graphically reconstruct and reconceptualize the context of the events and issues which reflect American foreign policy makers' perception of Vietnam and consequent decision to become involved. In doing so, I would like to use a three-tiered contextual framework which should facilitate any understanding of how the "concept" of counter-insurgency emerges as the guiding doctrine of American military policy in Vietnam. The first
part of this contextual framework focuses on U. S. policy officials' broad view of the world. In other words, it reflects on the events of worldwide significance which effected, necessitated and influenced the development of the counter-insurgency concept. Secondly, we would like to refine this broad world context and focus on those events of regional significance within Indochina. Finally, the third part of the contextual framework refines itself further to a look at events inside Vietnam. The interconnection of these three contextual analyses should then provide us with an understanding of "why" the United States became involves in what has come to be known as the Vietnam War.

From the standpoint of a world context, American policy officials' perception of Vietnam was related to events of global significance. More specifically, this concern for global events was reflective of foreign policy makers' constant post World War Two concern with the cold war. Through the prism of the cold war paradigm every major event was viewed in the context of the United States world policeman's role as the chief stalwart against international communism. In the immediate post World War Two era, Europe was considered to be the chief battleground of the cold war. Hence, the United States concentrated the bulk of its resources and attention to that part of the world. To everyone's surprise, however, major events and crises elsewhere in the world soon refocused the center of attention. Significantly, it was the anti-colonial, nationalist struggles of the so-called Third World on the continents of Africa, Asia and South America that caught the attention of the world. A series of small scale outbreaks of
violence throughout the Third World were evidence of growing challenge to American and European economic and political domination and exploitation. Former colonial empires were under attack and major changes were in the making. American security officials perceiving those events in the context of the cold war, generally explained the upheavals as a part of what they saw as an attempt at global expansion by communist nations, especially the Soviet Union. Moreover, they felt that these general conditions of instability and unrest provided ideal conditions for communist manipulation. In reference to Asia and the Vietnam arenas, this concern is explicitly noted in the Pentagon Papers, saying:

The process of devolution from colonial empires to independent states, it was thought, would create power vacuums and conditions of instability which would make Asia susceptible to becoming a battleground in the growing East-West cold war conflict.

Yet while U. S. officials were extremely concerned about these assumed attempts at communist expansion, an integrally related and much more fundamental concern was the result of such changes. The critical concern being that any such ideological transformation would probably have serious negative effects for American interests in those nations. And despite U. S. propaganda expressing concern for the welfare of these peoples living under communist systems, a much more realistic assessment of U. S. concern centers on its desire to safeguard its interest. Economic interest, of course, being at the heart of the matter.

Importantly, these economic interests which American foreign

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policy officials concern themselves with, must not be looked upon as a short-term profit operations but more generally as an integral part of the American capitalist system's inherent makeup. In the first instance, as William A. Williams has aptly illustrated in his The Tragedy of American Diplomacy, the perennial driving force behind United States foreign policy since 1776 has been the need to have access to free-trade open markets for America's surplus production. Therefore, viewed in the context of the cold war, the United States perceived the violence in the Third World as part of the much feared global communist expansion. Thus there was the fear that if any of these nations were to become communist, as such, this would automatically limit the ability of the United States to penetrate and have access to these nations' markets and resources for trade and investment purposes. Relatedly, a very important and similar point is explained and expressed by Noam Chomsky in his At War With Asia where he writes:

Consider, for example, how the threat of Communism to the American system is defined in an extensive study sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson Foundation and the National Planning Association, a study that involved a representative segment of that largely determines foreign policy, whoever is technically in office. The primary threat of Communism, as they see it, is the economic transformation fo the Communist powers "in ways which reduce their willingness and ability to complement the industrial economies of the West." Correspondingly, the American crusade against Communism is not a campaign against all forms of development, but only against the effort of indigenous movements to extricate their societies from the integrated world system dominated largely by American capital and to sue their resources for their own social and economic development.

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This ever-present desire for foreign markets is only half the issue, the other half being a vital need and dependence for certain necessary raw material resources. As evidenced by a Pentagon stock-piling program of strategic and critical raw materials (necessary for military and domestic production) we find that "eighty to 100 percent of the supply needed by this country of more than half of the strategic materials must be obtained abroad; for 52 of the 62 materials on the Pentagon list, at least 40 percent has to be secured abroad." A Senate committee also concluded in 1954 that the United States' inability to have access to these nations "to a very dangerous extent, the vital security of this nation would be in serious jeopardy." Even more crucial if viewed in the context of the post World War Two turmoil, a Presidential commission noted that "three-quarters of the materials imported under the stock-pile program came from underdeveloped (Third World) countries." Moreover, the chairman of the commission concluded: "... it is to these countries that we must look for the bulk of any possible increase in these supplies. The loss of any of these materials through aggression, would be the equivalent


5U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, Accessibility of Strategic and Critical Materials to the United States in Time of War and for our Expanding Economy, Report July 9, 1954, cited by Klare, Ibid., p. 11. In reference to these committee hearings, it is interesting to note the date--1954, the year of the French defeat and the same year the United States began to replace France in Vietnam.
of a grave military setback." Putting these points and the violence of the Third World into proper perspective, Michael Klare notes;

"No more graphic presentation of the strategic significance of the Third World to the American economy and way of life can be made (in that) these minerals can be obtained only in countries experiencing the seething turmoil born of nationalism and the struggle against economic stagnation."7

In sum, we can generally ascribe the United States' involvement in Vietnam to the fact the American policy officials perceived events in Vietnam within the broad context of post World War Two Third World upheavals and turmoil. More specifically, the context of that turmoil refines itself as that perception extends to also view the developments as part of the cold war, seeing the violence as communist inspired in an assumed quest for global expansion. As we have tried to briefly illustrate, American interest in these events was not based on abstract notions in respect to a communist takeover, but more on a rabid fear of the possible consequences for American economic interests.

It is within the context of this post World War Two trend that Vietnam as one of a number of these violent upheavals acquires its initial significance for American foreign policy officials. Yet its importance increased as these officials examined Vietnam's own internal events within the context of wider Asian regional developments. Oddly enough, American officials early perceptions of Vietnam's turmoil was simply that of a nationalist anti-colonial struggle. Here they

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7Klare, War Without End, p. 11-12.
saw a persistent and valiant Vietnamese people continuing their historical struggles against various forms of foreign aggression. Usually against the ancient Chinese dynasties but now in the post World War Two era against Japanese and French colonialism. President Roosevelt in particular was incensed at the French desire to maintain its colonial empire in Asia and had often spoke of establishing some type of international mandate system in those areas. Ironically, then, in the 1940's it was the United States through the offices of its Office of Strategic Services (OSS) that actually offered material assistance along with personal and technical training to the Viet-Minh forces. Moreover, it was Time magazine in 1945 that praised venerable Ho Chi Minh by calling him the "George Washington" of Vietnam.

These initial perceptions faded soon as U. S. officials drastically revised their views of both the turmoil in Vietnam and throughout Asia. Two major events stand out foremost in influencing that transformation. One being the Chinese communist victory in 1949, and the other being the outbreak of the Korean war in 1950. With these developments the cold war paradigm was quickly extended to Asia. Communism was now seen as the threatening menace to the entire area with the Vietnamese conflict now being viewed through the same prism. Chester Cooper, long time U. S. diplomat and specialist in Asian affairs with first hand experience in the area, succinctly notes official policy perception transformation in respect to these regional developments. We quote somewhat extensively his views on these events. On the Chinese Communist victory he writes:

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With Mao Tse-Tung's victory and the Chinese Communist forces deployed along the northern borders of Laos and Vietnam, Washington stirred out of its lethargy. The war between the French and the Viet Minh had taken on an entirely new character—it became an integral part of the struggle between the "Free World" and "International Communism." (emphasis added.)

Also,

In January 1950, China, quickly followed by the Soviet Union, recognized the government of the Ho Chi Minh. If anything else had been needed to remove the French-Viet Minh war from the sordid ranks of a Colonialist-Nationalist struggle into the elevated states of a confrontation between the Free World and the Communist Bloc, this was it. (emphasis added.)

And, furthermore on the Korean conflict,

The outbreak of the Korean war on June 25, 1950, gave further respectability to American assistance to the French efforts against the Viet Minh. With the Viet Minh now overtly supported by Moscow and Peking, the fighting in Indochina was transformed from a seedy, backwater colonialist-nationalist struggle to a major international contest between the Free World and Communist ideologies. (emphasis added.)

These two developments, the Chinese victory and the Korean war, established the general conditions for American involvement, albeit limited, into the affairs of Indochina. More important than this limited involvement, however, these developments led to the enunciation of that infamous post World War II stalwart of U.S. foreign policy—the Domino theory. Set forth and elaborated primarily by the then Secretary of State Dulles, the theory created an atmosphere in which all Indochinese developments were now viewed as vital to the security interests of the United States. Formulating this new principle Dulles commented:
If they (the Soviets) could get this peninsula of Indochina, Siam, Burma, Malaya, they would have what is called the rice bowl of Asia. And you can see that if the Soviet Union had control of the rice bowl of Asia that would be another weapon which would tend to expand their control into Japan and into India.

Later the Domino theory was further elaborated and given full credence in a National Security Council statement of policy on "U. S. objectives and Courses of Action in Southeast Asia." In part, it stated:

1. Communist domination, by whatever means, of all Southeast Asia would seriously endanger in the short term, and critically endanger in the longer term, United States security interests.
   a. In the conflict in Indochina, the Communist and non-Communist worlds clearly confront one another on the field of battle. The loss of the struggle in Indochina, in addition to its impact in Southeast Asia in South Asia, would therefore have the most serious repercussions on U. S. and free world interests in Europe and elsewhere.
   b. Such is the interrelation of the countries of the area that effective counteraction would be immediately necessary to prevent the loss of any single country from leading to submission to or an alignment with communism by the remaining countries of Southeast Asia and Indonesia. Furthermore, in the event all of Southeast Asia falls under communism, an alignment with communism of India, and in the longer term, of the Middle East (with the probable exceptions of at least Pakistan and Turkey) could follow progressively.
   c. Communist control of all of Southeast Asia and Indonesia would threaten the U. S. position in the Pacific offshore island and would seriously jeopardize fundamental U. S. security interests in the Far East.

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9 Cited in Cooper, Ibid., p. 90.
The effect of such a theory was in practice the extension of the Truman Doctrine (previously used to fight Communists in Greece) to the Indochina arena, thereby rationalizing and giving "justifiable" support to American involvement and later direct intervention. President Eisenhower, who uncritically accepted and gave full support to this thesis, proceeded to provide substantial monetary and technical assistance to French forces engaging the Viet Minh in Indochina.

Although one can easily agree that U. S. officials now regarded communism as being a threat in regards to the Indochina area, this does not wholly satisfy or explain why the U. S. became so directly involved with such intensity and expense. As partly justified and explained in the above analysis, the more general right-wing assumption has suggested that the United States was only attempting to prevent the spread of international communism. And on the left, we have had varying assumptions, with the more popular being that the United States was merely acting out its imperialist character and was seeking certain economic gains within Vietnam and the rest of Southeast Asia.

Yet, both the assumptions, in my view, tend to obscure the analysis and reflect too simplistic notions about the inertia of nations, (especially capitalist) and the motives of their foreign policies. The right-wing diatribe about stopping communism merely describes the superficial aspects of America's anti-communist policy without any substantive treatment of the subtle underlying motives, needs and consequences of such policies. As far as the left is concerned, it is true that certain specific economic interests were in mind and regarded as significant to U. S. security officials. For instance, notice remarks in the above mentioned National Security Council memorandum's assessment of U. S. interest in Southeast Asia:
The loss of Southeast Asia would have serious economic consequences for many nations of the free world and conversely would add significant resources to the Soviet bloc. Southeast Asia, especially Malaya and Indonesia, is the principal world source of natural rubber and tin, and producer of petroleum and other strategically important commodities. The rice exports of Burma, Indochina and Thailand are critically important to Malaya, Ceylon and Hong Kong and are of considerable significance to Japan and India, all important areas of free Asia. Furthermore, this area has important potential as a market for the industrialized countries of the free world. (emphasis added.)

