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AN EVALUATION OF THE PACIFICATION PROGRAM IN
SOUTH VIETNAM AND THE BOMBING OF NORTH VIETNAM

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AND THE BOMBING OF NORTH VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

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The questions involved are whether the pacification program in South Vietnam will be successful and therefore be of strategic value to other countries encountering similar guerrilla activities and whether the strategic bombing of an under-developed country is effective. Data was gathered using a literature research. The pacification program based on the establishment of strategic hamlets per se, will not be successful unless other factors are considered, i.e., the geography of the country, the political stability of the government, military security, etc. Massive bombing of North Vietnam was not effective in weakening its will and capacity to support the Vietcongs as the type of warfare and lack of mechanized equipment did not render its military wholly dependent upon parts, POL and supplies.

AN EVALUATION OF THE PACIFICATION PROGRAM
IN SOUTH VIETNAM AND THE BOMBING OF NORTH VIETNAM

The war in Vietnam is a classical example of the principle that in fighting a limited war, and particularly an unconventional war, pure military strength with all its manpower and firepower is inadequate to win the hearts and minds of the "oppressed" people and that accordingly, enduring peace cannot be attained by occasional military victories.

In reviewing the many strategies employed in Vietnam, I have therefore selected two aspects which I feel must be considered and properly evaluated in determining their success or failure and particularly in determining their applicability in the future. These two strategies, i.e., the pacification program and the bombing of North Vietnam represent typical examples of the non-shooting and shooting aspects of any war, both aspects of which must be considered in attaining total victory and a lasting peace.

THE PACIFICATION PROGRAM

I. The History of the Vietnam War.

After World War II and as a result of the Potsdam Conference in July, 1945 it was decided that the British would accept the Japanese surrender below the 16th

Parallel in Vietnam and that the Chinese would assume jurisdiction north of said Parallel. The British subsequently permitted the French to return and reassert their authority.^{1/} The French accordingly attempted to reinstate its colonial system which it had established in Vietnam under the Treaty of 1884 as a result of prior occupation by the French as early as 1867.^{2/} Since 1946, the Vietnamese have insisted on unification and independence of the entirety of Vietnam. The French, however, wanted to establish a federation of states which would be part of the French colonial system. By 1949 the greater part of Vietnam was in the hands of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam led by the revolutionary hero, Ho Chi Minh.^{3/} The fall of Dien Dien Phu by the French in May, 1954 resulted in the Geneva Conference on Indochina and the Geneva Agreements of July 21, 1954 which ended a 7-1/2-year war and over 60 years of French domination of Indochina. Under these agreements Vietnam was partitioned along the 17th Parallel into North and South Vietnam and that a nationwide election was to be held on July 20, 1956 for the eventual reunification of North and South Vietnam.^{4/}

It was during this period that Ngo Dinh Diem was appointed Premier of South Vietnam. Shortly thereafter in October, 1954, President Eisenhower transmitted a

letter to Premier Diem indicating United States' concern and interest in exploring ways and means to permit U. S. aid to Vietnam to be more effective in contributing to the welfare and stability of the government of Vietnam.^{5/} Despite Eisenhower's letter, President Kennedy made no unqualified commitment to fight a war against the Viet-Cong and the North Vietnamese on behalf of the South Vietnamese regime. It was not until the Johnson Administration that United States aid was predicated on the word "commitment."^{6/}

With U. S. aid and U. S. military advisors, Premier Diem formed a new cabinet composed largely of his own followers. Premier Diem also rejected any discussion of the all-Vietnamese election which was to take place on July 20, 1956 under the Geneva Agreements on the grounds that people in North Vietnam would not be able to express their will freely and that a true and free election for the reunification of Vietnam was therefore not possible. Communist guerrilla activities continued to take place against the South Vietnamese government. In mid-1959 the Viet-Cong movement was gaining momentum in the countryside as Premier Diem was never successful in rallying the loyalty and support of the South Vietnamese population. It is against this background of history that the pacification program was initiated in South Vietnam.

