

CIVIL DEFENSE FORCES IN COUNTERINSURGENCY: AN ANALYSIS OF  
THE CIVILIAN IRREGULAR DEFENSE GROUP IN VIETNAM

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## ABSTRACT

CIVIL DEFENSE FORCES IN COUNTERINSURGENCY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CIVILIAN IRREGULAR DEFENSE GROUP IN VIETNAM, by MAJ Darrell W. Carr, 144 pages.

This thesis examines the effect of civil defense forces on a counterinsurgency campaign through a study of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group in the Republic of Vietnam. This thesis challenges a common U.S. Army viewpoint on counterinsurgency that conventional combat power, training a host nation's national security forces, and expenditures on large civil reconstruction projects are the Army's main contributions to counterinsurgency operations. This thesis is a chronological study that outlines the U.S. Army's major successes and failures in the refinement of counterinsurgency doctrine.

This study uses two major research strategies: (1) qualitative analysis of counterinsurgency theory and U.S. Army counterinsurgency doctrine of the 1960s, and (2) a chronological study of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group. Further, operations are evaluated using the four major principles of counterinsurgency: unity of effort, securing the population, isolating the insurgent from sources of support, and winning the support of the population.

After examining counterinsurgency theory, doctrine, and operations in the Republic of Vietnam this study reveals that civil defense forces are a decisive in defeating an insurgency when properly balanced with conventional combat power. Additionally, a civil defense force assists in regaining area control, denial of support to the insurgents, and the restoration of government authority to an area.

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## ACRONYMS

CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Group
COIN	Counterinsurgency
CORDS	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (Vietnam)
CSD	Combined Studies Division
GVN	A military acronym for the Government of Vietnam that actually refers to the Republic of Vietnam government
LLDB	Luc Luong Dac Biet (aka Vietnamese Special Forces, VNSF)
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group (aka USMAAG)
MACV	Military Assistance Command Vietnam
NLF	National Liberation Front (aka. Viet Cong, Vietnam)
NSAM	National Security Action Memorandum
PROVN	Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam
RVN	A military acronym for the Republic of Vietnam
RVNAF	Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces that refers to the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Territorial Forces (Regional and Popular)
U.S.	United States
USASF	US Army Special Forces

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Importance of Civil Defense Forces

According to U.S. Army counterinsurgency doctrine of the 1960s and the classical counterinsurgency authors Sir Robert Thompson, General Sir Frank Kitson, David Galula, and Roger Trinquier, a government's civil defense force program plays a critical role in the restoration of peace to an area. Based on my research regarding the Vietnam War, and upon my experience as a practitioner, these assertions are valid viewpoints. Specifically, a civil defense force integrates the local population into the area's security framework and enables the restoration of government authorities.<sup>1</sup> Since, civil defense forces form and operate within their local community they provide valuable intelligence that assists in the protection of the population from insurgent violence and coercion. Furthermore, assigning static or offensive security duties to local forces relieve army units and police for other operations while protecting an area from insurgent attack or infiltration.<sup>2</sup> Typically, both doctrine and the above named theorists call for the establishment of civil defense forces after government troops eliminate or expel armed insurgents from an area. A civil defense forces' security operations reduced the remaining insurgents' infrastructure and enforced control measures to decrease support to

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), 104-112.

<sup>2</sup>Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 31-15, *Operations Against Irregular Forces* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1961), 35; Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 31-22, *US Army Counterinsurgency Forces* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1963), 83.

the insurgents. Moreover, a civil defense program demonstrates the government's ability to continue to protect the population from the insurgents when troops moved to other areas. Typically, a population's greater sense of security encourages additional participation in the government's pacification efforts. Overall, a civil defense force program is essential to a government's counterinsurgency efforts to retain power because it fosters participation in governance, stability, and it restricts the insurgents' ability to run a parallel local government.

### Research Questions and Methodology

Between 1961 and 1971 the U.S. Army and Army of the Republic of Vietnam Special Forces organized the Republic of Vietnam's isolated ethnic and religious minority groups into civil defense forces, known as the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG), to supplement counterinsurgency efforts against the Viet Cong. Although CIDG operations initially concentrated on the Montagnard tribes that resided in the Central Highlands, the program's success quickly expanded to the Cambodian, Chinese, and Catholic minority groups in other areas of the country. In addition, as the Viet Cong insurgency increased in intensity the program provided an economy of force effort that enabled the Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces' focus on the restoration of government control as well as the allied forces' focus on operations against Viet Cong and North Vietnamese main forces.

The primary research question for this thesis is: What effect, if any, do civil defense forces have on a counterinsurgency campaign? The answers to four further questions assist in understanding the effect of civil defense forces. When organizing a counterinsurgency effort, when should civil defense forces be established and how should

they integrate into the overall strategy? Can civil defense forces secure the population from insurgent influence? Do civil defense forces contribute to reducing or eliminating an insurgent threat? If so, how? What dialogue and actions actually convince a population to participate in a civil defense force program? A qualitative analysis of the relationship between civil defense forces and counterinsurgency campaigns provides better understanding to the development of operational approaches to future counterinsurgency efforts.

### Purpose and Organization of Study

This study analyzes the effect of the CIDG program on the Republic of Vietnam's counterinsurgency efforts to better understand the impact of organizing civil defenses from a population. The main sources for this study came from the documents of U.S. Army and government organizations or personnel directly involved in the CIDG program in order to gain an unbiased understanding on its impact on the counterinsurgency effort. Chapter 2 examines the counterinsurgency theory and doctrine to conceptually understand how civil defense forces should fit into a counterinsurgency campaign. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 analyze how the Republic of Vietnam's CIDG program organized rural minority groups into a civil defense force to counter the Viet Cong infrastructure. The changes in command and control procedures, priority of effort, and the operational environment established three major phases of the CIDG program. Each chapter focuses on one of the three phases of the program as a case study in order to understand how the Viet Cong and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Republic of Vietnam's government, and U.S. support influenced the success or failure of CIDG operations. Chapter 6 provides conclusions that synthesize the theoretical and doctrinal concepts with CIDG

operations to assist military leaders in the organization of civil defense forces for counterinsurgency operations.

## CHAPTER 2

### CIVIL DEFENSE FORCES IN THEORY AND DOCTRINE

Both the classical counterinsurgency theorists and the U.S. Army's doctrine of the 1960s relied on civil defense forces to retain government control in areas while regular security forces conduct offensive operations against armed insurgent groups in other areas to expand government control. This chapter reviews counterinsurgency theory and doctrine to evaluate the abstract role, integration, and contribution of civil defense forces to a government's counterinsurgency campaign.

#### Civil Defense Forces According to Theory

The theorists agree that support of the population is critical for either the insurgency or the government's counterinsurgency efforts to win the struggle for power over a nation.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the government must take steps to protect and control its people in order to re-gain the population's support. The theorists suggest principle lines of effort and operational approaches that simultaneously obtain the support of the population and defeat the insurgency. Effective civil defense force programs directly contribute to the principle counterinsurgency lines of effort and are fully integrated into the government's operational approach.

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<sup>3</sup>John Shy and Thomas Collier, "Revolutionary War," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 815-862.

## The Theoretical Principles of Counterinsurgency

The combined experience of the classical counterinsurgency theorists reveals the necessity of an approach unique to the social, political, economic, and security needs of each operational environment. Although, the approach to counter an insurgency varies with the operational environment a common set of principles guide a government's efforts to defeat an insurgency and regain the support of the population.

Sir Robert Thompson, a British military officer and leading counterinsurgency theorist, served as the Permanent Secretary of Defense for Malaya from 1959 until 1961 during the Malayan Emergency. Thompson also led the British Advisory Mission to the Republic of Vietnam from 1961 until 1965. His book, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, is considered one of the leading publications on counterinsurgency. In *Defeating Communist Insurgency* Thompson suggests a government's counterinsurgency efforts include: clear political aims focused on developing an independent and united country that is politically as well as economically stable; a government that functions within its laws; an overall plan that addresses the political, social, economic, administrative, police, and security measures to counter the insurgency; efforts to defeat the political subversion; and efforts to increase security for the population.<sup>4</sup>

General Sir Frank Kitson, a British Army Officer, served in the Mau Mau Uprising<sup>5</sup> from 1953 until 1955, the Malayan Emergency in 1957; the Jebel Akhdar War in Muscat and Oman in 1958, Cyprus during the 1960s, and Northern Ireland from 1970

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<sup>4</sup>Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), 50-58.

<sup>5</sup>The Mau Mau Uprising is also referred to as the Kenya Emergency.

until 1972. Kitson's most notable books on counterinsurgency operations are *Bunch of Five* and *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, Peace-keeping*. In *Bunch of Five*, Kitson's principles include developing a sound security framework, winning the war for the minds of the people, developing precise intelligence, and implementing an adequate and expedient legal system.<sup>6</sup>

David Galula, a French Army officer, served as the assistant military attaché at the French embassy in Beijing from 1945 until 1948 amidst the Chinese Civil War, in 1948 served in the United Nations Special Committee on the Balkans during the Greek Civil War, and served in the Algerian War from 1956 until 1958. Galula's book, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, significantly influenced U.S. Army Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, published in 2006. Galula suggests the key principles for counterinsurgency operations are a unified and coordinated effort, the development of a competing cause, area security, and the defeat of the insurgents.<sup>7</sup>

Roger Trinquier, a French Army Officer, served in the First Indochina War from 1946 until 1951 and in the Algerian War from 1956 until 1960. In *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency*, Trinquier advocates protecting the people from terrorism, developing intelligence, isolating the insurgents from the population, enforcing the rule of law, and winning the minds of the people through propaganda and social programs.<sup>8</sup> Since the four theorists generally agree on the principle lines of effort that

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<sup>6</sup>Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, 281-303.

<sup>7</sup>David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (London: Frederick A. Praeger Publishing, 1964), 75-76, 87-99.

<sup>8</sup>Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1985), 43-51, 71.

lead to a successful counterinsurgency it is necessary to next consider how civil defense forces relate to the theorists' operational approaches.

### The Role and Integration of Civil Defense Forces in Theory

A common theme amongst the theorists is the use of civil defense forces to augment pacification efforts. Additionally, the theorists recommend organizing civil defense forces from a community to enable the population's self-defense, develop intelligence, and assist in government control at the local level. Generally, the theorists envisioned civil defense forces as the catalyst to encourage more participation and mobilization of the population in support of the government.

Thompson's operational approach to pacification relies on consolidating the population into "strategic hamlets," and a phasing methodology of "clear, hold, win, won."<sup>9</sup> Thompson advocated the creation of civil defense forces during the "hold" phase to integrate the local population into the hamlet's security framework and enable the restoration of government authorities. Thompson recommends using civil defense forces to gather intelligence and enforce control measures within the strategic hamlet. He also spoke highly of the early establishment of militias or self-defense type units for rural, ethnic minorities using counter-guerrilla techniques as a method to augment counterinsurgency efforts until government control expands to these areas.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast, Kitson's concept to pacification relies on the development of a grid system to permit the removal of insurgents and the establishment of government control

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<sup>9</sup>Thompson, 112.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 104-112.

to an area. First, the government establishes an interconnected system that permits control of the population using the French “quadrillage,” British committee system or British single commander system.<sup>11</sup> Next, Army units systematically clear the gridded area of insurgents. Army units move to neighboring areas when police and local security forces can prevent the restoration of insurgent control. Subsequently, police and local security forces maintain control of the area by the enforcement of control measures and offensive operations.<sup>12</sup> Admittedly, a key difference in Kitson’s approach is the reliance on an area’s security forces to conduct offensive and reinforcement operations without assistance from Army units.<sup>13</sup> Thus, Kitson’s approach relies on the minimal allocation of security forces and counter organization of the population to stabilize an area.

Conversely, Galula recommends a methodical eight-step plan that relies on a combination of army units and civil defense forces to pacify an area. Galula’s first step concentrates a sufficient amount of army units to destroy or expel the armed insurgents. Next, static forces provide local security for the population in the cleared area. Third, population and resource control measures are emplaced to further isolate any remaining insurgents from the population. Fourth, the government pacification efforts dismantle the insurgent political organizations within the area. Fifth, elections establish tentative local leaders. Sixth, the new local leaders are evaluated on their ability to provide effective governance. Seventh, local leaders are integrated into a national political party. The final

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<sup>11</sup>Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, Peace-keeping* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1971), 133-134.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 79-81, 134.

step wins over or suppresses any remaining dissident people. The process is repeated in adjacent areas to expand government control.<sup>14</sup> Galula recommends the use of civil defense forces beginning in step six to integrate the population into the security framework and prevent the return of insurgent influence through the provision of effective governance.<sup>15</sup>

Whereas Trinquier's approach uses an area gridding pattern, termed "quadrillages," to pacify an area. Within a quadrillage, "sector forces" secure hamlets, "interval troops" provide security between the hamlets, and "intervention troops" serve as an uncommitted reaction force for the area.<sup>16</sup> Within Trinquier's organizational structure, civil defense forces fulfill the sector and interval troop roles.

Generally, the theorists suggest a pacification process that involves military clearing operations followed by control of an area through community defense and policing. Area control includes measures that reduce support to the remaining insurgents as well as behavior that wins the population's support. The pacification process methodically expands government control to additional areas. Throughout the "hold" or area control phase, civil defense forces aid in intelligence, security, and the enforcement of control measures to eliminate an insurgency as well as further government control.

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<sup>14</sup>Galula, 87-99.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>16</sup>Trinquier, 90.

### Civil Defense Forces According to Doctrine

The U.S. Army doctrine of the 1960s viewed counterinsurgency as a way to secure rear areas from guerrilla attack and shape the operational environment for offensive operations against an enemy army. As the Soviets had used guerrilla warfare successfully against the Germans in World War II (WWII), initial U.S. Army efforts attempted to understand the nature of guerrilla warfare in order to better protect rear areas and prevent the disruption of U.S. conventional operations. In 1952 the U.S. Army published Field Manual 100-5, *Field Service Regulations—Operations*, with an entire chapter dedicated to the techniques to secure rear areas from guerrilla attacks based on the 1951 publication of FM 31-20, *Operations Against Guerrilla Forces*, and FM 31-21, *Organization and Conduct of Guerrilla Warfare*.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the Army formally created the Special Forces in 1952 to provide expertise on guerrilla warfare as well as the capability to organize guerrilla operations as either a stay behind force or an advance force shaping the conditions for the success of conventional ground forces.<sup>18</sup> U.S. Army doctrine primarily focused on offensive operations and area control measures to defeat an enemy militarily as well as psychologically without addressing the underlying political aspect of insurgent operations.

The expansion of communist influence encouraged by subversive insurgencies hastened a U.S. strategy of counterinsurgency and U.S. Army doctrinal approaches

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<sup>17</sup>Andrew J. Birtle, Center for Military History (CMH) Publication 70-98-1, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), 144.

<sup>18</sup>Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 31-20, *U.S. Army Special Forces Group (Airborne)* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1955), 6-9.

particularly under the Kennedy administration. While the Soviet Union promised recognition and support for all wars of national liberation the U.S. increased assistance to at risk countries.<sup>19</sup> A key theme in Kennedy's national security strategy was the emphasis on the use of indigenous persons and the development of paramilitary forces that influenced Army counterinsurgency doctrine.

President Kennedy advocated the use of paramilitary forces in counterinsurgency efforts against subversive insurgencies to maintain sufficient U.S. combat power for a war against the Soviets and to support an ally's pacification efforts. To promote his strategy to deter the expansion of communism, Kennedy issued a series of National Security Action Memorandums (NSAM) following National Security Council meetings that influenced the Army's doctrinal approach to counterinsurgency. First, NSAM 2, issued on 3 February 1961, directed the Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, to coordinate with the Central Intelligence Agency and to increase emphasis on the development of counter-guerrilla forces.<sup>20</sup> Next, NSAM 57, issued on 26 June 1961, assigned the Strategic Resources Group the authority to assign paramilitary operations to the appropriate department or agency, and clarified the duties of both the Central Intelligence Agency and the Department of Defense for paramilitary operations:

Where such an operation is to be wholly covert or disavowable, it may be assigned to the CIA, provided that it is within the normal capabilities of the agency. Any large paramilitary operation wholly or partly covert which requires

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<sup>19</sup>James DeNardo, *U.S. Army Special Forces: Origins and Operations in Vietnam* - Term Paper, 18 May 1989. Soviet Premier, Nikita Khrushchev, formally declared the Soviet Union's support for wars of national liberation in January 1961, however his declaration simply confirmed the Soviet's policies of the 1950s.

<sup>20</sup>National Security Council, National Security Action Memorandum 2, *Development of Counter Guerilla Forces*, 3 February 1961.

significant numbers of militarily trained personnel, amounts of military equipment which exceed normal CIA-controlled stocks and/or military experience of a kind and level peculiar to the Armed Services is properly the primary responsibility of the Department of Defense with the CIA in a supporting role.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, NSAM 124, issued on 18 January 1962, established the Special Group (Counterinsurgency) to provide oversight on counterinsurgency plans and strategy. More importantly, NSAM 124 directed the Department of Defense to ensure ‘subversive insurgencies’ received equal importance to conventional warfare with regard to organization, training, doctrine, and equipment.<sup>22</sup> Finally, NSAM 162, issued on 19 June 1962, directed more U.S. support to the organization of third country personnel, particularly minority groups, into paramilitary forces to support counterinsurgency programs when appropriate.<sup>23</sup> In accordance with NSAM 57, an increase in paramilitary programs meant an increase in the assignment of U.S. Army Special Forces to counterinsurgency operations. As a result of President Kennedy’s NSAMs the Army’s counterinsurgency doctrine increased its reliance on the organization and integration of paramilitary forces.

#### The U.S. Army’s Doctrinal Principles of Counterinsurgency

U.S. Army doctrine of the 1960s assigned a broad set of principles to guide counterinsurgency operations similar to the classical counterinsurgency theorists. The

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<sup>21</sup>National Security Council, National Security Action Memorandum 57, *Responsibility for Paramilitary Operations*, 26 June 1961.

<sup>22</sup>National Security Council, National Security Action Memorandum 124, *Responsibility for Paramilitary Operations*, 18 January 1962.

<sup>23</sup>National Security Council, National Security Action Memorandum 162, *Responsibility for Paramilitary Operations*, 19 June 1962.

1962 revision of FM 100-5, *Field Service Regulations–Operations*, recommended the principles: control of the population, elimination of the insurgents, unity of command, enforcement of the local rule of law, and efforts to gain the support of the population.<sup>24</sup> The Field Manuals 31-15, 31-16, and 31-22 expanded on these principles to provide the Army’s approach to counterinsurgency operations.

### The Role and Integration of Civil Defense Forces in U.S. Army Doctrine

The U.S. Army’s doctrinal approach to counterinsurgency during the 1960s relied on combined arms units to control an area and local security forces to augment Army operations.<sup>25</sup> FM 31-16, *Counter guerrilla Operations*, described local security forces as indigenous police and the irregular organization of a population into paramilitary forces.<sup>26</sup> FM 31-16 also recommended combined arms units’ use of local security forces and sympathetic local individuals to assist in “intelligence, propaganda, self-defense forces, trackers and guides, and counter guerrilla combat units.”<sup>27</sup> Additionally, FM 31-15, *Operations Against Irregular Forces*, recommended the assignment of advisors to local security forces to ensure proper training, organization, and the capability to repel guerrilla attacks. The combined arms commander also had to provide reactionary

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<sup>24</sup>Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Field Service Regulations–Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1962), 136-143; Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 31-15, *Operations Against Irregular Forces* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1961), 4.

<sup>25</sup>Department of the Army, FM 31-15 (1961), 33-34.

<sup>26</sup>Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 31-16, *Counter guerrilla Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1963), 101.

<sup>27</sup>Department of the Army, FM 31-16 (1963), 101.

reinforcements to prevent the loss of local security forces.<sup>28</sup> As local security forces increased in their capability defend against guerrilla attacks FM 31-22, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency Forces*, used paramilitary forces for local security duties in order to allow Army units to concentrate on offensive operations.<sup>29</sup>

FM 31-22 relied on three types of paramilitary forces for local security - self-defense units, civil guard, and civil defense groups. Self-defense units organized local volunteers to defend their village or other key infrastructure. Self-defense units typically conducted local patrols, ambushes, and raids to support village defense. A civil guard unit consisted of volunteers organized to provide “internal security within a political subdivision” to reinforce security operations performed by self-defense units. Civil guard units conducted “raids, ambushes, and limited objective attacks [independently,] with self-defense units, regular army units, or both.” On the other hand, civil defense groups performed duties similar to civil guard units in remote areas as well as “hunter-killer teams, trail watchers, and for border surveillance.” Civil defense groups commonly consisted of volunteers from minority groups that resided in remote areas, managed and supported by U.S. Army Special Forces to set the conditions for future clearing operations. For all paramilitary forces FM 31-22 recommended the use of centralized training facilities to standardize the training of basic military skills, indoctrinate the volunteers in the concept of participatory governance, and to emphasize protection of the local population. Doctrinally, the Army organized paramilitary units to provide a higher

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<sup>28</sup>Department of the Army, FM 31-15 (1961), 34-35.

<sup>29</sup>Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 31-22, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency Forces* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1963), 83; Department of the Army, FM 100-5 (1962), 139.

sense of security within the population, engage the population in the national counterinsurgency effort, and assist in isolating the insurgent from the support of the population.<sup>30</sup> A memorandum titled *Concept of Employment of US Army Forces in Paramilitary Operations* summarizes U.S. policy and Army doctrine regarding the use of paramilitary forces in counterinsurgency into a single document:

The Department of the Army's approach to paramilitary operations, whether high or low intensity, is to optimize the overall capability of the indigenous military forces to ensure internal defense throughout the spectrum of sublimated war situations. Early institution of measures to this end enhances the probability of success. The objective is to defeat [a] communist inspired insurgency in each threatened area before the U.S. is confronted with a fait accompli and forced to take more drastic action.<sup>31</sup>

#### Summary

Both theory and doctrine considered civil defense programs a decisive component of a counterinsurgency campaign. A government's civil defense program integrated the population into the military and political struggle against an insurgency, increased the population's sense of security, prevented the resurgence of insurgent influence to an area, and assisted in the re-establishment of government control to an area. Additionally, theory and doctrine generally agreed that a government's counterinsurgency campaign included the principle lines of effort: unity of effort between security forces, the government and its population, and the government and its security forces; securing the area to protect the population from insurgent influence; isolating the insurgent from sources of support, and winning the support of the population. Of these key ingredients, protection of the population was the most important to facilitate other pacification

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<sup>30</sup>Department of the Army, FM 31-22 (1963), 83-84.