As evidenced by these comments real economic concerns were there.

Yet to ascribe the undertaking of a major foreign policy to these specific economic interests is to unfairly and unnecessarily place limitations on the theory of imperialism. Instead, it inversely professes a kind of blind economic determinism as a guide to the national interest of an imperialist power. This obscures rather than aptly applying the notion of imperialism. In the context of Vietnam an analysis of imperialist motives, in respect to national security and vital interests, must have a broader application. Therefore, a more appropriate analysis of imperialism emerges if viewed from the standpoint of what Arnold Wolfers calls "milieu goals"; that is, favorable conditions in the international environment, including balances of power and spheres of influence, which then become new national values requiring protection themselves.

11 U.S.-Vietnam Relations, Ibid., p. 221.


Hence the United States' involvement in Vietnam must be looked at in a broader sense as expressed by Wolfers and as implied earlier in this chapter in those remarks stressing the necessity of examining the Indochina war from a global standpoint or context. Note that the point made earlier in the chapter concerning the United States' need for certain raw materials and desires for foreign markets is substantiated and borne out — in a global context, in the remarks underscored in the above National Security memorandum.

In light of this need for a broader or more total picture, it is necessary to extend the context of our world and regional analysis by connecting it specifically to developments inside Vietnam and to those figures personally responsible for the direct United States involvement. In connecting our world view with specific events inside Vietnam, a very significant picture emerges. As emphasized earlier, the turmoil and upheaval within Vietnam was a common occurrence throughout the Third World in the Post World War Two era. The critical feature of this turmoil, however, was the unique nature of pattern of violence. Explaining the uniqueness of these upheavals Richard Barnett comments:

Since World War II the continents of Asia, Africa and South America have been continually swept with violence ... Much of the political violence that has influenced human society since 1945, however, has been of a special character. Its source has not been conflict between states, but conflict within societies ... Essentially, contemporary wars have been fights for the rights of various political groups within the former colonial appendages of Europe to take political power and to exercise it on their own terms ... These have been colonial wars against a European power or wars against a domestic ruling class or elite. In each case they are fought for a local political purpose. They are
struggles of new states to decide what they shall be and most importantly, who will run them. They take the form of civil wars but they are really revolutions... The goal is a radical redistribution of political and economic power to overcome contrivances of political oppression and crushing poverty... 14

As mentioned earlier, U.S. officials viewed these developments with great concern believing that they provided either fertile ground for communist infiltration and manipulation, or were the direct results of communist subversion. But more important than just the general assumption that the turmoil was the result of attempted communist expansion, the primary concern with the violence of the Third World was its particular form. Attention now focused on what was viewed as a "new form of Soviet aggression". Namely, it was known as national liberation war or guerrilla warfare along with a number of other names such as limited war, subterrenean war, brushfire wars, etc. In essence this type of warfare was viewed as a tactical tool used by communist agitators. A primary influence in aiding the development of this perception was the very important and widely read speech 15 by Soviet Premier Nikita Khruschev in 1961. On such types of wars he said:

Now a word about national liberation wars... can such wars occur in the future? They can... but these wars are popular uprisings. In other words, can conditions be created in which people lose their patience and rise in arms? They can. What is the attitude of the Marxists towards such uprisings? A most positive one... The Communist fully support such just wars and


15 A speech so important in fact that Congressional hearings were held on that speech alone. See U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act, Analysis of the Khruschev Speech of January 6, 1961, Hearings, before a subcommittee on the Judiciary, Senate, 87th Congress, 1st Session, June 16, 1951.
march in the front ranks with the people waging liberation struggles. 16

With this pronouncement U. S. officials were convinced that the violence in the Third World was the product of Communist agitation and interference. Hence, every major trouble spot was viewed with serious concern. And this was no small matter indeed in that former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara pointed out that "there have occurred in the last decade over 149 serious internal insurrections". 17 With such a large number of potential revolutionary developments in the making, the United States indeed was greatly concerned about the ability of oppressed peoples to resort to and effectively engage in wars of national liberation.

Despite being aware of these assumed developments, U.S. policy officials were unsure as to what would be the most appropriate response. Since World War II and particularly under the Eisenhower administration, the United States had concentrated its military build-up efforts under the doctrine of "massive retaliation". Under this doctrine the United States had been preparing for World War III with the belief that its appropriate response would be the threat of or actual use of nuclear reprisal to any necessary challenge. In essence, then, while the United States was well prepared to fight another general type of war, i.e., World War III, it was totally unprepared to deal with the small-scale irregular wars taking place throughout the Third World.


17 Barnett, Intervention, p. 4; also Jacobs, Ibid., p. 36.
As a response to this problem, many American military strategists began to criticize the excessive emphasis on massive retaliation and now called for new proposals to deal with these so-called limited or low-intensity conflicts. One of the first was Lt. Joseph P. Kruger, who wrote:

During the "no war, no peace" situation of the present, conspiratorial and unconventional techniques have played the major rather than the minor role. The sporadic flare-ups of various types of irregular warfare and the almost continuous condition of guerrilla warfare in parts of Africa, the Near East, and the Far East would appear to emphasize a need for us to re-examine our war plans and strategic doctrine.\(^{18}\)

In addition, another writer, Edward Downey, Jr., stressed the need for incorporating guerrilla warfare itself within the U.S. strategic military doctrine. He wrote:

The United States must develop a guerrilla potential as quickly as possible, based on the best available information and experience . . . Naturally the first step should be an exhaustive study of guerrilla warfare . . . we must create a sound theory for a resistance movement . . . we must glean every lesson from existing guerrilla literature. More than this, we must search out existing guerrilla leaders who have not published their experiences. Full development of any theory awaits upon this accumulation of knowledge.\(^{19}\)

Aside from these suggestions, by far the most publicized and influential criticism came from General Maxwell Taylor who set forth his views in a widely heralded book entitled The Uncertain Trumpet. On this subject Taylor wrote:\(^{20}\)


It is my belief that Massive Retaliation as a guiding strategic concept has reached a dead end and that there is an urgent need for a reappraisal of our strategic needs. In its heyday, Massive Retaliation could offer our leaders only two choices, the initiation of general nuclear war or compromise and retreat. From its earliest days, many world events have occurred which cast doubt on its validity and exposed its fallacious character. Korea, a limited conventional war, fought by the United States, when we had an atomic monopoly, was clear proof of its universal efficacy. The many other limited wars which have occurred since 1945 -- the Chinese Civil War, the guerrilla warfare in Greece and Malaya, Vietnam, Taiwan, Hungary, the Middle East, Laos, to mention only a few -- are clear evidence that, while our massive retaliatory strategy may have prevented the Great War -- a World War III -- it has not maintained the Little Peace; that is, peace from disturbances which are little only with the disaster of general war.

As an alternative, Taylor suggested a new policy which eventually transformed the entire strategy of the U.S. military:

The strategic doctrine which I would propose to replace Massive Retaliation is called herein the Strategy of Flexible Response. This name suggests the need for a capability to react across the entire spectrum of possible challenge, for coping with anything from general atomic war to infiltration and aggression such as threatened Laos and Berlin in 1959. The new strategy would recognize that it is just as necessary to deter or win quickly a limited war as to deter general war . . .

In that Vietnam was now attracting greater and more serious attention, many officials felt that it was the appropriate place to give Taylor's suggested strategy a try.

Out of this growing desire for a new military strategy, then, we began to witness the emergence of the doctrine and concept of "Counter-insurgency". But one man, more than General Taylor was chiefly responsible for providing a sustained impetus and substantial support for this new concept. That man was President John F. Kennedy. It is here in the context of this flexible response strategy that we find President Kennedy's great personal role and interest in the Vietnam conflict. As a matter
of fact, as early as 1956 Kennedy had recognized the importance of Vietnam in a global context. Basically synonymous with the accepted domino theory, Kennedy speaking to a group known as "American Friends to Vietnam" said:

Vietnam represents the cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia, the keystone in the arch, the finger in the dike. Burma, Thailand, India, Japan, the Philippines and obviously Laos and Cambodia are among those whose security would be threatened if the red tide of Communism overflowed into Vietnam . . . The fundamental tenets of this nation's foreign policy, in short, depend in considerable measure upon a strong and free Vietnamese nation . . . Vietnam represents a test of American responsibility and determination in Asia.21

In addition, Kennedy also clearly recognized the general post World War II trend of events as far as the prevalence and potential of guerrilla wars in effecting fundamental political and economic changes in the world. In a special message to Congress on the Defense budget, he expressed the view that "non-nuclear wars, and sub-limited or guerrilla warfare, have since 1945 constituted the most active and constant threat to Free World security".22 Moreover, Kennedy also recognized the fact that it was within the Third World underdeveloped nations where these wars would take place. On this point he noted: "The great battleground for the defense and expansion of freedom today is the whole southern half of the globe -- Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East -- the land of the rising peoples".23


In essence, Kennedy exhibited a keen understanding of the general thrust of world history in this era. Oppressed peoples throughout the Third World, the life blood-line of U.S. world imperialism, were mounting an increasingly powerful and widespread resistance movement. Kennedy, however, like most U.S. policy officials, recognized this trend but only in the context of the cold war. Hence, they saw dominoes falling as the result of a global Communist conspiracy. And because the American conception of the cold war was that of a zero sum game -- a win for the Communist was a loss for the West -- Kennedy felt that the United States had to become involved. Kennedy, moreover, even had a personal stake in deterring or defeating these national liberation wars. Having witnessed the loss of Cuba through revolutionary warfare and its subsequent alignment with the Soviet Union, he felt that the United States had to make a show of force to prove to the Soviet leadership (particularly Khruschev) that the United States would not buckle under pressures from Moscow. Kennedy, then, in order to stifle the rising revolutionary movements throughout the world felt that the United States must have the capacity to prevent such developments.

Accordingly, Kennedy was most receptive to General Taylor's notion of a "flexible response". In fact, Kennedy publicly reiterated the strategy as expressed by Taylor. On the limited utility of massive retaliation, he said:

But both before and after 1953 events have demonstrated that our nuclear retaliatory power is not enough. It cannot deter Communist aggression which is too limited to justify atomic war. It cannot protect uncommitted nations against a Communist takeover using local or guerrilla forces. It cannot be used in so-called brushfire peripheral ways.
And, on the necessity of a flexible response strategy,

We must regain the ability to intervene effectively and swiftly in any limited war anywhere in the world — augmenting, modernizing and providing increased mobility and versatility for the conventional forces of the Army and Marine Corps. 24

Further evidence of Kennedy's acceptance of this new strategy was reflected in his decision to appoint Taylor as his principal military adviser and his later promotion to the chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Yet, Kennedy was concerned with providing a creative response to the particular kind of warfare taking place inside Vietnam. Kennedy wanted a strategy of "counter-insurgency" developed as a tactical "flexible response" to what had come to be known as "revolutionary guerrilla war or national liberation wars". Kennedy expressed this view in a classic remark on this new concept of counter-insurgency in a speech to a graduating class at West Point:

Korea has not been the only battleground since the end of the Second World War. Men have fought and died in the Malaya and Greece, in the Phillipines, in Algeria and Cuba and Cyprus, and almost continuously on the Indo-Chinese Peninsula . . . This is another type of war, new in its intensity, ancient in its origins — war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins, war by ambush instead of by combat; by infiltration, instead of aggression, seeking victory by eroding and exhausting the enemy instead of engaging him. It is a form of warfare uniquely adapted to what has been strangely called "wars of liberation", . . . It requires . . . a whole new kind of strategy, a wholly different kind of force and therefore, a wholly different kind of military training. (emphasis added.) 25

This statement by Kennedy set the basic framework in which he wanted a counter-insurgency strategy developed. Eight days after the Bay of Pigs fiasco he again stressed the necessity of such a strategy as he ordered a Task Force to Vietnam for its development. Here he said:

... we dare not fail to see the insidious nature of this new and deeper struggle. We dare not fail to grasp the new concepts, the new tools, the new sense of urgency we will need to combat it -- whether in Cuba or South Vietnam.26

And so, Vietnam was to be the arena or "testing ground" for new military strategy. As Noam Chomsky has reflected on this point,

Vietnam then provided an opportunity to prove to Peking and Moscow that their policy of "wars of liberation" was dangerous and uncompromising and also provided both a challenge and opportunity to test the new doctrines of counter-insurgency.27

This notion of testing ground was later explicitly revealed in National Security Memorandum 288 (March, 1964) which noted that throughout the world "the South Vietnam conflict is regarded as a "test case" of U.S. capacity to help a nation meet the Communist "war of liberation . . ."28 For, as viewed by U.S. officials, they felt that in view of world events at that time, "faced with a challenge to deal with wars of national liberation, it would be hard to decide that the first one we happened to meet was 'not our style'."


