Robert Thompson and Vietnam: A Historical Analogy

Taken Out of Context by U.S. Leaders

by

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(ABSTRACT)  

This thesis examines the communist insurgencies in Malaya (1948-1960) and Vietnam (1961-1963). A British Colonial Service Officer, Robert Thompson, helped develop the successful counterinsurgency doctrine during the Malayan Emergency. Later he carried this knowledge to Vietnam to help in the anti-Viet Cong struggle. U.S. leaders welcomed lessons of the Malayan Emergency and their application in parts to the Vietnamese situation in the form of the Strategic Hamlet Program. Thompson's transfer of knowledge from Malaya to Vietnam shows a historical analogy taken out of context by U.S. leadership. I begin my study by looking at British evolution of counterinsurgency doctrine and practices, specifically the New Villages in Malaya, and Robert Thompson's role in the process. The second chapter examines Thompson's transferal of Malayan knowledge to Vietnam and the U.S. acceptance of and support for his efforts. I also compare these insurgencies in chapter two to show the differences between them and prove my thesis. Finally, the third chapter shows some reasons why the Strategic Hamlet Program failed and whether Thompson's program was doomed to fail or not. By examining the Strategic Hamlet Program, an understanding of how the U.S. evolved policy in the Vietnam War becomes possible.
Acknowledgements

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## Acronyms and Abbreviations

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<th>Acronym</th>
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<tr>
<td>ARVN</td>
<td>Army of the Republic of Vietnam</td>
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<td>BAM</td>
<td>British Advisory Mission</td>
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<td>CT</td>
<td>Communist Terrorists</td>
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<td>CIP</td>
<td>Counterinsurgency Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>DO</td>
<td>Director of Operations (Malaya)</td>
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<td>GVN</td>
<td>Government of Vietnam (The Republic of Vietnam)</td>
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<tr>
<td>JCS</td>
<td>Joint Chiefs of Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCP</td>
<td>Malayan Communist Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>MPAJA</td>
<td>Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAAG</td>
<td>Military Assistance Advisory Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>MACV</td>
<td>Military Assistance Command Vietnam</td>
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<td>Min Yuen</td>
<td>Squatter Support System for MCP</td>
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<tr>
<td>NLF</td>
<td>National Liberation Front (South Vietnam)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SVN</td>
<td>South Vietnam (The Republic of Vietnam)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UMNO</td>
<td>United Malays National Organization</td>
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<td>VC</td>
<td>Viet Cong</td>
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Introduction

In 1960, one "peoples revolutionary war" in Asia ended as another began. The last pieces of Communist resistance in Malaya retired beaten into mountains along the Malay-Thai border. After a twelve year struggle against the British and Malayan governments, the Malayan Communist Party(MCP), lacked the resources and manpower to maintain its political and military insurgency. This was due to the development and execution of counterinsurgency measures by British and Malayan leaders. An important part of these measures was the resettlement efforts embodied in the New Villages, which cut off the MCP from its material and manpower base. Additional efforts by the police (especially in intelligence) permeated the MCP so much that authorities knew the party's membership and activities making the group's insurgency actions useless.

However, when the Malayan Emergency ended in 1960, a similar communist insurgency in South Vietnam(SVN) by the Viet Cong(VC) grew. VC forces tried
to increase their political and military infiltration of the countryside, while planning eventually to overthrow the Ngo Dinh Diem government. Along with its backer the U.S., the government of Vietnam (GVN) searched for a way to defeat this struggle, but the country's initial tries at counterinsurgency (1959-1961) were unsuccessful.\(^1\) The arrival of Robert Thompson, a former British Foreign Service Officer, and the British Advisory Mission (BAM) changed this situation.

In the fall of 1961, BAM arrived in Saigon at the request of the GVN, with U.S. consent, due to the counterinsurgency experience of mission members in Malaya. Thompson, however, had the most exposure to the development and expression of counterinsurgency doctrine in his positions with early British leaders during the Emergency such as Sir Harold Briggs and later as a top official in the independent Malayan government. Eventually, Thompson gave his evaluation of and recommendations on the Vietnamese situation to President Diem, which the leader used in the Strategic Hamlet Program. This program became the centerpiece of the GVN's counterinsurgency effort, with increasingly harmful results for peasant moral and government popularity until Diem's overthrow in November 1963. Due to his role as a counterinsurgency authority and exporter of Malayan counter-guerilla experience to Vietnam, Thompson favorably influenced top U.S. officials to apply lessons of the Emergency to the Vietnamese situation. He is a historically significant figure because the U.S. government's

\(^1\) Counterinsurgency consisted of the actions needed to stop and reverse an insurgent struggle.
application of Emergency inspired measures to Vietnam shows a historical analogy taken out of context.

Since I concentrate on the Strategic Hamlet Program, some items about it need clarification. My main focus is the Strategic Hamlet Program from its 1961 inception until Diem’s death in 1963. Even though the program continued longer than that, this period most closely resembles the early part of the Malayan conflict and contains the most serious effort by a stable South Vietnamese government towards the program. Second, the term Strategic Hamlet itself is misleading, since two types of settlement existed. Strategic Hamlets or lightly guarded villages provided protection for villagers in low-infiltration areas while defended hamlets gave security involving more relocation to people in areas with greater infiltration. So, the term strategic hamlet can appear in reference to other pacification efforts before and after this program took place.

In examining a topic involving numerous acronyms and spellings of personal and place names, this work remains consistent. The acronyms appear initially in the work with their definition, and by themselves thereafter. Lastly, word spellings follow standard American practice or the most commonly found form of the word.

Also, I want to acknowledge the sources of maps contained in this work. Joseph Kennedy’s book, *A History of Malaya* provides an excellent map of Malaya during the Emergency which shows up in Chapter one. In addition, the

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Chapter One: The British Counterinsurgency Program in Malaya

In the years after World War II, important social and political struggles evolved in Asia. Areas of Southeast Asia, such as Malaya and Vietnam, ravaged by Japanese wartime occupation, had a power vacuum due to their occupier’s departure. This chaotic situation allowed resident communist groups in Malaya and Vietnam (who fought as guerrilla and grew militarily during the war) to take control in parts of their countries. As European colonial powers, such as France and Great Britain prepared to reestablish their empires in this area, the communists made ready to maintain their own authority through armed and political conflict. Labeled as “people’s revolutionary war” by the Chinese communist revolutionary, Mao Tse-tung, these struggles had much of their basis in his ideology. This line of thought concerned the use of guerrilla and subversive political tactics to gain national power. In response to these actions during the
Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) and the early Second Indochina War (1954-1960), government and military officials developed counterinsurgency doctrine and practices. In Malaya, people such as Lt. General Sir Harold Briggs, Sir Gerald Templer, and Colonial Service Officers played a decisive role in this process. One of these Colonial Officers, Robert Thompson, contributed especially to the development of counterinsurgency thought and programs, which he later took to Vietnam. Due to his own views and experiences on counter-guerilla warfare, Washington sought to use Thompson as an advisor in Vietnam: where he influenced U.S. officials to employ Malayan based measures. He is a historically significant figure, because this U.S. application of doctrine shows a historical analogy, between Malaya and Vietnam taken out of context.

Both insurgencies were based in part on Mao Tse-tung’s thinking. His views, developed over twenty years as leader (beginning in the late 1920’s) of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), served as a blueprint for revolution in Southeast Asia. In contrast to traditional Marxist thought, he believed rural peasants not urban workers would form the basis of revolution in Asia. Peasants organized into revolutionary cadres, would surround the cities and eventually take them over. The CCP victory over Chinese nationalists under Chiang Kai-Shek in 1949, seemed to confirm much of Mao’s theory.

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4 Ibid., pp.2-3.
Insurgency Theory

According to Mao, revolutions took place in three stages. First, armed insurgents would try to win peasant converts through agitation, propaganda, and pressure tactics such as murder and kidnapping. Insurgents would also form self-defense forces in hopes of later upgrading to regular army units. Second, the insurgents would start guerilla operations and build unreachable bases where they could act as a government, collecting taxes, and establishing a support system. Lastly, in the “climactic offensive phase” regular insurgent forces would launch full-scale offensive actions against the government. Of all these phases, the second or “guerilla stage” would be the longest and most important since it would determine whether or not the revolutionary effort would survive. Guerilla warfare would be based on four principles. First, a guerilla would use light weaponry in order to stay mobile. Second, he would fight only in a time and place of his own choosing. Thirdly, he would retreat when confronted with a superior force since he wins by avoiding defeat. Lastly, the struggle would be protracted because of the unequal resources and tactical positions between the insurgents and their enemies.

All of Mao’s theory would have been unsuccessful except for the rise of nationalism in Asia before and after World War II. In Asia during the War, the

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5 Ibid., pp.3-4. Those more interested in Mao’s theories may consult this work or Mao’s own writings.

6 The government forces usually controlled the cities where much of the population lived. Ibid., pp.4-5.
numerous communist groups that battled the Japanese gained credibility as nationalists fighting in defense of their countries. After the war, they intended to be viewed as nationalists, this time fighting against former colonial countries coming back to Asia to reclaim their old possessions. While initially pursuing their own courses, Malayan and Vietnamese communists eventually followed a plan for insurrection similar to the politico-military one envisioned by Mao.

_Early Post-War Period_

During the Malayan "Emergency" of 1948-1960 the British developed valuable tactics to battle communist insurgency. Robert Thompson gained great counterinsurgency experience during this time by helping in the formulation of policy against insurgents and fighting the communists personally. Born on 12 April, 1916 in the village of Charlwood to British Canon, W.G. Thompson, Robert Thompson went to Marlborough College after finishing his primary and secondary education. Higher education did not end for Thompson there, because he went on to Cambridge to pursue a degree in History. While attending Cambridge, he joined the University Air Squadron, and was "commissioned in the Reserve of Air Force Officers" in 1936. Faced with the choice of an RAF commission or time in the Colonial Service, he joined the latter, going to Oxford for a year long service training course. Thompson, upon leaving Oxford, went to

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7 During the 1920's and 1930's, groups such as the MCP and Viet Minh experienced limited success in their efforts. Ibid., p.6.

Ipoh (the base of Malaya's tin mining industry) in 1938, then to the Portuguese Colony of Macao (to learn the Cantonese dialect of Chinese). Thompson traveled to Singapore after a call up for RAF service in 1939, but went back to Macao when he the Malayan government asked that he be demobilized. Once in Macao, he went to Hong Kong, with the other Colonial Service Cadets to avoid a Japanese advance. After arriving in Hong Kong and returning to Macao, Thompson went back to Hong Kong on 8 December, 1941. He went into the hills around the city as part of a British stay behind group when the Japanese took Hong Kong during their pacific and Asian advance following the Pearl Harbor bombing of 7 December 1941. During the first 5 months of 1942, Thompson conducted guerilla actions around Hong Kong then moved into the Chinese interior escaping eventually to India. He then went to Burma where he served with General Orde Wingate's famous Army unit, the Chindits which he stayed with for the next three years until he returned to England in 1945.\footnote{Sir Robert Thompson, \textit{Make for the Hills} (London: Leo Cooper Ltd, 1989), pp.1-2.}

In 1942, at the same time Thompson was still in China, Japanese forces invaded Malaya ending, temporarily, more than 100 years of British rule.\footnote{For a lively account of Thompson's wartime experiences see Ibid., pp.3-70.} During this period, a group of Malayan Chinese formed the Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army(MPAJA) which conducted armed guerilla operations against the Japanese. Due to their hatred of the Japanese, the Malayan Communist Party(MCP) dominated, MPAJA agreed to follow military orders of the Allied Commander-in-Chief as long as Allied armed forces kept law and order.

order. The cost of this cooperation was "arms, money, training, and medical
treatment" from the Allies for MPAJA forces. In fighting alongside British Force
136 (the Southeast Asian part of Special Operations Executive) opposite the
Japanese, the MPAJA gained valuable experience in jungle warfare. This came
in very handy in later action against the British.

When the war ended in 1945, Malaya was left without a government. A
power vacuum developed which the MPAJA/MCP tried to fill by taking control
of many parts of the country. As a sign of thanks for the MPAJA war efforts,
the British even invited a delegation from their group to participate in a victory
parade in London. Nevertheless, a showdown was inevitable between the British
and the MPAJA as the communists tried to consolidate its power in preparation
for conflict with returning colonial forces.

Upon returning to Malaya in late 1945, the British received quite different
receptions from the MCP and the native Malays. The ethnic Malays graciously
welcomed them back as they helped to protect Malayan interests from the large
Chinese population. Due to a limited number of native laborers available for
work in Malaya's tin mines and on its rubber plantations, Chinese immigrants
had been used as a labor source during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
Large numbers of them had flooded into the peninsula to fill numerous job
openings. By the end of World War II, the Malay population consisted of 50%

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13 The Malays tended to control the government through their domination of the civil service sector, and
the Chinese ruled the economy through their domination of business. Thompson, Make for the Hills,
p.82.
ethnic Malays, 38% Chinese, and 11% Indians, making Malay natives nervous about the large numbers of Chinese in their country.\textsuperscript{14}

In contrast to native Malayans, the Chinese-dominated MCP carried on its struggle against the returning colonialists, basing its effort on union insurrection and unrest on the peninsula.\textsuperscript{15} The MCP looked to the General Labor Union (GLU) which had been formed in August 1945, and other labor groups to try and overthrow the government.\textsuperscript{16} Although a number of unions cooperated with the MCP in Malaya and Singapore, the effort eventually failed. Trade union representatives from Britain helped unions organize along democratic lines, thus undercutting the MCP efforts.\textsuperscript{17} During this time, Robert Thompson returned to Malaya as Assistant Commissioner of Labor for the state of Perak and Chinese Affairs Officer in Ipoh. He dealt with rising guerilla activity by deporting suspected guerrillas.\textsuperscript{18} As Assistant Commissioner of Labor, he also improved working conditions for Malayan laborers which had deteriorated during WW II, and acted as a arbitrator in labor disputes.\textsuperscript{19}

During this time, the leadership of the MCP also changed as Chin Peng became the party’s general Secretary in March 1947. Chin Peng was young

\textsuperscript{14} This did not include the large Chinese population of Singapore. Ibid., pp.153-154.
\textsuperscript{15} R.W. Komer, \textit{The Malayan Emergency in Retrospects: Organization of a Successful Counterinsurgency Effort} (Santa Monica, California: The Rand Corporation, Feb. 1972), p.5, R-957-ARPA. Non-Chinese membership of the MCP was always 10% or less. Short, \textit{The Communist Insurrection in Malaya.}, p.19.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., pp.28-29.
\textsuperscript{17} Sir Robert Thompson, \textit{Make for the Hills} (London: Leo Cooper Ltd., 1989), pp.85-86. An additional measure used was a law allowing only those with 3 years experience in a trade to lead a union in that trade.
\textsuperscript{18} He based his powers on the Banishment Act, because it allowed him to deport suspect aliens after an inquiry. A similar Emergency measure surfaced later for dealing with insurrection. Ibid., pp.82-84.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p.85.
(twenty-six years old) and had only eight years of service in the MCP, when he took over leadership from Loi Tek.²⁰ With the failure of union agitation, Chin looked for other ways to gain political power. Two events contributed to this decision. In February 1948, delegates at the Calcutta meeting of the Asia Youth Conference including representatives from countries in Southeast Asia such as the Philippines urged the MCP to take armed action against the British.²¹ In late May/early June the MCP politburo, under Chin Peng met in the jungles of Pahang, where they decided on armed struggle against the British.²²

In the conflict that followed the group pivotal to the success of either government or communist forces was the squatters. This group consisted, mostly of, Chinese who worked on rubber plantations and in tin mines and squatted on government lands at the edge of the jungle after layoffs. There they raised enough food to feed themselves and their families until jobs became available.²³ During World War II, the number of Chinese squatters shot up as they tried to avoid abuse by the Japanese.