<sup>31</sup>*Concept of Employment of U.S. Army Forces*, 2 January 1962.

endeavors. Both theory and doctrine established civil defense forces after army units cleared an area of armed insurgents. However, U.S. Army doctrine permitted the Special Forces to establish civil defense forces in rural areas in order provide the framework for government influence until operations permitted deliberate army clearing operations. Generally, a civil defense force program assisted in the intelligence effort and conducted offensive and static defensive operations following the relief of army units to secure the population from insurgent influence. Similarly, a civil defense force assisted the police in the enforcement of population and resource control measures that decreased support to the insurgents as well as conducted offensive operations that reduced the local area's remaining insurgent infrastructure. The key motivators for a population's participation in a civil defense force relied on an increased sense of security, economic improvement, and participatory governance. Both the classical counterinsurgency theorists and U.S. Army doctrinal approaches stressed the use of civil defense forces to increase a government's success against an insurgency.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Department of the Army, FM 100-5 (1962), 140.

## CHAPTER 3

### CIVIL DEFENSE FORCES IN ACTION: CIDG OPERATIONS

NOVEMBER 1961-JUNE 1963

#### Overview

The concept of Vietnamese nationalism began as a movement to end French colonial rule; eventually polarized the Vietnamese people to communist and democratic nationalist approaches, and served as the basis for the Viet Cong's insurgency against the Republic of Vietnam. The Viet Minh formed in 1941 as a coalition of nationalist movements designed to coordinate efforts against the Japanese occupation force and French colonists in order to gain independence. With the Japanese surrender immanent in August 1945 the Viet Minh coordinated revolutionary activities throughout the Vietnamese colonies to end French rule after the withdrawal of Japanese occupational troops. Ho Chi Minh, leader of the Indochinese Communist Party and Secretary General of the Viet Minh, coerced Emperor Bao Dai to abdicate in August 1945, seized Hanoi on 2 September 1945, and proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.<sup>33</sup> At nearly the same time, the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai religious sects as well as other nationalist groups formed the United National Front to establish an independent state in the former colony of Cochinchina, but separate from the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam.<sup>34</sup> However, the French colonists regained control of Saigon on 23 September 1945 and the

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<sup>33</sup>Douglas Porch, "French Imperial Warfare 1945-62," in *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, eds. Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2010), 79.

<sup>34</sup>Department of the Army, *PROVN*, A-19.

remainder of the Cochinchina colony by the end of November 1946.<sup>35</sup> The Viet Minh regrouped and launched an offensive against all French garrisons throughout December 1946 that renewed the armed struggle for an independent Vietnam under communist rule. By 1949, the French recognized the Viet Minh's revolutionary movement contained non-communist nationalists that if leveraged properly would fracture the Vietnamese resistance. As French public opinion called for an end to the Indochina War the French promised full independence to the non-communist Vietnamese nationalist movements under the exiled Vietnamese emperor, Bao Dai.<sup>36</sup>

Nationalist movements continued to polarize the Vietnamese people after the Geneva Conference ended on 20 July 1954. Although, when the Viet Minh defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu in April 1954 and achieved substantial bargaining power in the peace talks the State of Vietnam was partitioned at the 17th Parallel officially forming the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to the north and the State of Vietnam to the south.<sup>37</sup> As part of the peace process, elections were scheduled for 1956 to allow the people to decide whether or not to unify under a single government. However, on 23 October 1955, the people of the State of Vietnam voted to establish a democratic government under Ngo Dinh Diem that valued the importance of the individual and eliminated colonial and

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<sup>35</sup>Department of the Army, *PROVN*, A-20.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, A-24 to A-25.

<sup>37</sup>Informally the Democratic Republic of Vietnam is referred to as North Vietnam. Conversely, the State of Vietnam or the Republic of Vietnam is referred to as South Vietnam.

communist influence.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, the Republic of Vietnam's approach included efforts to develop a national economy, fairness, and opportunities for individuals to contribute to the overall national effort.<sup>39</sup> While the Republic of Vietnam formed a democratic nation, the Viet Minh continued its efforts to establish a united Vietnamese state under communist rule. The Viet Minh platform included communist solutions to many common grievances particularly the lack of universal suffrage, illiteracy, tax reforms, land ownership, and the abolition of forced labor.<sup>40</sup> Above all, the democratic and communist nationalist concepts polarized the Vietnamese people, and established the basis for escalation that led to the Vietnam War.

#### The Republic of Vietnam Government July 1954-1957

Following the establishment of the Republic of Vietnam on 26 October 1955, Ngo Dinh Diem, as the newly elected president, began aggressive steps to unify South Vietnam into a democratic nation. Initially, the Republic of Vietnam lacked the ability to assert control over its people and suffered from political divisions that weakened the central government. The country inherited its economic and social infrastructure from French colonization, however the Indochina War had left the country's agricultural, commercial, education, transport, and communications systems in shambles. Moreover, there were areas of the country that the French had been unable to control that continued

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<sup>38</sup>Following the October 1955 referendum the State of Vietnam became the Republic of Vietnam.

<sup>39</sup>Department of the Army, *PROVN*, A-28.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, A-25.

to provide safe haven and support to the Viet Minh communists.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, the government had to provide assistance in the resettlement of nearly 900,000 anti-communist refugees that voluntarily relocated from North Vietnam to avoid communist rule. President Diem's initial efforts consolidated the government's power and authority to eliminate opposition to the new government. Diem's consolidation of power gained the support of the Vietnamese National Army as well as the politico-religious sects of Hoa Hao and Cai Dai.<sup>42</sup> Next, he led the nation in the development of a constitution as well as organized the administrative and institutional structures to extend government control. The Republic of Vietnam's constitution established forty-four provinces sub-divided into district and village political administrative divisions to establish government control. Figure 1 depicts the Republic of Vietnam's provincial boundaries. The provincial chiefs were responsible for the administrative control, enforcement of security, implementation of the government's economic and social reform programs, dissemination of pro-government propaganda, and political action to extend government influence throughout the province. Usually, the province chiefs were the highest-level representatives of the government that interacted with the South Vietnamese peasants. President Diem installed army officers, typically majors, as provincial chiefs to ensure loyalty to the central government. Diem's personal appointment of the provincial chiefs allowed these officers

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<sup>41</sup>U.S. Information Service, U.S. Embassy, Saigon, *South Vietnam: the Formative Years*, 1964, 1-2.

<sup>42</sup>Department of the Army, *PROVN*, A-1-20. The Vietnamese National Army was renamed the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) after 26 October 1955. Similarly, other national military forces were grouped under the title, Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF).

to gain massive political power and direct access to the President.<sup>43</sup> While President Diem rapidly placed the Republic of Vietnam on a path to stability the Viet Cong exploited long standing social and cultural tension to destabilize the government.

In spite of Diem's efforts socio-cultural discord provided an obstacle to unify the Republic of Vietnam's population. In particular, divisions between South Vietnam's rural and urban populations degraded Diem's democratic efforts. Familial loyalty, tradition, and agricultural practices formed the basis for the rural people's desired way of life. However, the previous French colonial administration exploited the rural people's tendencies resulting in corruption, inefficiency, abuse, and agricultural indebtedness. Further, five years of Japanese occupation during World War II and the subsequent nine year, rural based struggle for Vietnamese independence degraded the rural people's desired way of life as well as created war weariness. For these reasons, the average peasants desired security within their immediate area in order to resume their desired lifestyle.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, the peasants desired the opportunity for education, medical treatment, and the ability to benefit from the land they worked. However, unfulfilled promises to provide these services increased social discontent.<sup>45</sup> The rural population's resultant dissatisfaction with the government created vulnerability to subversion and further conflict. On the other hand, South Vietnam's urban population considered the rural population backward, ignorant, and naïve. Generally, the urban population ignored

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<sup>43</sup>Ian McNeill, *The Team: Australian Army Advisors in Vietnam 1962-1972* (Hong Kong: Australian War Memorial, 1984), 70-71.

<sup>44</sup>Department of the Army, *PROVN*, 40-42.

<sup>45</sup>Milton E. Osborne, "Strategic Hamlets in South Viet-Nam: A Survey and a Comparison" (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, April 1965), 20-21.

the nationalist struggle in the rural areas with the hope that the conflict would not disrupt city life.<sup>46</sup> Criticism over the amount of aid, as well as the distribution of government programs, increased the traditional rift between rural and urban populations, something that hindered unification of the South Vietnamese people.

Antagonism between the ethnic Vietnamese and the Montagnards created another barrier to unification of the population. Many ethnic Vietnamese considered the Montagnards an inferior race of ‘moi’ (savages) due to racial, linguistic, and religious differences. Typically the ethnic Vietnamese maintained homogeneity derived from a common language as well as a common set of values and outlook on life. In contrast each Montagnard family settlement adhered to different dialects and cultural practices that prevented organization of the Montagnard tribes.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, the ethnic Vietnamese typically adhered to Buddhist or Catholic religious views while the Montagnards continued animistic religious practices. Further, the Montagnards utilized slash and burn farming techniques contradictory to the ethnic Vietnamese’ rotational farming techniques and land ownership. Even more, geographic separation furthered the divide between the Montagnards and the ethnic Vietnamese. While the Montagnard population composed only seven percent of the Republic of Vietnam’s population they occupied the highlands controlling nearly two-thirds of South Vietnam’s geographic area. In contrast the ethnic Vietnamese constituted eighty percent of South Vietnam’s population, and occupied the more fertile coastal plains alongside the Chinese, Khmers, Chams, and other portions of

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<sup>46</sup>Department of the Army, *PROVN*, 40-42.

<sup>47</sup>McNeill, 34-35.

the population.<sup>48</sup> Figure 2 graphically demonstrates the geographic distribution of the Republic of Vietnam's ethnic groups. The socio-economic, cultural, and geographic differences between the two ethnic groups resulted in further tension as the ethnic Vietnamese claimed leadership positions in the Republic of Vietnam's government and armed forces.

Socio-economic as well as cultural differences between the ethnic Vietnamese and the Montagnards transferred to the relationship between the Montagnards and the Republic of Vietnam government.<sup>49</sup> The first area of conflict between the Montagnards and the government centered on land reform measures since the economic potential for South Vietnam resided in its highlands. Conflict over land ownership developed when the government refused to recognize traditional Montagnard land claims in the highlands, and awarded land ownership in many areas to new ethnic Vietnamese settlers.<sup>50</sup> The government enacted severe population control measures for the Montagnards in order to continue Vietnamese land resettlement in the highlands after a Montagnard uprising over land ownership in 1958.<sup>51</sup> The second area of conflict included government efforts to assimilate the Montagnard tribes into Vietnamese social institutions, laws, and culture.<sup>52</sup> Generally, most Montagnards felt that the government's population control measures

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<sup>48</sup>Department of the Army, *PROVN*, 1-39 to 1-41.

<sup>49</sup>McNeill, 34-35.

<sup>50</sup>Gerald C. Hickey, *The Highland People of South Vietnam: Social and Economic Development* (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corporation, May 1967), 28-30.

<sup>51</sup>McNeill, 38.

<sup>52</sup>The Minority Rights Group, Report Number 18: *The Montagnards of South Vietnam* (London: the Minority Rights Group, 1977), 9.

following the 1958 uprising threatened tribal customs and traditions. Specifically, the ban on crossbows and teaching of Montagnard dialects in schools as well as the redistribution of ancestral lands upheld their opinion.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, many Montagnards distrusted the concept of a centralized government based on their experience under Chinese, French, and Japanese rule.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the Montagnards' desire to preserve their identity and traditions conflicted with the government's effort to unify the population under democratic nationalism.

The rift between South Vietnam's ethnic Chinese population and the Republic of Vietnam government over economic influence and perceived support to the Viet Cong also created an obstacle to the government's unification plans. The ethnic Chinese population prevailed as merchants, lenders, and other in key services in Saigon as well as many other major population centers. Despite the government's anti-communist position, the ethnic Chinese reportedly continued business transactions within Viet Cong controlled territories. Consequently, the government prohibited "all foreign nationals" from the eleven professions and businesses typically held by the ethnic Chinese in an effort improve the Republic of Vietnam's economy, force Chinese assimilation, and to deny Viet Cong access to resources.<sup>55</sup> Most ethnic Chinese refused to adhere to these directives in order to continue their desired way of life, which further hindered government stability and unification efforts. Despite President Diem's efforts to create a

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<sup>53</sup>Minority Rights Group, *The Montagnards of South Vietnam*, 3.

<sup>54</sup>Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Working Concept by Which the CIDG Program Could Become a Legalized Instrument of the Government of Vietnam*, Undated.

<sup>55</sup>Department of the Army, *PROVN*, 1-39 to 1-41.

unified South Vietnam, subversive groups exploited the existing tensions, dissatisfaction, and long-standing social differences within the population to promote the communist platform for Vietnamese nationalism.<sup>56</sup>

#### Escalation of Viet Cong Subversion 1957-1962

Communist subversion against the Republic of Vietnam increased during 1956 when President Diem refused to conduct elections in accordance with the 1954 Geneva Accords. Accordingly, former Viet Minh elements within the Republic of Vietnam initiated subversive activity that included political agitation, terrorism, and sabotage to set the conditions for a rural based insurgency. Specifically, the communists exploited the government's approaches to land reform, conscription, taxes, and inflation to gain support from the rural population.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, acts of terrorism, harassment, and sabotage reinforced political agitation as well as neutralized or eliminated opposition to the insurgents. The Viet Cong purposely incited the poor, the landless, the mid-level farmers, anti-US and anti-Diem individuals dissatisfied with government programs as well as the persistent socio-cultural tensions to undermine the Republic of Vietnam. As the communists gained support in the rural areas they emplaced quasi-governments to collect taxes and administer the other functions of a civil government thus creating support bases for an insurgency.<sup>58</sup> Subversive violence significantly increased between

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<sup>56</sup>Department of the Army, *PROVN*, 39.

<sup>57</sup>Department of Defense, Intelligence Report on Captured Enemy Document *Resolution of COSVN*, Drafted October 1961, Published 29 April 1969, 8, 24.

<sup>58</sup>George C. Morton, *Debriefing as U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam Chief of Special Warfare Branch, J3, and Commander, US Special Forces (Provisional) Vietnam 1961 – 1963*, dated 6 November 1963, edited by Ruben Shay, 6.

1959 and 1962 as the Viet Cong gained more support and expanded its efforts into the central and northern provinces.

The dramatic increase in the Viet Cong's insurgent movement between 1957 and 1960 resulted in additional support from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. During the Third National Congress of the Lao Dong, the North Vietnamese passed a resolution on 10 September 1960 to expand its support for the liberation of the South Vietnamese people from the "rule of the US imperialists and their henchmen."<sup>59</sup> With additional support from North Vietnam, Viet Cong leaders established routes through neutral Laos and Cambodia to support the insurgency, and formed the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF) in December 1960.<sup>60</sup> More importantly, the combination of Montagnard hostilities with the Republic of Vietnam government and Ho Chi Minh's promise of Montagnard autonomy under a united Vietnam led to significant Viet Cong control of the central highlands by 1961.<sup>61</sup> Generally speaking, the Viet Cong's use of political agitation reinforced by selective violence degraded the government's ability to extend control into remote areas. Likewise, Viet Cong subversion resulted in defaulted agricultural credit loans and payments to landlords as well as the failure of rural cooperatives that significantly hindered economic progress.<sup>62</sup> The Viet

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<sup>59</sup>Department of the Army, *PROVN*, F-15 to F-16. The Lao Dong is also known as the Communist Party of North Vietnam. During the Lao Dong's third congress the party adopted a resolution to overthrow the South Vietnamese on 10 September 1960.

<sup>60</sup>Wilfred G. Burchett, *The Furtive War* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), 95.

<sup>61</sup>Stephen Sherman, *Outline History of 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne)*, 83-84.

<sup>62</sup>O'Donnell, 4-9.

Cong's simple themes of social justice, elimination of government corruption, "land to the tiller," and a promise for Vietnamese nationalism resonated with a large portion of South Vietnam's disaffected population.<sup>63</sup>

### The Republic of Vietnam's Response to the Escalation of Viet Cong Subversion 1957-1962

As the Viet Cong's subversive activity increased in the Republic of Vietnam circa 1957 the government imposed strict population control measures to counter the insurgency. Government ordinances authorized imprisonment without trial for suspected subversion or communist activities, which created further dissatisfaction within the population. Additionally, President Diem instituted special intelligence networks and special police to identify subversive individuals, increased presidential control over the National Assembly, and instituted censorship to counter communist subversion.<sup>64</sup> More importantly, the government enacted the Agrovillage and the Strategic Hamlet programs to control the population. These programs intended to defend the population from Viet Cong attacks as well as further the government's land reform and economic improvement themes.<sup>65</sup>

The Republic of Vietnam instituted the Agrovillage program in 1959 as a population control measure to reduce rural subversion and guerrilla activities. Under the Agrovillage

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<sup>63</sup>O'Donnell, 4-9.

<sup>64</sup> Department of the Army, *PROVN*, A-1-22. Ordinance 6/56 authorized the Republic of Vietnam government to confine individuals suspected of being a danger to the defense of the state without the right of trial. Similarly, Ordinance 10/59 authorized military courts to conduct trials and imprison communists without the right to counsel or appeal.

<sup>65</sup>U.S. Information Service, *South Vietnam: the Formative Years*, 13.

program the rural population was resettled into self-contained and protected communities according to presumed association with the Viet Cong.<sup>66</sup> Agroville settlements became a national program based on a concept developed for the Can-Tho area that resettled the rural population into loyal and disloyal groups. Persons believed to maintain contact with the Viet Cong or had known relatives in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam were resettled into the “qui-khu” or disloyal groups. All other persons were resettled into the “qui-ap” or loyal groups as a technique to increase provincial security. When Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao, a former Viet Minh regimental commander and counter-intelligence chief and future Kien Hoa Province Chief, fully studied the concept for the government, Thao recommended continuation of the resettlement program.<sup>67</sup> However, Thao also recommended several modifications to the program that included the provision of social and economic measures within the resettlement areas as well as the discontinuation of separating the inhabitants according to loyal and disloyal groups. Based on Thao’s report, President Diem instituted the construction of “key rural Agrovilles” on 13 April 1959 with the goal of “improving the village standard of living, and the continuation of the government’s cultural, social, and security programs.” The Agroville program was widely criticized for its high requirement for peasant labor to construct the resettlement areas, insufficient compensation for resettlement, and problems with area administration.

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<sup>66</sup>Osborne, 21-22.

<sup>67</sup>Thao was actually a communist infiltrator to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. While he oversaw the Strategic Hamlet Program for the government he actually administered the program poorly to develop rural resentment against the Diem regime. Later, Thao’s assumed pacification efforts as the Kien Hoa Province Chief resulted in his promotion. Next, Thao assisted in the planning of the coups against President Diem and the military dictatorship under Nguyen Khanh.

Incidentally, the Agroville program envisioned the resettlement of 300,000 to 1,500,000 people by 1963, although only twenty-three Agroville locations were completed by 1961. However, the program was suspended when it failed to successfully reduce Viet Cong activity.<sup>68</sup> After the suspension of the Agroville program government efforts shifted to the Strategic Hamlet Program.

A second population control measure, the Strategic Hamlet Program replaced the Agroville program in 1961 and was officially adopted on 17 April 1962. While the Agrovvilles expected to contain thousands of people and relied on the construction of new settlements the Strategic Hamlets fortified existing settlements. In addition to the different size and scope, the Strategic Hamlet Program aimed to provide: “(a) a reasonable degree of safety; (b) a reasonable livelihood; (c) a reasonable amount of elementary justice; (d) a reasonable chance for his children; (e) a reasonable degree of status in his community; and (f) a reasonable degree of opportunity” as well as eliminated criticism over forced relocation programs.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, the government provided weapons and ammunition for the hamlet self-defense forces for six months. After this period the hamlet defenders would be expected to use captured weapons and ammunition for their self-defense program. In short the Strategic Hamlet Program became one of the government’s prevailing pacification programs.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Osborne, 24.

<sup>69</sup>Department of the Army, *PROVN*, A-26.

<sup>70</sup>Osborne, 24-26.

## U.S. Support to the Republic of Vietnam 1950-1963

U.S. aid to the State of Vietnam began in the early 1950s to prevent the expansion of communism, and increased as Viet Cong subversion grew more violent in 1961. U.S. military and economic aid to Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and the French in South East Asia began shortly after 24 May 1950 “to restore stability and pursue their peaceful and democratic development.”<sup>71</sup> As a result, President Truman established the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (USMAAG) to convey aid to the French Expeditionary Corps in Indochina.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, in September 1952 the U.S. agreed to assist France in the creation of national armies for Cambodia and Vietnam.<sup>73</sup> These early assistance programs set the conditions for the development of the CIDG program in 1961.

As part of the Military Assistance Program (MAP) the U.S. Army’s Special Forces trained the Army of the Republic of Vietnam in counterinsurgency operations and the Vietnamese Special Forces in guerilla warfare prior to 1962. In November 1957, U.S. Special Forces advisors trained fifty-eight members of the First Observation Group at Nha Trang, South Vietnam in Unconventional Warfare as part of the Military Assistance Program. Incidentally, the Vietnamese Special Forces evolved from the Presidential Survey Office, one of President Diem’s special police to repress dissidents, in February

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<sup>71</sup>Department of the Army, *PROVN*, F-11 to F-15.

<sup>72</sup>Robert H. Whitlow, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Advisory & Combat Assistance Era, 1954-1964* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1977), 15.

<sup>73</sup>Department of the Army, *PROVN*, F-11.

1956.<sup>74</sup> In the event of an overt North Vietnamese attack, the First Observation Group was tasked to organize stay-behind guerrilla operations just below the 17th Parallel.<sup>75</sup> The First Observation Group was re-designated as the Vietnamese 77th Special Forces Group in November 1960 with a table of organization and equipment (TO&E) similar to U.S. Special Forces.<sup>76</sup> Based on the units' comparable capabilities to the U.S. Special Forces the LLDB was later assigned the primary role of organizing civil defense forces for the CIDG program.

The increase in Viet Cong subversion and attacks in 1961 significantly deteriorated security, and prompted additional U.S. support to the Republic of Vietnam.<sup>77</sup> Based on the increased size and capabilities of the Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces as well as current U.S. national security policies, President Kennedy issued NSAM 52 on 11 May 1961. NSAM 52 increased the amount of advisors assigned to the USMAAG and directed the deployment of approximately 400 US Special Forces soldiers to the Republic of Vietnam's Nha Trang training center to accelerate the training of the LLDB in

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 5-62; Sherman 83. The initial name for the Vietnamese Special Forces was the First Observation Group.