II. The Nature of the Pacification Program.

The first pacification program was initiated in 1959 and involved regrouping parts of the rural population into specially built, fortified and self-sustaining communities called "agrovilles." This strategy was borrowed from the French who had tried to organize similar defensive "agro-cities" toward the end of the French-Vietnamese war. This program was eventually abandoned and in 1962 a new counterinsurgency program to build "strategic hamlets" was initiated.^{7/}

Under the strategic hamlets program, various hamlets were secured against Viet-Cong attack by barbed wire fences, moats, spiked bamboo hedges and other defenses put up by the hamlet dwellers themselves. Local militia were trained to repel guerrilla attacks while civilian "civic action" teams would work with the people on self-help projects. Subsequent to the assassination of Premier Diem and his brother in November, 1963 the strategic hamlets program was renamed "New Rural-Life Hamlets" in the hope that they could be consolidated and spread "like an oil slick" to neighboring areas.

In 1964 "political action teams" were created. These teams consisted of handpicked, dedicated young Vietnamese volunteers who were trained and indoctrinated and sent to live, fight and work among the villagers. In

1966 these "political action teams" were expanded and given special training in Revolutionary Development (RD). These RD teams were sent into secured hamlets to help the villages in their projects, i.e., repairing roads, houses and schools, and to assist in promoting better sanitation, medical care and building local defenses.

The United States' role in pacification was eventually consolidated and placed under a single agency designated as MAC/CORDS (Civil Operations for Revolutionary Development Support). Under the RD program a single American representative is designated as senior advisor on pacification to local Vietnamese officials in each of the provinces where said program is undertaken. Over \$100 million a year is contributed by these agencies toward training, paying and equipping the civilian cadres and approximately \$700 million annually spent on activities to back up the RD program.^{8/}

III. The Assumptions or Bases of the Program.

The initial purpose of the Strategic hamlets was to protect the Vietnamese peasants from the Viet-Cong by moving them into fortified villages and arming them for self-defense and secondly, to separate Viet-Cong from its source of rice and recruits. The current pacification program is designed to meet the Viet-Cong challenge politically, economically, socially and militarily. It

is designed to provide the villages with not only security but also to provide them with a better way of life and to win their loyalty. The strategic hamlets program assumes that you can relocate and regroup the villages into individual hamlets. It also assumes that these hamlets can be defended and that eventually the loyalty and the hearts and minds of the peasants could be won over to the side of the South Vietnamese government. The very involvement of the United States in Vietnam was predicated on the assumption that this was a war of aggression by Hanoi, aided and abetted by Peking.^{9/} It therefore assumes that the population in South Vietnam is generally friendly and loyal to the South Vietnamese government and that the general population therefore is harassed, intimidated and threatened by the Viet-Congs who are supported by North Vietnam.

IV. Evaluation of the Program.

One of the flaws of the strategic hamlet program was that Saigon and Washington had different objectives for it. President Diem used it as a means of controlling his population while Washington considered it to be a means of winning greater allegiance from the native peasants and thereby squeezing out the Viet-Congs.^{10/} The peasants objected to this program as they were being forced to move from their ancestral homes and fields.

In their haste to complete the hamlet program, local officials built flimsy bamboo fences and forced the people to move in without providing adequate food. These very same people continued to return to their own mountain villages because of the inadequate assistance, food and other economic aids.^{11/} The local officials in charge of the hamlet programs were ignorant and incompetent and failed to explain the program to the peasants. They were handpicked by the national government and accordingly had no interest in the local populace.^{12/}

The initial hamlet program contradicted the basic philosophy of the local peasants. It overlooked or disregarded their beliefs, principles, habits and customs. To the Vietnamese, the land itself was sacred. They worshipped their ancestors as a source of their lives, their fortunes and their civilization. Because of their form of worship and customs the Vietnamese resisted the hamlet program as they were being forced to relocate from their homes and rice fields where their ancestors were buried and where they had inherited the lands from their ancestors.^{13/}

With this initial reluctance and resistance to the hamlet program, compounded by the lack of planning and hasty and flimsy construction plus the tyranny of local officials, the hamlet program resulted in a political

disaster.