After the British returned in 1945, however, the government ignored the squatters because they performed a useful service providing food to the cities and

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²⁰ Richard Stubbs, Guerilla Warfare (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.58. Unknown to most of the party Loi Tek took off with a majority of the group’s funds, leaving Chin Peng to pick up the pieces. Chin Peng kept the incident quiet for a year while establishing his leadership, but remained ignorant of his predecessor’s real identity. Loi Tek was a British spy who led the MCP, and left because his cover was blown. For a fuller explanation see Noel Barber, The War of the Running Dogs (London: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd, 1971), p.35.


²² Barber, The War of the Running Dogs, p.28.

other areas of the peninsula short of food because of the war. Unfortunately, the presence of the squatters on state land angered many Malays which increased racial tensions. 24 In addition, the squatters remained as fence sitters when brought into contact with the government. Many of them would not commit themselves politically. 25 Even though many of the squatters supported the MCP/MRLA for ethnic and family reasons, their indecision caused a problem for the MCP and the British.

The Emergency Starts

In June of 1948, the Emergency began with the murder of three plantation managers on estates near Sungei Siput, north of Ipoh. (See Figure 1) 26 Subsequent acts of terror and murder against Europeans and Malayan and Chinese estate managers and civil servants by the MCP increased the fear among the former over the next few months. The British used the term “Emergency” for this insurgency because labeling this struggle as a war would have deprived local businesses of their insurance protection due to clauses in their contracts negating coverage during civil war. This was especially important as the British fought this war in part to protect their interests particularly in rubber and tin.

24 Richard Allen, Malaysia, Prospect and Retrospect (London: Oxford University Press, , p. 93.
26 Thompson, Make for the Hills, p. 88.
Figure 1. MAP OF MALAYA: 1948-1960

Chapter One: The British Counterinsurgency Program in Malaya
Composed mostly of ethnic Chinese, the MCP drew its support from the Chinese squatters, sometimes because of family loyalties, and other times because of squatter intimidation. MCP supporters within the squatter community, known as the Min Yuen, were also former members of the Anti-Japanese Union that played a similar role for the MPAJA during WWII. At this time and during most of the “Emergency,” the number of MCP guerrillas drawn mostly from the squatter population stayed around 5,000, except for the period 1951-1952 when they peaked at 10,000.

At the start of the Emergency, the top leadership in Malaya made no real move to deal with the insurgency. Instances of violence and intimidation increased throughout the peninsula as the MCP tried to spread its influence, but Anti-guerilla measures, at this time, took place on a mostly local level. For instance, Thompson formed a group of platoons known as Ferret Force to harass the Communist Terrorist (CT’s) in the jungle. Despite protests from the police and government officials, the national government did not listen. High Commissioner, Sir Edward Gent, showed how little he understood about the insurgent situation when he told British High Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia, Malcom MacDonald that the insurgency did not pose any danger to Malaya. This misunderstanding set the start of an overall national counterinsurgency effort back at least a year.


28 Allen, *Malaysia: Prospect and Retrospect*, p. 91. Other works put the number closer to 8,500 during this peak period.

Gurney Takes Over

Second in command of British forces and a crucial figure in the development of counterinsurgency measures and doctrine in Malaya was Sir Henry Gurney who made a significant number of contributions to the struggle. He limited the army's role, defined a command structure, created powerful measures for dealing with suspect Chinese, started the resettlement effort, and brought in Sir Harold Briggs as Director of Operations (DO) for the Emergency. By the time of Gurney's arrival in 1948, the level of the communist insurgency had increased, as the MCP tried to overthrow the government. Unhindered by the British, the party freely intimidated squatters in different settlements into helping the communist effort. Local measures taken by British forces since the declaration of the Emergency in July did not affect the overall communist effort. For example, British forces led by Major General C.H. Boucher conducted large sweeping efforts against the insurgents reminiscent of World War II tactics. But upon hearing of the operations, the guerrillas simply faded into the jungle leaving no target for the troops.30 In response, Gurney took additional counterinsurgency measures relying on a civilian-controlled counter-guerrilla effort backed by the army.

Gurney gave an expanded police force primary responsibility for security and changed the command structure for security forces. In 1948, he appointed

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Commissioner of Police W. N. Gray overall leader of Emergency Operations.\textsuperscript{31} The force began expanding in 1947 to meet the insurgent challenge. Within three years, it had tripled in size from 11,000 to 33,000 people.\textsuperscript{32} However, many problems accompanied this rapid increase, including a lack of Chinese officers, overrecruitment of Malays, and limited police training for new recruits. Even more severe problems which threatened to alienate the already wary Chinese squatters included police corruption, the introduction of policemen from Palestine (unfamiliar with Malaya), police brutality, and, especially, the unneeded use of weapons. For policemen and soldiers, the Chinese population became the enemy because a majority of the insurgents were Chinese. Some security forces shot suspected CT’s and communist supporters with no provocation except their own misgivings.\textsuperscript{33}

Gurney also initiated harsh measures for dealing with the insurgents. For example, he established Emergency regulations 17-C and 17-D, which provided for the detention and deportation of suspected communists or CT’s. Under these regulations officials deported 26,000 Chinese to mainland China before the CCP takeover in 1949.\textsuperscript{34} Criticism of 17-C’s harshness led to its eventual overturn in 1953.

\textit{The Briggs Factor}

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p.71.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p.71.

\textsuperscript{33} An example of this is the Batang Kali incident in Selangor province in December 1948, where nervous policemen shot 24 detainees held on suspicion of aiding the guerrillas. Ibid., pp.71-76.

\textsuperscript{34} Komer, \textit{The Malayan Emergency in Retrospect}, pp.36-37.
Most important, Sir Henry appointed Lt.-General Sir Harold Briggs to command the overall Emergency effort. This appointment originated with Gurney's gathering a committee to look at the squatter problem. The committee found that lack of police control over and administration of the squatters allowed the guerrillas to put greater pressure on them. Based on this finding, the committee recommended that the squatters relocate to an area where the government could protect them. For that reason, Briggs was appointed Director of Operations (DO) for the Emergency. Arriving in Malaya in 1950, he named Robert Thompson as his civil staff officer. Together with his superior, Thompson and the rest of the staff helped draft the so-called Briggs plan which set out the following suggestions for fighting the war:

1. Dominate the populated areas and build up a feeling of security allowing for an increasing flow of incoming information.
2. Break up the communist organization in populated areas.
3. Keep bandits from their food and information supply in populated areas.
4. Destroy the bandits by forcing them to attack us [the British and Malayan forces] (sic.) on our own ground.  

Now having a plan of attack against the communists, Briggs made the counterinsurgency effort more efficient by centralizing overall control. He did this through the introduction of a committee system, which he divided into 3 parts; a Federal War Council (FWC) on the national level, a District War

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36 General Briggs came to Malaya on civilian status because mine and plantation owners wanted to maintain the war as a civil skirmish. The appointment of a military officer might have caused people to consider this a war instead, thus driving businesses’ insurance rates up or eliminating coverage altogether. Lapping, *End of Empire*, p.166.

Executive(DWEC), and a State War Executive(SWEC). The composition of these committees was as follows:

The FWC contained the High Commissioner, Chief Secretary, Federation Secretary of Defense, Police Commissioner, General Officer Commanding(GOC) Malaya, and Air Officer Commanding(AOC) Malaya. Secondly, the SWEC contained the (Mentri Besar, Malay grand vizier, and prime minister to the local sultan), senior civil servant(usually the British adviser to the state government), senior police officer, senior soldier(usually a brigade commander), and the executive secretary seconded from the Malayan Civil Service(MCS). Others such as deputies, staff officers, civil officials, planters, and other local community representatives also attended at this time. At the lowest and yet the most important level was the DWEC containing the District Officer(the Senior Civilian), senior police officer, and the battalion commander and his deputy. Later additions included the Special Branch officer, local information officer, and other officials as needed. Prominent local officials also turned into local members later on.31

By bringing together the various groups involved in the struggle, such as the police, army, Chinese affairs ministry, and social reform groups, Briggs was better able to coordinate their efforts.

With his goals firmly laid out and an improved command structure in place, Briggs set up a system for carrying out the recommendations of the committee set up under Gurney. The resettlement program, which was the crux of this effort, consisted of three steps. Those steps were squatter location and identification; skeletal construction of new villages; movement of settlers; construction of squatter housing; and development of livelihoods, institutions, and governments within the new villages. Initially, government officials took a census of the squatters to determine their numbers and occupations. Depending on one’s classification as a farmer or wage laborer, one received more or less land. In addition, officials often made aerial photographs of the squatter settlements, to make sure they reached even the most isolated ones in an area.39 Once they accomplished this, authorities built the skeleton of the town with “a street for the

39 Pelzer, *Resettlement in Malaya*, pp.399-400.
shops and sites for a school, a clinic, a community center, a playground, and, of course, the lots for the squatter’s houses.” Barbed wire surrounded the towns and police posts within the towns.\textsuperscript{40} In addition, the government installed roads and sewage, water, and electric facilities in some but not all the New Villages.\textsuperscript{41} Then it carried out the most difficult part of the whole process, the move itself. In many cases, British armed forces transported the squatters. They were perfect for this role because of their ready-made organization and transportation abilities. \textsuperscript{42}

Once in the new village, many of the squatters lived in army tents until their homes were built. For their inconvenience, they received a house grant of from S$70-S$300 Straits Dollars (SS) depending on which state they were in), and up to S$15 for temporary loss of livelihood.\textsuperscript{43} After a hut was built, the squatters moved in and tried to resume their normal lives. The next problem for the squatters was obtaining land. Whether they wanted to pursue farming exclusively or fellow farming and wage labor as a source of income, squatters wanted land of their own. According to the resettlement plan, settlers in New Villages were to receive long term land titles. For those moving to an area with outside employment (such as the tin or rubber industries), the government granted

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p.409.


\textsuperscript{42} This was mostly the limit of autonomous army involvement in the resettlement effort. Mostly, the army played a security and jungle fighting role during the Emergency. Short, The Communist Insurrection in Malaya, p.394.

one-sixth acre tracts while those moving to a town with few exterior employment opportunities received an extra three acres for farming.  

After the moving process came the effort at social reform. The follow up or "after-care program," as Briggs named it, encompassed organizing education, giving medical care, setting up community centers, encouraging welfare activities and youth organizations, and arranging for visits by officials from the Department of Agriculture, the Public Relations Service, and the Chinese community. These activities were important since squalid conditions could alienate the settlers.  

Along with the resettlement program went the efforts to keep the squatters from supplying the insurgents with food and supplies. Since, the guerrillas received most of their material from the squatters, this was a measure designed to force them into the open. Security forces were burdened with the responsibility of searching people passing through the New Village's gates in order to stop the flow of materials to the guerrillas.

Even with the reforms Briggs carried out, the resettlement effort did not produce the immediate success government officials hoped to achieve. Problems with the effort undermined the program. British and Malayan officials carried out early resettlement efforts as a way to isolate the guerrillas through moving the squatters, but ignored the settler's security and financial stability once transplanted.  

This tended to alienate many of the newly-moved squatters. Also, government's inattention to settler's livelihoods angered them. The previously-

44 King, "Malaya's Resettlement Problem," p.35.
45 Peizer, "Resettlement in Malaya", pp.401-402.
46 Short, The Communist Insurrection in Malaya, p.394.
mentioned factor of land and distribution penalized people pursuing greater income, turning them against the Resettlement program in the process.47

Another problem in the early resettlement effort was the inconsistency between promises on land grants and when and if settlers actually received it. Because of government officials or Sultans of the different states, settlers had to wait a long time for a title to their land. Most of the land officials first settled squatters on land formerly held in reserve for Malays only.48 The Sultans who granted the land, however, were not keen on giving it to Chinese, so the settlement process stopped until the rulers changed their minds.49 In addition, the government had to buy land suitable for agriculture. Many of the New Villages occupied land located along railways or roads, but most areas adjacent to them were not state-owned. Often, the government paid high prices for this prime property. For example, the state of Johore spent some SS3 million for land by Spring 1951. Land planted in a crop such as rubber, cost between SS600 and SS1200, but the government sold it to settlers for only SS12 to SS15 because that was all they could afford.50 These land problems plagued the government throughout the Emergency.

Another weak point of Briggs' program was his effort at food control. The act of denying food and supplies to the guerrillas was one of the most important aspects of the resettlement effort. Even though he carefully worked out detailed

plans for this task, Briggs could not make it work effectively, because he lacked
the necessary police and other agencies. His efforts at counterinsurgency also
suffered because he the lacked the control over the existing agencies to make them
cooperate.\footnote{Mills, \textit{Malaya. A Political and Economic Appraisal}, pp.60-61.}

Was Briggs's effort then a failure? Hardly. Even though the short term
effect of his resettlement measures was not spectacular, the long term effect of the
New Villages was MCP defeat.\footnote{Ibid., p.57.} Briggs's needed a leader with the necessary
power to pursue it successfully. That leader soon appeared following a tragedy
in October 1951.

On a road leading to Fraser's Hill\footnote{Fraser's Hill was a resort northwest of Bentong in the State of Pahang. Barber, \textit{The War of the Running Deys}, pp.130-131.} on October 6, 1951,
communists ambushed a small motor group killing Sir Henry Gurney.\footnote{Mills, \textit{Malaya. A Political and Economic Appraisal}, pp.58-59. The communists killed more security force members(504) and civilians(533) in 1951, than in any other year during the Emergency. Lapping, \textit{End of Empire}, p.189.} This
tragedy sent shockwaves throughout Malaya. Combined with the high number
of security forces and civilian deaths in 1951, Gurney's murder led to the lowest
point for Malayan and British moral during the Emergency.\footnote{Ibid., p.57.} Observing these
events, the newly elected conservative government in Britain under Winston
Churchill, decided that to stop the insurgency, decisive counter-guerilla action
was necessary. Colonial Secretary Oliver Lyttleton thought that a military officer
with civil and military power over the situation was needed.
The man the British government selected was Sir Gerald Templer. During this year, another important, but much less known event took place. The MCP’s central committee, meeting in the Malayan Jungles, decided to switch their efforts from terrorist actions to a Mao type politico-military strategy. For the MCP their new strategy was a combination of insurgency on both the political and military levels. They made this decision because their terrorist activities did not have the desired effect. Indeed these actions scared many Chinese sympathizers away.