<sup>75</sup>Edward G. Landsdale, Excerpts from Memorandum to General Maxwell D. Taylor on *Resources for Unconventional Warfare, S.E. Asia*, July 1961; Military History Division, U.S. Army Pacific. *History of the US Army Buildup and Operations in the Republic of Vietnam 1 Jan 1961 to 31 Jan 1963*, 1; Le Thuan, "Vietnamese Special Forces." *The Green Beret* 2, no. 9 (September 1967): 24.

<sup>76</sup>Sherman 83; Thuan 24. The Vietnamese Special Forces are generally referred to as VNSF or Luc Luong Dac Biet (LLDB). Luc Luong Dac Biet literally translates to Army of the Republic of Vietnam Special Forces.

<sup>77</sup>Department of the Army, *PROVN*, A-1-22.

guerrilla warfare.<sup>78</sup> President Kennedy issued NSAM 111 based on recommendations from a fact-finding trip in October 1961 to assess the military and political situation in the Republic of Vietnam led by General Maxwell Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Walt Rostow, Deputy Special Assistant to the President for National Security. NSAM 111, issued on 22 November 1961, authorized an expanded U.S. effort to prevent further deterioration of the security situation in Vietnam. Furthermore, NSAM 111 outlined the U.S. military assistance for Vietnam that included expedited training and equipment for the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps for static defense so that the Army of the Republic of Vietnam became available for more offensive operations.<sup>79</sup> The military assistance activated in February 1962 since NSAM 111 effectively doubled the U.S. military advisory effort in Vietnam.<sup>80</sup> The increase in military advisors, specifically U.S. Army Special Forces troops, provided the impetus to develop paramilitary forces in support of the Republic of Vietnam's counterinsurgency campaign.

#### CIDG Operations October 1961-June 1963

The Combined Studies Division of the U.S. Mission in Saigon developed the Village Defense Program during 1961 as a concept to secure the Montagnard tribes from Viet Cong influence, and to develop intelligence on Viet Cong activity in the strategically

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<sup>78</sup>U.S. Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967: A Study Prepared by the Department of Defense, Senator Gravel Edition 2* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 432.

<sup>79</sup>National Security Council, National Security Action Memorandum 111, *First Phase of the Vietnam Program*; Edward G. Landsdale, Excerpts from Memorandum to General Maxwell D. Taylor on *Resources for Unconventional Warfare, S.E. Asia*, July 1961.

<sup>80</sup>Department of the Army, *PROVN*, A-1-22.

important highlands.<sup>81</sup> The highland areas were of strategic value because they contained the main infiltration routes for the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army to gain access to the Republic of Vietnam's population centers and critical infrastructure.<sup>82</sup> Control and support of the Montagnard tribes was also crucial to the government's counterinsurgency efforts to make the highlands untenable to the Viet Cong. In concept, the Village Defense Program provided a more effective employment of U.S. Special Forces operational detachments assigned to the U.S. Mission, and denied the Viet Cong further exploitation of minority group grievances.<sup>83</sup> President Diem approved of the program, and the Combined Studies Division organized a pilot program in Darlac Province in October 1961.<sup>84</sup>

The Combined Studies Division established the pilot program of the Village Defense Program with the Rhade tribe at Buon Enao; approximately three kilometers from Ban Me Thuot, Darlac Province, in October 1961.<sup>85</sup> The decision to begin the pilot program at Buon Enao resulted from the Combined Studies Division's detailed analysis that had revealed the Rhade tribe as one of the most advanced and intelligent of the

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<sup>81</sup>*Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) Political Action Program*, 3 March 1965, 2 [not in bibliography]; Francis J. Kelly, Center for Military History (CMH) Publication 90-23, *Vietnam Studies U.S. Army Special Forces 1961-1971* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1973), 7.

<sup>82</sup>Hickey, *The Highland People*, 1.

<sup>83</sup>Kelly, *Vietnam Studies*, 7.

<sup>84</sup>Sherman 84.

<sup>85</sup>McNeill 36-37; Detachment B-220, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), *Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) Project Outline for Buon Enao*, 1 September 1962; 1; Military History Division, U.S. Army Pacific. *History of the U.S. Army Buildup and Operations in the Republic of Vietnam 1 Jan 1961 to 31 Jan 1963*, 1.

Montagnard groups, as well as previous French success in the organization of the Rhade in the Groupement de Commandos Mixtes Aéroportés (Composite Airborne Commando Group or GCMA) during the First Indochina War, and intelligence reports of Viet Cong activity to gain control of Darlac Province.<sup>86</sup> The Combined Studies Division gained support to establish the pilot program by coordinating the pilot program's concept through the Presidential Survey Office (PSO) in Saigon to the Darlac Province Chief and Ban Me Thuot District official as well as the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group.<sup>87</sup> Subsequently, Paul Campbell, an Army Special Forces medic supporting the Combined Studies Division, initiated the pilot program at Buon Enao with the treatment of village members, and then offered a more robust medical care system if the village committed to the development of a self-defense program. Campbell's initial medical program provided the civic action necessary to gain the village's commitment to the program as well as the disclosure of the villagers' grievances against the government to further refine the program's immediate objectives.<sup>88</sup> The villagers' grievances included a lack of protection against the Viet Cong's terrorist acts, the discontinuation of government medical and

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<sup>86</sup>Francis J. Kelly, *The Green Berets in Vietnam 1961-1971* (New York: Brassey's, 1991), 6; Charles M. Simpson and Robert B. Rehaul, *Inside the Green Berets The First Thirty Years: A History of the US Army Special Forces* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1983), 102.

<sup>87</sup>Detachment B-220, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne). *Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) Project Outline for Buon Enao*, 1 September 1962, 1.

<sup>88</sup>Seth Adam Gitell, "Broken Promise: The Story of the U.S. Army Special Forces and the Dega People in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam, 1961-1965," *Broken Promises by Seth Adam Gitell, Betrayal as Usual by Jim Morris, and Other Readings on U.S. Army Special Forces and the Montagnards of South Vietnam*, ed. Stephen Sherman (Houston, TX: The Radix Press, 1996), 37-38; Louis O. Vipperman, "Genesis of the CIDG Program," August 1969, 1-2.

education programs due to a general lack of security, and the distribution of tribal land to ethnic Vietnamese settlers.<sup>89</sup> After two weeks of interaction and medical care the village elders agreed to construct a defensive perimeter fence, construct shelters to protect against an attack, assist in the development of an intelligence network, and to construct a village dispensary in return for more aid.<sup>90</sup> Civic action efforts such as steps to reduce economic exploitation, preventative medicine, improvements in agricultural practices, and empowerment of key village personnel to enable self-sufficiency committed the population to the Village Defense Program.<sup>91</sup> By the second week of November 1961 the village declared its defiance to the Viet Cong, and committed fifty volunteers for strike force training. With the Buon Enao camp established, the program extended to forty other Rhade villages within a fifteen-kilometer radius.<sup>92</sup>

The Buon Enao camp became the hub for training and support as other hamlets in Darlac Province enrolled in the program. Expansion efforts in Darlac Province established new area development complexes west toward Ban Don on the border; southeast via Lat Thien, Dalat, and Phan Rang on the coast; as well as north to Buon Ho, Cheo Reo, and Cung Son.<sup>93</sup> A critical point in the expansion process included gaining

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<sup>89</sup>Sherman, 84.

<sup>90</sup>Kelly, *The Green Berets*, 24.

<sup>91</sup>Gitell, 39-50.

<sup>92</sup>Sherman, 84-85.

<sup>93</sup>Detachment B-220, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), *Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) Project Outline for Buon Enao*, 1. French counterinsurgency theorist Marshal Hubert Lyautey's oil spot approach was influential in the CIDG program's expansion plans.

affirmation from the hamlet chief that his people would actively participate in the program.<sup>94</sup> The initial success at Buon Enao resulted in the infiltration of two complete U.S. Special Forces Operational Detachment Alphas, a total of sixteen personnel, to Darlac Province on 1 February 1962.

Buon Enao provided two CIDG training programs that supported expansion of the CIDG program in Darlac Province. Hamlet defense training organized village volunteers into a militia to provide local security for the village and the immediate surrounding one to two kilometer areas. Hamlet defenders received three weeks of training on weapons handling and minor tactics at Buon Enao before returning to their homes. Select volunteers remained at Buon Enao for additional training and formed area strike force companies. Unlike the hamlet militia, the strike forces were a full time paramilitary force capable of employment as platoons or companies. The strike force conducted continuous patrolling to check on hamlet defenses as well as provided security during expansion efforts or hamlet defender re-training. The strike force also reinforced villages under attack in addition to raids or ambushes on the Viet Cong. Within a few months the CIDG program trained and armed more than 12,000 Rhade tribesmen in Darlac province alone, and by the end of 1962 the CIDG program trained 5,000 camp strike force personnel to protect the Montagnards from Viet Cong influence.<sup>95</sup>

Based on the success of the pilot program in Darlac Province the Combined Studies Division attempted to expand the program into other strategic areas and minority

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<sup>94</sup>Sherman, 85.

<sup>95</sup>McNeill, 36-37; William E. Colby, Memorandum to Mr. B. Chalmers Wood, Director, Working Group, Vietnam on *Transmittal of Memorandum Concerning Manpower Utilization in South Vietnam*, 19 February 1963, 5.

groups within the Republic of Vietnam.<sup>96</sup> Each expansion effort maintained the same theme—to mobilize support for the government within minority groups isolated from government influence.<sup>97</sup> Figure 3 depicts the location of CIDG camps in 1963. In addition to expanding the CIDG program to other Montagnard areas the Combined Studies Division developed similar paramilitary programs such as the Fighting Fathers and Catholic Youth, the Republican Youth, the trail watcher program, the mountain commandos, and the civic action cadre.<sup>98</sup> Illustrating the growth of the CIDG program, a Combined Studies Division report from June 1962 listed 2,185 men in various training phases and another 4,000 volunteers awaiting training.<sup>99</sup>

The area development concept established in Darlac Province remained the operational approach for all later CIDG efforts. CIDG camps had the mission to “a) to establish a base camp for training strike forces and village defenders, b) conduct an area development program and bring government influence to the local populace, c) conduct

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<sup>96</sup>Morton, 40.

<sup>97</sup>Sherman, 86.

<sup>98</sup>Combined Studies Division, U.S. Mission-Saigon, Central Intelligence Agency, “Covert Annex” to the *Status Report of the Task Force Southeast Asia Covert Annex – Vietnam*, 5-17 September 62; Colby, 6; Morton, 32; Sherman, 86. Catholic priests that organized their parishes under the area development program were enrolled into The Fighting Fathers and Catholic Youth Programs. Thus, parish centers became the combat villages with the village youth organized as a paramilitary defense force. The Republican Youth program provided instruction and indoctrination of select individuals on the Republic of Vietnam’s constitution. At the completion of training graduates were issued blue uniforms and served as a source of democratic motivation within the hamlet. President Diem’s brother, Ngo Dinh Nuh, was the leader of the Republican Youth program. The mountain commandos were later renamed the mountain scouts.

<sup>99</sup>Combined Studies Division, U.S. Mission-Saigon, Central Intelligence Agency, “Covert Annex” to the *Status Report of the TF Southeast Asia - Vietnam*, 13-26 June 1962.

combat operations, interdiction activities and joint operations with Republic of Vietnam Army units, utilizing indigenous paramilitary forces, d) conduct psychological operations in order to enhance support for the government, e) establish an area intelligence system including agent networks, reconnaissance patrols, and observation posts, f) conduct a civic action programs, and g) where needed establish border screens along the Laotian and Cambodian borders.”<sup>100</sup> Typically, a LLDB officer commanded the area development center from a centrally located CIDG camp with the assistance of a US Special Forces ODA.<sup>101</sup> Security operations included hamlet militia training led by the LLDB, strike force training led by U.S. Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alphas, and combined patrols by the CIDG strike force. Simultaneously, small civic action and psychological operations projects reinforced the security operations in order to increase the population’s commitment to the government program. Above all the area development concept enabled the CIDG to accomplish its tasks to gather critical intelligence on insurgent activities and denial of Viet Cong influence to the Montagnards.

The CIDG program’s early success to increase security in Darlac Province and gain control of the Montagnards resulted in both praise and criticism. President Diem publicly expressed his satisfaction with the CIDG program on 30 August 1962. He also directed a combined approval process for future camps, that Provincial Chiefs assume the responsibility for the camps’ payroll, and the placement of Army liaison officers in the CIDG camps. Similarly, his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, proclaimed “Buon Enao is the

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<sup>100</sup>Sherman, 87.

<sup>101</sup>The LLDB integrated into the CIDG program after February 1962 with the increase in Special Forces Operational Detachment–Alphas (ODA) assigned to the program.

realization of an idea which has always been dear to me,” in a letter to Frederick Nolting, Jr., US Ambassador to Vietnam, dated 30 August 1962.<sup>102</sup> While the program helped the Montagnards defend against Viet Cong influence, a lack of government participation in the program instilled a false sense of future autonomy, and increased tension between the ethnic Vietnamese and Montagnards.<sup>103</sup> Illustrating the government’s concern with the CIDG program, in December 1962 Ngo Dinh Nhu attended a “highlander celebration” at Buon Enao. During the festivities General Ton That Dinh, III Corps Tactical Zone Commander, stated, “The Americans have put an army at my back,” when informing Nhu of the number of armed Montagnards associated with the CIDG program.<sup>104</sup> While the CIDG program supported the Republic of Vietnam’s struggle against the Viet Cong it also increased the animosity between the ethnic Vietnamese and the Montagnards.

#### Unity of Effort

The Republic of Vietnam established the CIDG program in the fall of 1961 to prevent the loss of the highlands and the Montagnard tribes to Viet Cong control as subversive violence dramatically increased. More importantly, the CIDG program achieved three objectives of the Republic of Vietnam’s counterinsurgency strategy. First, the program reduced the Viet Cong’s ability to conduct operations against the

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<sup>102</sup>Combined Studies Division, U.S. Mission-Saigon, Central Intelligence Agency, “Covert Annex,” 22 August–4 September 1962.

<sup>103</sup>Gitell, 49-52. During the early stages of the CIDG program the sole Republic of Vietnam support to the program was President Diem’s approval of the concept to initiate the program.

<sup>104</sup>Gerald C. Hickey, *Free in the Forest: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese Central Highlands 1954-1976* (New Haven, MA: Yale, 1982), 79-80.

government through reduced support, safe haven, and freedom of movement. Second, the program gained the support of the Montagnard tribes, which denied support to the Viet Cong. Finally, control of the Montagnards as well as a reduction in Viet Cong activity facilitated the integration of additional areas into the Strategic Hamlet Program.<sup>105</sup> The CIDG program provided a decisive component to the government's counterinsurgency strategy consistent with theory and doctrine of the 1960s.

The CIDG program primarily contributed to unity of effort between security forces. The program significantly increased a Province Chief's means to provide security and pacification to an average of 300,000 provincial residents distributed over an average area of 2,400 square miles. Essentially, the creation of civil defense groups amongst the Montagnard tribes established government control in the minority group areas and relieved the Army from static defensive duties in the highlands. The CIDG camp formed the nucleus of an area defense command that encompassed all hamlet militias, intelligence networks, and a strike force to protect the population from Viet Cong attacks. Hamlet residents provided intelligence and secured their local area with internally recruited hamlet defenders and strike force members. As a result the Provincial Chief could rely on the population, or at least portions of the population, to provide their own security, which allowed regular forces to concentrate on offensive operations against the Viet Cong.<sup>106</sup> Additionally, the increased level of security created by the CIDG program

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<sup>105</sup>Morton, 40.

<sup>106</sup>Colby, 2.

provided the Provincial Chief the opportunity to distribute government programs such as education, medical care, agricultural reform, and propaganda to the population.<sup>107</sup>

Joint operations against the Viet Cong in the U-minh Forest near Xuyen and Kien Giang Provinces between 27 March and 20 April 1963 illustrate the level of coordination between CIDG operations and regular security forces. Intelligence reports indicated a consolidation of Viet Cong units in the U-minh Forest.<sup>108</sup> As insurgent activity increased in the area, the Special Forces' advisors coordinated operations with the IV Corps U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group G3 section and the senior U.S. sector advisor. Simultaneously, the LLDB coordinated operations directly with the Province and District Chiefs.<sup>109</sup> The Viet Cong units dispersed from the area after two Army of the Republic of Vietnam battalions, a Vietnamese Marine unit, and the Tan Phu Camp Strike Force conducted two weeks of complimentary "search and clear" operations in the area.<sup>110</sup>

The CIDG program enabled unity of effort between the government and the military by setting the conditions for government pacification efforts. The goal for CIDG area development included the successful transfer of the area to the province's Strategic Hamlet Program for further pacification tasks. Douglas Pike, one of the leading experts

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<sup>107</sup>Morton, 40, 185.

<sup>108</sup>Detachment B-1, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne). Memorandum to US Army Special Forces, Vietnam on *Build-up of VC Activity in Tan Phu Area, An Xuyen Province*, 4 June 1963.

<sup>109</sup>Detachment B-220, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), Memorandum *Liaison Between ARVN, MAAG, and Special Forces*, 6 March 1963.

<sup>110</sup>Detachment B-1, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *Build-up of VC Activity in Tan Phu Area, An Xuyen Province*.

on the war in Vietnam, in *Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* describes the a successful Strategic Hamlet as,

the people (1) have cleared communists from the area, and have coordinated population-control measures with the police committee and hamlet chief; (2) have coordinated control of people and resources with the Vietnamese Information Service to indoctrinate the population, and successfully organized all the people; (3) have instructed and divided the work of all people as to their obligations when disaster strikes; (4) have completed defenses - such as fences, spikes, communications trenches, hidden trenches in all houses; (5) have organized two special forces cells in each hamlet; and (6) have held the election of an advisory council.<sup>111</sup>

The CIDG program eased a hamlet's transition to the Strategic Hamlet Program through the completion of tasks three, four, and five as well as the initiation of tasks one and two. The increased area security provided by the military enabled the government and civilian agencies to complete additional pacification tasks.

Despite the government's desire to counter the Viet Cong threat in the highlands, deep-seated animosity between the Montagnard tribes and the ethnic Vietnamese hindered unity of effort between the population and the government. Furthermore, the U.S.' unilateral approach to the CIDG program set an early precedence for Montagnard loyalty to the U.S. advisors rather than the Republic of Vietnam government. In fact, many Montagnards viewed the U.S. support as a buffer for mistreatment by both the Viet Cong and the ethnic Vietnamese that would eventually lead to autonomy.<sup>112</sup>

Consequently, the U.S. and Montagnard relationship developed during early CIDG operations also strained the relationship between the U.S. and Vietnamese Special Forces.

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<sup>111</sup>Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1966), 67. The special forces cells refer to the paramilitary organization of village defenders.

<sup>112</sup>Hickey, *Free in the Forest*, 83.

In some cases, often attributed to unwillingness, incompetence or discrimination, the LLDB refused to follow the CIDG training program and operational advice of the US advisors. Additionally, government and Montagnard tension became more evident between September 1962 and July 1963, when the Darlac Province Chief agreed to accept responsibility for 214 villages and 604-man strike force from the CIDG program, but was unable to pay the personnel. The continuation of U.S. Special Forces' support for an additional ten months prevented the loss of the CIDG capabilities as well as the potential for a Montagnard rebellion.<sup>113</sup> Some members of the Republic of Vietnam government feared that the successful arming of the Montagnards could result in future rebellions and directed the disarmament of many tribal areas in Darlac Province in 1963.<sup>114</sup> The government's inability to overcome Montagnard and ethnic Vietnamese tension significantly degraded other accomplishments to achieve unity of effort.

### Secure the Population

The CIDG program relied on an area development complex to secure Montagnard areas—militia to execute hamlet defense plans and provide local security; area strike forces for patrols and offensive action; and coordination with the District and Province Chiefs for support from Army units.<sup>115</sup> Security for CIDG areas included two concentric security zones. The inner security zone included outposts, sentinels, barriers, village

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<sup>113</sup>Headquarters, US Army Special Forces Vietnam, Memorandum for US Army Support Group, Vietnam on *Turnover of 214 Hamlets in Buon Enao CIDG Complex*, 26 July 1963.

<sup>114</sup>McNeill, 36-37, 52.

<sup>115</sup>Morton, 69.

defensive positions, and local patrols to prevent surprise attacks within a two-kilometer radius from a hamlet.<sup>116</sup> Hamlet defense forces consisted of a small group of residents trained in basic defense techniques and armed with excess Army equipment.<sup>117</sup> Area strike forces supported a network of hamlets generally up to fifteen kilometers in radius from a centrally located CIDG camp. Within this outer security zone the strike force conducted patrols, raids, and ambushes against the Viet Cong. Moreover, continuous strike force operations maintained area superiority through the principles of surprise, mass, and maneuver. Typically, Army units served as a mobile reserve for large-scale offensive operations against the Viet Cong infrastructure.<sup>118</sup> The areas' security operations not only protected the population from the Viet Cong but also aided in winning the support of the local people.

Although numerous examples of successful CIDG operations against the Viet Cong are available, two events in 1962 clarify the CIDG program's security efforts. The first occurred between 24 and 26 July 1962 when two Viet Cong company size elements attacked the hamlet of Buon Trap Mewal. Although the hamlet's militia was forced to withdraw after all their ammunition was exhausted, the militia with strike force reinforcements returned the same day and drove the Viet Cong out of the immediate area. Similarly, on 1 August 1962 a company size Viet Cong element attacked the hamlet of

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<sup>116</sup>Sherman, 85.

<sup>117</sup>Kelly, *The Green Berets*, 25. The Hamlet Defense Force is also referred to as the Hamlet Militia.

<sup>118</sup>Colby, 3, 5.

Binh Hung only to be driven off by the hamlet militia's mortar fire.<sup>119</sup> The combination of hamlet defense plans, counter-guerrilla operations, and intelligence provided a cohesive framework to isolate as well as reduce the base of support for the Viet Cong thereby securing the population.

#### Isolate the Insurgents from Sources of Support

The CIDG program's security operations and civic action projects provided the means for the Montagnards to reduce support to the Viet Cong. Hamlet defense training and area interdiction operations increased the population's protection from the insurgents' terror tactics.<sup>120</sup> The resulting reduction in guerrilla freedom of movement and access to the population forced the Viet Cong to resort to desperate measures such as food seizure, forced conscription, and hostage exploitation in order to gain the necessary support to survive.<sup>121</sup> As insurgent efforts became more desperate and overt the Army could identify and attack the Viet Cong infrastructure in the rural areas more easily. Similarly, the population's investment in self-help projects as well as civic actions to reinforce commitment to the program motivated the Montagnards to more aggressively resist Viet Cong influence. Area and population denial significantly reduced the Viet Cong's ability to gain support from the rural minority groups.