28 Cited in Chomsky, Ibid., p. 44.
In sum and in general, we can now answer the question of "why the U.S. became involved in Vietnam?" Essentially, it represented a test case and a battleground between so-called communist wars of national liberation and the U.S. military doctrine of counter-insurgency. Vietnam would be the chessboard and the Vietnamese peoples the pawns as the United States attempted to stifle a dynamic social revolution and in the process check what they viewed as another attempt at global communist expansion. Moreover, however, Vietnam provided the United States with the opportunity to test and develop its new military strategy of counter-insurgency, which they hoped could be used to deter other revolutionary wars of national liberation throughout the underdeveloped and exploited nations of the Third World. And so the doctrine of counter-insurgency emerges as something more than just a military strategy, it is much more, a global foreign policy. A foreign policy designed for the purpose of maintaining the international status quo and to prevent revolutionary change in the world.
CHAPTER THREE

COUNTER-INSURGENCY IN VIETNAM:
STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

After having established the basic framework which led to the United States' involvement in Vietnam, we would now like to go further and make a more substantive examination of the counter-insurgency doctrine in respect to its operational implementation. This will entail a review of various tactical attempts to operationalize the doctrine as far as its policy make-up and revisions are concerned. Moreover, this chapter will examine the attempt to develop and operationalize a counter-insurgency strategy as handled by the three Presidents, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon.

As explained in Chapter One, it was President Kennedy who provided the initial impetus and substantive support for a counter-insurgency strategy. It was he who set all the wheels in motion for the development of such a doctrine. Having read all of the works of Mao Tse-Tung and Che Guevara, Kennedy soon requested that all persons involved in strategic-military concerns do the same. As Chester Cooper points out, "Counter-Insurgency was the 'New Thing', and everybody who wished to be somebody in Washington scrambled to get on the bandwagon".¹ All concerned officials began to fervently read the works of Mao and Che and other information on guerrilla warfare. Furthermore, President Kennedy established

a high-level interdepartmental staff called the "Special Group for Counter-Insurgency". This group, headed by General Taylor, with Robert Kennedy as the President's personal representative, was to coordinate all activities of the various agencies and personnel working on the development of a counter-insurgency strategy.

In addition, a number of actions were taken on the military front. First of all, President Kennedy ordered an upgrading and increase in the Special Forces training program at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. As Roger Hilsman explains,

He wanted the Special Forces, who were to be experts both in guerrilla and counterguerrilla warfare, to be an elite corps, and over the objection of the Joint Chiefs of Staff he directed that they were to wear the green beret as a symbol of their elite status.

In response to this Special Forces buildup, the Navy and Air Force each created its own counter-insurgency units -- the Sea/Air/Land teams (SEAL'S) and Special Operations Forces (SOF), respectively. Furthermore, specific measures were taken to upgrade the general capabilities of regular military troops. Army troops were raised from 870,000 to 1,000,000 while the Navy added 29,000 and the Air Force gained 63,000. Moreover, about two billion dollars was appropriated for the development and purchasing

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of non-nuclear (i.e., counter-insurgency or limited war) weapons and equipment. Clearly, as Richard Walton has noted, "the great buildup in conventional war-making capacity, his (Kennedy's) passion for the Green Beret, the counter-insurgency program -- all these make sense only as a preparation for counter-revolution".  

Sensing a need for concrete action, Kennedy sent Vice President Lyndon Johnson to Vietnam in 1961 to see how the United States could be of more specific assistance. On his return, Johnson gave the following report:

We must decide to help the countries to the best of our ability or throw in the towel in the area and pull back our defenses to San Francisco and a "Fortress America" concept. More important, we would say to the world in this case that we don't live up to our treaties and don't stand by our friends. This is not my concept. I recommend that we move forward promptly with a major effort to help these countries defend themselves.  

While the remarks foreshadowed Johnson's later actions, they were not consistent with Kennedy's conception of what form the counter-insurgency effort should take. Consequently, Kennedy rejected such actions. Despite the rejection, however, Johnson's report signaled an increasingly serious situation and it did pressure Kennedy to back up what he felt were previous commitments.  

Accordingly, Kennedy responded in two significant ways. One, he increased the number of advisers (600 when he became President) beyond the 645 man limited stipulated by the Geneva Convention. Moreover, he


5 Quoted in Walton, Ibid., p. 170.
sent 400 Special Forces troops to Vietnam along with the following instructions:

1. Dispatch . . . agents to North Vietnam for intelligence gathering.
2. Infiltrate teams under light civilian cover to southeast Laos to locate and attack Vietnamese Communist bases and lines of communications.
3. In North Vietnam, using the foundation established by intelligence operations, form networks of resistance, cover bases and teams for sabotage and light harassment.
4. Conduct over flights for dropping of leaflets to harass the Communists and to maintain morale of North Vietnam's population and increase gray broadcast to North Vietnam for same purposes.
5. Train the South Vietnamese Army to conduct ranger raids and similar military actions in North Vietnam as might prove necessary or appropriate.6

These actions by Kennedy constituted the first concrete commitments to what was to become a long, gruesome fiasco in Vietnam. Yet despite the significance of these actions, they were not part of any clear-cut, comprehensive program of counter-insurgency. Realizing the necessity and urgency to be more programmatic in his approach, Kennedy ordered another mission to Vietnam. The purpose of the mission was to supplement the counter-insurgency plans being developed in the United States, in order that a more coherent, well planned program of action could be instituted.

This mission was carried out by General Taylor and Walt Rostow (two of Kennedy's key advisers) along with a team of specialists from various governmental agencies. After spending a few weeks in Vietnam, the Taylor-Rostow mission — in conjunction with the work done by the Pentagon,

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6 Quoted in Walton, Ibid., pp. 169 and 170.
State Department and Fort Bragg military schools — came up with a set of policy recommendations which would constitute a broad framework for the counter-insurgency strategy.⁷

These policy recommendations, known as the "strategic concept", specified a combination of military, political, economic and social measures. The first set of recommendations called for a series of governmental and administrative reforms by the Diem government. The second set asked that the United States provide the necessary material aid and technical advisers required. This aid would focus on economic reforms at the village level, supplemented by civic, police, social and political action. By implementing the measures, the counter-insurgents hoped to gain the support of the populace and later organize political parties/programs as a basis for Western-oriented modernization. In addition, the United States would furnish military arms and equipment for village self-defense corps along with specialized equipment for the South Vietnamese military to free them from a static defense and provide the mobility to carry out search and destroy missions. This aspect of the program was to include helicopter pilots, mechanics, and other specialized technicians who would implement training programs for the South Vietnamese. Finally, special types of weaponry suited to the ecological conditions in Vietnam were also recommended.

These set of recommendations were quickly approved by President Kennedy thereby establishing the basic "strategic concept" of counter-insurgency.

⁷ These recommendations are found in Hilsman, To Move A Nation, pp. 422 and 423.
Significantly, however, there had been a third set of recommendations which Kennedy disapproved. That is, General Taylor had specifically called for the immediate introduction of ten thousand American troops with the possibility of more increases later. This proposal was very much in accord with Vice President Johnson's earlier remarks. Yet, Kennedy continued to reject this type of action as he felt they did not constitute an effective counter-insurgency program. In this context, he said:

Without the support of the native population there is no hope for success in any of the countries in Southeast Asia: try to oppose Communist advancement apart from and in defiance of innately nationalistic aims spells foredoomed failure.

In summing up, we see that the strategic concept of counter-insurgency was a threefold program: (1) separating, protecting and winning the support of the population; (2) developing military and paramilitary counter-guerrilla capabilities, and (3) applying the political, economic, and social measures that are necessary to convert military successes into political gains.

Before going into the operationalization of the strategic concepts, I think it will be useful to examine the basic conceptual framework in which the counter-insurgency strategy was developed. This conceptual framework is divided into two parts: I. Basic Underlying Assumptions, and II. Operational Methods.

I. Basic Underlying Assumptions. The first part of this conceptual framework deals with a number of broad guiding assumptions underlying

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8 Hilsman, Ibid., p. 451
the counter-insurgency effort. Importantly, all of these assumptions are somewhat interrelated, one either growing out of the other or supplementing it. Generally, we can distinguish four basic assumptions.9

(1) The most basic assumption was that the Vietnam conflict was merely an extension of the cold war between communism and the western capitalist world. The conflict was not seen as arising out of local conditions, but rather that it was a new communist (i.e., Soviet Union and China) attempt at global expansion. And because the American conception of the cold war was that of a zero sum game — a win for the Communists was a loss for the West — the United States felt that it had to intervene. In this context, Michael Klare explains, "... South Vietnam was a new revolutionary front in what Kennedy and his advisers considered Free World territory — and thus could not fall into Communist hand."10

In assessing this cold war mentality of Kennedy, Richard Walton comments: "... Kennedy demonstrated deep and dangerous misunderstanding of the postwar world. He confused revolution in countries where revolution was inevitable with communist conspiracy".11 Most important, however, is that while this cold war mentality may in part be one of basic ignorance and misunderstanding, it also serves a very useful purpose for American imperialism. As Mr. Ahmed notes,

9 Some of these assumptions were noted earlier in Chapter One. Here we would like to re-emphasize those points as they relate to the development of the counter-insurgency strategy while adding more information on the assumptions.


11 Walton, Cold War, p. 164.
The association of revolutionary guerrilla warfare and radical nationalism with Communism helps justify U.S. involvement in a wide range of counter-revolutionary operations from Ethiopia to Uruguay (the former against non-Marxist Eritrean Nationalists, the latter against the Tupamaros, a group of anti-communist party, unorthodox radicals).12

(2) A second and related assumption to the communist conspiracy theory was the belief that the guerrillas in South Vietnam were externally trained, armed, supported and controlled from the outside -- primarily from Hanoi. Consequently, much of the literature on counter-insurgency was based on the thesis that the war was caused by "aggression from the North" through the sending of infiltrators into the South. It was for this that Kennedy's first orders directed the Green Berets to carry out special missions inside North Vietnam. Later United States intelligence sources revealed the complete inaccuracy of this assumption. This blunder, then, not only revealed the counter-insurgents' weak assessment of the Vietnamese revolution, it also illustrated their total lack of understanding about revolutions and guerrilla warfare. If they had read Mao and Che correctly, they would have understood that self-reliance and independent control are most fundamental to those engaged in revolutionary war. But, as with the first assumption, the second also serves a useful purpose for the U.S. imperialist. For if the liberal reactionaries of the Kennedy administration admitted that the revolution in Vietnam was an indigenous and popular war, it would undermine the entire counter-insurgency effort.