The pacification program which involved "political action teams" and later expanded into revolutionary development (RD) teams was an attempt therefore to overcome the shortcomings of the initial strategic hamlet programs. The use of RD teams under the pacification program constituted an attempt to win the support and loyalty of the peasants by providing various material aids for construction, education, health and welfare, food, etc. Technical assistance is offered. Yet the program has been disappointingly slow due to several major obstacles existing.

One of the major obstacles is that of providing security to the hamlet. The South Vietnamese Army has been reluctant to patrol the countryside at nights, tending to stay put in their camps. The Viet-Cong guerrillas are thus free to roam the countryside and to re-enter the hamlets and punishing the collaborators of the South Vietnamese government. Unless these hamlets are secured, it is difficult therefore to command the allegiance and loyalty of the local populace where their lives and the lives of their relatives and loved ones are in jeopardy.

Related to this lack of security is the lack of eligible qualified Vietnamese to serve on the RD teams as well as in the para-military forces. One of the reasons given is the inadequate pay which results in the

low morale of such teams. Unless these teams can be developed into an elite force with adequate pay and high esprit de corps, it seems very difficult to comprehend how these teams can be expected to go into a hamlet to win the hearts and minds of the peasants as well as their support for the South Vietnamese government.

The existence of corruption has also hampered the pacification program. The poor, underpaid Vietnamese officers as well as the venal local chiefs are easily tempted by the vast amount of American aid being literally poured into the hamlets program. The resulting corruption is just as much the fault of the American government which believes in quick, hasty solutions to a problem. Unlike the philosophy of Mao Tse-tung, the United States lacks the patience and perseverance so necessary in winning the hearts and minds of the people of a nation, particularly where there is a lack of communication, education and mobility. This lack of patience or perseverance may be attributed to political reasons where the American administration is up for election every four years and also to the modern dynamic society of ours which is predicated on rapid progress and development.

The factors which contributed to the success of the hamlet program in Malaya and the Philippines also did

not exist in South Vietnam. The resupply of communist forces in Malaya and the Philippines was difficult if not almost impossible as vigorous British-Thai patrolling along the Thai-Malayan border minimized any resupplies from China. Intensive patrolling of the sea surrounding the Philippine Islands also made resupplying difficult.^{14/} The terrain and geographical features of Vietnam with its lengthy western boundary bordering Cambodia and Laos presented a more difficult task of preventing infiltration and resupplies to the Viet-Cong.^{15/}

Force ratio in Vietnam was also about only four to one in favor of the South Vietnamese compared with the British strength in Malaya which far exceeded the twenty-to-one preferred ratio over insurgent forces.^{16/}

Politically, the British had the support of the Malayan population. This support was not evident under the various regimes of the South Vietnamese government. Economically, the rice fields in the Delta of South Vietnam provided an abundant source of food supplies to the Viet-Congs.

The above are just some of the many factors which affected the success of the hamlet program in South Vietnam.

V. Conclusion.

It has been stated that a viable alternative to the pacification program is to provide for just distribution of land and other economic resources and to provide an honest and competent public administration from the national government down to the local chiefs. This is easier said than done as you are confronted with still the problem of protecting the fruits of the land from the Viet-Cong guerrillas. Providing adequate pay and benefits to government officials may eliminate corruption but where is the money to come from? Must the United States continue its economic aid for an indefinite period in order to maintain a stable government in South Vietnam?