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<sup>119</sup>Combined Studies Division, U.S. Mission-Saigon, Central Intelligence Agency, "Covert Annex" to *Status Report of the TF Southeast Asia-Vietnam*, 25 July-7 August 1962.

<sup>120</sup>Sherman, 84.

<sup>121</sup>Ronald Shackleton, *Village Defense: Initial Special Forces Operations In Vietnam* (Arvada, CO: Phoenix Press, 1975), 137.

## Win the Support of the Population

The CIDG program used self-help, self-sufficiency civic action projects to win the support of the Montagnard tribes.<sup>122</sup> Primarily, medical care encouraged the tribesmen's initial participation while self-defense training with the promise of further assistance facilitated long-term support.<sup>123</sup> Other typical civic action efforts included self-help projects such as the construction of schools, medical clinics, agricultural improvement programs, and village defense training based on the needs of the particular village.<sup>124</sup> While the CIDG solutions to education and medical care were rudimentary at best the resultant level of security sustained support for the program. Similar to civic action programs, psychological warfare operations reinforced governance as well as CIDG operations and discredited Viet Cong activities.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, the U.S. and Vietnamese Special Forces transferred control of the program to the local people as swiftly as possible, which furthered the people's investment in the program. Specifically, Montagnard agricultural teams provided instruction in better farming techniques to include tool making and blacksmithing. Similarly, indigenous medical personnel trained by Special Forces medics manned dispensaries, administered sick calls, and provided basic medical care. Also, hamlet militias at the completion of training assumed responsibility for the hamlet's security and defense plans.<sup>126</sup> Area development activities

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<sup>122</sup>Sherman, 86.

<sup>123</sup>Gitell, 38.

<sup>124</sup>Shackleton, 18.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., 106.

<sup>126</sup>Sherman, 85-86.

appealed to the population's desire to maintain its way of life, and empowered the individual's active role against the Viet Cong.<sup>127</sup> The combination of increased levels of protection and civic action as well as empowerment of the participating tribesmen quickly won the support of the minority groups, and led to the rapid growth of the CIDG program between November 1961 and July 1963.

### Summary

Initial CIDG operations between November 1961 and July 1963 disrupted Viet Cong activity in the central highlands, gained the support of the Montagnards, and set the conditions for further pacification efforts. However, Montagnard support favored the U.S. rather than the Republic of Vietnam due to early unilateral U.S. operations. Additionally, continued animosity between the ethnic Vietnamese and Montagnards strained the integration of tribal areas to the Strategic Hamlet Program.

The first phase of the CIDG program provides several critical themes regarding civil defense forces. The first theme is counterinsurgency operations must address and validate the population's grievances in order to deny support to the insurgency. A civil defense force allows a government to address a portion of the population's grievances at the lowest level possible. The steps taken to counteract grievances demonstrate the government's commitment to the population, and gain the support of the population. Second, civil defense programs rely on the people's participation therefore it is critical to transfer responsibility of the program to indigenous leaders as early as possible. Additionally, the program must empower the indigenous leaders to continue active

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<sup>127</sup>McNeill, 44.

participation against the insurgency. Actions to empower the people accompanied by demonstrated success results in rapid growth. Finally, a civil defense force unifies the population's organized resistance against the insurgency with other security and civil efforts. A key concept developed by the CIDG program at Buon Enao that continued through the rest of the Vietnam War was the area development center. The centrally located CIDG camp provided concentric security and civic action zones as well as linkage to regular forces. Concentric area defense zones accomplish an economy of force while providing sufficient security to prevent expansion of the insurgency. Success within the area development zone was the combined result of governance, security, economic, and political coordination at many levels to counter the insurgency.

By August 1962 the CIDG program included over 200 hamlets encompassing nearly 60,000 people and 4,000 square kilometers of land previously under Viet Cong control.<sup>128</sup> The considerable success of the CIDG encouraged even more growth and the consolidation of other Central Intelligence Agency paramilitary programs under the CIDG. In light of this growth the Department of Defense believed the CIDG program should pass from CIA control to Department of the Army control based on NSAM 52. The final decision was made on 23 July 1962 to transfer the CIDG program to Army control under Operation Switchback with a 30 June 1963 transfer of authority date.<sup>129</sup> U.S. Army Special Forces–Vietnam (USASF-V) commanded by Colonel George Morton activated on 15 September 1962 as part of Operation Switchback to assist the Combined

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<sup>128</sup>Shackleton 136-139.

<sup>129</sup>Headquarters, U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam Memorandum *Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) Program* [for CINCPAC Conference] June 21, 1963, 1.

Studies Division in command and control of the US Special Forces Operational Detachments as well as provided continuity for the program during the transfer to U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam (USMACV) control.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup>Sherman, 88.



Figure 1. Republic of Vietnam Provincial and Corps Tactical Zone Boundaries

Source: Department of the Army, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Military Operations, *Study on A Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam (PROVN)*, March 1966, 1-27; George L. MacGarrigle, *The United States Army in Vietnam: Combat Operations, Taking the Offensive, October 1966-October 1967* (Washington DC: Center of Military History, 1998).

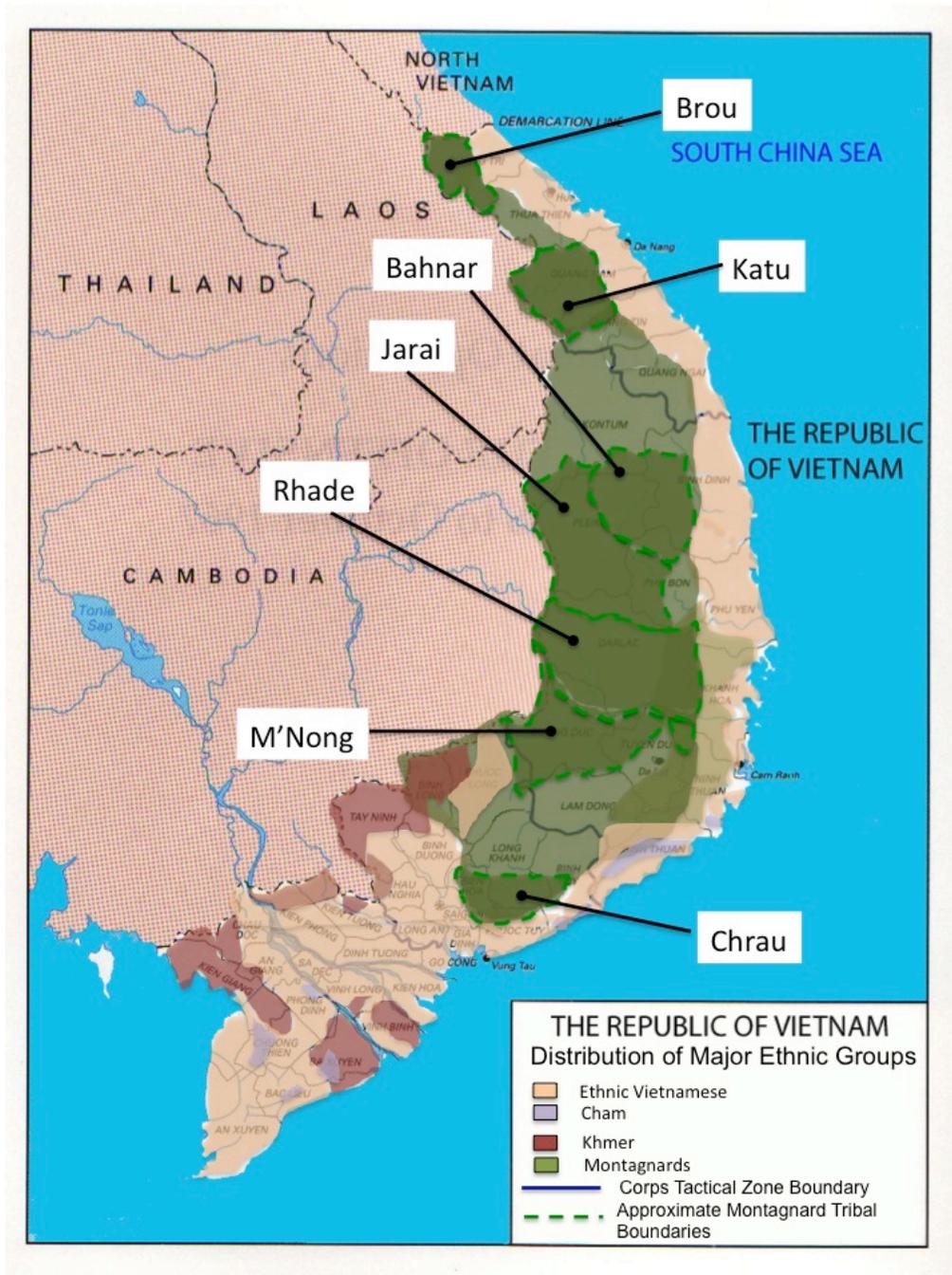


Figure 2. The Republic of Vietnam's Distribution of Major Ethnic Groups and Montagnard Tribes

Source: Gerald C. Hickey, *The Highland People of South Vietnam: Social and Economic Development* (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corporation, May 1967); George L. MacGarrigle, *The United States Army in Vietnam: Combat Operations, Taking the Offensive, October 1966-October 1967* (Washington DC: Center of Military History, 1998).



Figure 3. CIDG Camp Locations 1963

Source: Francis J. Kelly, Center for Military History (CMH) Publication 90-23, *Vietnam Studies U.S. Army Special Forces 1961-1971* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1973) Map 4; George L. MacGarrigle, *The United States Army in Vietnam: Combat Operations, Taking the Offensive, October 1966-October 1967* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1998).

## CHAPTER 4

### CIVIL DEFENSE FORCES IN ACTION: CIDG OPERATIONS 1963-1965

#### Overview

From 1963 to 1965 the Republic of Vietnam faced political instability and growth of the Viet Cong insurgency. Tension between the Republic of Vietnam's political organizations caused successive coups that detracted from counterinsurgency efforts. At the same time political instability and more support from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam aided Viet Cong growth. Additionally, military success against the Army of the Republic of Vietnam convinced the Viet Cong to shift to a combination of guerrilla and conventional warfare against the Republic of Vietnam. Also, based on the early success and continued expansion of the CIDG program, U.S. advisory support transferred to U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam and 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne). The aggregate of the Republic of Vietnam's operational environment led to a shift in the CIDG program's focus from an area control to offensive operations.

#### The Republic of Vietnam Government July 1963-May 1965

Political tension between the Republic of Vietnam's various military and religious factions led to a series of coups and political instability between 1963 and mid-1965. The Buddhist crisis began in May 1963 at Hue, the capital city of Thua Thien Province, when Buddhist monks protested a government ban on display of the Buddhist flag. Eight people died during the protests, but more violence followed when the Buddhists and the

government attempted to implicate responsibility for the deaths.<sup>131</sup> The Buddhists accused the Army and the police of using excessive force causing the deaths. Conversely, President Diem accused the Viet Cong of executions to aggravate existing political-religious tensions. Subsequently, many Buddhists reacted to the Hue violence with demonstrations, self-immolation, and riots that drove the government to declare martial law for Hue in June 1963.<sup>132</sup> Next, the self-immolation of Buddhist monk, Thick Quang Due, on 11 June 1963 caused additional riots in Saigon that required the commitment of Army units to end to the riots. As riots and more Buddhist monks used self-immolation to protest the government continued through August, President Diem agreed to extend martial law to the remainder of South Vietnam on 22 August 1963. Meanwhile a group of military leaders intended to use the declaration of martial law as cover to maneuver troops to launch a coup against Diem. However, Ngo Dinh Nhu ordered an attack on the Xa Loi Pagoda to discredit the military leaders. The government's inability to gain control of the Buddhist crisis coupled with the Xa Loi Pagoda raid scandal distanced U.S. support for the Diem regime. Incidentally, during the same time frame the Viet Cong decisively defeated the Ben Tuong strategic hamlet further decreasing Diem's support.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup>Seth Jacobs, *Cold War Mandarin: Ngo Dinh Diem and the Origins of America's War in Vietnam, 1950-1963* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 143.

<sup>132</sup>W. C. Westmoreland, *Report on Operations in South Vietnam: January 1964–June 1968*, 77.

<sup>133</sup>Westmoreland, 80-81. Ben Tuong, was one of the first strategic hamlets, and often used to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Strategic Hamlet Program. The Viet Cong overran the Ben Tuong on 18 August 1963 during the Buddhist crisis. "A United Nations fact-finding mission arrived on 24 October 1963 at the invitation of President Diem to investigate the charges of Buddhist suppression. Twenty-four hours before Diem was

Thus, discontent with Diem's approach to the Buddhist crisis merged with previous dissatisfaction with respect to Diem's approaches to land reform, minority groups, the Buddhist religion, and aggressive steps to counter the Viet Cong resulted in a significant decrease in political support for Diem.

Accordingly, several key military officers formed a coup that assassinated President Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, on 2 November 1963.<sup>134</sup> However, Diem's overthrow invalidated South Vietnam's constitution and disrupted the Republic of Vietnam's ability to extend governance.<sup>135</sup> Similarly, power struggles between South Vietnam's various political factions resulted in political instability at all levels of government and successive coups until mid-1965.

Continued political instability caused pacification efforts to peter out, which enabled the Viet Cong to gradually regain control in many rural areas. As a consequence the strategic hamlet program, President Diem's flagship pacification program, lost momentum as new political groups attempted to distinguish themselves from the Diem regime but failed to implement an alternative program.<sup>136</sup> This led to the Viet Cong's

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assassinated the fact-finding mission reported the charges of Buddhist suppression were unfounded to the United Nations.”

<sup>134</sup>Department of the Army, *PROVN*, A-1-23 to A-1-24.

<sup>135</sup>Westmoreland, 97.

<sup>136</sup>John B. O'Donnell, *The Strategic Hamlet Program in Kien Hoa Province, South Vietnam: A Case Study of Counter-Insurgency* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 11 May 1965), 53-55.

destruction of many strategic hamlets, the disintegration of numerous paramilitary units, and corruption within the remote areas that aided the Viet Cong.<sup>137</sup>

Government weakness and instability also impacted the Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces' operations against the Viet Cong. Many of the province chiefs, Army officers loyal to the central government under President Diem, changed with the political upheavals effecting security and civil administration down to the hamlet level.<sup>138</sup> The continued instability also weakened the Army of the Republic of Vietnam's leadership and discipline. For this reason offensive operations typically became short in duration and heavily reliant on fire support.<sup>139</sup> Despite the general lack of aggressiveness toward the Viet Cong, the Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces expanded thirty percent by the end of 1964 in an attempt to defeat the Viet Cong militarily in lieu of other efforts to pacify South Vietnam.<sup>140</sup>

#### Overview of Viet Cong Activity July 1963-May 1965

Political instability in the Republic of Vietnam between 1963 and 1965 enabled Viet Cong expansion and subsequent steps toward the final phase of communist insurgency, mobile warfare. After Diem's coup in November 1963, nearly all previous pacification efforts lost impetus, which allowed Viet Cong growth in the rural areas. In

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<sup>137</sup>Westmoreland 83; Combined Studies Division, U.S. Mission-Saigon, Michael V. Forrestal, Memorandum for President Johnson on *Present Situation in South Vietnam*, 11 December 1963.

<sup>138</sup>Forrestal, *Present Situation in South Vietnam*.

<sup>139</sup>Westmoreland, 83-84.

<sup>140</sup>Headquarters, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, *Command History, 1964*, 15 October 1965, 61-64.

particular, when the Strategic Hamlet Program dissolved guerrillas quickly overran many strategic hamlets to eliminate government control in the rural areas.<sup>141</sup> At nearly the same time, the Viet Cong increased kidnappings and assassinations to reduce government control and political instability. In fact, between 1962 and 1964 the Viet Cong conducted over 6,000 assassinations and 30,000 kidnappings with the assassination of 436 government officials in 1964 alone.<sup>142</sup> Government instability combined with the insurgents' coercion led to increased levels of dissatisfaction within the South Vietnamese people, and allowed the Viet Cong to grow from 4,000 men in April 1960 to nearly 40,000 men by 1964.<sup>143</sup>

Government instability also resulted in a reduction in Army aggressiveness and more Viet Cong military success. The Viet Cong achieved a dramatic military victory against overwhelming odds when they successfully stopped an Army of the Republic of Vietnam airmobile operation reinforced by artillery, mechanized infantry, and airborne units as well as American close air support at Ap Bac, Dinh Tuong Province in January 1963. The insurgents ended the battle with minor casualties, but inflicted nearly 200 hundred Army casualties along with five destroyed helicopters.<sup>144</sup> The Viet Cong's success at Ap Bac demonstrated the insurgents' commitment to both political and military action to overthrow the Republic of Vietnam. More importantly, success at Ap

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<sup>141</sup>Westmoreland, 81-83. The Viet Cong also increased attacks against the CIDG area development complexes to further reduce counterinsurgency efforts.

<sup>142</sup>Westmoreland, 97.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., 77.

<sup>144</sup>David M. Toczek, *The Battle of Ap Bac, Vietnam: They Did Everything But Learn from It* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 117.

Bac secured more support from the North Vietnamese government and indicated that the conditions in South Vietnam favored beginning the “mobile phase” of communist insurgency.<sup>145</sup>

The Viet Cong increased political and military pressure on the Republic of Vietnam to set the conditions for complete victory based on the Ap Bac victory and a boost in North Vietnamese support. The National Liberation Front increased its political infrastructure, particularly in areas formerly under government influence, to exploit the Republic of Vietnam’s instability and rally support for communist nationalism.<sup>146</sup> At the same time, Viet Cong conducted large-scale operations to defeat the Republic of Vietnam militarily. Particularly, two Viet Cong regiments gained control of most of Binh Dinh Province with the exception of the district towns and the provincial capital through continual defeats of Army, Regional Force, and Popular Force units operating in the province.<sup>147</sup> Next, in the final days of 1964 the Viet Cong committed its first division size attack against the Army of the Republic of Vietnam forty miles east of Saigon while regular North Vietnamese Army units moved south to join in future battles in the Republic of Vietnam. Shortly afterward in February 1965, North Vietnamese Army units conducted attacks near Dak To, Kontum Province as part of the communist goal to cut

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<sup>145</sup>Dale Andrade, “Westmoreland was Right: Learning the Wrong Lessons from the Vietnam War,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 19,no. 2 (June 2008): 152.

<sup>146</sup>Combined Studies Division, Central Intelligence Agency, Memorandum *The Vietnamese Communists Will to Persist: An Analysis of the Vietnamese Communists' Strengths, Capabilities, and Will to Persist in Their Present Strategy in Vietnam*, 26 August 1966, 7.

<sup>147</sup>Headquarters, U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1965*, 20 April 1966, 5.

South Vietnam from Pleiku to Qui Nhon.<sup>148</sup> Meanwhile, Viet Cong activity near Saigon included road and rail sabotage in Hop Tao, destruction of the Danheim-Saigon power lines to include attacks to prevent its repair, attacks to destroy South Vietnamese security forces, and subversion to neutralize the government structure in rural areas.<sup>149</sup> Generally, Viet Cong activity in 1964 and early 1965 revealed a definite increase in intensity to subvert government influence in rural areas as well as a shift toward mobile warfare in an attempt to decisively defeat the Army of the Republic of Vietnam.

#### CIDG Operations July 1963-May 1965

Rapid growth of the CIDG program in 1962 and early 1963 resulted in command and control changes, but allowed the program to survive the Republic of Vietnam's instability. In accordance with NSAM 57, the U.S. Department of Defense directed Operation Switchback in June 1962 to transfer control of the Central Intelligence Agency's paramilitary programs in Vietnam to US Army control as the CIDG program expanded and increased the requirement for more U.S. Special Forces advisors. Next, the Army established the US Army Special Forces-Vietnam (USASFV) command in September 1962, and gained operational control of the CIDG program in all four Corps Tactical Zones (CTZs) by January 1963. Although Operation Switchback concluded on 1 July 1963, the U.S. Army Special Forces-Vietnam provided the continuity that enabled

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<sup>148</sup>Westmoreland 84, 97, 99.

<sup>149</sup>US Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1965*, 6.

the CIDG program to endure the series of coups and political instability that ensued following President Diem's coup in November 1963.<sup>150</sup>

General Westmoreland's decision to delegate operational control of the Special Forces Operational Detachment Alphas (ODAs) to the corps senior advisors signified a second significant change in command and control for the CIDG program. To assist in this command and control relationship, U.S. Army Special Forces-Vietnam assigned a Special Forces Operational Detachment Bravo (ODB) to each corps tactical area.<sup>151</sup> As a result, this command and control relationship enabled U.S. advisors to leverage the success of the CIDG program and provide a more comprehensive counterinsurgency campaign.

As the Viet Cong insurgency grew based on the Republic of Vietnam's instability the U.S. committed more Special Forces troops to the CIDG program to prevent the loss of the highlands and Montagnard people to Viet Cong control. Figure 4 graphically depicts the CIDG camp locations in 1964. To provide more efficient command and control of the CIDG program as well as to eliminate the constant rotation of temporary duty Special Forces detachments; the Department of the Army approved the deployment

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<sup>150</sup>Kelly, *The Green Berets*, 57-58. Incidentally, Operation Switchback allowed the CIDG program to maintain a system of locally procured services and supplies as well as a quick procurement process for non-standard items not available through normal US Army supply mechanisms.