Templer, The Dictator

Once Sir Gerald Templer took over the Malayan Emergency in early 1952, the tempo of the British counterinsurgency effort in Malaya changed drastically. The General’s fiery temper, incessant drive, and attention to detail caused many complaints. He was renowned for his harsh treatment of officials and servants who did not follow his orders exactly, and he kept this reputation throughout his stay there. Using Briggs’s committee structure and resettlement plans along with improvements in education, health, the home guard, social organizations, food searches, and squatter relations, he made the resettlement program the center of a successful counterinsurgency effort. Again Robert Thompson showed

up in important positions where he gained real experience in developing
counterinsurgency measures.

Initially, Templer took two steps to change the image of the New Villages. He changed the names of resettlement camps and resettlement areas to "New Villages" to portray to the squatters the new and better life they had over the old. In addition, he rechristened the 'aftercare' services in the New Villages as 'development'. Additional steps by the federal government, before Templer's arrival improved New Villages' operations. The first of these actions was a December 1, 1951 announcement allowing State and Settlement governments to grant permanent land titles to settlers. Even though delays took place from these actions, their establishment increased the efficiency of the whole system.99

Once Templer arrived, he started making improvements in the lives of the New Villagers. Especially important were reforms in education. Previously, most squatters were illiterate, as they lacked the money or resources to get an education. Existing schools in Chinese settlements were supported by the people of the New Villages or by wealthy patrons. However, the government began to take responsibility for Chinese education. Officials also trained teachers on how government works so that they could then teach it to settlers.60 Even though these schools provided valuable education, they posed future problems for the government.

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60 In 1952, Chinese school enrollment went from 29,000 to 47,000 students, with only 234 out of 500 New Villages having their own schools by the end of the year. Ibid., p.399.
A second improvement in the New Villages was in health care for the squatters. Houses were separated, pure water was made available, primary sanitation facilities were improved, and malaria prevention measures, inoculation, and health education programs were introduced; but the squatters’ health remained poor due to their remoteness from urban areas.\textsuperscript{61} The greatest deterrent to good medical care was the lack of trained medical personnel in the New Villages.\textsuperscript{63}

Third, the government concentrated on improving social organization. In an effort to promote a sense of community, officials took many steps, such as building community centers, which acted as “the focus of social activity,” allowing missionaries to perform welfare work, forming sports teams, and sponsoring of Boy Scouts and Boys Brigade groups.\textsuperscript{63} In addition, missionaries provided settlers with medical care and education.\textsuperscript{64} Templer arranged for an ex-China missionary and Resettlement Supervisor to search in Britain for missionaries who formerly served in China. They would act as Resettlement Officers in Malaya. Aiding him was Robert Thompson, who was home on leave. This person’s efforts were successful as groups widened their commitment and new missionaries came to Malaya.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{61} John Kerry King, “Malaya’s Resettlement Problem,” p.36.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., p.36.
\textsuperscript{63} Stubbs, \textit{Hearts and Minds in Guerilla Warfare}, p.172.
\textsuperscript{64} Short, \textit{The Communist Insurrection in Malaya}, p.400.
\textsuperscript{65} Stubbs, \textit{Hearts and Minds in Guerilla Warfare}, p.161.
Additionally, the government decided to form Home Guards to support the security forces. This force, formed in 1951, recruited settlers in each New Village to protect their towns. Starting as unarmed monitors aiding the police, they eventually received training and arms taking over the static guard duties from the security forces. Most men of the force were initially untrained volunteers. By the end of 1955, Operational Sections grew to between 3,600 and 4,000 volunteers, but the static Chinese Home Guard remained susceptible to intimidation and coercion. For this reason the homeguard structure switched almost totally over to Operational Sections taking the strain off the other units.

Over the Home Guards were the Security Forces who engaged in the most armed actions against the guerrillas. These forces carried out many of the static guard duties in the New Villages (until Home Guard units could relieve them), maintained secure areas around the towns, and pursued guerrillas in the jungles using small versatile patrols. Richard Clutterbuck provides an excellent idea of the range of army and police functions in his description of an offensive operation against the CT's. During this operation, most of the police forces carried on static guard duties such as searching people going in and out of the New Villages and apprehending suspected CT sympathizers. Special Branch, the intelligence arm of the police, arrived in the village first and canvassed the population to

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67 From its 79,000 man base in 1951, the Home Guard grew to 250,000 men by mid-1953, and 210,000 at year's end. Short, The Communist Insurrection in Malaya, pp.412-414.
determine who the communist supporters were. Throughout the operation, they pursued these actions thereby weakening the CT’s.

Finally, army units participated in two ways. Initially, four or five platoons lived at jungle’s edge day and night for 10 to 20 days each, looking for signs of guerilla movement. Later, they set up ambushes for insurgents based on intelligence information. Other groups patrolled the rubber plants all day looking for odd activity. Secondly, army units helped the sometimes overwhelmed police search civilians at the New Village gates.69

In addition to social improvements and security, Templer developed food control methods. He used all possible measures at his disposal to stop the squatters from supplying the CT’s with food, as they were the group’s main source of material support. By depriving the terrorists of food, the government hoped to force them into surrender or into a conventional battle. These measures included searches, maintenance of detailed food sales records, and utilization of food’s limited shelf life. Searchers at the gates of New Villages and on the roads looked for food enroute to the guerrillas, and punished people for smuggling goods through levies such as jail terms and heavy fines.70 Common preparation of food in the New Villages, opening of tinned goods, and detailed records of food buyers

68 Special Branch performed most of the intelligence work during the Emergency, as it was a civilian run war. Komer, The Malayan Emergency in Retrospect, p.44

69 Richard Clutterbuck, The Long, Long War (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Inc., 1966), pp.116-121. Another powerful weapon against the guerrillas was the monetary awards given by the government to communist informers. At the program’s beginning in 1949, police gave out the huge amount of SS760,000. Barber, The War of the Running Dogs, p.93.

70 Stobbs, Hearts and Minds in the Malayan Emergency, p.167. Smugglers hid contraband under false bottoms in latex tuis (used for collecting latex from rubber trees), in bike seats and bells, and tire pumps. Clutterbuck, The Long, Long War, p.120.
also added to food control efforts, especially since rice spoiled quickly in Malaya’s hot climate.\textsuperscript{71}

At the same time British and Malayan officials fought the CT’s, there were other events taking place that had an eventual effect on the Emergency’s outcome. Occurrences such as the Korean War, Chin Peng’s visit to Indo-China, and the development of popular political parties in Malaya determined the immediate and eventual length of the struggle. In late 1951, the Korean conflict began, resulting in a sharp increase in rubber and tin prices. The government used export taxes on these materials to pay for the cost of the Emergency.\textsuperscript{72} Secondly, MCP leader Chin Peng traveled to Indochina to discuss with Viet Minh leader Ho Chi Minh how to heighten guerilla efforts against the British.\textsuperscript{73} While this conference on pursuing guerilla war not have an immediate effect, the MCP changed its method of fighting the war in the near future from terrorist tactics to a combination political-military struggle against the government.

Also, during this time, the first efforts to form political parties took place in anticipation of independence. Individuals such as Dato Onn bin Jafar, Tunku Abdul Rahman, and Tan Cheng-loc, led this important effort. Dato Onn was the first leader of the United Malys National Organization(UMNO), which came into being in the spring of 1946 in response to plans for a Malayan

\textsuperscript{71} Cable, \textit{Conflict of Myths}, p.86. In Malaya like many other Southeast Asian countries, rice was the main food source.

\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Kosner, the Malayan Emergency in Retrospect}, pp.22-24.

Union. Although the union plan failed, Dato Onn stayed on as leader of UMNO until 1951. The organization experienced great success after his departure. In 1953, it allied with the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) under Tan Cheng-lok to form the "Alliance Party." In 1953, the new front gained control of local and state governments. Tunku Abdul Rahman, who succeeded Dato Onn as leader of UMNO, led the Alliance Party in a move to gain an elected Legislative Council from the British. Under UMNO pressure, the British made changes allowing for the Council, and set the election date for 27 July, 1955. The Alliance Party swept the elections, and Tunku Abdul Rahman became the new Chief Minister. He held this position until the declaration of independence in 1957.

The Last Leg

In 1954, the Emergency entered its last phase when Sir Gerald Templer left. Guerilla strength by that time stood at one-third of its original amount making his presence unnecessary. Events during the next six years such as Malayan government negotiations with the MCP, military activities, and the success of the New Villages marked the success of British and Malayan counterinsurgency


75 Kennedy, A History of Malaya, p.277. Tan Cheng-lok formed the MCA mainly out of wealthy Chinese who had an interest in a non-communist Malaya.

76 Miller, A Short History of Malaya, pp.186-195.

77 Clutterbuck, The Long, Long War, p.113.
efforts against the communists. In 1955, the Malayan government, in preparation for independence, met with the MCP at Baling to discuss a possible end to the Emergency. The meeting failed however as the MCP demands for surrender with no penalty and legalization of their group fell upon deaf UMNO ears. Tunku Abdul Rahman worried about the effects a legal MCP would have on the country, and decided against it. Willing to compromise, he first proposed conditional amnesty with arrest or deportation for those who did not give up communism, but would not offer anymore.\textsuperscript{78} After this point, the only option in the Emergency was a fight to the finish.

With the failure of the Baling talks, the success of the New Villages continued unabated. The MCP changed its command structure at this point by adding a Malayan and Indian as second and third in command to give the impression of a united front, in contrast to the Alliance Party’s set up.\textsuperscript{79} Also, the New Villages caused such a shift in and concentration of the Chinese population that the towns became more urbanized in nature.\textsuperscript{80} This proved very important to the increasing success of the New Villages. Because of urbanization, the towns experienced an increase in services, employment opportunities, and amenities, making their inhabitants very happy and disinclined to support the guerrillas.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{78} Allen, \textit{Malaysia. Prospect and Retrospect.}, p.106.

\textsuperscript{79} Other efforts to undercut the Malayan government included MCP requests to China to negotiate a peace and attempts to destroy the 1956 London Conference on the Malayan Constitution. Kennedy, \textit{A History of Malaya}, p.219.

\textsuperscript{80} Dow, \textit{Nation Building in Southeast Asia}, p.49.

\textsuperscript{81} Stubbs, \textit{Hearts and Minds in Guerilla Warfare}, p.234.
Even though some of the New Villages did fail, most continued on a successful settlements.

Along with this, the security forces successfully pursued their actions against the communists, causing the insurgent structure to fall apart under the pressure. The declaration of communist free or “white” areas marked the beginning of the end for the guerrillas. Immediately after Gerald Templer left, DO, Sir Geoffrey Bourne, decided to eliminate the communist structure in the weakest areas first. This followed the declaration of the first White area on the peninsula in Malacca in 1953. A region once proclaimed a “white area” gained many advantages such as cessation of rice rationing, lifting of limitations on food and other ‘tactical’ articles, ending of curfews, and the rescission of regulation on road travel. Other measures included the reduction of Home Guard forces in each New Village to a group of ten to twenty volunteers. This effort continued throughout the mid-1950’s. By 1956, the government established a white belt the width of the country, freeing up security forces for other duties. This release of units and the improved training of special constables and Home Guards, meant security forces could concentrate their numbers against the MCP. This advantage continued on with increasing achievement until the end of the Emergency.

In 1957, the last major event in Malaya before the end of the Emergency took place. The country declared independence on 31 August under the

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84 Ibid., p.489.
leadership of Tunku Abdul Rahman. In addition, Robert Thompson gained more counterinsurgency experience during his time in the newly independent Malayan government. He became Coordinating Officer Security in the Defense Ministry responsible for wider security factors then simply the anti-MCP struggle. One of his responsibilities was investigating the suspected financing of subversion by Chinese businessmen through the Communist Chinese owned-Bank of China. The Malayan government ended the possibility of the bank paying for subversive activity by allowing only banks with less than 50% foreign ownership to operate in Malaya. Following his role there, Thompson moved to another position in the Ministry of Defense. He served as "Deputy Secretary for Defense (the Armed Forces) then as Secretary for Defense responsible for both Armed forces and Police, and both Defense and Internal Security under Tun Tazak as Minister." In these positions, he dealt with the formation and expansion of Malaya's armed forces, and also more importantly with Emergency efforts. This continued his experience with nationally led counterinsurgency efforts that began with his role as Chinese Affairs officer in Ipoh. In 1960, however, the Emergency ended and his service in Malaya came to a conclusion.

After twelve long years of struggle, the Emergency finally ended in mid-1960. The Malayan people threw a huge parade throughout Kuala Lumpur in

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87 Ibid., pp.109-110.
celebration of the communist defeat. At the same time, however the remnants of the once powerful MCP retreated into deep jungle along the Malay-Thai border. Around 400 communists went along with Chin Peng in hopes that some day they could fight the government and win. A much quieter but important event took place a bit earlier when Robert Thompson left Kuala Lumpur on 12 April bound eventually for South Vietnam.

Vietnam: The Rule of Diem and the Development of Insurgency

Running somewhat parallel to the Emergency, the Viet Minh struggle against first the French and then the South Vietnamese and Americans was a successful insurgent effort. From the Viet Minh’s position of dominance in Vietnam at the end of World War II, to the formation of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in South Vietnam in 1960, their enemies looked for ways to fight the guerilla war. The Viet Minh gained control in 1945 of much of the Vietnamese countryside as the Japanese eliminated French troops and officials intent on reasserting their authority over the area. The French reoccupied the country immediately after the war, but had a hard time recapturing control because of the Vietminh’s hold on the countryside.

Over the nine years after 1945, the French unsuccessfully struggled to reestablish their dominance over Indochina. Initial efforts to defeat the Vietminh failed, and by 1950 the war strained French resources to their limits. For this reason, they asked for American military and financial help in fighting the war. The U.S. gave this help as recent events such as the communist takeover of China in 1949 and the Soviet Union’s explosion of its first atomic bomb fueled growing fear of a communist threat.91 Growing American support and increased French efforts over the next four years did not affect the war as French forces lost ground.

By the beginning of 1954, their position in relation to the Vietminh was perilous. The Navarre Plan, which envisioned a large scale offensive against the Vietminh failed, as concentrated French forces broke up into smaller groups to deal with communist General Giap’s invasion of Northern, Central, and Southern Laos. French forces wound up at the Northern Vietnamese town of Dien Bien Phu where they hoped to bring the Vietminh to a climactic battle. In the end, however, the Vietminh won the battle with superior numbers and position. Set up in a valley and surrounded by the Vietminh, 12,000 French soldiers surrendered on May 7, 1954 after a 55 day siege.92 With the defeat at Dien Bien Phu came the end of French attempts at armed efforts to keep Vietnam. The French authorities then moved on to the 1954 Geneva Conference to end the war and their losing role in it.