It appears that in order to develop a stable form of government, guerrilla activities must be eliminated. To eliminate guerrilla activities the local population must believe in their form of government, dedicated and loyal enough to defend their way of life. It has been stated that the war in Vietnam is not a civil war, or a war of aggression by the north against the south, but that it is a revolutionary war.^{17/} This raises the question of whether the United States should continue to maintain its aid to South Vietnam for the purpose of eventually assisting South Vietnam in reuniting all of Vietnam under a so-called "democratic" form of govern-

ment. The alternative would be to let the Vietnamese people decide on which form of government they prefer in the hope that by popular choice, dissidence and guerrilla activities would be minimized or eventually eliminated.

Having committed ourselves to the support of the South Vietnam government, we must exercise a little more patience in providing the pacification program with the opportunity to succeed. Unless said program is so beset by corruption and constitutes a drain on the United States budget, we should not abandon said program. Military strength and fire power by themselves cannot win a lasting peace. It is only through the pacification program that hopefully the peasants may be indoctrinated in the beliefs of their government and eventually provide the necessary loyalty and support for the South Vietnamese government. The "Vietnamization" program which involves the withdrawal of American troops and turning over the military operation to the South Vietnamese will undoubtedly contribute toward the success of the pacification program, the discussion of which, however, is not covered in this essay.

THE BOMBING OF NORTH VIETNAM

I. The Decision to Commence Bombing.

Upon the assassination of President Diem on November 1, 1963 a new government was formed under a military junta headed by General Duong Van Minh. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara returned from a personal visit in Vietnam in mid-March 1964 with a pessimistic appraisal of the situation in Vietnam, reporting that the situation in the countryside had deteriorated and that the Viet-Cong had up to 90% control in key provinces. Although McNamara did not recommend bombing at that time he approved the planning of two particular types of bombing to be undertaken by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The first type involved a "quick strike" to be launched in retaliation and the other would be a "major strike" against the North's military and industrial centers.^{1/} On August 2, 1964 two U. S. destroyers, the Maddox and the C. Turner Joy, reported torpedo attacks while patrolling in the Gulf of Tonkin. In retaliation, American planes bombed the depot in Vinh. Shortly thereafter on August 7, Congress passed the Tonkin Resolution which authorized the President to use all measures including the commitment of armed forces to assist the government of Vietnam in the defense of its independence

and territorial integrity.^{2/} In June, 1964 General Taylor replaced Henry Cabot Lodge as ambassador to Vietnam. In the latter half of 1964, Taylor changed his views on bombing as he felt that the Viet-Cong could not be defeated in the South and that something must be done to save South Vietnam.^{3/} The destruction of several B-57 bombers on November 1 at Ben Hoa also infuriated Taylor and caused him to be committed to the bombing of North Vietnam. Thus after the election of President Johnson in 1964, a decision based on concensus was made in January, 1965 that the United States would commence bombing of the North if the South Vietnamese government would improve its stability. The attack of American barracks at Pleiku on February 7 and subsequently at Qui Nhon finally resulted in the decision to mount a sustained bombing campaign on February 13, 1965.^{4/}

II. The Objectives and Assumptions.

It was hoped that the threat or use of a sustained bombing program would coerce Ho Chi Minh to de-escalate the war rather than lose his precious industrial base. It was also assumed that if we showed our determination, Hanoi would not contest the United States. The declared aim of bombing was to impede the flow of men and supplies to the South.^{5/} As General Westmoreland indicated in his letter to the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific, the

main objective of the bombing was to prevent the enemy from imposing by force a communist government, to protect the people and resources of South Vietnam, and to defeat and weaken the enemy.^{6/} The United States strategists therefore assumed that the bombing of North Vietnam would be successful in attaining the objectives.