<sup>151</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1964*, 57. A Special Forces Operational Detachment-Bravo normally consists of six ODAs, and extends command and control to the ODA level. In February 1964, U.S. Army Special Forces-Vietnam included four Special Forces Operational Detachment-Bravos, one for each corps tactical zone, and thirty-seven Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alphas located at forty-four separate sites.

of 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), on 1 October 1964.<sup>152</sup> In addition to the improvements in continuity as well as command and control the 5th Special Forces Group codified much of the US Special Forces' support to the CIDG mission. For example, 5th Group defined its mission as providing

to provide advisory support in the conduct of the counterinsurgency effort in Vietnam. In addition to providing overall direction and supervision of the CIDG program within the area of operations: advises the Vietnamese Special Forces High Command, advises the Vietnamese 31st and 77th Special Forces Groups as well as the Vietnamese Special Forces Training Center; trains, advises, and directs the combat operations of the CIDG to include the payment of troops and purchase of supplies; directs and supervises the employment and operation of the combat intelligence teams committed throughout the country; and maintains the capability to execute unconventional guerrilla warfare missions in support of theater contingency plans.<sup>153</sup>

To demonstrate the integration and contribution of CIDG operations to the Vietnamese counterinsurgency effort 5th Group also published Letter of Instruction (LOI) Number 1 dated 1 January 1965.<sup>154</sup> Letter of Instruction 1 describes the Special Forces operation approach in five phases: "preparation, clear, secure, develop, and

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<sup>152</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1964*, 57-58. A Special Forces Operational Detachment-Charlie is a battalion-sized element commanded by an Army Lieutenant Colonel, and at full strength consists of three company-size elements, Operational Detachment-Bravos. The current term for a Special Forces Operational Detachment-Charlie is Special Operations Task Force (SOTF). Following the activation of 5th Special Forces Group, Operational Detachment-Charlies replaced the Operational Detachment Bravos as the command and control element for all Special Forces operations within a Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ). Resultantly, Operational Detachment-Bravos served as an intermediary command between the ODAs and the ODC. On 1 January 1965, 5th Special Forces Group included four ODCs, five ODBs, forty-four ODAs, and various support units to support CIDG operations.

<sup>153</sup>Vipperman, 1.

<sup>154</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) Letter of Instruction 1, dated 1 January 1965, is a revision of the 5th SFG (A) LOI Number 7, dated 3 November 1964. Following the publication of LOI 7 each ODA was required to provide feedback on the content of the LOI. LOI 1 is the result of this feedback.

civilian control.” Furthermore, the objectives of the CIDG program included “destroy the Viet Cong and create a secure environment; establish firm governmental control over the population; and enlist the population’s active and willing support of and participation in the government’s programs.”<sup>155</sup> In support of this operational approach Operational Detachment-Alphas performed operations consisting of “border surveillance and control, operations against [Viet Cong] infiltration routes, and operations against Viet Cong war zones or bases.”<sup>156</sup>

In addition to the changes in command and control the transfer of the CIDG program under Operation Switchback from July 1962 to July 1963, the program’s priority shifted to border surveillance and control under the U.S. Military Assistance Command–Vietnam.<sup>157</sup> The U.S. Military Assistance Command–Vietnam intended to expand the CIDG program to Montagnard tribal areas in the border region as a screening force given the fact that the CIDG program established eighteen camps in the border region during the Operation Switchback timeframe.<sup>158</sup> U.S. Military Assistance Command–Vietnam officially assigned the border surveillance mission to U.S. Army Special Forces-Vietnam on 1 November 1963, and directed the establishment of eight additional CIDG camps for

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<sup>155</sup>Office of the Director, Joint Research and Test Activity, JRTA Project Number 1B-154.0, *Employment of a Special Forces Group (U)* (20 April 1966) 2-3.

<sup>156</sup>Joint Research and Test Activity, 24.

<sup>157</sup>Central Intelligence Agency, Memorandum *Recent Military Assistance Command-Vietnam / Central Intelligence Agency Discussions Concerning the Transfer of Certain Programs*, 14 November 1963; Colby, 1-4.

<sup>158</sup>Kelly, *The Green Berets*, 46.

border surveillance duties in early 1964.<sup>159</sup> To clarify the CIDG's additional mission, U.S. Army Special Forces-Vietnam drafted the Border Surveillance-Control Operating Concept to

recruit and train personnel to serve in border surveillance and control units in populated areas; establish intelligence nets in the border areas to detect infiltration; direct psychological indoctrination and civic action programs in the border control zone; gain control of the international border little by little and gradually expand small secure areas until the border zone should be permanently under the control of the Border Command; and conduct guerrilla warfare and long-range patrol activities to deny the border areas to the Viet Cong by detection, interdiction, harassment, and elimination of the infiltration routes parallel to or through the border control zone.<sup>160</sup>

As North Vietnamese support to the Viet Cong through Laos and Cambodia increased in 1964 the CIDG's mission of border surveillance and control took priority over other area development efforts. As a matter of fact, by the end of 1964 the CIDG program employed six camps on the Laotian border and twenty-three on the Cambodian border, encompassing nearly two-thirds of the program's effort.<sup>161</sup> Despite greater emphasis on control of the border region, the Viet Cong infiltrated a sufficient volume of personnel and material to facilitate an increase in Viet Cong activity in mid to late 1964.

#### Unity of Effort

Despite political instability and the Viet Cong's steps toward mobile warfare the Republic of Vietnam's counterinsurgency strategy remained relatively unchanged between July 1963 and May 1965. The major differences in strategy for the CIDG

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<sup>159</sup>Westmoreland, 90.

<sup>160</sup>Kelly, *Vietnam Studies*, 46.

<sup>161</sup>Westmoreland, 90.

program included the additional mission to provide border surveillance and control, and the disintegration of the Strategic Hamlet Program. The CIDG program integrated the population into the security framework as a covering force to disrupt the Viet Cong infrastructure in the rural areas and infiltration routes from North Vietnam into the Republic of Vietnam. However, the area development complexes in the border areas were unable to significantly reduce infiltration rates or support to the Viet Cong infrastructure in the interior to prevent the insurgents' growth and transition to mobile warfare. Additionally, the program continued to gain the support of the Montagnard tribes, which denied support to the Viet Cong. Nevertheless, continuous animosity between the ethnic Vietnamese and the Montagnards resulted in the United Front for the Struggle of Oppressed Races (FULRO) uprisings in 1964 and 1965 as well as the population's continued commitment to the U.S. Special Forces advisors rather than the Republic of Vietnam government. Finally, the program's civic action projects contributed to pacification of the highlands. While the Chien Thang ("Victory") Pacification Program replaced the Strategic Hamlet Program following Diem's coup, the area development complexes' only connection to the program was the U.S. Special Forces advisors' support to the sub-sector advisory program in select areas.<sup>162</sup> The CIDG program continued to provide a decisive component to the government's counterinsurgency campaign despite devastating strategic flaws.

The establishment of U.S. Army Special Forces-Vietnam and later 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) as the in-country paramilitary program manager for U.S.

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<sup>162</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam *Command History 1964*, 65. The Republic of Vietnam government issued the "Chien Thang" or "Victory" plan to replace the Strategic Hamlet Program and to regain control of former strategic hamlets.

Military Assistance Command-Vietnam significantly enhanced unity of effort between the Republic of Vietnam's regular and irregular forces. While Operation Switchback transferred the CIDG program from Central Intelligence Agency control to U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam control it also consolidated other various paramilitary programs such as the Trailwatchers, Mountain Scouts, and Combat Intelligence Teams into the CIDG program.<sup>163</sup> Thus, U.S. Army Special Forces-Vietnam assumed control of a nation-wide, rural and minority-oriented area control and border surveillance program encompassing nearly 20,000 men with a budget of \$10 million per year.<sup>164</sup> Furthermore, General Westmoreland's decision to delegate operational control of the U.S. Special Forces detachments to the corps senior advisors increased the unity of effort between the CIDG program and other Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces by institutionalizing the combined efforts of both types of security forces as reflected in AB-139.<sup>165</sup> As a matter of fact, control over all Special Forces advisors to the CIDG program facilitated 5th Special Forces Group's ability to clarify and demonstrate the CIDG program's contribution to the Vietnamese counterinsurgency effort beyond 1964. More importantly, the integration of the U.S. Special Forces into formal advisory structures enabled the

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<sup>163</sup>Central Intelligence Agency, *Transfer of Certain Programs*; Colby, 1-4.

<sup>164</sup>Joint Test and Research Agency, 2-3.

<sup>165</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History 1965*, 137; U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam *Command History 1964*, 65. The Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Plan AB 139 delineated the objectives and missions of the Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces to continuously defend government lines of communication and strategic locations, continuously harass Viet Cong base areas and lines of communication, provide surveillance of the border, and support the Chien Thang Pacification Program.

CIDG program to endure the series of coups and political instability that ensued following President Diem's coup in November 1963.

The Special Forces' dual role of CIDG advisor and sub-sector advisor contributed to the coordination of CIDG and Provincial pacification efforts, which allowed unity of effort between the government and the military. The U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam assigned the sub-sector advisory mission to U.S. Special Forces advisors on 1 February 1965 in an attempt to better coordinate pacification efforts at the district level.<sup>166</sup> The subsector advisors assisted the provincial district leaders in the implementation of Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces' Plan AB 139 to continuously defend government lines of communication and strategic locations, continuously harass Viet Cong base areas and lines of communication, provide surveillance of the border, and support the Chien Thang Pacification Program.<sup>167</sup> To accomplish AB 139's objectives

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<sup>166</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1965*, 76. Prior to April 1964 U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam provided advisory detachments only to the sector or provincial level. U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam considered the provincial districts a subdivision of the province thus the title sub-sector advisory mission. In April and May 1964 U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam developed a pilot program of thirteen two-man sub-sector advisory teams. The success of the sub-sector advisory pilot program resulted in the US Ambassador to Vietnam's recommendation to expand the program in June 1964 with the initial assignment of forty-five additional sub-sector advisory teams to the top eight priority areas in August 1964. By the end of 1964 U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam employed 103 sub-sector advisory teams with plans to expand the program throughout 1965. Of the 181 planned sub-sector advisory teams, the 5th Special Forces Group provided twenty-nine teams in areas where CIDG area development complexes were the dominant security forces.

<sup>167</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1965*, 137; *Employment of a Special Forces Group*, 2-3; U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1964*, 65. The Republic of Vietnam government issued the "Chien Thang" or "Victory" plan to replace the Strategic Hamlet Program and to regain control of former strategic hamlets. The Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Plan AB 139 delineated the objectives and missions of the Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces to

provincial and district commanders employed Army, Regional Forces, Popular Forces, and CIDG forces to find, fix, and finish the Viet Cong within the commander's respective area of operations.<sup>168</sup> In order to accomplish the sub-sector advisory duties and area development duties simultaneously, detachments had to either co-locate the CIDG camp with the district headquarters or split the detachment.<sup>169</sup> In some instances the Special Forces detachments had difficulty conducting rural area security operations and sub-sector advisory tasks simultaneously, allowing one task to be performed well at the expense of the other.<sup>170</sup> Generally, the dual advisory mission provided effective results in the execution of the government's counterinsurgency campaign.

#### Secure the Population

The area development complex concept remained the CIDG program's approach to security in the rural areas. With the addition of the border surveillance mission, strike force operations increasingly focused on the interdiction of Viet Cong infiltration routes and bases to reduce the insurgents' ability to interact with the population.<sup>171</sup> In fact, nearly a third of the authorized 450-man CIDG strike forces were committed to patrols or offensive operations at any given time. Typically platoon size or smaller formations

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continuously defend government lines of communication and strategic locations, continuously harass Viet Cong base areas and lines of communication, provide surveillance of the border, and support the Chien Thang Pacification Program.

<sup>168</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1965*, 137.

<sup>169</sup>Kelly, *The Green Berets*, 76.

<sup>170</sup>*Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>171</sup>Joint Research and Test Activity, 24.

conducted area reconnaissance missions to locate Viet Cong elements within the area development complex. In the event the patrol made contact with guerrilla or main force units the strike force would emplace either a hasty ambush or initiate an air strike since the patrol's size limited its ability to destroy large enemy units.<sup>172</sup> In addition to locating Viet Cong elements in the area, the patrols established a pattern of routine interaction with the hamlets to check defenses and gather intelligence. However, the emphasis on border surveillance over area development resulted in less focus on directly protecting the population at hamlet level and more focus on protecting the area with strike force operations to interdict the Viet Cong.

#### Isolate the Insurgent from Sources of Support

The CIDG program's area development concept remained an effective technique to reduce the population's support to the Viet Cong, however it was not an effective technique to reduce the infiltration of North Vietnamese support into the Republic of Vietnam. Under the combined strategy of the Joint General Staff and U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, the CIDG area development complex on the Cambodian and Laotian borders provided two key functions: population denial and covering force operations for the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. The CIDG program's use of security and civic action continued to convince the population to support the Republic of Vietnam government over the Viet Cong. On the other hand, the CIDG program had limited ability to interdict enemy infiltration routes. Two key factors limited the CIDG's ability to secure the border. First, area development complexes didn't overlap because of

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<sup>172</sup>Oral History Interview, DC201203170001C\_Session1A.

poor camp placement. In order to provide maximum border coverage CIDG camps were on average twenty-eight kilometers or seventeen miles apart. Typically, strike force patrols remained within ten kilometers of the CIDG camp in varying patterns, which created large gaps in border security. Second, the 5th Special Forces policy to maintain two companies in the CIDG camp at all times to react to a major Viet Cong or North Vietnamese Army attack reduced the forces available to conduct area patrols to one company. In order to maintain continuous operations, within this company one platoon conducted a patrol while a second platoon conducted mission planning for an upcoming patrol, and the third platoon conducted refit and debriefing following a patrol upon return from a patrol.<sup>173</sup> The net result was one platoon per camp to cover the average twenty-eight kilometer distance between camps. However, the average area of influence affected by a CIDG camp was within a ten-kilometer radius. Thus, the Viet Cong units were normally able to avoid contact with CIDG forces, travel through the highland interior, and reach their desired operational areas to conduct attacks against the Republic of Vietnam.<sup>174</sup> In the end the CIDG's operations on Vietnam's border areas had limited effectiveness in assisting the government's counterinsurgency effort to isolate the Viet Cong from North Vietnam's support.

#### Win the Support of the Population

The government's unwillingness to alleviate ethnic tension between the Montagnards and the ethnic Vietnamese undermined the CIDG program's use of security

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<sup>173</sup>Oral History Interview, DC201203170001C\_Session1A.

<sup>174</sup>Kelly, *The Green Berets*, 47, 52.

and civic action to win the support of the population.<sup>175</sup> The immediate increase in protection against Viet Cong terrorism and coercion combined with basic medical care and relief supplies such as blankets, food, and clothing convinced the minority groups to participate in the CIDG program.<sup>176</sup> The population's primary desire to increase security enabled the program to reduce civic action efforts and provide more focus on the higher priority of increasing border security through strike force patrols.

Security and civic action won population's support for the CIDG program, but continued tension between the Montagnard tribes and the ethnic Vietnamese stymied the unity of effort between the government and the population to defeat the Viet Cong. As Montagnard dissatisfaction with the government increased the United Front for the Struggle of Oppressed Races (FULRO) organized an uprising amongst the tribes to force the government to address the minority group's grievances in 1964. The movement represented most of the Montagnard tribes, but the Rhade tribe reportedly organized 2,000-armed men to support the FULRO. Incidentally, the U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam believed the FULRO could organize up to 10,000 Montagnards, and feared the Viet Cong would use the rift to gain a considerable advantage over the government. However, the government's ethnic biases prevented substantial efforts to de-escalate the growing Montagnard movement. In September 1964, approximately 500 Rhade staged a minor rebellion at Ban Me Thuot based on the FULRO's 1 August 1964

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<sup>175</sup>Westmoreland, 90; Kelly, *The Green Berets*, 46.

<sup>176</sup>Kelly, *The Green Berets*, 59.

proclamation of grievances against the government and demand for autonomy.<sup>177</sup> In fact, Montagnards in five CIDG camps were prepared to support the rebellion, but Colonel John F. Freund, Ban Me Thuot Provincial Advisor, stepped in to assist a peaceful presentation of Montagnard demands to South Vietnam's Premier Khanh. Khanh responded to the Montagnards' request with goals for better schools, more medical facilities, and increased Montagnard representation in the government.<sup>178</sup> Given the long history of unfulfilled promises to the Montagnards the FULRO situation continued to linger through 1965.<sup>179</sup> Since the Montagnards fulfilled nearly two-thirds of the CIDG forces the FULRO political movement significantly impacted the CIDG program. For example, on 29 July 1965, FULRO forces penetrated the ranks of the CIDG force at Buon Brieng CIDG camp in Darlac Province, seized the camp, and threatened to hold the US Special Forces advisors as hostages. Three days later the FULRO force withdrew along with nearly 176 CIDG personnel. Next, on 7 September 1965 the commander of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam's 23rd Division dispatched troops to Buon Brieng to disarm all CIDG personnel at the camp and offer the opportunity to enlist in either the Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces or return to their homes.<sup>180</sup> Consequently, the CIDG advisors, as the expression of Republic of Vietnam's governance, were placed in an awkward situation to gain the trust and loyalty of the Montagnard people to actively

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<sup>177</sup>Headquarters, U.S. Army Special Warfare School, *Montagnard Tribal Groups of the Republic of Viet-Nam*, 2nd ed. (Fort Bragg, NC, March 1965) citing the translation of an original French document from Dr. Bernard B. Fall, 10.

<sup>178</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>179</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1965*, 23.

<sup>180</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1965*, 347-9.

participate in the CIDG program while government leaders often failed to follow through on promises for improved governance. In order to present a unified counterinsurgency campaign against the Viet Cong the government required the support of the Montagnards to gain control of South Vietnam's highland areas. On the other hand, the Republic of Vietnam government's inability to effectively address Montagnard grievances undermined a cohesive counterinsurgency strategy.

### Summary

CIDG operations between July 1963 and May 1965 disrupted Viet Cong activity in the central highlands and gained the support of the minority groups. While area development efforts remained effective the CIDG camps' border surveillance operations had limited impact on the infiltration of North Vietnamese support to the Viet Cong. Additionally, CIDG security and civic action efforts gained the minority groups' support for the program, but the Republic of Vietnam failed to capitalize on this success and allowed animosity between the ethnic Vietnamese and Montagnards to detract from the counterinsurgency campaign.

The second phase of the CIDG program provides three critical themes regarding civil defense forces. The first theme is counterinsurgency operations must address and validate the population's grievances in order to deny support to the insurgency. Without continuous steps to reduce the population's grievance the government perpetuates vulnerabilities that if exploited by the insurgents provide a significant advantage over the counterinsurgent. Second, civil defense programs contribute to security operations, but are not a replacement for regular security forces. CIDG strike force operations typically relied on platoon or smaller sized formations, which inhibited the unit's ability to destroy

large enemy units.<sup>181</sup> The average 320 square kilometer operational area for strike force platoon or even company operations impacted the CIDG program's ability to interdict Viet Cong operations. Finally, the area development complex provides a valid framework for security and government control. An area development complex links local hamlets to area security and governance programs, however it is not synonymous with the area defense operations used by conventional U.S. Army units.<sup>182</sup> It can be inferred that the U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam and Republic of Vietnam Joint General Staff desired the CIDG program to accomplish conventional area defense operations in the border areas although this type of operation is beyond the capability of a civil defense force.

The CIDG program expanded as well as matured between July 1963 and May 1965 with the activation of 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) in South Vietnam. The program's efforts to secure the highlands and gain the support of minority groups became better organized and supported. Furthermore, CIDG operations relied on area development and border surveillance to disrupt Viet Cong activities in the highlands. However, the Montagnards' FULRO uprising in 1964 convinced the U.S. advisors to reconsider the program and options to force the Republic of Vietnam government

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<sup>181</sup>Oral History Interview, DC201203170001C\_Session1A.

<sup>182</sup>Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-90, *Tactics* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2001) 8-4. FM 3-90 defines area defense as, "a type of defensive operation that concentrates on denying enemy forces access to designated terrain for a specific time rather than destroying the enemy outright. The focus of the area defense is on retaining terrain where the bulk of the defending force positions itself in mutually supporting, prepared positions. Units maintain their positions and control the terrain between these positions. The decisive operation focuses on fires into [engagement areas] possibly supplemented by a counterattack. The reserve may or may not take part in the decisive operation."

integrate the force while eliminating ethnic tension. In the meantime the steady flow of support from North Vietnam to the Viet Cong caused the CIDG program to become a covering force focused on interdiction operations. Accordingly, the CIDG program shifted its focus from primarily area defense and population denial to a more offensive role.

As the Viet Cong demonstrated its intent to move into the third and final phase of communist insurgency, mobile warfare conducted by large conventional forces to decisively defeat the Republic of Vietnam, the U.S. began the deployment of combat troops in March 1965. In April 1965 Secretary of Defense McNamara, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Wheeler, and Ambassador Taylor recommended that President Johnson deploy additional combat units to the Republic of Vietnam. The first U.S. Army combat units arrived in the Republic of Vietnam on 1 May 1965.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>183</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam *Command History 1965*, 37.



Figure 4. CIDG Camp Locations 1964

Source: Francis J. Kelly, Center for Military History (CMH) Publication 90-23, *Vietnam Studies U.S. Army Special Forces 1961-1971* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1973) Map 4; George L. MacGarrigle, *The United States Army in Vietnam: Combat Operations, Taking the Offensive, October 1966-October 1967* (Washington DC: Center of Military History, 1998).

## CHAPTER 5

### CIVIL DEFENSE FORCES IN ACTION: CIDG OPERATIONS

MAY 1965-JANUARY 1971

#### Overview

From 1965 until 1971 Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army conventional forces attempted to decisively defeat the Republic of Vietnam's military forces, and force a reduction in U.S. support. However, improvements in political stability and the introduction of Free World Armed Forces provided the means to prevent the loss of the Republic of Vietnam to communist control. Additionally, as the Republic of Vietnam's military capabilities improved the CIDG program transitioned to Regional Force and Army of the Republic of Vietnam Ranger Border battalions relieving 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) of the CIDG advisory mission.

#### North Vietnamese and Viet Cong Strategy and Tactics

Between 1965 and 1970 Viet Cong strategy remained focused on the collapse of the Republic of Vietnam as well as the cessation of US support. Throughout 1965, the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) attempted to maintain support areas particularly in the highlands and Mekong delta area to launch both guerrilla and large-scale main force attacks under General Vo Nguyen Giap's operational concept termed "strategic mobility." The North Vietnamese concept of strategic mobility included the use of massed combat operations supported by guerrilla attacks to decisively defeat the Army of the Republic of Vietnam.<sup>184</sup> Division sized forces organized in dispersed support areas

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<sup>184</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History 1966*, 19-22.

to launch large-scale attacks across a broad front to seize important objectives, destroy Army units, and expand control.<sup>185</sup> Simultaneously, guerrilla attacks supported the main forces' operations through persistent harassment of Republic of Vietnam and allied forces with the goal expand Viet Cong control and the additional commitment of troops to static defensive duties. Additionally, the Viet Cong prepared defensive positions to support base areas with the objective of inflicting heavy Army of the Republic of Vietnam and allied casualties. In order to leverage the demilitarized zone between North and South Vietnam as well as secure base areas in Laos and Cambodia the Viet Cong and NVA's main effort remained in the highlands of South Vietnam's I and II Corps Tactical Zones.<sup>186</sup> Simultaneously, the Mekong Delta or South Vietnam's IV Tactical Zone and Military Capital District served as a supporting area in order to maintain pressure on Saigon and develop political resistance against the Republic of Vietnam government.<sup>187</sup> By mid-1965 the Viet Cong intended to leverage the 'strategic mobility' concept to decisively defeat the South Vietnamese, however the deployment of US and other Free World combat units in 1965 and early 1966 delayed this goal.<sup>188</sup>

By the end of 1967, Army of the Republic of Vietnam and allied operations reduced available Viet Cong manpower by over twenty percent as well as disrupted

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<sup>185</sup>Dale Andrade, "Westmoreland was Right: Learning the Wrong Lessons from the Vietnam War," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 19, no. 2 (June 2008): 153.