(3) The third and perhaps most fundamental assumption was that revolutionary guerrilla warfare was merely a new communist technique which

had to be answered with a better technical solution. All analysis toward a solution was focused on technical problems as opposed to any attempt to understand the substantive causes of guerrilla warfare. Consequently, the American counter-insurgents stressed the necessity of devising and creating counter techniques to meet the new challenge. Hence you have Kennedy's fervent emphasis on new strategies and tactics (i.e., Special Forces, psychological warfare, pacification schemes, etc.) and his admiration for the Green Berets who were symbolic of these new techniques. In this context, then counter-insurgents view so-called communist techniques such as land reform, health care, education, etc., as being opportunistic tools rather than genuine answers to local grievances. Also, it is for this reason that "the military writings of Mao are reproduced and cited out of their political context, their specific local character is ignored", notes Mr. Ahmed, "and he is presented as a systems-builder rather than the leader of a historical revolution."13

(4) A final assumption, growing out of the emphasis on a technical solution, was that of considering Vietnam as a testing ground. Vietnam was viewed as the testing ground for what they saw as the new weapons of the cold war-counter-insurgency vs. guerrilla warfare. The counter-insurgents of the Kennedy administration felt that since the communists had instituted this new technique, Vietnam would be the battleground to challenge the tactic and settle the issue. This notion is indicated in a well-publicized statement by one of the chief counter-insurgents,

Walt Rostow:

... if we have the common will to hold together and get on with the job — the struggle in Vietnam might be the last great confrontation of the post war era ... If the Cuban missile crisis was the Gettysburg of the cold war, Vietnam could be the wilderness; for indeed, the cold war has been a kind of global civic conflict. Vietnam could be the closing of one chapter in modern history and the opening of another.14

In 1963 General Taylor also provided some remarks which not only attest to the use of Vietnam in devising a counter-insurgency strategy, but also indicates the second way in which it was used as a test, namely the development of new counter-insurgency weapons and technology.

Speaking before a Congressional committee in 1963, he said:

Here we have going a laboratory where we see subversive insurgency, the Ho Chi Minh doctrine, being applied in all its forms. This has been a challenge not just for the armed services, but for several of the agencies of government, as many of them are involved in one way or another in South Vietnam. On the military side, however, we have recognized the importance of the area as a laboratory. We have had teams out there looking at the equipment requirements of this kind of guerrilla warfare . . .15

Six years later General Westmoreland updated and verified Taylor's statement in comments he made on the value of the Vietnam laboratory:

The devices coming out of there are "revolutionizing" the techniques of warfare; having inflicted in Vietnam over two-thirds of enemy casualties, long-range warfare and air power have proved their capacity to rain destruction on the battlefield within minutes . . . whether friendly troops are present or not; with the new electronic devices the enemy could be mechanically located, tracked and targeted; and that technology would permit a tremendous economy of man power.16

14 Quoted in Ahmed, Ibid., p. 19.
15 Quoted in Klare, War Without End, p. 49.
16 Quoted in Ahmed, "Revolutionary War", p. 21.
Finally, out of this assumption concerning techniques, you have the development of the "domino theory". American strategists were vehemently claiming that the United States must squash this new communist technique in Vietnam, otherwise its use would be attempted throughout the world.

II. Operational Methods. The operational methods constitute the basic overall range of approaches or plans to be utilized in developing a complete counter-insurgency program. The different categories are by no means mutually exclusive, as one or more methods can be integrated while each may receive greater or lesser emphasis depending on specific conditions and who is heading the war effort. Generally there are three basic approaches:

(1) The first approach places emphasis on political, economic and social development. Recognizing the supremacy of the political character of guerrilla warfare, it attempted to provide or restore some measure of "political" legitimacy to the crumbling South Vietnamese government. For this reason, psychological warfare or pacification programs (designed to win the hearts and minds of the people) supplemented by rural development and economic assistance schemes are implemented. In addition, the counter-insurgents found it necessary to institute a "system of resources control in the villages (i.e., restraints on the movement of people and goods in and out of the guerrilla zone) in order to undermine the insurgents' administrative infrastructure".17 In essence, this approach is geared toward "modernization" in the framework of western liberal democracy.

17 Klare, War Without End, p. 47.
Consequently, its literature is saturated with terms such as freedom, democracy, reform, free-choice, progress, development, etc.

(2) The second approach emphasizes the use of the local indigenous population in carrying out the counter-insurgency program. While these troops would do the actual fighting, the United States was to provide material and economic support along with the necessary specialized irregular training. This approach appeased Kennedy’s desire not to commit large numbers of American troops, for as he well knew, it would be impossible for foreigners to claim they were fighting for national liberation as were the guerrillas. Furthermore, it would reduce the use and inevitable loss of American manpower.

More specifically, this mercenary approach was carried out in three ways. First of all, the Green Berets, CIA and other intelligence agencies trained Montagnard and Meo minority tribes in South Vietnam as specialized mercenary forces. The second method was the general training and support of the regular South Vietnamese army by American advisers. A final section of the plan called for the training of local police forces to be used in the cities, villages and strategic hamlets.

The entire approach rested on the belief that the United States would confine its activities to that of an assistance and advisory capacity. While it was felt that Americans might be used in some initial operations — such as helicopter and jet pilots, it was assumed that these tasks would eventually be taken over by the South Vietnamese.

(3) The third and final approach emphasizes the full exploitation of the United States' superior technology and resources. In a general
sense, its aim was to provide maximum mobility and firepower necessary for a "now you see, now you don't" type guerrilla warfare. In the early stages of the war, then, there was great admiration for helicopters and supersonic jets. Later, out of this emphasis on technology, there were calls for the use of sensors and detection devices designed to locate the guerrillas. Finally, this approach led to the development of completely electronic or automated battlefield systems requiring limited manpower. More details on this topic will be discussed in the next chapter.

At this point let us examine President Kennedy's attempt to operationalize the strategic concept. As mentioned earlier, the Taylor-Rostow mission combined with the work done by military strategists in the United States provided the basic guidelines for a counter-insurgency program. Yet, no specific operational plans had been devised to implement the strategic concept. The solution to this problem was eventually worked out by a man named Sir Robert Thompson, head of the British Advisory Mission to Vietnam. Thompson, a career officer in the British colonial service, had spear-headed the British counter-insurgency program in Malaya. Thus, because of that program's so-called success, Thompson was acknowledged as one of the world's foremost experts on counter-insurgency.\(^{18}\)

The key to Thompson's plan was what had come to be known as the "strategic hamlet".\(^{19}\) He was proposing the adoption and refinement of a special

\(^{18}\) Thompson's highly acclaimed counter-insurgency work, based on his experiences in Malaya, is *Defeating Communist Insurgency* (New York: Praeger, 1966).

village program which the British had used in Malaya. Thompson explained that the plan was essentially political, saying that pure military efforts, as the British found in Malaya, would not solve the problem. As Roger Hilsman notes,

Thompson pointed out that the Viet Cong's main effort was not in fighting the regular troops -- they could have done much more of that than they were actually doing -- but in attempting to gain administrative control over the sixteen thousand hamlets of South Vietnam.20

The Viet Cong's efforts, then, were essentially of a political nature. They strove to organize and gain the support of the population. Their struggle depended primarily on the amount of support given by the peasantry. As Mao had pointed out, "the peasants were the sea in which the guerrillas swam". Consequently, Thompson's plan suggested the cutting off of the guerrillas from their base of support, the peasants, who he believed were being forced into assisting the Viet Cong.

To be more specific, Thompson's plans were broken down into two major areas: physical security or protection; and reform and development. In the first phase, Thompson suggested that a series of strategic hamlets be established in the Delta region of Vietnam extending from the sea to the mountains and jungle. Each hamlet was to be situated in close defensive proximity to other hamlets so that together, they would constitute a broadly connected zone of security. Each of the respective hamlets would then be surrounded by barbed wire and a moat. Afterwards the peasants would be moved (or forced) into these hamlets so as to

20 Hilsman, To Move A Nation, p. 430.
provide them with "protection" from the Viet Cong. Once in the hamlets, a strict security program would be established to control the flow of goods and people. This aspect of the plan would entail the issuing of identification cards and setting up curfews and checkpoints maintained by local police forces. At some point, the people would be armed for their self-defense and protection, while other military and paramilitary forces would be used to reinforce security and maintain communications between all the hamlets. The key to the entire protection phase of the plan was to eliminate the guerrilla infrastructure within the hamlet. Thompson notes,

Until this is done, no hamlet will be secure against repenetration and treachery, nor can the people themselves be expected to take positive action on behalf of the government until insurgents' agents and supporters within the hamlet are removed.\footnote{Thompson, Communist Insurgency, p. 124.}

This point is significant in that the protection phase was designed to provide the peasants with opportunity to make a "free choice" as to whom they would support — the government or the Viet Cong.

In the effort to assist the peasants in their "free choice", the second phase of Thompson's program — reform and development — follows. Thompson felt that government had to prevent the peasants from supporting the guerrillas by offering them positive and concrete benefits. The reform and development phase, then, was to be a combination of economic, political, social and cultural benefits. Thompson, who characterizes this as the "winning" stage of the operation, called on civic action
teams to implement the following measures:

... the provision of schools, medical clinics, markets, land reform, improved agricultural methods and credits, running water supplies, electricity, radio programmes, newspapers and improved communications (so that there is constant contact with the outside world), followed by local elections to village councils and national elections to a national legislature.22

Accordingly, these measures would necessitate widespread reforms by the Diem government. If implemented, the government would then be providing basic services to areas where none, other than tax collection, had previously existed.

In essence, Thompson's plan, like the Viet Cong's, was essentially a political one. It sought to isolate the guerrillas, just as the guerrillas sought to isolate the government, for this was the key to victory. As Thompson pointed out, these actions would take years of slow, painstaking work, but once this turning point was reached, and once the majority of the population had decided to support the local Vietnamese, the struggle against the supportless guerrillas could be won.

Overall, Thompson's plan was well received in the Kennedy administration's counter-insurgency network. Note Roger Hilsman's, one of the Administration's top strategists, comments on this subject:

It seemed to Ambassador Notting and others in the U.S. Embassy that Thompson's ideas made a great deal of sense -- as they certainly did to me when I heard it from Thompson himself. And his recommendations jibed completely with results we had been conducting in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research at the State Department.23

22 Thompson, Ibid., p. 125.

23 Hilsman, To Move A Nation, p. 433.
As Hilsman further explained, they saw two significant military advantages with the plan: (1) By isolating the people, the strategic hamlet would deprive the guerrillas of their main source of strength, food and recruits; and (2) Being cut off from this support, they felt that the guerrillas would then have to come out of the mountains and jungles, and be forced to fight on the government's terms. In this context, Hilsman adds:

> It seemed more and more possible that an effective strategic concept could be developed by combining Thompson's strategic hamlet plan with the work in Washington and Fort Bragg on both the military tactics to be pursued and the measures to combat the strains of modernization. 24

In this way, the United States proceeded to provide the operational military task to complement the Thompson plan. Generally there were five military tasks which the South Vietnamese were to carry out: 25

(1) The first was a static defense — this entailed the guarding of bridges, power plants, communication centers, armament supplies and other strategic installations necessary for the government's operation.

(2) The second task constituted the heart of the strategic hamlet military program. It consisted of "clear and bold" operations — pushing the Viet Cong out of an area and holding them off until the hamlets were capable of defending themselves.

(3) The third task would be the setting up of partly mobile forces who would act as reinforcements to hamlet self-defense units.

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24 Hilsman, Ibid., p. 435.