92 Ibid., pp.27-37.
Diem Takes Control

After Geneva, the tone of the struggle in Vietnam changed as America took over France's former position. The Geneva Agreements provided for a temporary partition of Vietnam at the 17th parallel, and national elections in 1956. Netwithstanding these provisions, the U.S. made moves to stabilize the South Vietnamese government under Ngo Dinh Diem, through the introduction of $300 million dollars in aid. As for elections, they never took place, because Diem instead consolidated his power. To do this, he eliminated or subjugated the private armies of which various religious political, and criminal groups maintained throughout the country. The three most threatening to him were the Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and the Binh Xuyen. During 1955 Colonel Edward G. Lansdale, an American advisor close to Diem helped the premier neutralize both the Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai by bribing top officials into joining Diem's side. The Hoa Hao guerilla leader, Ba Cut, who did not accept the offer marked the end of this struggle with his death by guillotine in 1956. Another more deadly group, the Binh Xuyen, met their demise in the spring of 1955 when their 40,000 man army was defeated by Diem's troops.  

94 Ibid., p. 220.  
95 Emperor Bao Dai, who backed Diem until this time, supported the Binh Xuyen. With this event and his defeat by Diem in a questionable referendum, the emperor lost his remaining power to Diem who became chief of state. Ibid., pp. 222-223.
During the next three years, Vietnam again drifted towards war as Diem moved to eliminate the remaining opposition to his rule while the communists in the North solidified their rule. The South Vietnamese ruler began his systematic attempt to clear out the remaining Viet Minh organization in South Vietnam, around the time of the Binh Xuyen conflict. He liquidated some 90% of the former Vietminh cells in the Mekong Delta by 1956, but years passed before these groups recovered from near extinction.\textsuperscript{96} Paralleling these developments, U.S. aid continued growing based on the apparent stability of Diem's government, and the absence of Vietminh actions which remained at a limited number mostly for special purposes against the government.\textsuperscript{97} With the beginning of 1959, however, Vietminh complacency ended. The Central Committee of the Vietnamese Workers' (Lao Dong) Party, in North Vietnam, made a decision to pursue armed struggle against Diem\textsuperscript{98} Following this decision, kidnappings and murders increased greatly throughout the country.\textsuperscript{99} Diem's response to this growing insurgency was the creation of Agrovilles later that year. The regime built these villages to keep the rural peasantry from the communist side by moving some 300-500 families to each "Rural Community Development Center," bringing the plusses of urban life(schools and services) to them, and strengthening their security.\textsuperscript{100} The program failed, however, because

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid, p.227.


\textsuperscript{98} Guenter Lewey, \textit{America in Vietnam}, p.15.

\textsuperscript{99} Spector, \textit{Advice and Support}, p.330.

\textsuperscript{100} USPR, Vol.2 pt.IV.B.2., p.2.
the government separated the peasants from their ancestral lands, tombs, and farming lands, and forced them to build the Agroville with no compensation. In two years the program faded away, but it hardened many of the peasants to the GVN during that time. Finally, in 1960 the communists made their formal move to organize and start the insurgency in South Vietnam. Old members of the Viet Minh formed the National Liberation Front (NLF) as the official group opposing the Diem government and concentrating on its downfall. With this organizational move, began the large-scale effort by the Viet Cong against the GVN and the move towards eventual war with the United States.

101 Spector, Advice and Support, pp. 332-333. In an Agroville near Vi Thanh in the Mekong Delta, the village director, Major Tran Cuu Thiem, forced 20,000 peasants to complete the town in 55 days according to Diem’s schedule. The village, unfortunately, only held some 6,000 people meaning the other 14,000 left their crops to build the Agroville without any reward or compensation. Karnow, Vietnam. A History, p. 291.

102 Karnow, Ibid., p. 230.
Chapter Two: The Rise and Fall of the Strategic Hamlet Program

For U.S. and Vietnamese officials, the years 1960-1963 were the most important of the Second Indochina War. This period saw the rise of the Viet Cong insurgency in South Vietnam and accompanying government moves to quell it. (See Figure 2) Both the Americans under Kennedy and the Vietnamese under Diem looked for an effective doctrine for protecting the peasantry from the Viet Cong and for flushing the insurgents into the open. The result of this search was development of the strategic hamlet program. Started under the leadership of Ngo Dinh Nhu (Diem’s brother), the program was the crux of the Vietnamese pacification effort. It encompassed defeating the Viet Cong by winning peasant support from the government.

But, where did the idea for the program originate? The source for much of it was Robert Thompson and the British Advisory Mission (BAM), which
Figure 2. MAP OF NORTH AND SOUTH VIETNAM: 1960-1963
consulted with President Diem on insurgency matters. For many top U.S. officials, the Malayan experience offered a valuable tool for dealing with communist insurgency in Vietnam. They showed this in their initial approval of the BAM, and their support of Thompson’s Delta Plan. But as the program’s demise suggested, their application of the Malayan Experience to Vietnam was a historical analogy taken out of context.

*Events in Southeast Asia Heat Up*

With the rising insurgency rate in South Vietnam beginning in the early 1960’s and the experience of the Cuban revolution and Laotian insurgency behind them, American leaders looked for measures to combat guerilla warfare. President John F. Kennedy, who had already shown unshakable interest in counterinsurgency actions and believed that international communism threatened the third world through subversion, spearheaded the effort. Prior to Kennedy’s 1961 inauguration, opponents of the Diem regime including large numbers of previous Vietminh members had formed the National Liberation Front while the Diem’s regime popularity deteriorated. By late 1959, the size of the guerilla

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103 The BAM consisted of men who had counterinsurgency roles in the Malayan Emergency. Group members besides Thompson included Desmond Palmer, deputy leader, who was experienced in police and intelligence work, Jack Marsh, who served as Deputy Commissioner of Police in Malaya, Dennis Duncanson who spoke eight languages and had knowledge of information services, and Bill James who worked in the Malayan Civil Service previously. Thompson, *Make for the Hills*, pp.123-124.

104 During the 1950’s, Kennedy voiced his worries about the threat of guerilla warfare in places such as French Algeria. Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era*, p.53.
group(later known as the Viet Cong) reached 4,000 o 5,000 and doubled in 1960.\textsuperscript{105}

Already unpopular for its Agroville Program, the government lost more support as it refused to make reforms allowing a voice for the opposition.\textsuperscript{106} This contributed in large part to the failed coup attempt by elite paratroop units against Diem and his family in November of 1961. Led by some of his supposedly most loyal generals, the paratroopers surrounded his palace and demanded basic political reforms including the installation of a new government. Diem promised reforms even as he secretly mobilized armed forces loyal to him. They quickly put down the coup.\textsuperscript{107}

\textit{The Search for a Counterinsurgency Doctrine Starts}

Influenced by the Cuban and Laotian situations as well as Vietnam, Kennedy and his advisers worked to develop an overall counterinsurgency doctrine specifically for Vietnam. A week after his inauguration, the President approved the Counter Insurgency Plan (CIP), which proposed giving Diem financial support to increase his 150,000 by an additional 20,000 men and aid for about one-half of the Civil Guard.\textsuperscript{108} Diem was expected to reform his

\textsuperscript{105} Peasants serving as soldiers at night, and provincial and regional elements of the communist forces also aided the struggle through their increasing numbers. Robert Shaplen, \textit{The Lost Revolution}, (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p.140.

\textsuperscript{106} Ambassador Durbrow met alone with Diem to convince him of the necessity of these reforms, but he had no luck. Spector, \textit{Advice and Support}, pp.366-367.

\textsuperscript{107} Shaplen, \textit{The Lost Revolution}, pp.141-142.

\textsuperscript{108} Among the reforms proposed was a change in the confusing Vietnamese Army command structure "which
government including transferring control of the Civil Guard (CG) from the Interior Department to the Department of Defense. This was a very important since it put all counterinsurgency forces in the countryside and rural villages under the command of the armed forces.

With this change, American leaders hoped to eliminate some of the internal opposition to Diem and strengthen his government against the Viet Cong. But, this did not happen. Diem refused to reform his government.

During this time, the U.S. tried to develop an overall counterinsurgency doctrine and structure for use on an international level. This move, as said before, had its basis in JFK’s previous experience with counter-guerilla warfare, and additionally with Kruschev’s 1961 speech mentioning wars of national liberation. When Kennedy entered office, he undertook a massive military buildup on all levels (nuclear, conventional, and unconventional) to meet any kind of communis challenge. The development and increase of unconventional forces was a process of armed forces evolution, civilian and military coordination, and refinement of the resulting structure.

lay in the hands of some 42 people (38 province chiefs, 3 regional commanders, and a chief of staff).” USVR, vol.2, pt.IV.B.1., p.i. The Counterinsurgency Program designated by the acronym CIP should not be confused with the Commercial Import Program. Also known under the CIP acronym, this program started in the 1950’s, as an indirect method of U.S. aid to South Vietnam. The U.S. deposited large amounts of U.S. dollars in the Vietnamese treasury, making them available for currency exchange. Importers then traded Vietnamese piasters for the hard currency, with the piasters going to finance the GVN’s operation. For a fuller explanation, see Dennis Duncanson, Government and Revolution in Vietnam (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp.283-284.

USVR, pt.IV.A.5., p.92.


Walton, Cold War and Counterrevolution, p.65. The counterinsurgency buildup was a small part of the overall U.S. military increase to meet the communist challenge.
The Gilpatric Commission

Other efforts to form a plan for fighting counterinsurgency soon took place. With the memory of the Bay of Pigs still fresh in his mind and with Laos facing possible collapse, Kennedy ordered Deputy Secretary of Defense, Gilpatric on April 20, 1961 to from a new plan to save South Vietnam the Viet Cong insurgency. In response, Gilpatric expanded on economic aspects of the CIP and created the position of coordinator responsible for counterinsurgency operations. However, government officials failed to complete the plan and it was never put into operation.

The Staley Commission

Soon after this effort faded, an economic group under Stanford economist Dr. Eugene Staley went to Vietnam in June 1961 to assess the insurgency situation. The Staley Economic Commission composed of the American economists and a Vietnamese group under Vu Quoc made new recommendations for strengthening the anti-guerilla struggle including increasing troop sizes, maintaining CG and Self Defense Corps(SDC) levels, and beginning a crash social and economic program. Remembering that there were some 12,000 Viet

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113 Ibid., pt. IV.B.2., p.5 The CG was a paramilitary group that carried out security on the province level, and actively pursued the Viet Cong when requested by ARVN. To compliment to the work of the CG,
Cong and that 90% of the armed forces remained on static duty, the Staley group recommended an increase in South Vietnam’s armed force levels from 170,000 to 200,000 men in 1962 with further increases later. An accompanying proposal to keep the CG and SDC meant that the army was expected to do the bulk of the fighting. However, the group did not say how the increased army should fight the war.

Along with these two recommendations, the Staley group proposed a crash social and economic program to improve the lives of the peasants and make them better able to defend against the insurgents. The program included increasing the inter-village communication system, increased transistor receivers in the villages, roads for 100 additional Agroilles, greater medical availability, training for lower and middle level civil administrators, and training of youth corps in civic action. The Kennedy administration took the groups proposals under advisement. Later it decided to increase the level of ARVN troops, approving a 30,000 man expansion in SVN’s armed forces.

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the SDC composed of local peasants with different degrees of training and armament was supposed to maintain a security role at the village and hamlet.


15 Group members proposed CG numbers remain at 70,000 and SDC numbers stay at 60,000. Ibid., p.12.


17 Originally, Diem wanted a 100,000 man increase approved. *USVR*, vol.2, pt.IV.B.1., pp.iii-iv.
disagreements with the U.S. military over formation of counterinsurgency policy, the Joint Chiefs of Staff backed him on the troop increase.\textsuperscript{118}

\textit{The Geographically Phased Plan}

Following these initial efforts, the U.S. government finally came up with a decisive counterinsurgency plan in 1961 to deal with the communist insurgency. The "Geographically Phased National Level Operational Plan for Counterinsurgency" was a product of MAAG, Saigon under the command of Lt. Gen. Lionel C. McGarr. To understand better the makeup of this document, a short examination of its main creator, McGarr, is useful. Before assuming command of MAAG from Gen. Williams in August 1960, he was Commandant of the Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth Kansas, where he showed a keen interest in the study of counterinsurgency. Arriving in Vietnam in 1959, he guided the design of the tactical military section of MAAG’s CIP, entitled "Tactics and Techniques of Counter-Insurgent Operations." All of this reflected McGarr’s conviction that counterinsurgency was a special style of war demanding unique doctrine and tactics.\textsuperscript{119}

As the first U.S. counterinsurgency plan designating definite plan of action against the Viet Cong, Geographically Phased Plan was significant in its divergence from previous attempts. Combined with the CIP, it presented a

\textsuperscript{118} Memo, SecDef to JCS, 21 Aug 61, sub: Joint Programs of Action with the Government of South Vietnam, Ind. to JCS 2343/16, Box 172, JCS records, RG 218.

\textsuperscript{119} Spector, Advice and Support, p. 365.
comprehensive U.S. plan for combatting the Viet Cong threat. The plan envisioned “three phases of action” in pacifying the countryside and set out regions of “primary interest for pacification.” These phases were:

(1) the “preparatory phase” which concentrated on intelligence in the primary area, conducted political and economic need surveys, formed a plan and trained political cadres for specific primary areas; (2) the “military phase” which allowed regular forces to clear the area and hand security responsibility over to the SSR; and (3) the “security phase” which handed over security and civil action to the SDC, redirected the people, gave control to civilians, and carried out economic and social programs.\textsuperscript{120}

In accordance with this timetable, the plan established a precise schedule for bringing the countryside under GVN control. It provided for pacifying Kontum and 6 provinces around Saigon by the end of 1962. This would be followed by the pacification of the Delta and South of Kontum into the Central Highlands by late 1963, and the control of more of the highlands and areas North and East of Saigon by the close of 1964. In addition, this plan proposed an ARVN move up through one of the areas most heavily infiltrated by the Viet Cong. By sweeping through War Zone D northeast of Saigon, officials hoped ARVN could gain confidence and eliminate immediate danger to the capital.\textsuperscript{121}

Even though it appeared therefore, that the the U.S. finally had a solvent counterinsurgency plan for South Vietnam, which would turn the tide, this proved not to be the case. The arrival of Robert Thompson and the BAM in October radically changed matters.

\textsuperscript{120} U.S. P.R. vol.3., pt.IV.B.2., p.8.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., p.8.
Robert Thompson and BAM Arrive

In October 1961, in the midst of the U.S. buildup of ARVN and immediately after the debut of MAAG's Geographically Phased Plan, the BAM (under Robert Thompson) arrived in Vietnam. Thompson's group came in order to inform Vietnamese and American officials about the British experience in Malaya. But who was responsible for moving them to Vietnam? According to Thompson, Malayan Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, suggested to President Diem and British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan the idea of dispatching a British advisory team to Vietnam. President Kennedy also approved of the mission. Before the main part of the group went onto Vietnam however, Robert Thompson consulted with U.S. officials in Washington including Walt W. Rostow and General Maxwell Taylor on intelligence and military sweeps. He also met with officials from the CIA, the JCS, and other agencies, to talk about the importance of organization to the counterinsurgency campaign.