<sup>186</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam *Command History 1966*, 19-22.

<sup>187</sup>Combined Studies Division, *The Vietnamese Communists Will to Persist*, 15-16.

<sup>188</sup>US Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1966*, 19-22; Andrade, "Westmoreland was Right," 153-155.

support areas.<sup>189</sup> In fact, the Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, testified to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee of Armed Services that the loss of Viet Cong support areas resulted in an increased reliance on the more secure base areas in Cambodia and Laos.<sup>190</sup> Additionally, the loss of support areas caused a reduction of manpower recruitment and available supplies. As a result the Viet Cong increased its reliance on the North Vietnamese infiltration of weapons, ammunition, radios, medical supplies, and food through Laos and Cambodia.<sup>191</sup> In fact, the heavy casualty rates between 1965 and 1967 as well as the reduction in support areas made it difficult mobilize additional manpower.<sup>192</sup> The Viet Cong resorted to attacks that achieved limited objectives such as the increase of freedom of movement in select areas, psychological effect of heavy casualties, prevention of the massing of Army of the Republic of Vietnam and allied combat assets, and continued harassment to commit more troops to static defensive duties.<sup>193</sup> Despite continued losses throughout 1967 the North Vietnamese leadership decided to shift the insurgency into Mao's third phase, destruction of the enemy, in order

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<sup>189</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History 1967*, 31.

<sup>190</sup>Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, United States Congress, *Fiscal Year 1967 Supplemental Authorization for Vietnam (H.R. 4515): Hearings Before the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, Ninetieth Congress, First Session* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967) 59.

<sup>191</sup>Committee on Armed Services, *Fiscal Year 1967 Supplemental Authorization for Vietnam*, 59.

<sup>192</sup>Combined Studies Division, *The Vietnamese Communists Will to Persist*, IV-1.

<sup>193</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1967*, 71-72.

to leverage a perceived decline in US public support for the Vietnam War. The result of this decision was the “1967-68 Winter and Spring Campaign.”<sup>194</sup>

In 1968 the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese launched three major countrywide coordinated offensives to collapse the Republic of Vietnam government and isolate US support to the South Vietnamese. The first offensive, also known as the “1967-68 Winter/Spring Campaign,” began in September 1967, but peaked in January 1968 with the Tet Offensive. The Tet Offensive included attacks against every major city in South Vietnam with the ultimate goal to incite a popular uprising against the Republic of Vietnam government. However, the first offensive failed when the Viet Cong forces were repelled out of the urban areas within several days of each attack and the popular uprising failed to materialize.<sup>195</sup> Following the major failures February 1968 the Viet Cong initiated a second ‘mini-Tet’ offensive on 4 May 1968 attacking 119 cities, towns, villages, and military installations with a main objective of Saigon.<sup>196</sup> Again, the second offensive failed to produce the desired results due to allied intelligence and spoiling attacks. The third ‘mini-Tet’ offensive occurred on 17 August 1968 when the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese attempted to seize the cities of Saigon and Da Nang while tying down other areas with harassing attacks to achieve a better position in the peace negotiations in Paris.<sup>197</sup> Similar to the previous two offensives the August attacks fell short of the Viet Cong’s political objectives. By the end of 1968 most of the Viet Cong

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<sup>194</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1968*, 37.

<sup>195</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1968*, 1, 37.

<sup>196</sup>Ngoc Lung Hoang, *General Offensives of 1968-69* (McLean, VA: General Research Corporation, 1978), 95.

<sup>197</sup>Hoang, 110.

and North Vietnamese Army units were in Cambodia, Laos or remote border sanctuaries and had lost nearly a third of their combat power during the three general offensives.<sup>198</sup>

After the failure of the 1968 offensives the Viet Cong shifted its strategy back to phase I of Mao's insurgency; organization, consolidation, and preservation of the insurgency movement for 1969 and 1970. Additionally, in 1969 the North Vietnamese government expanded its participation in the Paris peace talks, but remained vigilant in its position to re-unify Vietnam and the withdrawal of US troops from South Vietnam.<sup>199</sup>

In support of the peace talks the Viet Cong relied on guerrilla warfare tactics and terrorism to influence the withdrawal of US and allied troops from South Vietnam. However, during 1969 the Viet Cong conducted two general offensives. The spring offensive started on 22 February 1969 consisted of attacks to inflict damage to against provincial capitals, military installations in rear areas and outposts as well as and storage areas.<sup>200</sup> The summer and fall offensive included similar types of attacks with more emphasis to impose heavy US casualties leading to a demand within the US public for full withdrawal of forces. Meanwhile, North Vietnamese troops continued to infiltrate into South Vietnam while the Viet Cong increased political subversion in rural areas to maintain pressure on Saigon.<sup>201</sup> Although the Viet Cong experienced numerous military failures at An Loc as well as during Tet and the loss of support due to the Phoenix

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<sup>198</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1968*, 37-38.

<sup>199</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1969*, III-1.

<sup>200</sup>Hoang, 114.

<sup>201</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1969*, III-116 to III-140.

Program, the insurgents continued to re-group in order to eventually achieve their long-term goal of a unified Vietnam under communist rule.

#### Republic of Vietnam Government Response to the Viet Cong

The establishment of the National Leadership Committee achieved a reasonable amount of political stability for the Republic of Vietnam government in 1966 that allowed the Armed Forces to gain and maintain the initiative against the Viet Cong. Although the government had not fully overcome the many political, ethnic, and religious divisions within the South Vietnamese population renewed efforts to improve the economy, education, and basic services provided the momentum to counter the Viet Cong insurgency.<sup>202</sup>

From 1966 to 1970 the Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces strategy included four lines of effort to defeat the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army, extend government control through increased security capabilities, and to protect national resources in support of Revolutionary Development activities. The line of effort to defeat enemy combat troops consisted of inflicting casualties in excess of replacement rates, denial of support areas, neutralization of infrastructure, and the reduction of manpower through reconciliation under the Chieu Hoi program. Simultaneously, the second line of effort sought to expand the pacification effort through increased security. The third line of effort included the organization, equipping, and modernization of regular military units to improve combat effectiveness as well as the enhancement of territorial security capabilities. The fourth line of effort sought to restore and secure key national

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<sup>202</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1966, 7-8.*

infrastructure, facilities and resources.<sup>203</sup> In 1967 the Republic of Vietnam's Joint General Staff established national priority areas for each Corps Tactical Zone to support Revolutionary Development activities. Figure 6 graphically presents the Republic of Vietnam's national priority areas. The priority areas included major population centers, agricultural areas, and critical lines of communication. More importantly, the focused military efforts in the national priority areas sought to restrict the Viet Cong to sparsely populated and food-scarce areas in order to protect the population and control critical resources for additional Revolutionary Development activities.<sup>204</sup>

The concept of Revolutionary Development began on 21 February 1966 when the National Leadership Council re-designated the Ministry of Rural Construction as the Ministry of Construction.<sup>205</sup> In order to better describe the activities of the Ministry of Construction General Westmoreland and South Vietnamese Premier Ky defined Revolutionary Development as:

the integrated military and civil process to restore, consolidate, and expand government control so that nation building can progress throughout the Republic of Vietnam. It consists of those coordinated military and civil actions to liberate the people from Viet Cong control; restore public security; initiate political, economic, and social development; extend effective Government of Vietnam authority; and win the willing support of the people toward these ends.<sup>206</sup>

Furthermore, the Revolutionary Development program contained four types of cadre to support the government's pacification effort at the national to district levels. To start

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<sup>203</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1969*, II-9.

<sup>204</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1967*, 320.

<sup>205</sup>*Ibid.*, 506.

<sup>206</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1966*, 507.

with, the People's Action cadre trained the People's Self Defense Forces at the hamlet level as well as provided support for urgent needs regarding social welfare, health care, and education. Next, the Census Grievance cadre led censuses and conducted public opinion polling. Then the Civil Affairs cadre assisted with local elections and mentored elected representatives. Finally, the New Life Development cadre managed direct government assistance programs and organized assisted in the organization of self-help projects.<sup>207</sup> More importantly, Revolutionary Development program sought to involve the population in the government's pacification efforts in order to achieve a more democratic South Vietnamese society. The population significantly increased its interest in the Revolutionary Development program to defend themselves from future Viet Cong attacks following the South Vietnamese military success against the 1968 offensives.<sup>208</sup>

Following the first two Viet Cong offensives of 1968, the government established the Phung Hoang Dong Tien, also known as the Phoenix program, to accelerate pacification efforts and simultaneously destroy the Viet Cong infrastructure.<sup>209</sup> The Phung Hoang program coordinated the civil and military assets at all levels of government to attack or neutralize key members of the Viet Cong infrastructure, and included support from the U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam's Civil

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<sup>207</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1967*, 508.

<sup>208</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1968*, 520; U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam *Command History, 1969*, II-9.

<sup>209</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1968*, 250; U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Phung Hoang Advisor Handbook*, 20 November 1970, 3.

Operations and Revolutionary Development Support program.<sup>210</sup> The priority of effort included:

1) members of Viet Cong Liberation Committees and Alliance of National Democratic and Peace Forces, 2) [People's Revolutionary Party] PRP finance and economic cadres, 3) chiefs and deputies of PRP committees and steering sections (e.g. propaganda, culture, indoctrination, security, military affairs) at hamlet, village and district, and 4) communication-liaison cadres.<sup>211</sup>

Additionally, on 10 October 1968 Tran Thien Khiem, Chairman Phung Hoang Central Committee, directed a national goal of 3,000 neutralized persons per month to include a minimum of 1,000 persons within the high priority categories.<sup>212</sup> Furthermore, the campaign regained government control of over 770 of the 1,000 targeted hamlets in contested areas.<sup>213</sup> Thus, the combination of defeats in 1968 and the implementation of the Phung Hoang campaign directly contributed to the Viet Cong's return to phase I of Mao's insurgency.

#### US and Free World Support to the Vietnam War

The deployment of US, South Korean, Filipino, Australian, and New Zealand combat forces to the Republic of Vietnam beginning in May 1965 provided the stimulus to offset the Viet Cong's strategy of "strategic mobility."<sup>214</sup> In support of the Republic of

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<sup>210</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Phung Hoang Advisor Handbook*, 3.

<sup>211</sup>Tran Thien Khiem, Chairman Phung Hoang Central Committee of the Minister of Interior, Letter of Transmittal Number 2320/BNV/UBPH/TU/M, *Phung Hoang Dong Tien*, 10 October 1968, 2.

<sup>212</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>213</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History 1968*, 522.

<sup>214</sup>Combined Studies Division, *The Vietnamese Communists Will to Persist*, IV-5.

Vietnam's Armed Forces strategy, the 'Free World Armed Forces' were assigned the mission of destroying enemy main forces, base areas, and resources. By 1 January 1966 allied troops in South Vietnam included forty-five maneuver battalions and over 206,000 allied troops, however, as the Viet Cong operations became more aggressive the US deployed additional troops.<sup>215</sup>

Robert Komer led the U.S. effort to improve the coordination of U.S. military and civilian assistance to the Republic of Vietnam in 1967, which resulted in the establishment of the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) under U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam. The first step to improve U.S. assistance to the Republic of Vietnam's pacification programs began in December 1966 with the establishment of the Office of Civil Operations (OCO) as the single manager of all US civil aid supporting the Revolutionary Development program.<sup>216</sup> Next, in May 1967 consolidated all U.S. military and civilian assistance under the Deputy Commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS).<sup>217</sup> After 1967 CORDS assumed responsibility, monitored, directed, and evaluated all US support to the Republic of Vietnam's Revolutionary Development Program.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>215</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1966*, 65.

<sup>216</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1967*, 218.

<sup>217</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>218</sup>Dale Andrade and James Wilbanks, "CORDS/Phoenix: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam for the Future," *Military Review* 86 (March-April 2006): 15.

The Tet Offensives of 1968 shocked the U.S. public and resulted in widespread demand to withdraw U.S. troops from the Republic of Vietnam. Despite Viet Cong and North Vietnamese defeats during the Tet Offensives of 1968 the high number of U.S. casualties and rumors of a new draft call distressed U.S. public opinion on the Vietnam War.<sup>219</sup> Additionally, the U.S. public became concerned that the commitment of additional troops to the Republic of Vietnam would negatively impact the U.S. economy and further the financial crisis of 1968.<sup>220</sup> Declining public approval ratings influenced President Johnson's announcement on 31 March 1968 that he would not run for re-election, and led to the election of Richard Nixon. Further, on 9 June 1968 General Creighton Adams replaced General Westmoreland as the commanding general for the U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam.<sup>221</sup>

President Nixon introduced the "vietnamization" approach to U.S. support to the Republic of Vietnam to set the conditions for the withdrawal of U.S. troops. The term Vietnamization supported the "one war" concept and the development of additional Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces capabilities to take on more responsibility of the fighting against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army in 1969.<sup>222</sup> More importantly, these concepts focused on pacification, increasing Republic of Vietnam's

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<sup>219</sup>Dave Richard Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet: The History of the Vietnam War from a Military Man's Viewpoint* (New York: Ballentine, 1978), 258.

<sup>220</sup>Robert M. Collins, "The Economic Crisis of 1968 and the Waning of the 'American Century,'" *The American Historical Review* 101, no. 2 (April 1996): 396-422.

<sup>221</sup>Samuel Zaffiri, *Westmoreland: A Biography of General William C. Westmoreland* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1994), 315-316.

<sup>222</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1969*, V-146.

Armed Forces' modernization and combat capabilities, and the coordination of all available forces and assets to defeat the Viet Cong infrastructure.<sup>223</sup>

Under the Vietnamization strategy General Abrams executed a three-phased transfer of the war effort to the Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces. The first phase included the transfer of control of ground combat forces and an improved force structure. The second phase involved modernization as well as the development of Republic of Vietnam capability to provide artillery, air, naval, and support activities. The third phase assigned a more robust advisory structure consisting of regional assistance teams at Corps headquarters as well as provisional and division advisory teams.<sup>224</sup>

#### CIDG Operations May 1965-1 January 1971

From 1965 until mid-1969 CIDG strength continued to grow despite the increase in Republic of Vietnam and allied troops. The program rapidly expanded in all four Corps Tactical Zones reaching seventy-eight CIDG camps by December 1965 and 30,400 personnel; a 160 percent increase from January.<sup>225</sup> Figure 5 graphically depicts the CIDG camp locations in 1967. The expansion of the CIDG program during this timeframe resulted from the Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces strategy that focused conventional forces on the destruction of enemy forces and revolutionary development activities without allocating forces to secure locations outside the national priority areas.

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<sup>223</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1969*, II-3.

<sup>224</sup>James Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 21-42, 47-58, 277-288.

<sup>225</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *Operational Report for Quarterly Period Ending 31 December 1965*, dated January 1966, 6.

As the operational areas for conventional troops expanded from 1966 to 1970 camps either closed or relocated to other areas outside government control in response to enemy activity and in support of the Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces' strategy.<sup>226</sup> As a result of CIDG operations government control significantly increased in many provincial areas facilitating more intense operations by the Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army.<sup>227</sup>

The CIDG supported the Republic of Vietnam's military strategy by setting the conditions for "revolutionary development."<sup>228</sup> The Combined Campaign Plan for 1967 established National Priority Areas to focus 'revolutionary development' efforts and resources. In addition, the plan designated that Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces operations primary support Revolutionary Development activities while allied operations primarily focus on the destruction of enemy main forces, base areas, and resources to enable Republic of Vietnam operations.<sup>229</sup> However, most CIDG development areas did not reside within the National Priority Areas. Therefore, most camps provided the framework for government influence and protection to the population with minimum commitment of security forces. On the other hand development areas located within the National Priority Areas continued until a sufficient level of pacification allowed the transfer of the area to conventional troops. Typically, Army of the Republic of Vietnam

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<sup>226</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *Operational Report 30 April 1966*, 24.

<sup>227</sup>Desobry Debrief, 6.

<sup>228</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *Operational Report 31 December 1965*, 2.

<sup>229</sup>U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Command History, 1967*, 317-319.

and allied forces relied on large-scale operations to dislodge Viet Cong combat forces from an area while strike force operations kept the area improved security and pacification following the operation at the hamlet, village, and district levels.<sup>230</sup>

Additionally, a common tactic used throughout this period included the use of strike force elements to find and fix a Viet Cong or North Vietnamese Army force while conventional troops moved by helicopter to the area to finish the enemy force.<sup>231</sup> As a result CIDG area development efforts directly translated to strategic results.

The Mobile Strike Force, also referred to as “Mike Force,” was established in August 1965 at the Pleiku camp as a quick reaction force to reinforce CIDG camps under a large-scale Viet Cong attack.<sup>232</sup> In January 1966 the Table of Organization and Equipment (TO&E) authorized 198 Mobile Strike Force personnel organized into three rifles companies, a weapons platoon, and a combat reconnaissance platoon under 5th Special Forces Group’s unilateral control.<sup>233</sup> Next, in December 1967 the Mobile Strike Force expanded to 8,250 CIDG personnel grouped into forty-seven companies enabling the assignment of a company for each Corps Tactical Zone and at the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) headquarters in Nha Trang.<sup>234</sup> In many cases the assignment of Mobile

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<sup>230</sup>Ibid., 2; 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *Operational Report 31 December 1965*, 6-10.

<sup>231</sup>Franklin J. Yurco, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) Annex D, “Outline History of Company D, 1962-70,” to 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces Outline History, 10.

<sup>232</sup>Sherman, 16-17.

<sup>233</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *History of B-36 (III CTZ Mobile Strike Force)*, 1.

<sup>234</sup>Sherman, 16-17.

Strike Force companies as the Corps headquarters led to the inappropriate use of this force. A misunderstanding of the Mike Forces' role and capabilities resulted in the assignment of missions such as static defense, route security, and light infantry augmentation more appropriate for a regular infantry company.<sup>235</sup> Essentially, the Mobile Strike Force provided a rapid, airborne qualified, reaction force capable of reaching an area of responsibility in a minimum period of time to reinforce a CIDG camp under construction or heavy attack.<sup>236</sup> Admittedly, when the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army shifted to mobile warfare tactics in early 1965, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) and the CIDG program was pressured to conduct more offensive operations to locate and destroy enemy forces. While the CIDG strike forces were actively involved in the area development complex and border security duties the Mobile Strike Force provided the means to attack enemy units. Recruitment for the Mobile Strike Force was accomplished in the same manner as selection of the area strike forces—assessment of a volunteer's aptitude, motivation, and ability to perform duties beyond the village militia. Thus, village militias were often stripped of the best fighters to fill the ranks of the area strike force and Mobile Strike Force units. More importantly, the Mobile Strike Force created a multipurpose reserve force at the Corps and 5th Group headquarters level capable of raids, ambushes, combat patrols, and quick reaction with minimal disruption to conventional combat units.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>235</sup>Memorandum for General Peers, March 1965; Yurco, 10.

<sup>236</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), "Outline History of Company D," 7-8.

<sup>237</sup>Harold R. Aaron, Debriefing as Commander, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) 4 June 1968 to 29 May 1969, dated 12 June 1969, 5; Yurco, 7-8.

For locations outside the National Priority Areas limited resources and forces were available to support Revolutionary Development program objectives. Therefore CIDG offensive, civic action, and psychological operations in these areas constituted the main effort to achieve Revolutionary Development outside the National Priority Areas. At the hamlet level area development activities contributed to the six-point Revolutionary Development criteria for a secure hamlet specifically, “census, infrastructure, intelligence net; security forces; integrated defense; grievance and project councils; self defense, self-help organization; and the election of [a] hamlet chief.”<sup>238</sup> At the sub-sector advisory level, area development activities included the coordination and management of the security forces, development activities, and governance to support the Revolutionary Development programs. More importantly, nearly all CIDG area development techniques correlated to the Revolutionary Development framework, which facilitated transition and unity of effort.

From 1963 to 1969 CIDG forces converted to Regional Forces when areas surrounding the CIDG camps achieved a sufficient level of pacification to accommodate the area’s integration into the Revolutionary Development programs.<sup>239</sup> The Regional Forces provided local defense for provincial and district facilities, villages, and hamlets by conducting operations in the areas between villages and providing reactionary forces

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<sup>238</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *Operational Report for Quarterly Period Ending 31 January 1967*, 18.

<sup>239</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *CIDG Conversion After Action Report*, 28 January 1971, 4.

to support the Popular Forces.<sup>240</sup> More importantly, the Republic of Vietnam's Ministry of National Defense controlled and paid the Regional Forces as full-time, uniformed soldiers for duties within their home province.<sup>241</sup> However, disruptive factors such as inadequate administrative and logistic support, prejudice between South Vietnam's ethnic groups, individual alliance to American advisors over the government, and changes in Viet Cong strategy hindered the conversion process. For example, the U.S. Military Assistance Program's campaign plan for 1965 directed the conversion all CIDG companies to Regional Force units by 1 January 1967.<sup>242</sup> However, four critical flaws prevented the completion of this plan. First, conversion remained dependent on the area's degree of pacification, but the increase in Viet Cong aggression and large-scale main force units in 1965 and 1966 curtailed this plan.<sup>243</sup> Second, the \$44 billion cap on US aid to South Vietnam created a ceiling of 300,000 Regional and Popular Force personnel preventing the conversion of CIDG personnel. Third, the U.S. Military Assistance

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<sup>240</sup>Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Congress of the United States, Vietnam: Policy and Prospects, 1970: Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Ninety-first Congress, Second Session on Civil Operations and Rural Development Support Program, 17-20 February 1970. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), 716-717; U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Regional Forces-Popular Forces Handbook for Advisors*, 1 January 1969, 1. The Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps, originally developed as local militias, were integrated into the Army of the Republic of Vietnam in 1964. The Civil Guard was renamed the Regional Forces and the Self-Defense Corps renamed the Popular Force.

<sup>241</sup>Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Policy and Prospects, 1970: Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, 717; U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Regional Forces-Popular Forces Handbook*, 1.