(4) The fourth task would be the establishment of completely mobile forces who constantly attack the guerrillas in order to prevent them from massing large concentrations of troops. Importantly, however, these were not to be large seek and destroy operations -- for most government troops would be used in the first three tasks. Only in the late stages of the program when the hamlets developed a stable security zone would such operations be undertaken.

(5) The fifth and final task would be the adoption of almost pure guerrilla tactics. Units of the South Vietnamese Special Forces, acting like guerrillas, were to lay ambushes, plan raids and generally maintain a constant harassment of the Viet Cong.

These military tasks combined with Thompson's plan, then, characterize the main attempt by the United States to operate its strategic concept of counter-insurgency. Yet, despite the seemingly well-organized nature of the plans, the American counter-insurgency did not go well. So, after about a year and a half of operations, a report was sent to President Kennedy explaining the major problems in operationalizing the plans.

In brief, the report made the following assessments and conclusions: (1) the South Vietnamese Army relied too much on large-scale operations and conventional tactics. In addition, there was an excessive use of air power and chemical defoliants; (2) concerning the hamlets themselves -- their establishment had been shabby and totally uncoordinated; and (3) there had been a total neglect of the necessary political, economic and social reforms. Overall, there was a lack of administrative coordination.
exacerbated by an excessive emphasis on military matters.

In early 1963, Michael Forrestal and Roger Hilsman went on a special mission for the President and confirmed the previous report while adding:26

There is no overall planning effort that effectively ties together the civilian and military effort; (2) There is no long-range thinking about the kind of country that should come out of a victory; (3) Among both civilians and military (American and Vietnamese) there is still some confusion over the way to conduct a counter-guerrilla war; and (4) In general, the United States should use all of the leverage it could to persuade Diem to adopt the suggested policies.

In examining the counter-insurgents' assessment of their problems, one can see that they continued to view the war as being a case of managerial and technical manipulations. Interestingly enough, while this bureaucratic-managerial assessment may in part be a case of ignorance, it also comforts the counter-insurgents in their refusal to accept the genuine sincerity of the Vietnamese revolution. Consequently, it is from this standpoint that one must judge the weaknesses and failures of the counter-insurgency program. For while it is true that the handling of the counter-insurgency program resulted in many of the problems, a more fundamental cause was that they were challenging an inevitable, well-organized, and popular revolution. In this context, no amount of managerial techniques and manipulations could stifle the determination and sincerity of the Vietnamese people.

26 Hilsman, Ibid., pp. 451 and 452.
Faced with the problems, however, President Kennedy was forced to commit more and more American troops. At the time of his death there were a little over 16,000 advisers and troops in Vietnam. Yet, in spite of this growing American war by proxy, Kennedy seemingly remained committed, in principle, to his original counter-insurgency strategy. He hoped that the American troops could hold off the Viet Cong until the South Vietnamese were prepared to carry on the counter-insurgency program. In this context, note Hilsman's personal assessment of Kennedy's strategy after the President's death:

No one, of course, can know for sure what President Kennedy would have done in the future had he lived. But his policy had been to keep the fighting as limited as possible, to urge the new government to pursue an effective counter-guerrilla program designed to protect the people and win their allegiance . . . In any event, President Kennedy made it abundantly clear to me on more than one occasion that what he wanted most to avoid was turning Vietnam into an American war . . . 27

After Kennedy's assassination the American counter-insurgency effort began to undergo serious changes. Lyndon Johnson, who was now President, and, as indicated in his earlier report to Kennedy, favored a much more forceful and conventional approach to the war. Moreover, there was rising pressure from the Pentagon and other military officials for a more full-scale attack in the war. Significantly, however, Johnson and these military officials believed quite strongly in the notion that the war was a result of an external (communist) source of aggression. This was indicated in two key statements by Johnson. He states:

27 Hilsman, Ibid., pp. 536 and 537.
It became increasingly clear that Ho Chi Minh's military campaign against South Vietnam was a part of a larger, much more ambitious strategy being conducted by the Communists. And more specifically,

Thus what we saw taking shape rapidly was a Djakarta-Hanoi-Peking-Pyongyang axis, with Cambodia probably to be brought in as a junior partner and Laos to be merely absorbed by the North Vietnamese and Chinese.

Acting in such a framework, the Johnson policy was designed to deter what was believed to be "infiltration and aggression" from the North. Johnson, then, did not share Kennedy's perception of certain internal dynamics of the war in the South. As a result, in 1964 Johnson began what was to later become a massive bombing campaign. Interestingly enough, much of the bombing was concentrated not only in South Vietnam where the actual fighting was taking place, but also in North Vietnam.

Despite the new bombing policy, the situation continued to worsen in South Vietnam. Faced with the possibility of almost total collapse, Johnson decided to introduce — as a matter of formal policy — large number of American troops. This decision was made on July 28, 1965, with the following statement:

I have asked the commanding general, General Westmoreland, what more he needs to meet this mounting aggression. He has reported to me the need for more troops. We will meet his needs. I have today ordered to Vietnam the Air Mobile Division and certain other forces which will raise our fighting strength from 75,000 to 125,000 almost.


29 Johnson, Ibid., p. 136.
immediately. Additional forces will be needed later, and they will be sent as requested. 30

True to his word, Johnson introduced more and more troops until the number passed the 500,000 level. The large number of troops complemented by an intensive bombing campaign committed the United States to a major war effort in Vietnam. While many of the technical strategies and programs of the Kennedy era remained and were retried on a larger and more brutal scale, Johnson did not share the previous President's ideas favoring a sophisticated, meticulous, political counter-insurgency effort. Johnson saw himself as a man of forceful action and in his view a vigorous and tough military campaign was the strategy through which the war could be won. True to his beliefs that was his course of action. A course of action so military oriented in fact, that the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese accurately characterized the Johnson strategy as the "Burn All, Destroy All, Kill All" policy. 31 In this context it was clear that the strategy of counter-insurgency as elaborated by the Kennedy administration had been drastically altered, if not totally abandoned.

Despite Johnson's decision to turn the Vietnam conflict into an American war, the United States was unable to defeat the so-called "insurgents". More important, the war began to have some serious negative consequences for the United States. First of all, the war was becoming too costly as it began to seriously affect the business economy, leading to the dual pressures of inflation and recession. Its monetary cost


was rising to thirty billion dollars a year. Furthermore, this cost was compounded by the increasing loss in American manpower. By 1968 casualties were up from over 100 killed in action a week to over 500. Moreover, the moral isolation and condemnation of the United States became more vigorous not only throughout the world, but even more so within the American society as anti-war sentiments heightened.

In the context of these growing pressures we have President Nixon's handling of the war. In general, the Nixon doctrine abandoned the revised massive involvement policy of Johnson and returned more closely to Kennedy's original counter-insurgency strategy. This revision of the Johnson massive involvement policy, however, is primarily in respect to a visible American presence. Nixon like Johnson had no hesitation about the massive use of force. Essentially, this was accomplished in two ways: (1) the initiation of what was called the policy of "vietnamization"; and (2) an increased use of air power in addition to a reliance on mechanized and technological warfare. The details of this technological and mechanized warfare will be discussed in Chapter Four.

The policy of vietnamization was established as an integral part of the Nixon doctrine in 1969. In reference to Vietnam the following guidelines were put forth:

In deterring subtheater or localized warfare (i.e., conflict which does not involve the U.S. directly with either the U.S.S.R. or the People's Republic of China),

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33 Thompson, *No Exit From Vietnam*, Ibid., p. 61.
the country or ally which is threatened bears the primary burden, particularly for providing manpower, but when U.S. interest or obligations are at stake, we must be prepared to provide help as appropriate.34

Interestingly, once again, we find that its chief architect was Sir Robert Thompson.35 The main purpose of the policy — called a "long haul, low cost" strategy by Thompson — was to eliminate the overt and intensive opposition to the war in the United States. As Mr. Ahmed explains it: "Making a war domestically acceptable thus involves turning it into a forgotten war . . . by relegating it to the back pages of the newspaper and by keeping it at a maximum distance from cameras".36 Moreover, this task would entail a reduction and eventual elimination of the U.S. troop presence in Vietnam. Thompson explains:

In this way the whole cost of the war, in every sense, could be reduced to a level which would be acceptable to the majority in the United States, without proving to be an excessive drain on her manpower or emotions.37

A second aspect of the strategy of vietnamization called for the formal re-emphasis or return to the pacification schemes (strategic hamlets, etc.) of the Kennedy era. More specifically the measures included: inducing the Saigon regime to act in accordance with the law; improving civil and military administration; defining the control governments and


35 Thompson's analysis and suggestions for President Nixon are explained in his No Exit From Vietnam.

36 Ahmed, "Revolutionary War", p. 16.

37 Thompson, No Exit From Vietnam, p. 199.
villages' responsibilities and obligations; selecting priority areas for pacification and mounting seek and destroy operations in areas outside the selecting ring. Thompson in particular, called for these measures, with the belief or rationalization that they were never properly implemented before.

Significantly, in conjunction with vietnamization, there was another side of the Nixon strategy which placed maximum emphasis on technological warfare. As a matter of fact, it was the United States ability to introduce what was known as an "automated or electronic battlefield" that not only aided vietnamization, but actually made it possible. As a result of years of experimental testing which took place in Vietnam, the United States had advanced its technology to the point where it sought to conduct warfare with less and less manpower. Major General Ellis W. Williamson explained these developments in congressional hearings saying:

We are making unusual efforts to avoid having the American young man stand toe-to-toe, eyeball-to-eyeball, or even rifle-to-rifle against an enemy that may outnumber him on the battlefield. We are trying to fight the enemy with our bullets instead of the bodies of our young men — firepower not manpower. 38

This automation of war fitted quite nicely into Nixon's strategy geared toward a reduction of American ground troops. In this way Nixon's counter-insurgency strategy would be mainly that of a supportive role, unlike

Kennedy's, however, because instead of limited troops and advisers there would be American technology.

While the details of this new kind of warfare will be discussed in Chapter Four, we should mention here that the corollary of this advanced machine technology — air power — was also used quite vigorously by Nixon. Surpassing even the massive bombing campaign of Johnson, Nixon used conventional air technology to the maximum extent as a means of supplanting the reduction of American troops. Thus, during the Nixon phase of the war emphasis began to shift to air operations. The result and significance of this change is noted by Fred Branfman who writes:

As of May 1, 1972, Air Force and Navy airmen (55-60,000) outnumber U.S. ground forces (53,000) for the first time. This is THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY THAT A SUPER POWER HAS DEPLOYED MORE AIRMEN THAN FOOT SOLDIERS TO FIGHT ABROAD. 39

Moreover, the effect of this increase meant that it was under the Nixon administration that the majority of bombs were dropped on Indochina. 40 The total bomb tonnage dropped being over 3.2 million tons since 1969. Breaking this tonnage down into further statistics it comes out to: (1) more than three million pounds a day; (2) more than 2,000 pounds or a ton a minute; and (3) at a cost of seven million dollars per day. 41

In conclusion, as we assess the American counter-insurgency strategy in Vietnam, one could say — that because it was based on a number


41 Air War, Ibid., p. 5.
of erroneous assumptions, complemented by the imperialist nature of the United States in general -- the American officials never truly understood the dynamics of the social revolution in Vietnam. Consequently, their bureaucratic-managerial technical manipulations never addressed themselves to the real problems and causes of the Vietnamese revolution. As a result, the counter-insurgents stumbled endlessly and painfully on a course devoid of political reality. Yet it was precisely this aberration of political reality that led American officials to devise new strategies, tactics and weapons culminating in the development of a complete counter-insurgency doctrine. A counter-insurgency doctrine, it should be added, designed to challenge all outbreaks of violent revolutionary nationalism deemed harmful to United States interest.
CHAPTER FOUR

WEAPONS OF COUNTER-INSURGENCY

As noted in the previous chapter, the final phase of the American efforts in the war began to shift toward the increased use of advanced machine technology as the primary form of U.S. involvement. Significantly, as noted also in Chapter Two under the section regarding "basic underlying assumptions", we cited certain evidence which indicated that the search for new technological weaponry specifically suited for wars such as the guerrilla conflict in Vietnam was one of the key American goals. This search and testing of new weapons complements my earlier assertions made in Chapter One, that United States strategists saw Vietnam as a testing ground for the development of strategies capable of defeating these guerrilla or national liberation wars.