From its arrival in Saigon throughout the end of 1961, the group encountered resistance especially from MAAG advisors and higher members of the U.S. military. The basis of this conflict was BAM's semi-independent role,

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122 Sir Robert Thompson, interview by author, 15 November 1989, letter. Diem made a trip to Malaya and invited Malayan officials to Vietnam before 1961 to take advantage of their counterinsurgency experience. This might mean that he also had the impetus like Tunku Abdul Rahman to send a British advisory team later on. Thompson, Make for the Hills, p.122.

133 Ibid., pp.123-124.
also MAAG differed with the group over the correctness of the Delta Plan vs Geographically Phased Plans. When Thompson and the BAM started their work, U.S. military and civilian officials worried about them advising Diem on counterinsurgency beyond their sphere of influence and without being responsible to anyone. A move to define the group's effort came from MAAG chief, Lionel C. McGarr. In a memorandum to Commander-in-Chief Pacific, Admiral H.D. Felt, he states that the British area of operation encompassed every aspect of counterinsurgency except for military functions and specifically "the military field of civilian administration." In addition, he wanted to define the working relationship between MAAG and the BAM. The most important aspect of this would encompass British notification of MAAG on any advice the group gave GVN indirectly affecting military aspects of counterinsurgency.

A memorandum from the JCS to General Maxwell Taylor in mid-October concentrated more on the applicability of the Malayan experience to Vietnam and the intended role of the BAM there. General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, Chairman of the JCS, told Taylor that he felt the police basis for a security system was not applicable in Vietnam as in Malaya, so they wanted the army to have the main role. He warned that the British, without thoroughly checking the situation,

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124 The military aspect of civilian rule had to do especially with "activities after military operations." Msg. CHMAAG to CINCPAC, 090745Z, Aug 61, p. 1, JMG 9155.3/3369(9 Aug 61), Box 173, JCS Records, RG 218.

125 Ibid., p.3.

could try to convince the Vietnamese of the opposite train of thought.\textsuperscript{127} This indicates that the JCS worried about the BAM's ability to advise without being responsible to anyone.

\textit{The "Appreciation" Comes Out}

When BAM finally arrived in Saigon, it set to work, eventually drawing up its "Appreciation" of the insurgent situation and the Delta Plan for pacification of the Delta region.\textsuperscript{128} Thompson and other group members spent some weeks touring the countryside to determine what the situation was. By the end of that time, he decided that the situation was bad. This was upheld by the large size of the insurgency as compared to that in Malaya, and the lack of administration, especially in the Delta which was formerly the French Colony of Cochin-China.\textsuperscript{129} On October 27, Thompson delivered his "Appreciation" of the Vietnamese situation to President Diem. Thompson warned that the Viet Cong were trying to increase their control of the countryside (the peasants) while the GVN was ignoring the importance of the peasant.\textsuperscript{130} Diem, instead preferred large-scale army actions against the guerrillas, which were useless since the Viet Cong were elusive.

\textsuperscript{127} An interesting sidenote. The General also warned that the Advisory Mission might be a British tool to broaden the country's influence in the area for political purposes. Ibid., p.326.

\textsuperscript{128} When the French pulled out in 1954, they left the Delta region leaderless because their nationals held most of the offices. Thompson, \textit{Make for the Hills}, pp.125, 127-128.

\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Appreciation of Vietnam, November 1961 - April 1962}, Incl. to Memo, CINCPAC to JCS, 5 Dec 61, Ser:00732, sub:Activities of the "Thompson" Group(U), JMF 9155.3/3360(9 Aug 61), Box 173, JCS Records, RG 218.
Figure 3. MAP OF SOUTH VIETNAMESE FOURTH CORPS (THE DELTA REGION)
Taking this into account, Thompson called for reforming the army, the police, and the command structure and developing a national counterinsurgency plan. He would also limit the army's size and establish a national police force by joining together the National Police, CG, and Sûreté (first in the Delta). The police force would carry out most static security tasks (along with the SDC) and all intelligence work. Army units freed up in the Delta could then pursue mobile actions against the Viet Cong. A recurring theme throughout the whole report, however, was the need to win the Vietnamese peasants over to the program and bring them into the fight against the communists. Otherwise all counterinsurgency efforts were useless.

Thompson's report was not popular with everyone who saw it however. Ambassador Nolting, Admiral H.D. Felt, and Lt. General McGarr: all expressed reservations about Thompson's recommendations. For both Nolting and Admiral Felt, the British presented an unneeded option to existing U.S. strategy which included the following steps.

A. Elimination of Diem's fear of a coup so he will delegate authority to them [ARVN] (sic.) without worrying about being overthrown.
B. An effort to convince the SVN Defense Department to make and execute a plan for the destruction of the Viet Cong's structures, morale, and hold over the rural population. (He did not believe Thompson's plan struck the necessary balance between resources and objectives in this type of plan.)
C. Persuasion of soldiers and civilians that they fought a common enemy for their mutual benefit.

General McGarr also had objections to Thompson's "Appreciation," that he expressed in a telegram to Admiral Felt. Initially he agreed with most of the report's recommendations concerning the state of the insurgency, the need for a

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130 Ibid., p.7.
131 Ibid., pp.9-11.
132 Memo, CINCPAC to JCS, 5 Dec 61, Ser:00732, sub: Activities of the 'Thompson' Group(U), JMF 9155.3/3360(9 Aug 61), Box 172, JCS Records, RG 218.
defined chain of command, the need for a coordinated command of
counterinsurgency efforts, and the necessity of a comprehensive plan for fighting
the insurgency. But he disagreed strongly with Thompson's suggestions that the
police play the primary security and intelligence roles in the pacification effort,
leaving the military to pursue mobile actions. Rather, McGarr believed the army
should play the primary role because it was in existence when the insurgency
started and assumed the main burden immediately. He also thought that the
Civil Guard played almost the same role as the police in controlling the
peasantry. While McGarr acknowledged that a coordinated intelligence system
was desirable, he indicated it would not be based in the police force. The Central
Intelligence Organization should play the primary role in controlling and
coordinating intelligence efforts when a national counterinsurgency plan finally
appeared.13

The Delta Plan Debuts

On November 13, the BAM faced more controversy when Thompson
submitted his plan for pacifying the Delta to Diem. (See Figure 3) This document
considers such issues as creation of Strategic hamlets, security measures, a
proposed intelligence structure, and areas of concentration. Initially, Thompson
defines strategic hamlets and defended hamlets which form the basis of his

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13 Memo, CHMAAG to CINCPAC, 18 Nov 61, Incl. to Memo, CINCPAC to JCS, 5 Dec 61, Ser:00732,
sub: Activities of the "Thompson" Group(L), JMF 9155.3/3360(9 Aug 61), Box 173, JCS Records, RG
218.
system. The defended hamlets would consist of 200-300 houses and be located along the Cambodian border and astride the mangrove swamps on the eastern coast. They would be used to prevent infiltration, while strategic hamlets would occupy the rest of the region.134 GVN officials would surround these hamlets with barbed wire, watch towers, moats, and bamboo spikes. They would undertake as little peasant resettlement as possible. To help maintain security, such “control measures” would be established as prohibited areas, curfews, distribution of identity cards, and establishment of checkpoints on roads and waterways. Controls on food material control methods would take place.135

The SDC, the CG would be mainly responsible for security, while the army would actively pursue the Viet Cong in the countryside. Thompson also reiterated this proposal for CG companies to move after their province was declared “white” (secure) so they could help secure other areas.

Military forces would actively pursue the guerrillas and maintain static guard duties where necessary, while officials established the Strategic Hamlet structure. Once the framework was complete, the military could slowly give up its static duties and leave a mobile reserve for hamlets still having problems. As the security forces constricted the supply of material, food, and manpower available to the Viet Cong, they could be expected to attack therefore letting the military forces actively pursue them. This process would give villagers security and confidence, resulting in more information from them. Greater elimination


135 Ibid., pp.349-350.
of the Viet Cong would follow from this information leading to greater peasant confidence, increased flow of information, and so on. From this point the CG and SD would maintain security in all “white areas.” Freed up of their duties, the military could move to other still unsecured areas and help.\textsuperscript{126}

To control intelligence and the counterinsurgency effort, a series of committees and Combined Headquarters would respectively could be formed. As an aid to the security effort, intelligence committees would be set up at district, province, and Combined Headquarters level. The district committee might consist of the Surete, SDC, Chef De District, CG, and military unit (if in the area) representatives. One of these people would become the group’s director beneath the Chef de District. A similar system would be used at the province and Combined Headquarters levels.\textsuperscript{127} To direct the whole pacification effort including these hamlets, the government would form Combined Headquarters in Saigon. It would coordinate “antiterrorist operations, civilian emergency measures, security intelligence, information and propaganda, and follow up social improvements.”\textsuperscript{128}

As part of the program, the government would pursue social reforms in the villages. Responsibility for such measures as establishing schools and providing medical care would be delegated to civic action cadres trained especially for this purpose. These actions were to follow the emergency measures (such as curfews) as soon as possible in Strategic Hamlets, and were to take place simultaneously

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., pp.350-352.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., p.354.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., p.347.
to them in Defended Hamlets (to show the settlement’s benefit to the peasants). Resettled people would be compensated for loss of property as would SDC members or relatives of soldiers killed in action as a result of the Strategic Hamlet Program.\textsuperscript{139}

Lastly, the plan called for the program to concentrate initially around the Mekong River in the Delta Region. This was intended to stop inflation along the river and through the borders, and to push the communists into the mangrove swamps where they could be defeated. Also, the building program could not take place throughout the Delta region at one time, because of limited resources and the need to spread outward from secure areas. Results of this program would include troops released for other missions in the Highlands and along the coast, higher morale spread after the declaration of “white areas,” and the establishment of a model for counterinsurgency programs in other parts of the country.\textsuperscript{140}

\textit{Differing Reviews for Thompson}

As with the Appreciation, General McGarr quickly criticized Thompson’s program, because it conflicted with the Geographically Phased Plan. The Delta Plan did this by keeping the ARVN command structure and putting Diem in charge of the “Delta Program,” placing priority on the wrong geographic area, emphasizing static security instead of the large mobile ARVN forces McGarr

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., pp.355-356.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., pp.357-358.
wanted, and moving too slowly (because McGarr desired quicker action).\textsuperscript{141} The fact that Thompson kept the ARVN command structure and put Diem in overall charge of the counterinsurgency effort in his plan made McGarr angry because it went against MAAG's push for a central command framework in the Geographically Phased Plan. Through this framework, McGarr hoped to end the personal hold Diem held on most all military and counterinsurgency efforts. Placing Diem in control did not help this. McGarr was angered by the emphasis on the Delta Plan and static security. A very distinct part of MAAG's plan was a call for initial action in War Zone D to the northwest of Saigon.\textsuperscript{142} In this respect, it came into direct conflict with the Geographically Phased Plan.

Thompson also emphasized static security instead of mobile large unit action which McGarr formed. Thompson's theory is significant since McGarr had claimed at an earlier meeting that military matters were out of the BAM's perview. His objection to the slow pace of Thompson's plan reflected once more the disagreement existing in the U.S. government and military whether to rely on the military or the police in a counterinsurgency effort. The General's effort got "results" quicker than Thompson's by clearing out areas with troops. However, Thompson thought waiting for his counterinsurgency structure to stabilize would bring a better and faster final product.

Most officials in Washington did not agree with McGarr. General Maxwell Taylor(special military representative for the President), Roger Hilsman(State


\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., p.10.
Department official), Walt W. Rostow (Deputy to Special Presidential Assistant McGeorge Bundy), and President Kennedy approved of most or all of Thompson's program. In September 1961, Maxwell Taylor became Kennedy's special military representative in September 1961 to check counterinsurgency moves in the military and give it to the President.\footnote{Blauffarb, \textit{The Counterinsurgency Era}, pp.56-57.} At the President's request, he went to Vietnam in October to evaluate the situation, and returning to Washington, he recommended an increase in advisory levels and the number of weapons going to SVN.\footnote{Lester A. Sobel, ed., \textit{South Vietnam. U.S. Communist Confrontation in Southeast Asia} (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1973), vol. 1, 1961-1965, pp.26-28. Taylor also recommended deploying some 8,000 U.S. troops disguised as logistical support units (to meet the conditions of the 1954 Geneva Agreements) helping in relief efforts for victims of a recent flood. However, Kennedy turned down the suggestion because he did not want to escalate the U.S. manpower presence. Kamow, \textit{Vietnam. A History}, pp.252-253.} While there, he met Robert Thompson from whom he requested and received a copy of his "Appreciation."\footnote{USVR, vol.3, pt.IV.B.2., p.11.} He shortly obtained a copy of the Delta Plan from Thompson and received a long letter from him in the spring of 1962 on his counterinsurgency views. He later delivered a report to the President from Roger Hilsman that mimicked Thompson's pacification recommendations.\footnote{Ibid., pp.13-14.}

Of all the officials who looked at Thompson's counterinsurgency theory, Roger Hilsman was the strongest advocate. Appointed Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research at the State Department in 1961, Kennedy sent him on a quiet fact-finding mission to Vietnam in late 1961/early 1962 to find out if anything else could be done. He met Thompson while there and talked with him

\footnotetext{Blauffarb, \textit{The Counterinsurgency Era}, pp.56-57.}
\footnotetext{USVR, vol.3, pt.IV.B.2., p.11.}
\footnotetext{Ibid., pp.13-14.}
about Thompson's counterinsurgency theories and the Delta Plan. Upon returning to the U.S., he gave the President a report on his mission to Vietnam and his notes on Thompson's plans. Kennedy then told him to compose his talk as a formal report entitled "A Strategic Concept for Vietnam," and give his talk to people like the Attorney General (Bobby Kennedy), Vice-President, heads of the CIA and AID, and the Chief of Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV). Later, Taylor presented to the President the plan, which he liked previously. The plan was based on three assumptions: 1.) the Viet Cong struggle was political rather than military; 2.) the villagers and hamlets needed protection and physical security for a successful counterinsurgency program; and 3.) the counter-insurgent forces required the adoption of guerilla tactics.

Accompanying these men was Walt W. Rostow, deputy to Special Presidential Assistant McGeorge Bundy during the Kennedy Administration and one of the administration's top counterinsurgency people who in the 1950's had written about the economics of underdeveloped countries. As a top administration official, he pushed the use of new counterinsurgency tools such as the helicopter and the green berets against the VC. On a theoretical note,


151 Herring, America's Longest War, p.78. Rostow also supported the deployment of U.S. troops to improve the situation in Vietnam. Kornow, Vietnam, A History, p.358.
Rostow and his supporters developed the view, based on the Malayan experience, that the needed ratio of regulars to guerrillas for a successful fight was twelve to one.\textsuperscript{132} Even so, he had reservations about Thompson's plan. In his book, \textit{The Diffusion of Power}, Rostow states that Thompson's plan was partially effective, but could not work if North Vietnamese manpower and material aid continued to flow across all of SVN's borders.\textsuperscript{133} Later comments took a harder line through. In a letter to the author he states "I found him intelligent on guerilla warfare in the narrow sense, but inclined to translate his Malayan experience too automatically into Vietnam terms."\textsuperscript{134} This however, did not sway Kennedy decisively against Thompson.