<sup>242</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *Study to Resume Conversion of Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) to Regional Force (RF) Status*, 25 November 1968, 3.

<sup>243</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *Study to Resume Conversion*, 4.

Program did not authorize U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam the additional advisor billets or equipment to replace the US Special Forces advisors and CIDG equipment to facilitate the conversion process.<sup>244</sup> Fourth, many CIDG personnel didn't want to convert to Army of the Republic of Vietnam's Army or Regional Force units due to biases against the government and the possibility of duty in areas other than their home district. In other words the CIDG appealed to many people because it guaranteed duty near their village consistent with their values, but the Regional Forces conducted operations throughout the entire province potentially breaking down the village as a socio-cultural institution. Thus, the concept to convert CIDG units to other units was not fully supported and not a valid plan of action.<sup>245</sup> Despite annual goals to convert the CIDG from a paramilitary program to legitimate Republic of Vietnam military units a fully coordinated plan failed to develop until late 1969.

As part of the Vietnamization program U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam and the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff issued a combined plan to convert the CIDG program to Regional Force units on 1 June 1969.<sup>246</sup> Following the Montagnards' FULRO uprising in 1964 and minimal government steps to resolve the minority group's grievances, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) had looked at options

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<sup>244</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), Memorandum *Planning for a New Concept of Employment of US Special Forces, the LLDB, the CIDG, and the ARVN Ranger Battalions to form the Vietnamese National Constabulary*, 30 October 1966, 1.

<sup>245</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), Memorandum *Re-examination of the Ultimate Objectives of the U.S. Army Special Forces in the Republic of Vietnam*, 1.

<sup>246</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *S3 Plans Input to Group History*, 17 September 1970, 1. Secretary of Defense, Melvin R. Laird described the term 'vietnamization' as the transfer of additional combat functions to the South Vietnamese while at the same time reducing the number of U.S. combat troops.

to integrate the program into the Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces. However, the Viet Cong's shift to conventional operations between 1965 until after the 1968 Tet offensive hindered the conversion plans. Moreover, until the vietnamization program in 1969, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam did not have the force structure or level of competence to assume the border surveillance mission. Ultimately, the government benefited from the conversion process through the assimilation of minority groups, particularly the Montagnard tribes, into South Vietnam's political, social, and economic structure facilitating unification of the population.<sup>247</sup> On the other hand, converted CIDG troops received the sociological benefits of legalized birth and marriage certificates, medical benefits, disability pay, and retirement previously denied to minority group members.<sup>248</sup> Thus, the conversion to Regional Forces began on 1 January 1970 under the supervision of 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne).<sup>249</sup>

CIDG conversion to Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces units included two distinct phases during 1970. The first phase reduced overall CIDG strength from 54,000 personnel located in fifty-three camps to 21,218 personnel located in thirty-eight camps. Between 1 January 1970 and 30 June 1970 two CIDG camps closed permanently and thirteen CIDG camps within South Vietnam's interior converted to Regional Force companies. The reduction of these fifteen camps reduced the overall CIDG strength to 26,258 personnel and a total of thirty-eight CIDG camps. Also during this period the TO&E reduced camp authorizations to 525 personnel organized into three strike force

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<sup>247</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *S3 Plans Input*, 2.

<sup>248</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *CIDG Conversion After Action Report*, 6.

<sup>249</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *S3 Plans Input to Group History*, 1.

companies, three combat reconnaissance platoons, a heavy weapons section, and a Political Warfare (POLWAR) section. As a result of the re-organization total CIDG strength reached 21,218 personnel.<sup>250</sup> While the first half of 1970 continued the previous CIDG to Regional Force conversion program the second half of 1970 transferred the remaining CIDG personnel to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam's Ranger Border Surveillance Battalions.

The second phase to formally phase out the CIDG program by the end of calendar year began on 20 March 1970 with the decision to convert the remaining 21,218 CIDG personnel to Army of the Republic of Vietnam's Ranger Border Surveillance Battalions.<sup>251</sup> In accordance with the Joint General Staff's 26 June 1970 directive, the program reduced seventy personnel per camp to streamline the transition to the 461-man Ranger battalion TO&E.<sup>252</sup> The second CIDG conversion phase added thirty-one Army battalions or approximately 14,534 personnel by 31 December 1970.<sup>253</sup>

The 1970 CIDG conversion to Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces units encountered many of the same problems as previous transfer attempts. First, many CIDG personnel were forced to pay exorbitant fees for the birth certificates, marriage licenses, and dependent identification cards necessary to substantiate citizenship and complete the

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<sup>250</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *CIDG Conversion After Action Report*, 1.

<sup>251</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>252</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *S3 Plans Input, 2; CIDG Conversion After Action Report*, 2. In November 1970 the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff added six additional POLWAR personnel increasing each Ranger battalion's TO&E from 455 to 461.

<sup>253</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *CIDG Conversion After Action Report*, 6.

conversion process. Second, a shortage of available US advisors to the Regional Force companies and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam's Border Ranger battalions slowed the conversion process. In fact, U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam advisors to the Border Ranger battalions did not arrive until November 1970 after seventeen CIDG camps already completed the conversion process. Finally, while the Republic of Vietnam authorized 17,057 CIDG billets in the Army's Ranger battalions only 14,534 personnel completed the transfer based on individual allegiance to the US Special Forces leadership and previous grievances against the government. In many cases the CIDG personnel's allegiance to the U.S. Special Forces advisors resulted from civic action projects and personal relationships established to gain the support for program.<sup>254</sup> Incidentally, U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff, and 5th Special Forces Group anticipated resistance during the conversion process based on previous experience. Hence, cultural drama teams, political warfare bands, oral lessons, and other propaganda techniques were used in an attempt to indoctrinate the personnel to their new duties. Regardless, the 1970 transfer of approximately 54,000 CIDG personnel to the Republic of Vietnam's Regional Force and Army Border Ranger Battalions allowed many minority members the opportunity to gain official government status and continued gains in government influence in the Republic of Vietnam's remote areas.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>254</sup>Gitell, 45-48.

<sup>255</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *S3 Plans Input*, 5-6.

## Unity of Effort

Between 1965 and 1971 the CIDG program contributed the counterinsurgency strategy by securing areas outside the National Priority Areas and conducted operations to locate and disrupt Viet Cong forces. The CIDG program continued to primarily contribute to unity of effort between security forces. Although in many cases this relationship was lopsided due to conventional leaders misunderstanding of the role, capabilities and limitation of the CIDG force. When U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam assigned the border surveillance and control mission to the CIDG in November 1963, the program's main effort changed to border surveillance operations, intelligence collection, the interdiction of enemy infiltration routes, and the expansion of government control to the remote areas of South Vietnam.<sup>256</sup> The Combined Campaign Plan of 1967 essentially continued the use of the CIDG as an economy of force effort for both the Republic of Vietnam and allied combat units despite continued increases in conventional troops. More importantly, CIDG camps served a critical role in the areas outside the conventional units' footprint by providing forward staging areas, assistance to advance parties, local intelligence, participation in joint operations, and the provision of sector and sub-sector advisory duties.<sup>257</sup> Typically, strike force elements located and maintained contact with an enemy force until conventional troops arrived via helicopter to finish the enemy unit.<sup>258</sup> Resultantly, the coordinated effort between the regular and irregular units

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<sup>256</sup>*Extract from AB-144*, 30 May 1969, 1.

<sup>257</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *Operational Report 31 December 1965*, 6-10.

<sup>258</sup>Yurco, 10.

leveraged the strengths of both forces - the conventional forces' strike capability and the CIDG forces' ability to increase security facilitating government control at the lowest levels.<sup>259</sup> Additionally, for large-scale conventional operations CIDG units fulfilled critical roles as blocking forces, screening forces, and reconnaissance in force missions. However, on many occasions CIDG and conventional force operations misuse of the CIDG led to strained relationships between the two forces.

An excellent example of the coordination between the CIDG and conventional troops occurred in the Vinh Thanh valley of Binh Dinh Province during the final months of 1965. The Viet Cong occupied the Vinh Thanh valley with elements of the 2nd Viet Cong Regiment and the 95th People's Army of North Vietnam (PAVN) Regiment. Consequently, the district headquarters evacuated under duress in February 1965, and 10,000 persons displaced to the coastal plains of the province. Over the following months the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division and 2nd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) conducted twenty-seven joint operations with the Binh Khe and An Khe CIDG camps.<sup>260</sup> In October 1965 intelligence collected by a large-scale 1st Cavalry Division facilitated the successful clearance of the valley, and the immediate establishment of the Vinh Thanh CIDG camp. Throughout the operations to clear the valley local men were recruited, equipped, and trained at Binh Khe in preparation for the Vinh Thanh camp. The new camp expanded security within the valley facilitating the

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<sup>259</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *Operational Report 31 December 1965*, 6-10.

<sup>260</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *Operational Report 31 December 1965*, 27.

return of 6,500 original inhabitants as well as government control to a former Viet Cong stronghold.<sup>261</sup>

By the same token Special Forces advisory duties at the provincial and district level achieved complimentary operations between the CIDG and South Vietnamese Territorial Forces during 1965 to 1971. While the provincial and district advisory duties significantly increased the workload for more than half of the CIDG advisors the resultant coordination between the CIDG and the Regional and Popular Forces greatly benefited security efforts.<sup>262</sup> For example, on 15 May 1965 intelligence agents in the Phuoc An sub-sector reported the preparation of a two-company Viet Cong defensive position on the outskirts of a hamlet four kilometers from the sub-sector headquarters. That night a joint force organized from 350 CIDG personnel, two Regional Force platoons, the sub-sector chief, a LLDB ODA, and a US Special Forces ODA launched an attack on the Viet Cong position. The attack caught the Viet Cong units by surprise, and completely overwhelmed the enemy force preventing an organized counter-attack. This example provides significant insight into the coordination between CIDG and sub-sector forces specifically the timely response to local intelligence and the use of all available assets to disrupt Viet Cong activity.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>261</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>262</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *Operational Report Ending 31 December 1965*, 4.

<sup>263</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), Memorandum for Brigadier General William DePuy *Rhade CIDG and Regional Force Troops Conduct a Spoiling Attack Against a Viet Cong Unit*, 19 May 1965.

On the other hand two trends detracted from unity of effort—survivability of CIDG camps preventing enemy psychological and freedom of movement victories. The opposition to support specifically related to the allocation of air assets and commitment of quick reaction forces during emergency situations. As an example, Detachment B-32 reported that the US 25th Infantry Division absolutely refused to provide support to camps in heavy contact on numerous occasions between November 1967 and August 1968.<sup>264</sup> The second trend involved the inappropriate use of CIDG units. Due to conventional troop shortages some commanders attempted to assign strike force elements to static defense, route security, and unit reinforcement roles.<sup>265</sup> However, such duties remained outside the tactical training, fire discipline, and leadership capabilities of the paramilitary force. Thus, leaders had to maintain an understanding of the CIDG program's contribution to strategic and operational level objectives to fully benefit from its contribution to unity of effort.

### Secure the Population

Throughout 1965 to 1970 CIDG operations relied on the area development complex concept to secure rural areas and to disrupt large-scale attacks against population centers. Even though most camps were located outside the National Priority Areas the additional aircraft and artillery assets available from the increase of Army of the Republic of Vietnam and allied troops enabled the camps to conduct more effective

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<sup>264</sup>Detachment B-35, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) *After Action Report*, 5 August 1968, 2.

<sup>265</sup>Memorandum for General Peers, 8 March 1965; Yurco, 10.

covering force operations.<sup>266</sup> Furthermore, the strategic location of many CIDG camps incited attacks by large Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army units in an attempt to gain access to the Republic of Vietnam's population centers or draw conventional forces into a decisive battle. However, the North Vietnamese Army's main combat forces overran numerous CIDG camps. Generally, offensive operations launched from CIDG camps and camp defense assisted in increased security of the population through the control of key lines of communication and enemy disruption in depth.<sup>267</sup>

The establishment of new camps disrupted the Viet Cong's ability to sustain areas of safe haven, collect taxes, collect necessary supplies, and recruit manpower from the population. By way of example, the establishment of the Buon Ea Yang camp in Phuoc An District of Darlac Province on 28 April 1965 regained government control over several thousand residents, captured large quantities of enemy supplies, and eliminated Viet Cong influence within the camp's 400 square kilometer operational area.<sup>268</sup> During these operations the CIDG camp was extremely effective because the primary enemy forces were guerrillas.

Similarly, the successful defense of CIDG camps between 1965 and 1970 prevented further enemy action against the South Vietnamese population. First, the successful defense and Mobile Strike Force reinforcement of the Plei Me camp between

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<sup>266</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *Operational Report for Quarterly Period Ending 31 January 1967*, 1.

<sup>267</sup>*Planning for a New Concept of Employment of US Special Forces, the LLDB, the CIDG, and the ARVN Ranger Battalions to form the Vietnamese National Constabulary*, 1.

<sup>268</sup>Operational Report for Quarterly Period Ending 31 December 1965, enclosure 17.

19-20 October 1965 prevented the North Vietnamese Army from gaining access to Pleiku and control of Highway 19, the main line of communication between Cambodia and the South Vietnamese port facilities located at Qui Nhon.<sup>269</sup> Again, the failed attempts to overrun the Ha Thanh camp between 23 August and 28 September 1968 prevented North Vietnamese Army access to Quang Ngai, the capital of Quang Ngai Province, and also denied the Viet Cong a psychological victory. Finally, the successful defense of the Thuong Duc camp on 28 September 1968 disrupted the 21st and 141st North Vietnamese Army Regiments attempt to gain more freedom of movement between communist bases in Laos and Da Nang, attacks against the Da Nang port system, and control of the Han River as a line of communication. The earlier defense of Thuong Duc also enabled the execution of Operation MAUI PEAK, a combined US Marine and Army of the Republic of Vietnam operation, from 6-19 October 1968 to further reduce the Viet Cong infrastructure in the area.<sup>270</sup> Thus, CIDG operations protected the population from the Viet Cong's coercion and terrorism, which led to increased isolation of the insurgent movement.

#### Isolate the Insurgent from Sources of Support

CIDG operations to isolate the Viet Cong infrastructure from the population included lethal and non-lethal techniques within the area development complex.<sup>271</sup> Lethal operations included attacks on enemy formations, assistance to large-scale Army of the

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<sup>269</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>270</sup>Aaron, 9-10.

<sup>271</sup>Ibid., 18.

Republic of Vietnam's and allied operations, and the capture of enemy personnel and equipment. Non-lethal operations to reduce base support areas included the assistance to hamlets for the achievement of the six-point revolutionary development criteria for a secure hamlet, civic action, psychological operations, assistance to refugee groups, and the sub-sector advisory effort.<sup>272</sup> Throughout 1965 to 1970 new camps opened to expand security and government control.<sup>273</sup> As a result, the Viet Cong continually lost manpower, equipment, and support in previously accepted support areas.<sup>274</sup> In response to these operations the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army conducted large-scale attacks to accomplish the limited objectives of a psychological advantage over the population and to regain freedom of movement.<sup>275</sup> For example, the North Vietnamese Army committed massive forces to attack overrun the A Shau camp, southwest of Hue and five kilometers from the Laotian border, on 9 March 1966 in order to regain control of three major infiltration routes from Laos.<sup>276</sup> Similarly, the Viet Cong attempted a thwarted large-scale attack on the Tong Le Chon camp on 21 October 1967 in response to the camp's introduction of revolutionary development programs earlier in the month.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>272</sup>Aaron, 18.

<sup>273</sup>*Extract from AB-144*, 1.

<sup>274</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *Operational Report Ending 31 December 1965*, 4.

<sup>275</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *Operational Report for Quarterly Period Ending 31 October 1967*, dated 15 November 1967, 1.

<sup>276</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *Operational Report for Quarterly Period Ending 30 April 1966*, dated 10 May 1966, 1-2 and Enclosure 15 "After Action Report - The Battle for A Shau."

<sup>277</sup>*Ibid.*, 13.

Another example of this trend included the failed series of attacks, including an attack by five PT-76 tanks, on the Ben Het camp from 23 February to 3 March 1969 to regain freedom of movement along an infiltration route linking the Ho Chi Minh trail to Viet Cong base areas in Kontum Province.<sup>278</sup> While area development efforts remained effective in isolating the Viet Cong infrastructure from the population supplies, troops, and units continued to infiltrate into South Vietnam.

Additionally, during 1965-1970 improvements in CIDG intelligence collection and expansion into new areas contributed to a general lack of Viet Cong success. Prior to 1966 CIDG intelligence collection efforts focused on the camps' immediate area with minimal analysis at higher levels. However, in 1966 5th Special Forces Group directed the establishment of information analysis centers at each of the battalion level or Operational Detachment C headquarters to collate and provide intelligence products to the CIDG camps as well as adjacent conventional units.<sup>279</sup> The resultant emphasis on intelligence collection dramatically improved the quantity and quality of information for the CIDG camps as well as improved knowledge of Viet Cong activities.<sup>280</sup>

### Win the Support of the Population

Generally, the CIDG program relied on increased levels of protection to win the support of the population. Civic action projects and revolutionary development tasks

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<sup>278</sup>Aaron, 10-11.

<sup>279</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *Operational Report Ending 31 October 1966*, 3.

<sup>280</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), *Operational Report Ending 31 December 1965*, 4.

were conducted on a smaller scale than previous phases to enable more focus on offensive operations. The CIDG program won the contribution to winning the support of the population included area development activities linked to the revolutionary development programs. The establishment in December 1965 and subsequent operations of the Duc Co camp, in the Gia Lia Province bordering Cambodia, illustrate CIDG efforts to win the population's support. To regain control of the Duc Co area strike forces moved to assault positions during the night and cleared hamlets at first light. After securing a hamlet, all residents were interviewed to separate the Viet Cong cadre with follow-on searches as necessary. Next, the strike force held sick call for the hamlet that included the treatment of wounded Viet Cong. Shortly after, the strike force assembled the hamlet to celebrate the enrollment of any Viet Cong defectors into the Chieu Hoi program, and the immediate organization of security and civic action activities to assist the village.<sup>281</sup> Security activities included the preparation of defensive positions and intelligence networks while civic action activities included self-help activities to repair roads, schools, bridges, clinics, etc. In the Duc Co District over 6,000 people supported the CIDG program to include over 120 Chieu Hoi.<sup>282</sup> In summary, the CIDG program won the

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<sup>281</sup>The "Chieu Hoi" program also referred to as the "Open Arms Plan" recruited, cajoled, entrapped, or drafted Viet Cong and National Liberation Front leaders to reconcile with the Republic of Vietnam government. The program weakened the Viet Cong manpower by integrating over 194,000 members. J.A. Koch, Rand Report, R-1172-ARPA, *The Chieu Hoi Program in South Vietnam, 1963-1971* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, January 1973). Chris DeMure's Military Masters of Art and Science thesis, "Does Defection Matter? The Impact of the Chieu Hoi Program in Vietnam," provides additional analysis on the Chieu Hoi Program.

<sup>282</sup>5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) "Det A-215 Memorandum to Detachment C-2 Duc Co-A Successful Method of Operation" in *Civic Action Guide for Vietnam*, 13 December 1965, 104-106.

support of the people by improving security first and then instituting activities that supported the government's revolutionary development programs.

### Summary

CIDG operations between May 1965 and January 1971 disrupted Viet Cong activity in the highlands, gained the support of the minority groups, and enabled the integration of minority personnel into the Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces. While the program enabled an economy of force effort outside the national priority areas, the CIDG force had limited impact on the interdiction or defeat of enemy main force units. At the same time, the pressure to conduct offensive operations hindered area development efforts. Specifically, recruitment goals to fill the Mobile Strike Force units often stripped an area of its best fighters, which reduced the local population's ability to defend the area development complex.

The final phase of the CIDG program provides four critical themes regarding civil defense forces. First, civil defense forces must be part of an overlapping security effort. The combined campaign plan relied on the CIDG program to establish security and government control in areas outside the national priority areas in the same manner as conventional forces, which was beyond the program's capabilities. In most CIDG area development complexes, particularly on the border, conventional forces or assets were not available to defeat enemy forces resulting in pressure to conduct offensive operations in lieu of population denial and area security. Second, a dedicated reactionary force is necessary to prevent the loss of a civil defense force. The creation of the Mobile Strike Force in 1966 fulfilled a critical capability gap for the CIDG program from the previous two phases; a dedicated reaction force to improve the survivability of a civil defense

force, and to prevent insurgent psychological victories. However, the establishment and expansion of the Mobile Strike Force cost an area development complex critical manpower. Third, strategic and operational level leaders must understand the roles, capabilities, and limitations of a civil defense force. CIDG strike forces and the Mobile Strike force were often assigned missions and duties inappropriate to the CIDG program or failed to support a camp under duress. Finally, civil defense forces require a deliberate de-mobilization program that capitalizes on the program's capabilities and enhances the population's continued support for the government.