III. The Constraints Imposed.

Initially, United States strategy was to confine the war within the boundaries of South Vietnam, avoiding the use of United States forces and thereby limiting United States involvement. The bombing of North Vietnam was slowly escalated in the hope that Hanoi could be threatened to de-escalate its efforts and reduce its supply and support to the Viet-Congs. POL facilities were initially excluded from the target lists.^{7/} There was also the danger that massive bombing may cause Communist China to intervene in support of North Vietnam. Despite the fact that Cambodia and Laos were being used as sanctuaries by the North Vietnamese, bombing was confined generally to Vietnam to avoid any expansion of the Vietnam war beyond its boundaries.

In addition, many of the target areas had to be approved in Washington. As a consequence, a time lag occurred which diminished the urgency of bombing such targets as enemy concentrations and movements do not

remain static.^{8/}

IV. Evaluation of the Bombing.

Even before the decision to commence bombing in North Vietnam was made, a study report prepared by the State Department in early 1964 indicated that the bombing would fail because the North was motivated by factors which were not affected by any physical change or damage.^{9/} Undersecretary of State George Ball also had his doubts about any bombing. Ball had been a member of the Strategic Survey team which studied the effects of allied bombing on Germany in World War II. Ball indicated that the study had revealed how surprisingly ineffective the bombing had been, that it had rallied German morale and spurred industrial production. Thus, since bombing had not worked against a major industrialized state like Germany, Ball had doubts about Vietnam which had very limited industrialization.^{10/} On the other hand, the actual report of the survey indicated that in very few instances did the bombing permanently raise the morale as the weariness resulting from constant bombing had a decided effect upon the trust of the people in their leaders.^{11/} The study further seemed to indicate that low morale is clearly related to the severity or closeness of bombing exposure. Another study on the effects of strategic bombing on Japanese morale indicated

that the primary reaction to bombing was abject fear and confusion and that it did not raise civilian morale.^{12/} Italian Air General Douhet and American General Mitchell have advocated bombing of populations to disrupt the enemy's industrial structure and to weaken his morale.^{13/}

The initial bombing involved supply routes and eventually included roads and rail arteries, public utilities within major cities of North Vietnam, as well as principal airfields. The initial goal of inhibiting intervention in the South was therefore expended in an attempt to force North Vietnam to reduce its support in the flow of men and supplies to the South. The bombing operations designated as "Operation Rolling Thunder" did not seem to have any effect upon Hanoi after six weeks of massive bombing. In June, 1966 air strikes were launched against POL facilities in Haiphong. Despite the substantial damages, Hanoi still refused to negotiate. It appeared that the bombing had no effects as the North Vietnamese had learned to disperse their facilities.

One factor which appeared to be overlooked in the strategic bombing of North Vietnam is the fact that the North was not engaged in conducting a conventional war. The North was engaged in insurgency warfare, utilizing guerrilla tactics and basically foot soldiers. The Viet-Congs themselves were not mechanized and the infiltration of troops from the North was generally by foot

soldiers. The destruction of POL facilities therefore had minimal effect on the fighting capabilities of the enemy.

According to Secretary of Defense McNamara's statement of April 20, 1966 before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, approximately 250,000 tons of aerial ordnance were expended in 1965, followed by approximately 630,000 tons in 1966. This amounted to 91% of the total dropped in Korea in 37 months, and 48% of all the bombs used against Germany in World War II. The United States also incurred tremendous costs in the number of aircraft lost, totaling over 600 combat aircraft.^{14/}

The key targets in North Vietnam were the bridges and mountain passes which are considered good "choke points" where bomb damages would be most difficult to repair rapidly. These targets, however, bristled with SAM emplacements which made high-flying attack most vulnerable as the SAM would have more time to lock on the aircraft. To protect against low-flying attack, the North Vietnamese installed an umbrella of antiaircraft artillery barrages which contributed to the large number of American aircraft being shot down.^{15/}

The tremendous cost of the bombing campaign and the rising dissent of the American public caused some second thoughts about the effects and the success of the bombing program. In effect, it prompted the United States

to search for a negotiated settlement. In fact, it has been stated that the bombing of North Vietnam brought the United States and not Hanoi to the conference table.^{16/}