Accordingly, the purpose of the chapter is to tie in the dialectical interaction of the American military doctrine of counter-insurgency and the operational technology (i.e., weaponry) developed to implement it. While the weaponry developments were quite numerous and beyond my purpose here,¹ I do want to discuss three types of weapons which tend to delineate

or clearly reflect the emphasis on counter-insurgency as opposed to conventional warfare techniques. The three particular concepts of warfare under consideration here are: (1) Environmental warfare—Ecological defoliation; (2) Geophysical warfare—Weather modification; and (3) Technological warfare—automated battlefield.

In examining these new methods of warfare developed in Vietnam, one notices the immediate relationship between the weapons and the overall American counter-insurgency strategy. As would be expected, new ideas (ideas about weapons in this case) evolve and development to fit the appropriate conditions or environment under which they must be operationalized. Accordingly, we would first like to examine this idea of ecological defoliation as being intrinsically connected with the American counter-insurgency strategy. For it is in guerrilla war that ecological advantages and tactics become extremely important.

In the first instance, for the guerrilla the ecological environment becomes a vital necessity. It is his cover, sanctuary and haven. Facing a technologically advanced, better equipped and larger enemy, the guerrilla must learn to blend in with his natural environment as he fights a hide and seek, appearing and disappearing war. Significantly, theorists on guerrilla warfare denote two strategic environmental necessities for the guerrilla. The first, his people — as Mao Tse-Tung put it, "The people are the sea in which the guerrilla swims". This human environment calls attention to the ability of a guerrilla to disguise himself as an everyday civilian (which in a very real sense he is) outside of the actual military conflict. The second, which is more of our concern
here, is the natural plant environment. It is here under actual military conditions, that the guerrilla has a strategic weapon to move men and materials without notice, to rest without harassment and to strike with awesome deception upon an unaware and foreign enemy.

On the other side of the line is the counter-insurgent (generally a foreign invader) unfamiliar with the territory and terrain. For him, the environment is no friend, it is a cold, dark, mysterious menace. In this context, the American counter-insurgency strategist were logically led to initiate and perpetuate a war not only upon the guerrillas themselves, but also, perhaps his best ally — his natural, ecological environment. Especially in Vietnam, which is largely a rural area with thick forest, swamps, high fields and hilly mountainous terrain — the National Liberation Front (NLF) or Viet Cong enjoyed a tremendous ecological advantage. Accordingly, in an attempt to destroy this protective environment, the United States military pursued a "war against the land". 2

The rationale of this counter-insurgency tactic was set forth at the First Defoliation Conference in 1963. Explaining the concept, F. J. Delmore commented:

The capability of destroying cover and concealment to defend against and fight off guerrilla and other type of tactics is absolutely essential. When we clear vegetation from roadsides, railways and canals, we substantially reduce the opportunities for ambush, and thus allow our own operations to proceed in a more timely manner. Defoliants would also be used to demarcate bounda-

2 Although this particular section concentrates on the direct ecological attack on nature, it should be borne in mind that this tactic also affects the guerrilla's first natural ally — the peasants. More on this will be forthcoming.
ries. Defoliation could be used to clear gun emplacements, open up fields of fire, mark areas of bombing, or test whether or not a particular area has camouflage or actual vegetation.³

What we had developed in Vietnam, then, was a new concept in warfare appropriately labelled "ecocide". While no clear cut definition of the concept has been enunciated, we refer to it as the conscious and persistent attempt to destroy or maim a natural ecological system.

The U.S. military actually began to use herbicides as a weapon of war in 1961 under a program code named Operation Ranch Hand. Confined mainly to South Vietnam, Operation Ranch Hand was a two-part program. Its main objective "accounting for about 89 percent of all U.S. contemporary aircraft sorties, was directed against the forest of South Vietnam in an attempt to deny cover and sanctuary to the other side".⁴ In addition, the second part of the operation was aimed at crop (mainly rice) destruction in an attempt to deny the NLF a source of food. Before going further it should be pointed out that both these tactics served a larger purpose in the U.S. counter-insurgency strategy. Namely, it sought to force the people into strategic hamlets thereby destroying the guerrillas' support structure.


⁴ Arthur Westing, "Herbicides in War: Current Status and Future Doubt", Biological Conservation (Vol. 4, No. 5, Oct., 1972), p. 322. It should be pointed out, that although this paper focuses on herbicidal damage to the forest, it is by no means the only method used by the U.S. Widespread saturation bombing, attempted firestorms and rome-plows were other tactics of destruction.
In looking at the attack on the forest of South Vietnam we can denote six broad categories of forest types: (1) Dense forest (jungle); (2) Open (clear); (3) Bamboo; (4) Mangrove; (5) Rubber; and (6) Other (pine and brush). The main areas of concentrated chemical herbicide attacks were the dense forest and mangrove. As an indication of the widespread nature of the U.S. program, however, one notices that almost no areas were spared from becoming military targets. Accordingly, a 1967 Midwest Research Institute document noted the following areas as targets: "Nipa-palm and Mangrove, upland forests, foliage around villages and military post, roadsides, the southern portion of the Demilitarized Zone, swamps and canals in the Mekong delta and also the Sihanouk Trail in Southern Laos". A more precise measure of the damage is determined by the actual land areas which have been sprayed. Looking first at those areas which came under concentrated attack — the dense upland forest (jungle) — an estimated 32 percent of South Vietnam's 5.5 million hectares were sprayed; in addition to 25 percent of the total 0.5 million hectares of mangrove lowland forest type. In other areas Arthur H. Westing, who perhaps has done more research in this field than any other single individual, estimates that from 1961 to 1971, a total of 2 million hectares (4.9 million acres) out of 10 million hectares (24.7 million hectares) were sprayed.

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7 Westing, "Herbicides in War", p. 235.
acres) have been sprayed one or more times. This representing roughly 20% of the total forest in South Vietnam. Westing admits that his estimate is conservative due in part to a dependence on the Department of Defense (DOD) figures. In this context, the DOD figures suggest a total of 22% for the total area sprayed from 1961-1969, while the NLF asserts a total of 52%. Again, the disparity in figures is found in the percentage of annual sprayings — the DOD suggesting 6% while the NLF suggests 9 to 10%. Whatever the actual extent of the forest sprayings, the areas subjected are significant indicating the seriousness of the counter-insurgents' views on ecological warfare. As one researcher explained it, "The Vietnamese war is probably the most consistently forest war of any recorded, at least in modern history".

Turning now to the crop destruction tactics of the ecological war, one can sense the brutal and extremists lengths this American counter-insurgency establishment was willing to go in its battle against the NLF. The crop destruction or food denial program as it is called, is simply a means of trying to starve the guerrillas into submission. Although not as significant as the attacks on the forest, this aspect of the environmental war also constituted an integral part of the American strategy. It began quietly in the early 60's, but by 1968 its operations were openly acknowledged.

Statistically speaking, the area sprayed was over 300 thousand

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9 See Westing, Ibid., Table p. 894.
hectares or 8% of South Vietnam’s total croplands. The main target of these attacks was the upland rice in the Central Highlands. According to Westing, "The total estimated destruction via this aspect of the U.S. resource denial programme, for the years 1962-70, comes to 163 million kilograms of milled rice". This figure does not include the amount of rice destroyed which was found in rice stores in rural areas.

Overall, then, the U.S. counter-insurgency strategy was designed to deny their guerrilla enemies both food and cover. Attacking forestry and croplands, the United States sprayed and mutilated (many areas more than once) over 12% of the total land in South Vietnam.

In carrying out these sprayings a number of herbicidal agents and their mixtures were tested. The most widely used and standard chemical herbicide was a mixture of N-butyl esters of 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T esters commonly called Agent Orange. This agent was also used from time to time in conjunction with Agent Purple (a different configuration of the same esters). After 1966 another herbicide, Agent White — a mixture of 2,4-D and Pilcoram — was also widely used. These three chemicals are characterized as systematic herbicides which destroy plants by attacking their internal systems. Pilcoram in particular, the most active herbicide known, kills a wide range of plants and remains active in the soil many months after spraying. Looking at the amount of active

10 Westing, "Herbicides in War", p. 325.
11 See Lewallen, Ecology of, Table p. 64.
12 Lewallen, Ibid., p. 63.
ingredients used on the ecological system in South Vietnam, we find a "total of over 25 million kilograms (55 million lbs.) of 2,4-D, over 21 million kilograms (47 million lbs.) of 2,4,5-T and over 1.5 million kilograms (3.3 million lbs.) of Pilcoram". Different from the above agents -- Agent Blue, a dessicant on contact herbicide was the chief crop destruction defoliant used. A mixture of sodium dimethy larsenate and dimethylarsinic (cacodylic) acid, this agent "injures foliage by direct chemical action on contact, causing the leaves to turn brown, curl, dry up and wither". A total of 3 million kilograms of this Agent Blue was used on crops.

This combined total of "86 million pounds" of herbicides were sprayed mainly from specially equipped C-123 cargo planes. Over the years these planes (later assisted by helicopters) flew more than 20,000 sorties. These sprayings had an almost immediate effect on the forests and plants. Explaining the detailed effects of these herbicidal attacks Westing comments:

When an upland forest is attacked with herbicide, the leaves drop after two or three weeks and the trees remain bare for several months. Sunlight, able to reach the forest floor following defoliation promotes the growth of a luxuriant understory in which certain

14 Found in Lewallen, Ecology of, p. 63.
15 Westing, "Herbicides in War", p. 322.
herbaceous grasses and shrubby bamboos dominate . . . when refoliation occurs, it turns out that at least one out of every 8 or 10 trees has been killed by the treatment, a situation presumably obtained in 1.5 million hectares (3.7 million acres). On the other hand, for those one-half million additional hectares (1.2 million acres) that have been sprayed more than once, the proportion of these killed rises dramatically — apparently anywhere from 50% to 80% or even higher, depending upon the local mix of species and on the interval between sprayings.  

In assessing the overall performance of this aspect of counter-insurgency, one would have to say it met with dubious success or to be more correct, it was simply a failure. Designed primarily to deny the NLF its ecological advantage — the defoliation of the jungle forest allowed for the subsequent growth of a thick underbrush of savannahs and bamboos which provided as much or more cover than before. Moreover, the genocidal crop destruction operation, it was found, had a more devastating impact on the civilian population rather than on the NLF guerrillas. This is particularly true as far as its effects on old people, women and children were concerned. For the program only caused an increase in hunger and starvation. So rather than winning the hearts and minds, confidence and support of the people — and in the process isolate the guerrillas — just the opposite was the case. This had to be the logical outcome of such a policy, particularly in a nation like Vietnam, where the people have a strong attachment to the land and love to see and reap the benefits of their productive labor. By destroying their land and crops, the counter-insurgency strategist lost vital support and confirmed

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the arguments of the NLF that the Americans were just another bunch of destructive foreign invaders. As a substantiation of these claims, Westing notes that herbicidal impact was not only ecological, for the food denial program destroyed rice crops that were destined to supply the total diets of 894,000 Vietnamese civilians for one full year. In addition, the economic loss due to forest defoliation "amounts to roughly 47 million m$^3$ (6500 million bd. ft.) of merchantable timber plus an indeterminate amount of fuel wood, charcoal and other secondary products — for an approximate total cash value of 0.5 billion dollars".