As stated previously, Kennedy supported the actions of top officials involving the Delta Plan. He approved the BAM's dispatch to Vietnam in 1961 when Malayan, English, and Vietnamese officials first proposed it. Also, he listened intently and approvingly in early 1962 as Roger Hilsman delivered his talk on the applicability of Thompson's Delta Plan to the Viet Cong insurgency. Finally, he received the official report on Hilsman's talk, entitled "A Strategic Concept for South Vietnam." Since a majority of top administration officials agreed on Thompson's proposed plan, the next step was a resolution of differences the BAM leader and MAAG. disagreements between Thompson and MAAG needed to be solved.

\textsuperscript{132} Warner, \textit{The Last Confucian}, p.142.


\textsuperscript{134} Dr. Walt W. Rostow, interview by author, 28 February 1990, letter.
In late 1961/early 1962, British and American officials successfully smoothed the Thompson-MAAG problem over clearing the stage for the program to begin. British Ambassador Hohler, American Ambassador Nolting, and Thompson met to settle the dispute. During this conference, Thompson decided to drop his recommendations on command arrangements and at least for the moment, his insistence on the leading role of the police. He and MAAG were then able to establish a good working relationship on the pacification issue, but important changes soon took place in the game plan and the players.\textsuperscript{155}

\textit{The Strategic Hamlet Program Starts}

In early 1962 Vietnamese officials and American and British advisors put forth their own suggestions for the location of the first pacification effort. The Americans, following the thinking of the "Geographically Phased Plan" favored a military push into heavily infiltrated war zone D northeast of Saigon, so ARVN could boost its confidence and show its mettle by taking this area.(See Figure 4) In opposition to this, Thompson’s plan called for the GVN to begin its efforts in small secure sections of the Delta Region and spread outward as its forces gained control of the area.\textsuperscript{156} This reflected the "oil blot" theory used by the British in Malaya and the French in Indochina during the 1950's. In Malaya, the British started from small areas of control and formed regions known as "white areas"


\textsuperscript{156} Letter from Robert Thompson to President Diem on the "Delta Plan," Reprinted in USVR, vol.11, p.357.
that were mostly secure from communist activities.\textsuperscript{157} These areas eventually spread throughout the country until they covered it and the government had control.

The French also made similar attempts against the Viet Minh in the early 1950's. In line with this, officials divided small parts of the rural areas into squares, which they tried to clear of insurgents, and eventually spread their control throughout. Extremely vulnerable because of their dispersed locations along roads, inferiorly supported French outposts gave way to Viet Minh attacks.\textsuperscript{158} The program eventually failed as the French fell back from the Viet Minh effort, and gave up the war after Dien Bien Phu.

In consideration of this, this effort to start the Strategic Hamlet Program did not entail the first move to build Strategic Hamlets. The Agroville program, which ran from 1959 to 1961, was an attempt to resettle peasants into large Agrovilles in order to provide them with security and social and medical improvements and to keep control over them. Eventually, it faded away as Diem's harsh resettlement efforts gained only disdain from the peasants.\textsuperscript{159} The GVN then tried in mid-1961 to eliminate the bad image of the Agrovilles by beginning the construction of Agro-hamlets. Building them at a slow rate based on the peasants agricultural timetable, officials put only 100 families in the Agro-hamlets compared to the Agroville's 300-500 families. They also placed the settlements much closer to the peasants' farm land eliminating many past...

\textsuperscript{157} Stubbs, \textit{Hearts and Minds}, pp.179-180.

\textsuperscript{158} Shaplen, \textit{The Last Revolution}, p.9.

\textsuperscript{159} See chapter 1.
complaints. The first strategic hamlets appeared during this time also. Under the supervision of Ngo Dinh Nhu, officials and peasants completed the first three "Strategic Hamlets" in Vinh Long province in July 1961.

Operation Sunrise

In addition to these factors, a more immediate action affected the initial direction of the Strategic Hamlet Program favored by the Americans. Secretary of Defense McNamara met in Honolulu with central U.S. figures in Vietnam to discuss pacification in late 1961. In an effort to make concrete gains, he recommended picking one province for concentrated action and U.S. money and equipment would follow. With the help of U.S. advisors, Diem decided to make his first effort at pacification by building Strategic Hamlets "on the road from Saigon to Tay Ninh Province in Ben Cat district." U.S. and GVN officials called it "Operation Sunrise." (See Figure 4)

For the GVN officials, soldiers, and peasants involved this was not a completely successful experience. The operation began during the week of March 18, 1962 when ARVN forces moved into the village of Ben-Tuong. Soldiers moved peasants out of their old homes, and immediately burned them down. Out of 210 families, only 70 volunteered for resettlement into the hamlets, while

163 General McGarr originated the idea for the strike into this general area near Saigon. Hilsman, To Move A Nation, pp.440-441.
Figure 4. MAP OF SOUTH VIETNAMESE THIRD CORPS
soldiers forcibly moved the rest.\textsuperscript{164} Most of the families did not know of the impending move, because troops did not inform them through acts such as dropping leaflets. They wanted to surprise the peasants to keep them from fleeing into the woods.\textsuperscript{165} During their move, the government promised to give the peasants resettlement money, "land, building materials, agricultural tools, and emergency food and clothing."\textsuperscript{166} Much of this material did not readily show up.

Along with this, U.S. and Vietnamese officials and agencies took actions to help the program along. The two key moves were the allocation of money by the United States Operations Mission (USOM) and the publication of a newspaper by USOM (the operational division of AID in Vietnam). To alleviate some of the economic strain of moving, USOM set aside some $300,000 to compensate the peasants.\textsuperscript{167} Along with this, the Operations Mission also printed a weekly newspaper entitled \textit{Toward the Good Life} that they distributed to the settlers. The newspaper told the peasants why they were resettled and promised them a new house and/or the necessary tools, cash, and other aid needed to build a home. It also promised them distribution of a hectare (2.47 acres) of land to every peasant family, who resettled into the Strategic Hamlets.\textsuperscript{168}


\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 3(2).

Even with these actions, the program still had many failings and came under harsh criticism for them. Such weak points included the poor distribution of relocation funds, the absence of a decent village structure, the lack of promised social improvements, and the rapid relocation of whole villages. First of all, resettled peasants did not receive immediate compensation for land or goods lost due to their move. They had to wait until they showed the government that they would not flee.\(^{169}\) This put an enormous economic strain on the peasant as he had to assume the entire initial cost of moving. When peasants received reimbursement, they only were given $21(1500 piasters) which paid for the cost of a new house and left a mere $5.57(400 piasters) for the farmer’s other expenses.\(^{170}\)

Another problem was the lack of an overall structure in the hamlets to which the peasants moved. In his book *The Lost Revolution*, Robert Shaplen says, “Their new village of Bentuong(sic.) had not been properly prepared, and looked like a refugee camp.”\(^{171}\) Efforts to bring the people to the government’s side also had problems. Civic action cadres dispatched to the Ben Cat hamlets did not immediately arrive there and begin their work.\(^{172}\) This caused problems as the cadres’ absence left the villagers longer to think that the government did not care about them. Finally, the relocation of whole settlements at one time did not endear the peasants to the GVN. Roger Hilsman says that Operation Sunrise


\(^{172}\) Ibid., p.180.
called for the movement of all the hamlets in Ben Cat because of their proximity to War Zone D.\textsuperscript{173}

Even with any limited success the operation achieved, it was a poor start for the Strategic Hamlet Program. The number of people resettled, and the attitudes of American and British officials supported this. Operation Sunrise resulted in the movement of some 2,700 people in three villages by mid-May.\textsuperscript{174} Most American officials did not like the operation. A good indicator of this is Roger Hilsman’s March 17 trip to Saigon at Kennedy’s request. He found out that Ambassador Nolting and General Harkins had reservations as he and the President did about Operation Sunrise.\textsuperscript{175} Also, Robert Thompson expressed doubt about the operation’s location. He preferred that the effort took place in a less heavily infiltrated area.\textsuperscript{176}

Both the leadership and the direction of the counterinsurgency effort changed in early 1962 when General McGarr left, and Diem began official Vietnamese pacification actions, and started the Strategic Hamlet program. Of these moves, one of the most significant was the firing of McGarr from his position as CHMAAG and his return to the U.S. in March. Officials used him as the scapegoat for the declining South Vietnamese situation during lat 1961.

\textsuperscript{173} U.S. military advisors wanted to pursue the operation here to try and slow the flow of men from Tay Ninh province to train in War Zone D. This meant that the hamlets needed to be closer together for better security. Hilsman, \textit{To Move A Nation}, p.440.


\textsuperscript{175} Hilsman, \textit{To Move A Nation}, p.441.

\textsuperscript{176} \textit{USVR}, vol. 3, pt.IV.B.2., p.ii.
On February 9, 1962, MACV under General Paul Harkins superseded MAAG.\textsuperscript{177} In addition, Diem finally took action on the Strategic Hamlet Program. He issued a presidential decree on February 3, 1962 officially starting the program.\textsuperscript{178} An additional step in March committed the government more firmly to the program, gave the Delta Plan priority, and made Nhu program head.\textsuperscript{179}

Following Operation Sunrise other similar efforts soon took place. The most prominent of these was Operation Sea Swallow whose most prominent version took place in Phu Yen province. Aimed at winning the people through security, compensated resettlement, and medical and educational aid, the program would move from areas of lesser to greater communist infiltration, thus clearing the VC before moving on.\textsuperscript{180} According to Dennis Duncanson, another Sea Swallow effort took place on the Camau Peninsula of extreme southern South Vietnam. This was a successful effort by a Father Hoa to protect his group of ex-Nationalist Chinese soldiers in a defended settlement.\textsuperscript{181}(See Figure 5)

During this time and immediately after, the official government effort shifted into full gear. The Strategic Hamlets that resulted had their base in Nhu’s new concept of personalism. Built around self-sufficiency, this system looked to the


\textsuperscript{179} Hilsman, \textit{To Move A Nation}, p.441.

\textsuperscript{180} Warner, \textit{The Last Confucian}, pp.179-180. Warner says that the program had a goal of 156 strategic hamlets during the first 89 days, while Roger Hilsman (as a State Department official) put the target at more like 80 hamlets by the end of 1962. The lower number seems more believable. Memo, Roger Hilsman to Governor Averell Harriman, 18 June 1962, sub: Progress Report on South Vietnam, RFE-27, Reprinted in \textit{USFR}, vol.12, p.470.

\textsuperscript{181} Duncanson says that both efforts were led by two separate figures named father Hoa. Duncanson, \textit{Government and Revolution in Vietnam}, pp.315-316.
Figure 5. MAP OF SOUTH VIETNAMESE SECOND CORPS
hamlets' inhabitants to set up and provide their own defenses, improve village life through clean living in coordination with increases in government sponsored public services, and reform the villages' political and social lives. Other parts of the total personalism concept included the three enlightenments which were used to instruct self sufficiency, and the three motivations which had the former trio as their base.\textsuperscript{182} In line with this, the government even set up a training center under a Colonel Phuoc on personalism in Vinh Long province. There Catholic priests taught cadres in the personalist philosophy of Nhu, and sent them out into the country not only to win over the people, but to give them a whole new ideology for life.\textsuperscript{183}

The steps taken in establishing and operating a strategic hamlet followed somewhat along the lines of the BAM recommendations, but more thoroughly reflected Nhu's personalism making British and American officials nervous. Once the army relocated people into strategic hamlets, the peasant worked to build their houses and the settlements defenses. These defenses consisted of ditches, fences of sharpened bamboo stakes, hedges, and added barriers constructed in a square or triangular pattern around the more densely occupied part of the hamlet.\textsuperscript{184} In line with Nhu's Personalism, construction of homes and buildings in the hamlets rested on corvéé labor with the peasants paying for most

\textsuperscript{182} For a fuller explanation see ibid., pp.316-317.

\textsuperscript{183} Warner, The Last Confucian, p.13.

or all building materials. Nhu even made some GVN employees to help with this effort on Sundays.\textsuperscript{185}

Another part of the program concurrent with this was the dispatch of Civic Action cadres to the villages and the formation of mass organizations. Both measures served the dual purpose of protecting the village and winning the people over to the GVN's side. Civic Action cadres began in 1955 with the formation by Diem of a General Directorate of Civic Action. This Directorate sent groups of trained volunteers from the civil service to work in the villages, as a way of increasing the peasant's condition and create or improve a rapport between the government and the people. Due to complaints, the government scaled back the program in the late 1950's, but revived it in 1961 in preparation for the Strategic Hamlet program.\textsuperscript{186} These groups were to help set up the Strategic Hamlet Program and stay around afterwards to bring social improvements to the peasants and win them over to the government side.\textsuperscript{187} In addition to this, the government wanted to form mass organizations to bring all the people of the village together into organizations in their own age group. The main force for this effort was the Republican Youth which tried to recruit people for various groups in all towns, and also organized "alarm, evacuation, and defense" and acted in most cases as the hamlets defense.\textsuperscript{188}

\textsuperscript{186} Blaufarb, \textit{The Counterinsurgency Era}, p.113.
\textsuperscript{188} Duncanson, \textit{Government and Revolution in Vietnam}, p.317.
Also, military actions involved with the program fell in a very limited range. ARVN declared "free kill" zones around secured Strategic Hamlets to encourage peasants still living outside the settlement to move inside. The remainder of ARVN continued to carry on their operations against the VC at this time, many of which were on paper rather than a real action. An excellent example of this was the Battle of Ap Bac in January 1962. Elements of ARVN and the CG caught the 514th Viet Cong Battalion in three sided box in a tree line near the village of Ap Bac. Leaving the fourth (East) side of the box open, the ARVN thought artillery could take care of the VC if they tried to escape across the East's open fields. Due to various ARVN commanders' unwillingness to attack on the three sides combined with unsupported assaults across wide open fields on the west side, the 514th escaped virtually unscathed across the open side. Some U.S. reporters, especially David Halberstam and Neil Sheehan covered this event thoroughly at this time, but it did not get official U.S. recognition. Many of the U.S. military advisors did remember this during subsequent ARVN operations whether real or claimed.

Viewing all of the GVN's counterinsurgency efforts, many British and American Advisors were worried. On May 12, Homer Bigart reported that some Americans in Vietnam were impatient for a comprehensive plan for the pacification of the Mekong Delta provinces. An additional basis for much of

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this was Diem's rejection of key points of the Delta Plan such as quick reimbursement for "damage to or loss of property or life, coordination of all civil and military actions," establishment of a concise chain of command, and the guidance and "coordination of the information services and psy-war units." The absence of the first factor was especially indicative of Nhu's personalism, with its emphasis on self reliance instead of government aid. With this measure, the government did not try to win the peasantry over by showing them what it could do for them. The remaining aspects showed deficiencies in the Vietnamese system, especially Diem's unwillingness to give others power in fear that they might use it against him.