In October, 1966 after returning from Vietnam, Secretary McNamara submitted a report to the President which indicated that despite the fact that the communist military initiative had been blunted, the enemy morale had not been broken, that the enemy instead had adopted a strategy of "wait and see." McNamara's report indicated that the pacification program was a bad disappointment and that the Rolling Thunder program of bombing North Vietnam had neither significantly affected the infiltration nor cracked the morale of Hanoi. Among other recommendations, McNamara recommended that the Rolling Thunder program be stabilized for the reason that he felt that the bombing would not have significant effect on the road network and that trucks, spare parts and petroleum could still be imported. McNamara was more concerned however with the fact that any increased bombing would involve a serious risk of drawing us into open war with China. A stabilized bombing program however would still remain available as a bargaining factor in any future negotiations.^{17/}

A prior study by the Institute of Defense Analysis indicated that as of July, 1966 the bombing of North Vietnam had no measureable effect on Hanoi's ability to

mount and support military operations in the South. The report indicated further that the industrial sector of North Vietnam produced little of military value as most of the essential military supplies were provided by the U.S.S.R. and Communist China. The report further indicated that North Vietnam had ample manpower reserve for internal military and economic needs to provide repairs and reconstruction. The fact that the damages to facilities and equipment in North Vietnam by the bombing had been more than offset by the increased flow of military and economic aid from the U.S.S.R. and Communist China made it unlikely that Hanoi's capability would be impaired by such bombing.^{18/}

In fact, the bombing clearly strengthened popular support of the regime by engendering patriotic and nationalistic enthusiasm to resist the attacks. The end of bombing caused some concern to the North Vietnamese regime as it produced a let-down and required a constant campaign for support and enthusiasm.^{19/} It is true that the bombing had caused substantial damages and destruction but at the same time the cost of the bombing to the United States in lives and money was immeasurable. The overall objective of the bombing which was to weaken the will of North Vietnam and to coerce it into negotiating or de-escalating its war efforts did not show much success. It was not until March, 1968, therefore, that

President Johnson made the move to seek a political settlement of the Vietnam war.

V. Conclusion.

Relying on the bombing of North Vietnam as a means of also influencing Ho Chi Minh to reduce the North's support was ineffective as the bombing was not massive enough to reduce their capability to fight and support the Viet-Congs.

It has been stated that the strength and power of any nation must take into consideration the following essential elements: political, military, economic, scientific and technological, and social.

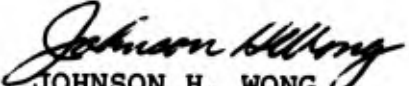
The repeated coups in the South Vietnamese government certainly did not help to provide a stable political base. The lack of fighting spirit by the local military, coupled with an inflated economy, scarce commodities and the lack of social reforms were all instrumental in affecting the power and success of the South Vietnamese government, which power and success were minimal during the period of the bombing in 1965 and 1966.

The bombing itself, as a means of interdiction was certainly successful in affecting the flow of personnel and supplies to the South. It did not stop the flow completely, however, as this was almost impossible due to the terrain and jungle-like conditions. Whether the

limited success of the bombing was worth it, in the light of the substantial costs and lives involved, is highly questionable.

In any future limited war, the sporadic bombing of enemy facilities, in the hope of inducing the enemy to negotiate, does not appear, therefore, to be a practical strategy. It should have been continued until the enemy's capability has been destroyed. This would then induce him to negotiate. Bombing alone is not the ultimate solution as the other elements of a nation's power must also be strengthened.^{20/}

Despite the testimonies of Admiral Sharp and General Wheeler^{21/} which indicated that the air campaign was achieving its objectives, the Jason studies as well as other studies all concluded that the bombing of North Vietnam was ineffective in accomplishing its objectives.^{22/}


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FOOTNOTES

THE PACIFICATION PROGRAM

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