In sum, the American strategy of counter-insurgency devised and implemented a new form of weaponry — environmental warfare (i.e., ecological defoliation) — based on the widespread and unprecedented use of chemical herbicides. Wreaking havoc on a total ecological system, herbicidal warfare has and will have far-reaching human, animal and plant life ramifications. Of course, due to the unprecedented use of herbicides and the lack of information of the details of the operation, the full effects, side effects of this type of warfare will not be known for some time. Yet, despite the massive level of destruction, damage and misery brought on by this ecological warfare, an end to its further use is not in sight. For the American counter-insurgency strategy in many ways

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18 Westing, "Herbicides in War", p. 322.

19 Westing, Ibid., p. 324.

20 What is known at this point, however, is that many areas of Vietnam have been permanently maimed, while others will take years and even decades to regenerate themselves.
viewed Vietnam as a testing ground and consequently what was learned there must now be refined. In this context, environmental warfare through ecological defoliation seems to have found a permanent place as one of the new counter-insurgency weapons useful in fighting guerrilla wars. Aside from the continuation of this type of warfare by the South Vietnamese army, Westing notes that "contingency plans have just been revealed for their future U.S. military employment.  

John Lewallen also comments: "There are indications, however, the Defense Department is refining its herbicide program as a means of dealing with its problems throughout the world." He cites a 1969 Air Force announcement that it was seeking a contractor for its "ultimate goal" of a handbook for Air Force civil engineers with world-wide recommendations for affecting vegetation control. Accordingly, in future wars of national liberation we can expect not only a war against the guerrillas, but also a "war against the land."

At this point I would like to turn the discussion to another form of warfare which is both relatively new in general and relatively unpublicized as far as its use in Vietnam is concerned. That is geophysical warfare or weather modification. More specifically, one type of counter-insurgency warfare which was tested and used in Vietnam was that of manipulating the rainfall. As I said, however, detailed information on the development and use of this weapon is scarce. With that in mind, this section will attempt to piece together the available information on the subject.

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22 Lewallen, Ecology of, p. 68.
and in the process will hopefully shed some light on the actual operations of this new weapon of war.

The first concrete indication that the use of weather modification was being used as a form of warfare in Vietnam was in 1966. It was at this time that one of the DOD top weather scientist Pierre Saint Amand—who is head of the Earth and Planetary Sciences Division of the Naval Ordinance Laboratory, Naval Weapons Center, California—speaking before a Senate committee discussing weather modification comments: "We regard the weather as a weapon. Anything one can use to get his way is a weapon and the weather is as good as any." Yet Saint Amand's statement went relatively unnoticed and attracted little attention.

In 1971 however, well-known syndicated columnist Jack Anderson revealed that the United States had been using weather modification techniques to stimulate rainfall over the Ho Chi Minh trail since 1967. In his controversial March 18th Column Anderson wrote:

...The hush-hush project, known by the code name "Intermediary-Compatroit," was started in 1967 to hamper enemy logistics. Those who fly the rainmaking missions believe they have increased the precipitation over the jungle roadways during wet seasons... These assertedly have caused flooding conditions along the trails, making them impassable.

The Ho Chi Minh trails will get their next monsoon bath from May to September... Only those with top security clearance know, until now, that nature would be assisted by the U.S. Air Force.

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Soon after, and in addition to Anderson's startling column, the most direct evidence so far was found in the Pentagon Papers. Here it was revealed that the U. S. had previously, in 1966 conducted weather modification experiments successfully over Laos. That section of the Pentagon Papers read:

4. LAOS OPERATIONS—Continue as to plus Operation POP EYE to reduce trafficability along infiltration routes. Authority Policy Changes—Authorization required to implement operational phase of weather modification process previously tested and evaluated in same area. Risk/Impact—Normal military operational risks. Risk of compromise is minimal.

In addition, there is another reference to a memo dated February 24, 1967 which listed escalation proposals recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the President. Number eight of these proposals states: "cause interdicting rains in or near Laos."26 In a summary of the eight proposals the memo reads:

The discussion section of the paper dealt with each of the eight specific option areas noting our capability in each instance to inflict heavy damage or complete destruction to the facilities in question.

From the above it become obvious that weather modification was deemed an important weaponry in Vietnam.

After this information became known a number of congressmen became interested and attempted to gain knowledge on the full details of the operation. Senator Claiborne Pell in particular—as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oceans and International Environment—began a series

26Ibid., p. 146
27Ibid., p. 146
of correspondence with the DOD on the matter. Inquiring about the use of weather modification techniques in Indochina, Pell sought answers to a number of questions including the following:

1. What are the objectives of the project known by the code name "Intermediary-Compatriot?"

2. How long has the project been in existence? Would you provide a detailed description of this project?

3. In what specific countries is this project conducted? 28

When the DOD did respond, they were quite evasive, either commenting indirectly to Pell's letters (providing information on projects in the Phillipines, Texas and elsewhere) or just completely disregarding his inquiries. Pell's persistent efforts for four months finally got him a clear cut answer from the Director of Defense Research and Engineering, John S. Foster, Jr., who replied:

... Certain aspects of our work in this area (weather modification) are classified. Recognizing that the Congress is concerned with the questions of the military application of weather modification technology, I have, at the direction of Secretary Laird, seen to it that the Chairman of the Committees of Congress with primary responsibility for this Department's operations have been completely informed regarding the details of all classified weather modification undertaken by the Department. However, since the information to which I refer has a definite relationship to national security and is classified as a result, I find it necessary and respectfully and regretfully decline to make any further disclosure of the details of these activities at this time. 29

Some months after this somewhat informative brush-off, Pell and a number of other Senators submitted Senate Resolution 281 asking the

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28 Congressional Record, Jan. 26, 1972, p. 1330.

29 Ibid., p. 1330.
to seek an international agreement on this treaty in which:

Nations would undertake to prohibit and prevent any
environmental or geophysical modification activity
as weapons of war, or any research or experimentation
relating, to the development of these activities as
weapons. 30

At the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings in April 1972,
Senator Pell sought further information on weather modification through
direct questioning of former Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird. 31
Laird first responded to Pell's questions just as the DOD had done
earlier by talking about weather projects in the Phillipines, Texas
and Caribbean. Pell then became direct and asked Laird, "Have we engaged
in these activities for military reasons in Southeast Asia?" Laird
replied, "I can't discuss the operating authority that we go forward
with in Southeast Asia." Later in the hearings, under questioning
from Senator J. William Fulbright, the questions dealt more directly
with weather modification activities in North Vietnam:

Fulbright: . . .why do you decline to discuss weather control
activities in North Vietnam when you freely discuss B-52 flights
over North Vietnam? What is the sensitive nature of weather control
or whatever you do with the weather?

Laird: I do not talk about things that we haven't done . . .
In connection with the weather programs . . .we have not conducted
. . .such programs, but I am not going to rule them out.

Fulbright: In other words, you have never engaged in the use
of weather control?

30 Congressional Record, March 17, 1972, p. 8872.

31 For the transcript of this exchange, see Caplan, "Weather Modification," p. 29.
Laird: We have never engaged in that type of activity over North Vietnam.  Although Fulbright refused to question Laird about weather modification activities in other areas of Southeast Asia, the implication was clear that this type of operation had been used in areas other than North Vietnam. But Peter Caplan points out that most meteorologists will agree that it is not necessary to be "over" a country as small as North Vietnam to modify its weather.  

Except for Laird's denial concerning North Vietnam, the DOD's refusal to comment on or deny the use of weather modification techniques (claiming national security reasons) in the above mentioned hearings and later ones on Senate Resolution 281, led a number of Congressmen to conclude that the charges must be true. As one columnist reversed the old saying: "The Generals are doing something about the weather, but nobody is talking about it." Senator Pell in particular, on the Senate floor on February 22, 1973 said outright, "In my own mind, there is no doubt that the United States did indeed conduct weather modification operations in Southeast Asia."  

After these events there were two later developments which offered further evidence that the U.S. had used weather modification activities in Vietnam. One was the publication of a United Press International

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\[33\] Caplan, Ibid., p. 29.

\[34\] Congressional Record, March 8, 1973, p. S4129.
report by an unofficial military newspaper Stars and Stripes. Commenting on the military capabilities of some U.S. air bases and C-130 transport planes located in Thailand, the report went:

The planes serve a variety of roles, from airborne command post, to cloud seeding operations over North Vietnam, to dropping reconnaissance drones, to weather reporting missions.\(^{35}\)

The second development arose on September 8, 1972 when

... a commercial weather modification firm, Weather Engineering Corporation of Canada, Ltd., filed a suit for $95 million in Washington claiming that the government had used a cloud-seeding device called 'weather cord' in Southeast Asia in violation of the firm's patent rights.\(^{36}\)

In addition to these two events, a petition to President Nixon (March 1973) by the Federation of American Scientists appealing to him for full disclosure of the previously classified information on weather modification tended to substantiate others beliefs. The significance of the petition, it should be pointed out, was the fact that its two key representatives were Dr. Herbert Scoville, Jr.,--(FAS Secretary; former Deputy Director of the CIA under Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, and former Assistant Director for Science and Technology of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson) and Dr. Donald J. F. MacDonald--(a member of the FAS Executive Committee, a former charter member of the Presidents Council on Environmental


Quality under President Nixon and formerly with the DOD's Institute for Defense Analysis). Obviously these men and their colleagues had some knowledge on the ability of United States to conduct geophysical warfare. Ironcally, MacDonald, who is recognized as the nation's leading authority on geophysical warfare, a year earlier (July 1972) in testimony on Senate Resolution 281 sponsored by Senator Pell—had refused to divulge any information on the United States weather modification activities in South Asia on the grounds that it was classified information.

From all available information we would suggest that the U.S. military—under the code name "Intermediary-Compatriot"—conducted weather modification activities in Indochina (South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and North Vietnam). As an integral part of a number of new counter-insurgency weaponry, these activities served a multitude of purposes. On the one hand it was to flood and muddy the hundreds of infiltration routes which make up the Ho Chi Minh Trail. By damaging this trail which winds through Laos, Cambodia, South Vietnam, North Vietnam and China, it was hoped that the flow of men and material would be greatly impeded. Moreover, The New York Times on July 1972 reported that the weather modification activities were intended to supress enemy anti-missile fire, provide cover for South Vietnamese commandos penetrating...

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into North Vietnam. In addition, like ecological defoliation, these weather activities would assist in the effort to force the masses of people into the American created strategic hamlets.

As a counter-insurgency weapon weather modification was a rather easy, cheap and covert operation. It is known that a cloud-seeding plane can be of any type, needing little special equipment, and only 35 to 100 pounds of silver iodide for a normal seeding mission. Using the "weathercord" device developed by the Weather Engineering Corporation of Canada, the silver iodide would be distributed upon release from the airplanes, after a brief 10-second delay. Interestingly, the ability of the United States to increase rainfall was unquestionable. For in one of the letters of correspondence with Senator Pell (dated November 23, 1971) the DOD had explained its ability to carry out the process:

. . .This research has established a significant point. There is no known way to "make rain" under all conditions. When the proper meteorological conditions prevail (that is, when clouds capable of producing natural rain exist), it is a relatively simple matter to increase the amount of rain which will fall. The amount of increase is frequently of the order of 30 to 50%. (emphasis added)

This admission by the DOD is significant when its use is understood as a related component of the heavy bombing raids in North Vietnam.

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41 Congressional Record, Jan. 26, 1972, p. 1330.
In a study by John Gliedman, *Terror From the Skies*, the relationship between bomb explosions (and the resultant invisible weakening of the dike systems) and the additional rainfall caused by weather modification techniques are explained. Peter Caplan summarizes Gliedman's basic contention:

He estimated the relatively modest additional volume of water from rainfall at the end of the monsoon season (when waters are highest and the soil saturated) that would be needed to cause flooding, then compared that to the volume claimed to be attainable by the latest weather modification techniques. (See my (Slaughter) footnote No. 19). He concluded that existing techniques would have produced dangerous flooding, thus lending some weight to Pell's accusations that the disastrous 1971 monsoon floods (among the five worst of this country) were attributable to rain-making activities.