During early and mid-1962, the reported and actual construction rate of strategic hamlets continued to climb. This statistic made many U.S. and Vietnamese officials optimistic about the anit-Viet Cong struggle, due to the GVN's supposed control of the population. By this time, however, Viet Cong troop levels stood at some 20,000-25,000 people with thousands of additional local guerrillas and "regional troops" available for insurgent actions. Top U.S. officials kept a positive outlook though. As previously mentioned, Secretary McNamara, back from a trip to Vietnam, felt that SVN did not need increased U.S. aid due to the success of Strategic Hamlets(springing up all over Vietnam) and the improved training of the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps. General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, Chairman of the JCS who accompanied him noted a

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193 Warner, The Last Confucian, p.139.
greater sense of confidence in the Civil Guard and Self-Defense units. These units were getting better training and giving up less weapons than before.\textsuperscript{194} This positive attitude did not pervade all U.S. officials as mid-year approached though.

A June 18 report from Roger Hilsman in the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research sounded a more cautious note. One one hand, he talked of the program’s slow progress because of the lack of coordination, direction, and material assistance from the central government and from confusion among provincial and local officials. Other factors such as province chiefs drawing up unrealistically high quotas with limited resources resulted in the bad construction of hamlets with inadequate defenses. On the other hand, Hilsman discusses the improvements in such matters as CG and SDC training, ARVN deployment, and individual action of military officers and GVN officials. Another very important factor was an increase in the amount of information being passed from villagers to the GVN. An example of this involved a planned Viet Cong attack on an ARVN base in An Hoa in Quang Nai province by 300 men armed with recoilless rifles and machine guns. Peasant warnings allowed ARVN to prepare for the attack and successfully turn it back. Taking this into account, Hilsman concluded that progress in the military-security sector during the three months before June were not matched by great improvements in implementing the Delta Plan and building strategic hamlets because of previously

\textsuperscript{194} Bigart, “McNamara Terms Saigon Aid Aplite,” 2(4).
mentioned government inadequacies. Finally, he states that no real progress in
bringing the people into the effort against the Vietnam took place.195

Throughout the rest of that year, the number of “completed” Strategic
Hamlets continued to grow, but the viability of many of those settlements
remained into doubt. In August, the GVN finally took a measure that allayed
many American fears on the viability of the whole pacification effort. The Diem
regime put out an official counterinsurgency plan that set up four priority areas
and specified sections of importance in each area. Of first importance were the
11 provinces around Saigon, which contained most of the area that fell under the
Delta Plan, the region of “Operation Sunrise,” and Gia Dinh Province. The
provinces of Vinh Long, Long An, and Phuoc Tuy had initial priority in the first
priority region, while Binh Duong province (the sight of Operation Sunrise)
ranked third priority.196 Regardless of much of this plan, officials continued to
build Strategic Hamlets to please their superiors. This resulted in some 3,225
completed hamlets with 4 million inhabitants by September 1962.197

During this time, a marked increase took place in the military part of the
anti-Viet Cong effort as America introduced large numbers of new weapons,
especially helicopters. Utilizing the firepower of their new artillery and other
weapons and the mobility of their new helicopters, ARVN took the initiative
from the Viet Cong driving them back in many areas. Indicators such as the
occurrence of Viet Cong attacks, and the number and scale of Viet Cong

195 Memo, Roger Hilsman to Governor Averell Harriman, 18 June 1962, RFE-27.
casualties also told a brighter story. Even though much doubt remained about these numbers due to padding by ARVN officers and GVN officials, the overall increase of percentages indicated real gains.\textsuperscript{198}

Additional U.S. government reports later in the year, while acknowledging recent advances, sounded a note of caution. Roger Hilsman expressed worry, at the sustained anti-GVN effort by the Viet Cong and an increase in their numbers of regular guerrillas and auxiliary armed forces. At this time, they controlled 20\% of the villages and 9\% of the population in the countryside, and had differing amounts of influence in another 47\% of the villages.\textsuperscript{199} Hilsman, taking account of these developments, asserted that the GVN made some real advances during late 1962 especially in the military part of the struggle. Among the most important parts of these improvements involved Diem’s willingness to give army commanders more control over military actions.\textsuperscript{200} A second improvement was the greater capacity shown by the army for offensive measures against the VC. While ARVN took mostly large scale actions, it left CG and SDC units to pursue small units operations.\textsuperscript{201}

Along with this, the GVN’s actions in the Strategic Hamlet Program produced a combination of moderate success and failure. Hilsman reports that

\textsuperscript{198} Rostow, \textit{Diffusion of Power}, p.280. For an excellent discussion on the value of different insurgency indicators, such as numbers of weapons captured, see Bernard B. Falk, "Insurgency Indicators," \textit{Military Review} XLVI (April 1966), pp.3-11.

\textsuperscript{199} Memo, Roger Hilsman to Sec of State, 3 December 1962, sub: The Situation and Short-Term Prospects in South Vietnam, RFE-59, Reprinted in \textit{USVR}, vol.12, pp.488, 494-496.

\textsuperscript{200} Diem’s willingness to give some authority might rest in the fact that he hand-picked many division commanders for their loyalty to him and his family. Ibid., pp.504-505.

\textsuperscript{201} As a result, the CG and SDC took heavy losses as compared to the army. Ibid., pp.505-506.
the program looks fruitful, especially as indicated by an increase in Viet Cong efforts to destroy it, and brought at least a limited number peasants under GVN control. Unfortunately, Diem and Nhu's opinion of it as the only tool in the counterinsurgency fight, and the quick pace of construction resulted in a heavy reliance on what were often poorly protected hamlets. The importance given them led to a turn away from a military-political pacification effort. The quick building rate for strategic hamlets outpaced the ability of pacifications' other aspects to keep up especially in rural areas.\textsuperscript{202} His most important recommendation concerning the Strategic Hamlet Program involved Diem's need for emphasis on non-military aspects of the counterinsurgency program. When combined with a modified military part of the program, and an integrated Strategic Hamlet and increased systematic pacification program, this made a way to consolidate recent military gains.\textsuperscript{203}

In early 1963, the limited advances of the Strategic Hamlet Program began to turn around. Construction rate for the settlements continued to climb indicating a spread of GVN influence. By May, the GVN controlled some 54\% of the countryside, and possessed a total of 6,000 strategic hamlets.\textsuperscript{204} This was the program's zenith, however, because the Viet Cong now used to the influx of new American weapons could concentrate on destroying strategic hamlets. Province chiefs made their efforts much easier since their intense building efforts

\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., p.530.

\textsuperscript{203} Ibid., p.489. Hilsman also discusses the possibility of a coup by military, civilian, intellectual, and/or other South Vietnamese leaders.

\textsuperscript{204} Rostow, The Diffusion of Power, p.221.
so impress Saigon led to unsecured villages. Infiltrating the hamlets through shoddy or non-existent defenses, the Viet Cong had access to many peasants who did not experience any benefits from living under government rule. Upon clearing the settlement, the guerrillas demolished it as a sign to the GVN of Viet Cong power.

At this time, some important advisors showed a positive outlook on the future of the Strategic Hamlet program. Robert Thompson, working on implementing the program, told Roger Hilsman of his support for the GVN's efforts on the latter's trip to Vietnam in January 1963. To start, Thompson admitted that the over zealous building of the hamlets resulted in two big problems. First, officials set up many of the settlements in highly vulnerable areas in violation of the oil blot principle Thompson cited in the Delta Plan. Along with this, other hamlets had inferior or no defenses resulting in greater VC infiltration and little positive peasant feeling for the government. Thompson told Hilsman, that even with these factors, a nucleus of "good" hamlets in the Delta could be spread to cover people throughout the region if our(sic.) luck stays. Diem's application of Thompson's Delta plan and the increasing inflow of U.S. aid added to the British Advisor's optimism on the program.206

Beginning in March, the program started a downward slide. Throughout the late spring and summer of 1963, conditions in strategic hamlets throughout the

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206 Hilsman says that Thompson had reservations about taking the program too fast and being unprepared for the reaction of the Viet Cong. By moving too quickly, Vietnamese officials would leave unsecured areas in their rear while moving onto new areas. The resulting security structure would be full of holes. Secondly, Thompson warned that Viet Cong would leave infiltrators in hamlets behind the main GVN effort, so officials should watch for lack of subversive activity in hamlets where it should occur. A lack of activity might indicate that the Viet Cong successfully reentered the villages, and were laying low. Hilsman, To Move A Nation, pp.462-463.
country deteriorated as results of their quick growth caught up with them. By September the outlook for the hamlet program was very poor, especially in the Delta, as seen in a USOM report. Based on a province by province account of the strategic hamlets, this document showed a general downturn in the program (especially in the Delta) and an upswing in other regions of the country. In I and II Corps, respective advances such as the distribution of pigs and construction of schools and the building of more hamlets were less effective due to the rising Buddhist Crisis in the country and the insecurity of completed hamlets. The effort also had limited success in III Corps, but suffered from problems affecting the program nationwide. Besides overbuilding, these difficulties included poor administration by local officials and their lack of attention to winning the peasantry to the GVN during hamlet construction; inadequate meshing of hamlet defenses into military planning; and limited or non-existent defense plans for individual settlements. The report asserts that the war would be lost unless officials addressed problems in the construction, consolidation, and defense of the hamlets.  

206 “Second Informal Appreciation of the Status of the Strategic Hamlet Program,” 1 September 1963, Kennedy Papers, National Security File. A former associate of General Edward Lansdale, Rufus Phillips, who had a role in the Strategic Hamlet Program told the National Security Council on September 10, that the effort’s military aspect was going poorly and the political aspect was headed for defeat. Hammer, A Death In November, p.208.
Diem's Overthrow and the End of the Strategic Hamlet Program

Any success the program had did not last long due to its collapse in the wake of Diem's overthrow in November 1963. The coup resulted from dissent over the Buddhist issue which had built over the months since March. Starting with the issue of flag burning, the conflict moved on to the larger issue of Buddhist rights within this Catholic dominated society.207 The Buddhists publicly demonstrated against the government by such actions as the now famous self-immolations of several monks throughout South Vietnam. In August the Diem government sealed its fate by dispatching Vietnamese special forces to raid numerous Pagodas throughout the country and arresting 1400 plus Buddhists on the 21. This action stirred the feelings of the public, opposition leaders, and military opponents of the regime. After two months of political intrigue in Saigon and Washington, a group of ARVN generals moved on Saigon taking over government buildings and the presidential palace, and overthrowing Diem. Unknown persons later murdered the ex-ruler and his brother Nhu inside an armored personnel carrier supposedly taking them to safety.208

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208 Herring, America's Longest War, pp.96-105. For a fuller explanation of the coup intrigue, see Hammer, A Death In November
Vietnam vs. Malaya: A Historical Analogy Taken Out of Context

To show how an analogy between the Malayan and Vietnamese situations was disastrous, one needs to compare aspects of the two struggles. These aspects fall into two categories of existing conditions and institutional aspects of the countries. Existing conditions include geographic layout, presence of industry in the country, ethnic makeup of the insurgents, and the source of supply for the insurgents. Between the countries, the length and makeup of their borders greatly differed. Malaya was on a peninsula, surrounded mostly by ocean, and shared a border with only one country. This border with Thailand, ran for 275 miles through thick jungles and mountains, and prevented the large-scale inflow of aid and weapons to Chinese guerillas.\textsuperscript{209} Also, since the guerillas operated from jungles in the country’s interiors, the long coastline did not act as a pathway for exterior aid. These two factors and the fact that Thailand was friendly lessened pressure on the British to protect from outside infiltration.

In Vietnam, the geographic set up was quite different. The country had 750 miles of borders with two disinterested countries (Laos and Cambodia) and one hostile country (North Vietnam), which allowed for the inflow of men and material to the Viet Cong.\textsuperscript{210} The fact that insurgents had access to the coast,

\textsuperscript{209} O’Tilman, "The Non-Lessons of the Malayan Emergency," p.413.

\textsuperscript{210} Ibid., p.413.
where they could also infiltrate men and supplies into the country, made the GVN's situation more difficult. In addition to this NVN's presence on SVN's northern border added the threat of conventional invasion to the South's problems.

Presence of industry in the two countries varied also. In Malaya, the lucrative tin and rubber industries flourished during the 1950's due to demand created by the Korean War. This resulted in an increase in Malayan revenues used to pursue counterinsurgency measures. In addition, the rubber and tin companies had an added reason to fight for their survival against the communists.\(^{211}\) In Vietnam, industry did not play the same significant role. Rice farming was the main moneymaker, along with subsidiary crops such as sweet potatoes, manioc, and other fruits.\(^{212}\) Due to the insurgency, rice production did not play a decisive role as an export commodity or a money maker. Industries including rubber production and forestry played were much less important, and definitely did not bring in the revenues that tin and rubber did in Malaya.\(^{213}\)

Another difference between Malaya and Indochina was the ethnic makeup of the insurgents. The Emergency was an insurgency based on Chinese Squatters, who comprised only 8% of the population.\(^{214}\) As a result, the British could (with help from the native Malays) isolate the squatters in order to deprive the

\(^{211}\) Between 1950 and 1951, expenditures on the police force rose from $73.5 million to $138.4 million. Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds In Guerilla Warfare*, pp.107-114.


\(^{213}\) Rubber production took place in a narrow zone from Saigon over the Cambodian border. Ibid., pp.61-62.

\(^{214}\) Dow, *Nation Building in Southeast Asia*, p.194.
communists of men and supplies. The communist threat was not as prevalent in the peninsula’s cities, except Singapore, because these Chinese resided mainly in the country. However, the situation in Vietnam was quite different. The insurgents were mostly ethnic Vietnamese who composed a majority of the population. Faced with this, South Vietnamese officials and forces looked for the insurgency on all sides as they could not distinguish one suspect group.

For the insurgents in the two countries, sources of supplies were another point of divergence. In Malaya, material support for the guerrillas came from the Chinese squatters, because as previously mentioned, geographic and political factors stopped outside help. In addition, the country’s limited food resources allowed the British to exercise almost total control over the food supply. The Vietnamese situation was different however, as the VC got their supplies at this time from sympathetic peasants and North Vietnam. With the large output of rice in South Vietnam and the inflow of weapons from the north, the supply of the communists was extremely difficult to stop.

Institutionally, in the set up and functioning of their governments and social organizations during their insurgent struggles, Malaya and Vietnam were quite different. These differences fell into four divisions of government set up, government command structure, government corruption and the military’s position in the country. Within Malaya, all three factors were very well defined. The British reestablished themselves in Malaya in 1946, where they held power until the country declared independence in 1957. Throughout the

Emergency, one government voice existed in the counter-guerilla battle. This allowed for total British control during the Emergency's critical period, without having to consult with another government on every action. Also, British controlled and staffed army and police units pursued the effort with the benefit of their supply base and command structure.