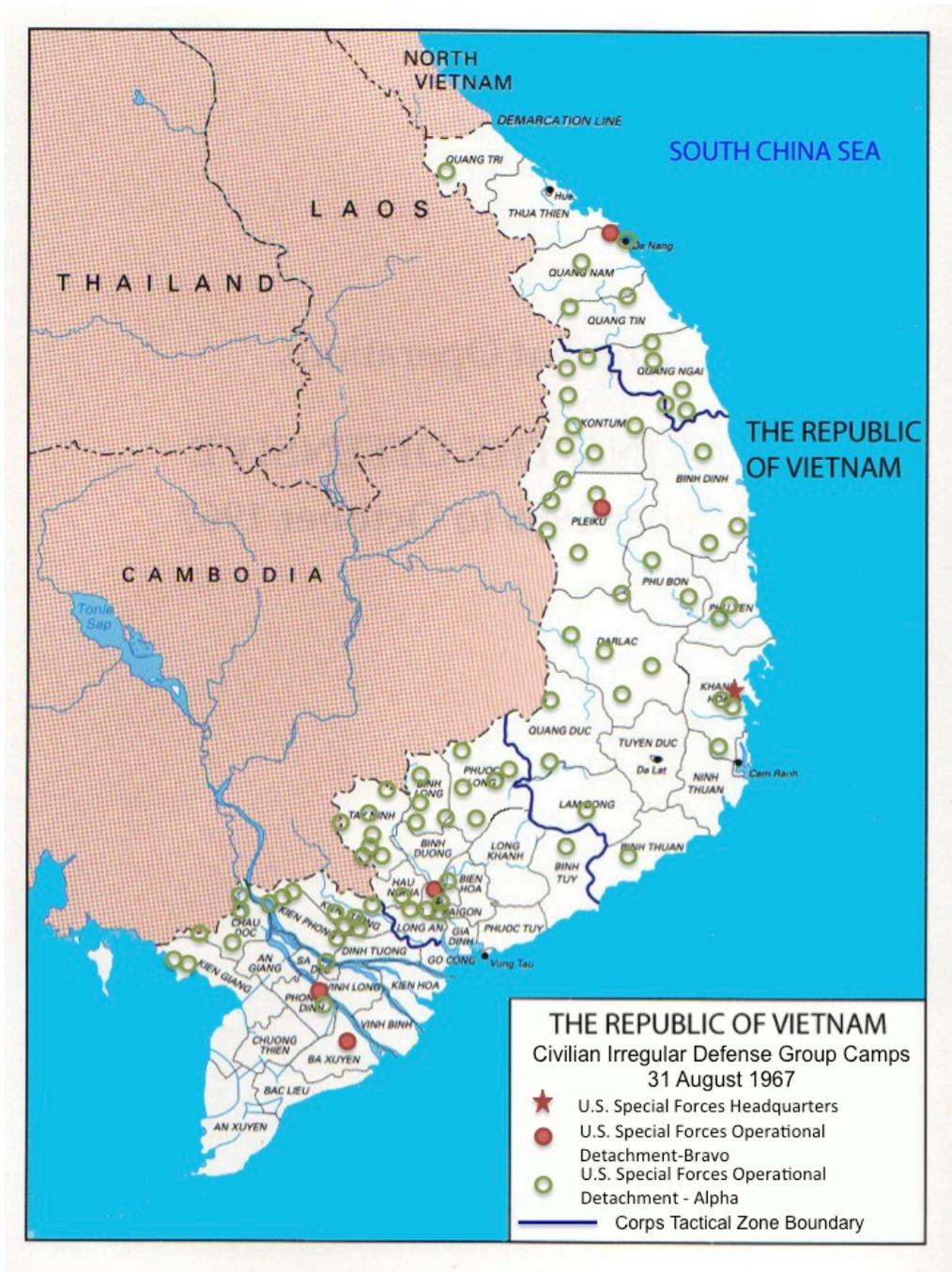


Figure 5. CIDG Camp Locations 1967

Source: Francis J. Kelly, Center for Military History (CMH) Publication 90-23, *Vietnam Studies U.S. Army Special Forces 1961-1971* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1973) Map 6; George L. MacGarrigle, *The United States Army in Vietnam: Combat Operations, Taking the Offensive, October 1966-October 1967* (Washington DC: Center of Military History, 1998).

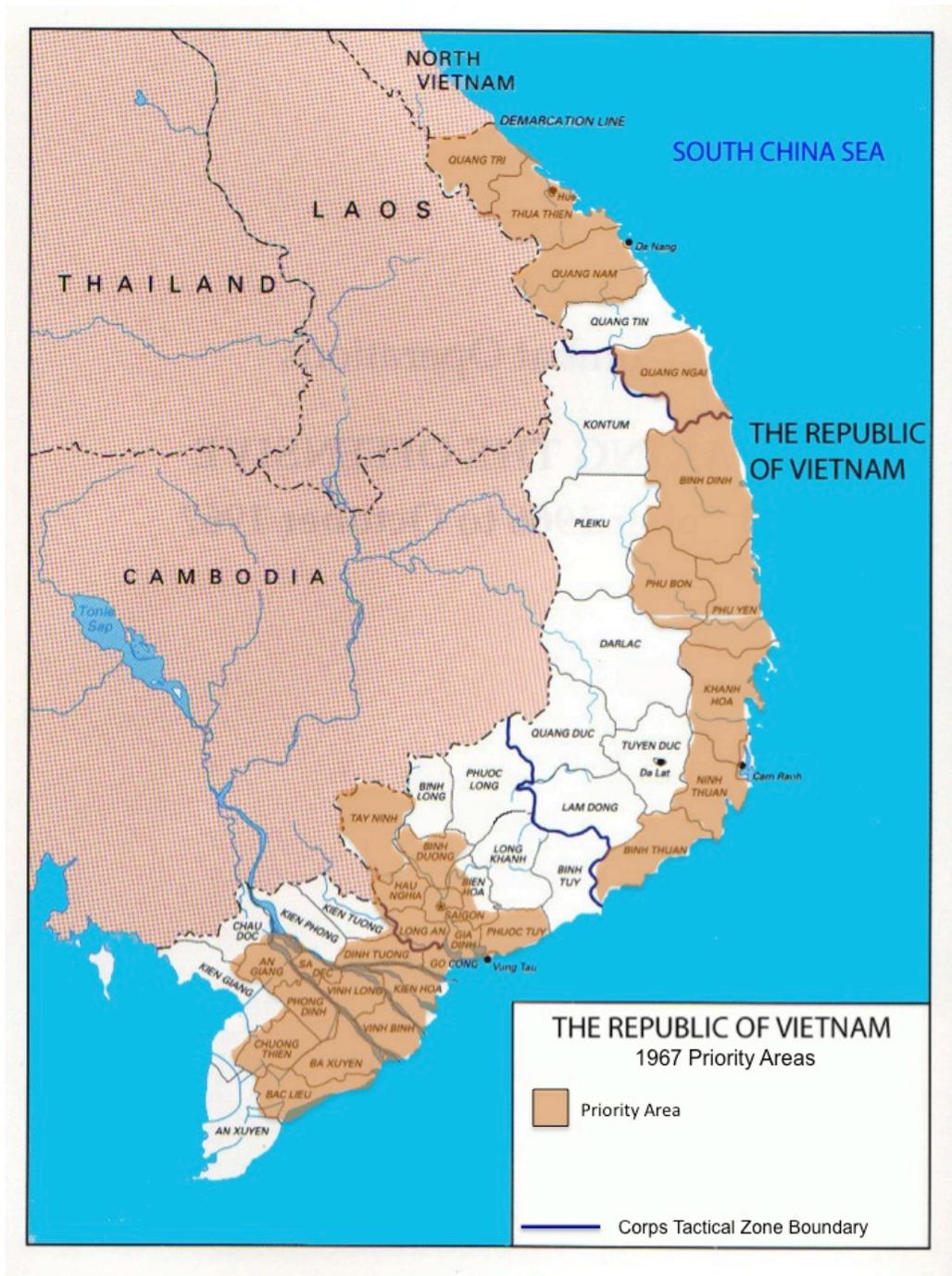


Figure 6. Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces' National Priority Areas, 1967

Source: U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, Command History, 1967; George L. MacGarrigle, *The United States Army in Vietnam: Combat Operations, Taking the Offensive, October 1966-October 1967* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1998).

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Conclusions

In 1961 the Viet Cong's subversive violence toward the Republic of Vietnam's government significantly increased. The deteriorating level of security developed concern that the Viet Cong would gain control of the strategic highlands, which contained the main infiltration routes to gain access to the Republic of Vietnam's population centers and critical infrastructure from North Vietnam.<sup>283</sup> An additional concern was the government's inability to gain control of the Montagnard tribes that resided in the highlands in order to deny support to the insurgents. Based on the U.S. Army's doctrine of the 1960s, the Republic of Vietnam's government implemented the Civilian Irregular Defense Group program. While counterinsurgency theory validated the civil defense force concept, the program also became a bilateral and national level proof of concept due to the struggle's basis of communist versus democratic governance. Therefore, the CIDG program is a case study in the success and failure of organizing civil defense forces from a local population to assist in the defeat of an insurgency.

#### Unity of Effort

The CIDG program contributed to both the success and failure in the Republic of Vietnam's unity of effort to defeat the Viet Cong. The program relieved the ARVN from static defensive duties and allowed the development of increased capabilities to conduct offensive operations. This enabled the government to conduct operations against the Viet

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<sup>283</sup>Hickey, *The Highland People*, 1.

Cong infrastructure in simultaneously strategic regions of the country. Additionally, the program enabled unity of effort between the military and government by linking security as well as civil action projects to pacification programs. Conversely, when strategic and operational level leaders failed to understand the CIDG program's role, capabilities, and limitations the program resulted in less effective operations against the Viet Cong and NVA units. For example, assignment of the border surveillance mission and the assignment of tasks more appropriate for conventional force units lessened the program's ability to provide area control and population denial.

### Secure the Population

The CIDG program increased an area's level of security by providing more protection to the population. The area development complex was a key concept in the establishment of hamlet defense plans as well as the creation of area strike forces. Within an area development complex hamlet defense forces provided protection of a hamlet's immediate area while area strike forces supported a network of hamlets. Additionally, the establishment of hamlet defense and area strike forces organized from the local community provided a sense of ownership in reducing the insurgents' ability to affect their desired way of life. On the other hand pressure from U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam and the Joint General Staff caused the CIDG to become more offensively focused. The increased focus on interdiction of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army main force units detracted from the program's original focus to develop static and mobile paramilitary forces to secure the area development complex.

### Isolate the Insurgent from Sources of Support

The CIDG program reduced the population's support to the Viet Cong, but was limited in its ability to affect external support from North Vietnam. Area development complexes relied on the closely aligned concepts of security and civic action projects to inculcate resistance to Viet Cong influence. While area self-defense capabilities were effective in reducing the population's support to the insurgents, the area development complex was not effective in interdicting North Vietnamese support to the Viet Cong. In fact, Viet Cong units were normally able to avoid contact with CIDG forces, travel through the highland interior, and reach their desired operational areas to conduct attacks against the Republic of Vietnam.<sup>284</sup>

### Win the Support of the Population

The CIDG program was effective in gaining the support of the population, however the government's inability to reduce ethnic tension hindered the program's success. The main objective of the CIDG program included gaining the support of the minority groups in order to restore government control and local security. In order to achieve this objective the program assisted in self-help projects such as medical care, education, preventative medicine, improvements in agricultural practices, and other projects that directly benefited the community. In turn, these projects developed a sense of pride within the people that encouraged efforts to protect these benefits from the Viet Cong. As the level of security increased additional projects were possible either under the CIDG program or under revolutionary development programs, which resulted in more

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<sup>284</sup>Kelly, *The Green Berets*, 47, 52.

support from the population as grievances subsided. The combination of increased levels of protection and civic action as well as empowerment of the participating tribesmen quickly won the support of the minority groups, and continued to result in rapid growth of the CIDG program. Additionally, the rapid transfer of leadership roles within the area development complex led to ownership and personal pride in the people's ability to continue their desired way of life. In contrast, the Republic of Vietnam government's unwillingness to reduce or alleviate tension between the minority groups and the government undermined the CIDG program's efforts to win the support of the population.<sup>285</sup> As a result, discontent with the government's reaction to the Buddhist crisis enabled the successful coup against President Diem in November 1963, invalidated the constitution, and caused political instability that set the conditions for the Viet Cong to initiate conventional warfare to defeat the Republic of Vietnam. Further, the continued tension and animosity between the Montagnard tribes and the ethnic Vietnamese caused the organization of the United Front for the Struggle of Oppressed Races (FULRO)'s uprising in 1964 in an attempt to force the government to address the minority group's grievances. Also, underlying grievances combined with minimal government support for the program resulted in misplaced support to the U.S. Special Forces advisors, who were credited for the reduction of grievances over the government. Finally, pressure from the Joint General Staff and U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam to conduct offensive operations to interdict Viet Cong and NVA units led to a reduction in civic action and psychological operations to win the support of the population while increasing over-reliance on security operations.

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<sup>285</sup>Westmoreland, 90; Kelly, *The Green Berets*, 46.

Undoubtedly, U.S. Army doctrine of the 1960s and classical counterinsurgency theorists were correct in emphasizing the importance of organizing civil defense forces from the local population to assist in counterinsurgency campaigns. Revolutionary movements grow into an insurgency when political action fails to persuade a government to address a population's grievances. An insurgency uses political subversion, coercion, and terrorism to gain additional support from the population. At the same time a government uses security forces, control measures, and the resolution of grievances to regain the support of the population. As a result, a population will support the side that provides the best resolution of grievances. The organization of the population, particularly civil defense forces, against an insurgency decisively affects the outcome of a counterinsurgency campaign.

A civil defense force program is a decisive component to a government's counterinsurgency effort that enables the denial of support to an insurgency and the restoration of government authority to an area. A population supports a government when the people have a greater sense of protection from insurgent coercion and terrorism. A civil defense force allows the population to undertake an offensive role against the insurgent's infrastructure thus increasing a government's ability to politically, militarily, economically, and socially defeat an insurgency. Additionally, to maintain the population's ownership and sense of self-reliance in defeating an insurgency a civil defense force program must be part of an overlapping security framework. Stated another way, a civil defense program is effective in establishing an area's security framework for a short duration in advance of clearing operations or after clearing operations, but is not a substitute for the regular military combat power necessary to

defeat armed insurgent groups. However, to fully gain the benefits of counter-organizing the population against an insurgency the government must actively take steps to reduce the population's grievances toward the central government. Therefore, success or failure of a civil defense program is reliant on the government's ability to leverage the population's will to resist insurgent influence.

### Recommendations

This study demonstrates the importance of a civil defense force program to a counterinsurgency campaign. A civil defense force enables a government to reduce an insurgency's guerrillas, auxiliary, and underground elements complimentary to conventional force operations. However, military leaders must ensure the program properly nests with the counterinsurgency strategy and utilizes the program within its capabilities to gain the maximum effect on the insurgents.

A civil defense force's operations should compliment the four counterinsurgency lines of effort: unity of effort, secure the population, isolate the insurgent from sources of support, and win the support of the population. While conventional forces provide the combat power to eliminate the armed insurgents a civil defense force should augment the framework to maintain security and government control in an area. A civil defense force program is best used in advance of conventional clearing operations to establish a basic level of security and control, however conventional forces should be prepared to reinforce area development complexes. Additionally, a civil defense force should remain after deliberate clearing operations to root out any remaining insurgent influence in the area. Further, a deliberate plan with clear criteria should be established early to indicate when to demobilize or transfer civil defense force volunteers to regular forces. More

importantly, military leaders must operationally synchronize the objectives and capabilities of the civil defense force program to gain the maximum impact on the insurgency.

A civil defense force provides an immediate way to increase protection of the population by organizing a local community to defend itself from insurgent influence. A civil defense force is capable of increasing security within an area by creating ownership in a defense force capable of active patrolling, interdiction of guerrilla forces, and the enforcement of control measures due to familiarity with the local area. While civil defense forces are organized as paramilitary forces they are not a one-to-one replacement for regular security forces. A civil defense force is trained to conduct specific tasks under specific conditions. Moreover, the organization's leadership is also dependent upon familiar relationships and social bonds than the type of leadership found in many military organizations. Additionally, a civil defense force program requires a specific type of advisory support. Advisors must be capable of navigating local customs, and social relationships as well as mitigate the risk and autonomy of working without direct military oversight. The U.S. Army Special Forces demonstrated in the Republic of Vietnam as well as later operations that they are the preferred force for organizing paramilitary forces. The final area of consideration for understanding the capabilities and limitations of a civil defense force program is the motivation for an individual to volunteer. In the CIDG program small, self-help civic action projects motivated the volunteers to increase security in their area. The reward of further civic action projects encouraged more participation in the program. The secondary motivation was the reduction of grievances against the government. In order for volunteers to commit to a civil defense force

program the government had to demonstrate its willingness to reconcile areas of contention between the population and the government.

In recent counterinsurgency campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq have focused on eliminating insurgents while creating security forces to replace US troops, installing a new government, and providing large civil-military projects assuming these efforts solely result in committing the population to its government. The difficulty with these efforts is the time, money, and people required to generate as well as sustain the programs. Security is a key ingredient for implementing such efforts, however, a lack of security increases the population's dissatisfaction with the government and allows insurgency growth. Experience and frustration with the counterinsurgency efforts resulted in two recent attempts to establish civil defense forces. However, both attempts were limited in scope and occurred late in the campaign. The Sons of Iraq program encouraged tribal Sheikhs to organize self-defense forces for al Anbar Province. Likewise, Village Stability Operations in Afghanistan seek to enhance local governance and improve livelihood by providing security within the tribal/village social structure.<sup>286</sup> The initial lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan indicate insurgencies will follow traditional combat when security and governance are lax due to other combat efforts. In order to succeed in future counterinsurgency campaigns the Army needs to consider how the lessons of civil defense forces in the Republic of Vietnam can assist future counterinsurgency operations. More importantly, the U.S. Army needs to develop leaders that understand the

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<sup>286</sup>Brian Petit, "The Fight for the Village: Southern Afghanistan, 2010," *Military Review* (May-June 2010): 25-32.

capabilities, limitations, and role of both regular and irregular forces that enable the operational synchronization of both types of forces to defeat an enemy.

## GLOSSARY

Civil Defense Forces. An irregular, paramilitary force formed from a community to defend a local area from insurgent attack or infiltration.<sup>287</sup> Dependent on the operational environment a civilian defense force may include static defense and mobile offensive functions.

Clearing Operations. Security forces conduct clearing operations to destroy or expel insurgents from an area.<sup>288</sup> Clearing operations are often abbreviated as clear.

Counterinsurgency. The summation of all political, economic, psychological, and military efforts to deter, defeat or debilitate an insurgent movement. The above definition of counterinsurgency differs slightly from Joint and Army doctrinal definitions of counterinsurgency. JP 3-24 defines counterinsurgency as the “military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency.”<sup>289</sup> While still a valid definition for counterinsurgency the doctrinal definition generally describes the US efforts to assist another nation in countering an insurgency within its sovereign borders. On the other hand, the above definition is more descriptive for understanding the impact of the CIDG program on the Republic of Vietnam’s counterinsurgency campaign.

Guerrilla Warfare. Consists of “combat operations conducted in enemy held territory by predominantly indigenous forces on a military or paramilitary basis to reduce the combat effectiveness, industrial capacity, and morale of the enemy. Relatively small groups employing offensive tactics conduct guerrilla operations. Above all, guerrilla warfare supports other military operations.”<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>287</sup>Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 31-15, *Operations Against Irregular Forces* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1961), 35; Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 31-22, *US Army Counterinsurgency Forces* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1963), 83 (Hereafter referred to as FM 31-22 (1963).)

<sup>288</sup>David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (London: Frederick A. Praeger Publishing, 1964), 87.

<sup>289</sup>Joint Chiefs of Staff, JP 3-24.

<sup>290</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.

Insurgency. The organized use of subversion and violence by a group or movement that seeks to overthrow or force change of a governing authority. Insurgency can also refer to the group itself.<sup>291</sup>

U.S. Army doctrine identifies the elements of an insurgency as the guerrilla force, the underground, and the auxiliary. Guerrillas are the overt element that conduct attacks and provide security for the insurgency. Further, guerrillas consist of irregular personnel organized along military lines to conduct paramilitary operations. The underground is a covert, cellular organization responsible for subversion, sabotage, intelligence gathering, deception, and other compartmentalized activities in support of the insurgency. Typically, underground members conduct operations in areas inaccessible to the guerrillas and often maintain leadership positions within the insurgent movement. An auxiliary is a clandestine network of active supporters who provide support services such as intelligence, food, funding, labor, security, etc. to the guerrilla force and underground.<sup>292</sup>

The Viet Cong led a communist insurgency against the Republic of Vietnam in a similar manner as the insurgency against the French during the First Indochina War. Mao Tse Tung describes the three phases of a communist insurgency in On Guerrilla Warfare as: organization, consolidation, and preservation; progressive expansion; and decision, or destruction of the enemy.<sup>293</sup> Mao's first phase includes organizing a base of people in rural and remote areas to support the insurgency. Activities in this phase include the indoctrination of supporters, the use of agitation and propaganda to gain additional support, and establishing support mechanisms to protect the insurgency against government forces. The second phase intensifies subversion and propaganda activities that include violent attacks on government forces and infrastructure. The efforts within the second phase are intended to place pressure on the government to mobilize security forces thereby exposing the population to the insurgents' subversion and propaganda. The final phase combines guerrilla operations with conventional forces to decisively defeat the government's forces allowing the insurgency to gain a political advantage over the government. The insurgency then uses this advantage to seize control of the government.<sup>294</sup> While Mao viewed each of these phases as sequential, Vo

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<sup>291</sup>Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2009), GL-6.

<sup>292</sup>Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-05.130, *Army Special Operations Forces Unconventional Warfare* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2008), 4-6.

<sup>293</sup>Mao Zedong, *On Guerrilla Warfare* (New York: Praeger, 1961), 49.

<sup>294</sup>*Ibid.*, 48-50.

Nguyen Giap's experience in the First Indochina War suggested an overlapping of phases. To expand on this concept Giap believed that not all areas would be in the same phase of an insurgency simultaneously, and that the insurgent leadership must be able to shift between Mao's phases in order to achieve success.<sup>295</sup>

Operational Environment. The "composite of the conditions, circumstances, and influences that affect the employment of capabilities and bear on the decisions of the commander."<sup>296</sup>

Pacification. Pacification means the restoration of peace to an area. Pacification is achieved through the combination of security measures, economic development, social mobilization, and political participation.<sup>297</sup>

Population and Resource Control Measures. "Government actions to protect the populace and its materiel resources from insurgents, to deny insurgents access to the populace and material resources and to identify and eliminate the insurgents, their organization, their activities, and influence while doing so. The objective of populace and resources control is to assist in preserving or reestablishing a state of law order within an area or entire nation. Populace and resource control operations are normally nontactical, police-type operations and a responsibility of Host Nation governments."<sup>298</sup>

Resistance. A resistance movement includes "the organized element of a disaffected population, which resists a government or occupying power with means, varying from passive methods to active violence. Resistance movements begin to form when dissatisfaction occurs among strongly motivated individuals who cannot further their cause by peaceful and legal means."<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>295</sup>Vo Nguyen Giap, "Inside the Vietminh," *The Guerrilla-And How To Fight Him (Selections from the Marine Corps Gazette)* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), 147- 177.

<sup>296</sup>Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010 (Amended 2011)).

<sup>297</sup>Headquarters, US Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, *Handbook for Military Support of Pacification* (Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Vietnam, 1968), 1.

<sup>298</sup>Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual Interim (FMI) 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2009), 3-25 to 3-26.

<sup>299</sup>Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) FM 31-21, *Guerrilla Warfare and Special Forces Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1961), 5.

Unconventional Warfare. “Includes the interrelated fields of guerrilla warfare, evasion and escape, and subversion against hostile states (resistance). Unconventional warfare operations are conducted in enemy or enemy controlled territory by predominately indigenous personnel usually supported and directed in varying degrees by an external source.”<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>300</sup>Department of the Army, FM 31-21 (1961), 3.

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