If one connects Gliedman's analysis with Anderson's assertion that project "Intermediary-Compatriot" would take place from May to September 1972 (the monsoons are normally from April to October) it seems almost indisputable that the United States was in part responsible for the disastrous flooding.

In conclusion, then we can say that despite the lack of explicit evidence, it is most probable that the United States has utilized weather modification techniques as a form of warfare in Indochina. Moreover, just as is the case with ecological defoliation, research presently


under a project code-named Nile Blue--continues to search for more effective methods of weather modification. Geophysical warfare through weather modification techniques has become another tactical weapon as an integral part of the American military strategy of counter-insurgency.

As the final type of counter-insurgency weaponry tested and utilized in Vietnam we would like to examine the development of technological and electronic warfare. Taking shape during the last years of the overt American manpower presence in the conflict, we noted earlier that this form of warfare constituted an essential part of the Nixon strategy of Vietnamization.

As a beginning, the first major attempt at automated warfare came in 1967 when the United States attempted to build an electronic fence across the 900 mile Demilitarized Zone. Mockingly known in military circles as the "Maginot East Line" or "McNamara's Wall", the fence was designed to stop infiltration from North to South Vietnam. Later, due to monetary and manpower requirements needed to maintain the fence, it was abandoned in 1969. After this project's failure emphasis was placed on the development of counter-infiltration systems which could be used throughout Vietnam. The code for this electronic system was "Igloo White."46

44 Congressional Record, March 17, 1972, p. 8871.
45 Chris Robinson, "Electronic Battlefield, Inc.," Motive (Vol. XXXI, No. 4 Feb. 1971) p. 34.
This system was composed of electronic sensors and detectors designed to alert U.S. troops to the almost invisible movements of the guerrillas. In brief, here is a limited example of some development:  

(a) acoustic detectors—records the sounds produced by humans or vehicular activity in a given area;  
(b) seismic detectors—register the pressure wave produced in the earth's surface layer by a person walking or a vehicle in motion;  
(c) magnetic detectors—indicate the presence of an unusual concentration of ferromagnetic metals;  
(d) surveillance radars—designed to detect moving targets, including soldiers or vehicles, in the vicinity of a campside or border zone; and  
(e) night vision devices—designed to illuminate trails and roads at night. In 1968, Leonard Sullivan, one of the chief researchers for the DOD commented on these sensors:

> These developments open up some very exciting horizons as to what we can do five or ten years from now. When one realizes that we can detect anything that perspires, moves, carries metal, makes a noise, or is hotter or colder than its surroundings, one begins to see the potential. This is the beginning of the instrumentation of the entire battlefield.

As Sullivan indicates, the final phase of the effort toward an electronic battlefield was the decision to integrate these sensors into computerized fire-control systems. This notion was first presented to the public by Gen. Westmoreland in 1969. Speaking before the Association of the U.S. Army he said:

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Comparing the past few years with a forecast of the future produces one conclusion: we are on the threshold of an entirely new battlefield concept. On the battlefield of the future, enemy forces will be located, tracked and targeted almost instantaneously through the use of data links, computer-assisted intelligence evaluation and automatic fire control.\(^{49}\)

In addition, he explained further, "With first-round probability and with surveillance devices that can continually track the enemy, the need for large forces to fix the opposition physically will be less important."

The actual implementation of the concept began around 1969. "The Army began by setting up a program called Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Night Observation (STANO) to plan, test and put into operation a totally controlled and computerized electronic battlefield."\(^{50}\) According to Gen. Betts of the army:

The STANO program was established to insure that all battlefield reconnaissance and surveillance activities are coordinated and that the end product of these activities is an upgrading of our capacity to find the enemy and to use our available fire-power to the maximum.\(^{51}\)

In addition to STANO, another testing project—Mobile Army Sensor System Test, Evaluation and Review (MASSTER)—was also established. Both STANO and MASSTER are the keystones to the major goal of an "Integrated Battlefield Central System (IBCS)." The IBCS concept, as explained by Mr. Klare:

\(^{49}\)Klare, Ibid, p. 203.

\(^{50}\)Robinson, "Electronic Battlefield," p. 33.

\(^{51}\)Quoted in Klare, "War Without End," p. 204.
Calls for the integration of surveillance devices into an automated weapons system that not only monitors the sensor subsystem for signs of enemy activity but also searches a computerized data bank for information on the location of friendly and enemy forces in order to determine the appropriate countermeasure.  

A major aspect of the IBCS is the telecommunications system known as the Automatic Data System for the Army in the field (ADSAF). It is mainly a data processing system which coordinates intelligence, logistics and personnel with fire control. Finally, under ADSAF there are two other sub-systems. One is the Tactical Fire Direction System (TACFIRE) and the other is Tactical Operations System (TOS). TACFIRE consists of a central computer linking decentralized artillery installations, while TOS translates and displays computer operations for quick decision-making.

While the information present here is by no means a comprehensive analysis of the electronic battlefield, it does present some of the major developments in the area. From this one can clearly see that the major thrust of Nixon's counter-insurgency strategy was the rapid installation and use of almost purely technological warfare. Pushing full speed ahead, Gen. Westmoreland said in 1969, "No more than ten years should separate us from the automated battlefield."

In conclusion, we can say that the United States military was led to develop a new concept of weaponry designed mainly for future use in counter-insurgency warfare. For the most part, the new weaponry attempts to respond to the ecological and tactical disadvantages of

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52 Klare, Ibid., pp. 205 and 206.
54 Robinson, Ibid, pp. 35 and 36.
a guerrilla war. In this context these weapons have sought to revolutionize the entire concept of weaponry and counter-insurgency strategy. Being based primarily on capital-intensive technology, they hope to minimize the need for a direct man-to-man confrontation with the guerrillas. This is clearly the case with ecological defoliation and weather modification where planes assume a major role. Also, with the automated battlefield, the ultimate objective is no contact with U.S. personnel. Moreover, in the past counter-insurgency strategies have argued that a manpower ration of 10 to 1 is necessary to successfully win a guerrilla war. All of the new weaponry discussed in this paper eventually seeks to cut that ration drastically. The automated battlefield, in particular, seeks to limit the U.S. ration to zero.

In sum, we can denote a number of control features about these weapons. One, as mentioned is the sought after reduction in necessary manpower. Two, all are based on highly scientific capital-intensive technology. And, three, all would negate the necessity of a large scale intervention by the U.S. military. These weapons, requiring little manpower and training, could be handled by a small special forces unit of the government which the United States would be assisting.

In light of the economic and political consequences of the intervention in Vietnam, this point becomes significant. Overall, then, the United States has attempted to develop and continues to refine, new weaponry designed for the specific purpose of engaging in guerrilla wars. Based on the particular make-up and purpose of these new concepts in war, we have appropriately labelled them "weapons of counter-insurgency."
CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In summing up this work let me say that I have attempted to shed some light on the American military doctrine of counter-insurgency. Despite its overt military form, however, the essence of the concept is its political significance. Counter-insurgency's purported objective of challenging guerrilla warfare militarily was only its form, while its political essence is to prevent the development of national liberation movements seeking social revolution. Accordingly the doctrine of counter-insurgency had its genesis and development in what has come to have greater significance than a mere military war, but what is now referred to as the Vietnam era. It was an era in the sense that American officials were attempting to stifle the emergence and progressive movement of a historical era. An era seeking the national and social liberation of oppressed peoples in those parts of the world which remain as the antiquated historical legacies of eighteenth century European imperial expansion and conquest. It was the attempt to shake off this decadent legacy of not only formal European colonialism, but also the new yokes of repression as manifested by reactionary elites, neocolonial lackeys and lumpen-comprador bourgeoisie regimes. Hence, the post World War II trend was one which had began to nurture a new era seeking the entire social transformation of these societies. And it was in the context of these opposing historical eras or trends that Vietnam emerged as perhaps the most vivid expression of this clash of history.
The United States government on the one hand represented the old guard. As the top superpower of the international capitalist system and ironically not one of the former colonial empires, it stood as imperialism last bastion of defense. As the European empires crumbled, no longer capable of maintaining their overt imperialist presence, the United States stepped in to stifle, crush and annihilate what seemed to be a classic case of social revolution—the Vietnamese revolution. Classic in the sense that the Vietnamese nation had historically risen to the occasion to resist foreign domination and oppression in every form. Moreover, the Vietnamese people had waged a militant nationalist and people's guerrilla war to wrench themselves free from the French colonial empire thereby dealing a serious blow to the international imperialist system. Yet the critical feature of this revolution was not simply its nationalistic spirit and guerrilla warfare nature, but more important the dialectical evolution of these features with a social ideology which would move Vietnam into an unseen historical era of development for its people. The era of course being the socialist path of development, the antithesis of international capitalism and imperialism.

The transformation of the Vietnamese revolution from a nationalist one into a socialist one thus changed the entire character of the struggle. For this meant the extraction of the Vietnamese people from the throes of the western capitalist system. This particular process in time would mean the destruction of traditional economic trappings which the industrialized nations of the West had imposed on the so-called developing countries of the Third World. By taking this militant path of socialist
transformation the Vietnamese people would inevitably break the vicious cycle of stagnation and regression which other poor nations pursuing western-oriented paths of modernization had been subjected. Thus, the western model of development which has become more clearly exposed as a process leading to what analysts in the field speak of as the "development of underdevelopment," would be totally rejected by the Vietnamese people.

This rejection coupled with a successful socialist alternative, could have possibly become a model for other underdeveloping nations. Thus, we have the political essence of the American intervention, namely the prevention of world-wide socialist revolution. Militarily, however, the form of the American involvement was its counter-insurgency character. In this sense American officials were seeking a military strategy capable of defeating the means by which revolutionaries would possibly seek to gain political power. Their overriding concern being focused on the strategy of guerrilla or people's war taking into consideration its military tactics and its implicit ideological and political ramifications. Hence in the course of the Vietnam war, American officials developed a comprehensive political and military strategy of counter-insurgency along with the accompanying technological innovations necessary to implement the policy. The purpose of which was to challenge guerrilla warfare and prevent the proliferation of national liberation movements espousing nations of radical social transformation.

Importantly, while in a relative sense the strategy of counter-insurgency as devised and developed in Vietnam was an absolute failure, the consequences for other nations attempting similar revolutionary
movements may not be as sure. On the one hand, the years of experience of the Vietnamese guerrillas was invaluable as they were able to constantly devise and create counter strategies and techniques in confronting the American military machine. Other movements lacking this experience in addition to the Vietnamese's remarkable program of organization, recruitment and motivation may not be able to withstand the rigorous and vicious attack of a massive counter-insurgency effort. Fortunately in view of the thorough and devasting defeat of the United States in Vietnam, other countries may be spared an overt American intervention. Yet the counter-insurgency strategies, tactics and techniques developed in Vietnam have been transferred to reactionary client regimes throughout the world with the specific intention of negating the very development of revolutionary movements. The main form of this American counter-insurgency assistance has been through a variety of aid programs including civic action, military training and work with local police forces.

Thus, we cannot underestimate the significance of counter-insurgency as a world-wide counter-revolutionary phenomenon. Yet, its existence must not become a reason to be cautious or fearful of revolutionary actions, for Vietnam stands as a shining testament to the victory of people's war. What it must do is force national liberation movements throughout the world to become more skillful in their political actions, be prepared to make serious and necessary sacrifices and resolute in their decision to bring about revolutionary change. With that in mind we can rest assured that as the late great revolutionary Chou En-lai once remarked, "... that whatever the zigzags or reverses there will be in the development of history, the general trend of the world is definitely toward light and not darkness."