The situation in Vietnam was quite different. Assuming their advisory role in 1955, the Americans had to deal with an independently minded ruler, Diem, who pursued the war in his own way. This situation proved very difficult for the Americans, who saw chances to prosecute the war successfully, but could only suggest to the GVN actions which the regime could choose (which it often did) to ignore.

Along with this command structure, GVN corruption seriously hindered Strategic Hamlet Program. Graft and corruption among hamlet and village officials was epidemic as they took material aid, such as barbed wire and building supplies, for the settlement and sold it on the black market. Also, leaders embezzled funds intended for the villagers. Bribery and corruption were a honored tradition in Vietnam, and seen as necessary due to government officials' low salaries. With the inflow of U.S. aid, this formerly quiet practice became a showy display by many leaders.\(^\text{216}\) A good example of this corruption involves the GVN's appointment of members of Nhu's Can Lao party to leadership positions in the hamlets in contrast to providing for democratic government by the peasantry. These men used their position to embezzle money, carry out

repriasals, and make the people work without pay.\textsuperscript{27} Also, during the rapid construction phase of the Strategic Hamlet Program this was especially applicable. Finally, the Vietnamese army carried the burden of the military actions during this time. U.S. advisors became angry as many top ARVN commanders did not commit their forces to battle in fear of taking casualties. An excellent example of this was the battle of Ap Bac.

\textit{Comparison of the Malayan New Villages to the Vietnamese Strategic Hamlets}

A limited comparison of the programs in the two countries, also shows the misapplied historical analogy. Such aspects of the programs as the methods for relocating peasants, time required for completion, reimbursement of peasants for the move, efforts to protect resettled villagers, efforts to bring political and social improvements to the peasants, and availability of resources are very important to this comparison. The method of relocating peasants in these different programs was important as it constituted the peasant’s first impression of the whole program. In Malaya, British Commonwealth soldiers moved the peasants, but did so with kindness and understanding allowing them to take as many of their personal possessions as possible.\textsuperscript{28} Again, Vietnam differed greatly with the Malayan situation. Often soldiers entered hamlets to resettle villagers, then

\textsuperscript{27} Tran Van Don, \textit{Our Endless War} (San Rafael, California: Presidio Press, 1978), p.82.

\textsuperscript{28} For a good example, see Barber, \textit{The War of the Running Dogs}, pp.103-104.
forcibly moved them and destroyed their homes and belongings. These actions
turned many of the settlers against the government effort.

Other points of difference between the two programs were the time required
for completion of resettlement and reimbursement of peasants. In Malaya the
program resulted in the resettlement of the 500,000 member squatter population
over a twelve year period allowing for effective development of the program.219
The Strategic Hamlet Program planned on resettling most of Vietnam’s 10 million
plus rural inhabitants into 12,000 Strategic Hamlets.220 Because of this rapid rate
of construction, the program had many subsequent problems. Reimbursement
of peasants for the aspects of their move including loss of property and cost
incurred in building a new house also set the two programs apart. Initial British
actions in this area were inadequate, but improved over time. Such an example
of improvement involves the distribution of land, with a thirty year lease, to
settlers so they could earn a living.221 GVN actions in this area during the
Strategic Hamlet program were proved very unsuccessful. An example of this
took place in the five hamlets of Khanh Hau village, where a promised $2000 for
relocated settlers did not appear for some or showed up only in part for others.222

Efforts to give the settlers protection and improve their lives economically
and politically were also substantially differed in Malaya and Vietnam. In


220 Nightwonger, *Rural Pacification in Vietnam*, pp.61-62. Dennis Duncanson puts the projected number of


222 Khanh Hau lay southwest of Saigon in the Mekong Delta Region. Gerald Cannon Hickey, *Village in
Malaya, close protection of the New Villages by police, army, and paramilitary forces resulted in a feeling of security for the inhabitants and a safe environment for the settlements to develop. Strategic Hamlets did not offer similar safety. Due to their rapid construction and poor security arrangements, many of the hamlets were not secure, leaving the population open to Viet Cong attack. Many of the villages attacked could not defend themselves because of these deficiencies, and when they did the result was disastrous. A good example of this was a strategic hamlet in the Delta that held off an attacking Viet Cong force for 24 hours while waiting for a relief force. Relief finally arrived, but only after the guerrillas overran the village, killed its defenders, murdered its officials, took all the weapons, and left.\footnote{Hilsman, \textit{To Move A Nation}, p.456.}

Efforts at improving the social and political lives of villagers were also significantly different. In Malaya, officials attempted to offer a combination of social and political benefits to the Chinese squatters once they resettled in the New Villages. Such benefits included medical care, more schools, and the appearance of elected village governments. An ordinance of July 1952 provided for the first time for democratic election of local councils in the New Villages. These councils took over the office and obligations of the district officer, and had control of items such as levying and collecting rates, taxes, and fees; keeping up and directing schools; and pursuing public works on health, roads, and sanitation.\footnote{King, "Malaya's Resettlement Problem," p.37.} Through these elections, the Chinese squatters gained a stake in the

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\footnote{Hilsman, \textit{To Move A Nation}, p.456.}
\footnote{King, "Malaya's Resettlement Problem," p.37.}
Malayan government. The Strategic Hamlet Program resulted in some social and political improvements in the new settlements, but most of the hamlets suffered from mismanagement and as a result did not benefit. Of the social improvements promised by the GVN, most failed to take place inadequately. The numerous mass organizations the GVN set up in the hamlets tended to serve as vehicles for government control. Also, Nhu and Diem promised political reforms to the peasantry through "controlled election of hamlet committees and councils."\footnote{225}

Availability of resources is the final point of comparison between the two programs showing the historical misanalogy taken out of context, by U.S. officials. Resources in Malaya for early resettlement efforts did not arrive immediately, but started flowing in as the program evolved and the Malayan government's revenues (from tin and rubber sales) for fighting the war climbed. This allowed for construction of secure New Villages and the development of social and political improvements within them. In Vietnam, the case was different. The early strategic hamlets depended largely on monetary and labor contributions from the peasants for their construction and operation. In the village of Khanh Hau in May 1962, for example, corveé labor and peasant contributions were used to build many of the defenses around the hamlet.\footnote{226} In early 1963, U.S. aid started to flow into South Vietnam in substantial amounts for the strategic hamlets, but by that time the program was overextended.


\footnote{226} Hickey, \textit{Village in Vietnam}, p.12.
Because of this overbuilding and poor management, these supplies went to waste.27

While all of these differences between the Malayan and Vietnamese situations were detrimental to the Strategic Hamlet program's existence, the Nhu's real purpose for the program also played a decisive role in its demise. Nhu said that he wanted to use the Strategic Hamlet program to spread his concept called “personalism,” basic to which was self reliance. However, he did not use the settlements strictly for that purpose. Instead he used them to control the rural population and head off the increasing political threat from the growing Vietnamese army28 This effort turned many of the peasants away from the GVN as they saw no benefits from supporting it.

**Immediate Results of the Hamlets**

When the Strategic Hamlet program ended in October 1963, the new ruling government of SVN was left with a large number of unsecured settlements and an alienated rural population. The efforts of Nhu and government and officials under him led to the construction of around 8,000 hamlets by the time of Diem's overthrow.29 This large number of unsecured hamlets presented a major security problem for the new rulers as they tried to solidify their control over the country.

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27 Nhu initially wanted the peasants to depend on their own physical and material resources, but allowed the input of U.S. aid for the program later on. Duncanson, *Government and Revolution in Vietnam*, p.318.

28 Hammer, *A Death In November*, p.130.

The alienation of the rural peasantry would hurt the new GVN efforts to consolidate their power and their actions against the Viet Cong. U.S. officials did not feel much better as their financial, administrative, and advisory efforts on the program came to naught. The poorly administered and very independent Diem government proved inadequate to lead an effective counterinsurgency effort.
Chapter Three: The Strategic Hamlet Program:

Success or Failure?

During the early 1960’s, the VC began their rural-based insurgency against the Diem government in South Vietnam. The United States and the GVN looked for a way to defeat the Viet Cong, and found guidance from the the lessons of the British-led Malayan Emergency. Former British Colonial Officer, Robert Thompson, served as a conduit for the counterinsurgency thought and practice that the British had developed in their fight against the MCP, and drew up the Delta Plan on which South Vietnam’s Strategic Hamlet program partially rested. Unfortunately, the program under the management of Nhu faltered due to overbuilding, poor planning, concentration on population control, and corruption of the leadership. The strategic hamlet structure finally fell with Diem’s overthrow in October 1963. In 1964 and 1965, succeeding regimes tried to revive remaining strategic hamlets as New Life Hamlets with limited success.
As the Strategic Hamlet Program showed, the Viet Cong insurgency was a difficult and complex problem for Vietnamese, British, and U.S. officials. U.S. acceptance of British counterinsurgency doctrine based on the Malayan Emergency and brought to Vietnam by Robert Thompson shows the danger of an historical analogy taken out of context. As U.S. officials found in later attempts at pacification in South Vietnam, the harmful results of the Strategic Hamlet Program plagued their efforts to win the devotion of the peasants to the GVN.

By the time of the Diem coup, much of the framework of the Strategic Hamlet Program was already in a shambles. The new GVN leaders, concerned with the growing Viet Cong insurgency, depended on the remaining strategic hamlets for their half-hearted attempts at counterinsurgency. When U.S. and South Vietnamese officials took stock of the guerilla situation in November 1963, they found that the supposed progress of the strategic hamlet system against the insurgents was an illusion. Thousands of Nhu's reportedly secure hamlets lay in ruins after the Viet Cong tore down their defenses and told the people to leave. When Robert Thompson assessed the situation soon after the Diem coup, he found a decaying Strategic Hamlet structure in the Delta Province of Long An. The Viet Cong endangered the province's district capitals and “the main road south to My Tho,” while a small nucleus of strategic hamlets defended by armed militia with poor morale encompassed the remainder of the province's strategic hamlets. Thompson believed that the program's regression had started in July,
ending in heightened Viet Cong action in the weeks before Diem's overthrow. In other hamlets throughout Vietnam, the program also deteriorated. When villagers in the hamlets of Khanh Hau village voluntarily returned, for example, to their old homes from strategic settlements in late 1963 and early 1964. Village Council members also told them they had to leave their new homes since the former owners of land on which the strategic hamlets rested wanted that property back.

When those responsible for Diem's overthrow took power, the found a Viet Cong insurgency mostly unaffected and even exacerbated by the Strategic Hamlet Program. The 12 men who formed a military revolutionary council under General Duong Van Minh's leadership looked to the remaining strategic hamlets as a possible base for a new national counterinsurgency effort. During its 20 month existence, the Strategic Hamlet Program managed to alienate much of the rural population, making them sceptical of new GVN tries at counterinsurgency. American aid continued to flow in large quantities to the remaining strategic hamlets as U.S. agencies kept up their social and economic efforts. However, without Diem and Nhu's leadership, the effort became only a rural aid program. Vietnamese leaders, under pressure from the U.S., during the last

230 Hilsman, *To Move A Nation*, p.524.


232 Only 20% of the 8,600 hamlets supposedly completed by the time of Diem's ouster were militarily secure. Bain, *Vietnam: The Roots of Conflict*, p.132.

233 Minh was a former Diem loyalist who led the effort against the Hoa Hao religious sect from 1955 to 1956. Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, pp.222,324.

months of 1963, continued the Strategic Hamlet Program, but pursued it in safe areas so villagers would not become worried.\textsuperscript{235}

In January 1964, General Khanh took power from the ruling military council promising major political changes including the renaming of existing strategic hamlets as New Life Hamlets to indicate the program's separation from the Strategic Hamlet Program. This effort concentrated on rural reconstruction and included new criteria for finished hamlets and safeguards against forced peasant relocation. Reflected among these criteria was much of the basic counterinsurgency thinking of top U.S. civilian officials and British advisors.

The conditions for completion included:

1. Elimination of Viet-Cong infrastructure;
2. Trained and armed militia;
3. Physical defenses complete;
4. Communications systems for requesting reinforcement set up;
5. Organization of community for civil defense and social development activities;
6. Free election of hamlet committee by secret ballot.\textsuperscript{236}

However, the optimistic predictions of the Khanh regime were simply that. The program resulted in the successful construction of only 531 hamlets (including only 195 formerly under Viet Cong domination) out of a planned 2,000 by the program's conclusion in 1966.\textsuperscript{237}

In considering the Strategic Hamlet Program, an obvious question concerns whether or not the program was doomed to fail. This question may be answered in two ways. One has to do with the execution of the program, and the other plan on which it rested. Carried out by Nhu and based on corvée labor, forced


\textsuperscript{236} Nighswonger, \textit{Rural Pacification in Vietnam}, pp.62,73.

\textsuperscript{237} Fall, \textit{The Two Vietnams}, p.382.
resettlement, rule by Can Lao leaders, rapid construction, and random placement of hamlets, the program could not succeed. By putting the strategic hamlets in heavily infiltrated Viet Cong areas, depriving the settlers of promised security, and concentrating on the construction of the hamlets ignoring needed social, political, and economic reforms, the GVN alienated much of the rural population and opened the door for greater insurgency. The application of Thompson’s Malayan-based Delta Plan does not follow this conclusion however. Even though the Diem government officially claimed that it based the Strategic Hamlet Program in large part on the Delta Plan, most of the Plan’s important parts were not utilized. Primary points deleted included a police (instead of military) basis, a concentrated starting point in the Delta, and a unified command structure for the insurgency effort. An answer is not available in regards to whether Thompson’s plan could have worked if carried out fully to win the peasant’s loyalty. The Diem government’s leadership (especially Nhu’s) prevented this possibility.

Because of his transfer of Malayan counterinsurgency knowledge to Vietnam, and his expertise in that field, Thompson influenced U.S. leaders to apply Malayan lessons to the Viet Cong insurgency. He is a historically significant figure because this shows a historical taken out of context by U.S. leaders. Thompson is a counterinsurgency expert due to his training and innovations in this area during the Emergency with such people as Harold Briggs and later as Malayan Secretary of Defense. More importantly, Thompson carried the information to Vietnam convincing the U.S. government beforehand

Chapter Three: The Strategic Hamlet Program: Success or Failure
and along the way of the doctrine’s applicability to Vietnam. After Thompson arrived in Vietnam, the Kennedy administration picked the Delta Plan for pacification over the Geographically Phased Plan of its own MAAG in Saigon. This action signaled the preference of top U.S. officials for Thompson’s civilian controlled effort. Over two years from 1961-1963, they consulted with him constantly on the Strategic Hamlet Program’s status. Thompson convinced the U.S. government of the applicability of Malayan thought to Vietnam in ignorance of two very important points. First the U.S. role in Vietnam was strictly that of an advisor to a sovereign nation. Additionally, Nhu and Diem wanted to use the Strategic Hamlet Program to control the population, not win it over. The U.S.’s part as an advisor to an independent nation is especially important as proof of U.S. official’s wrongly applied analogy between Malaya and Vietnam. U.S. officials were wrong in thinking they could get the GVN to apply preferred American counterinsurgency methods in Vietnam when the U.S. wanted. But because British officials had complete control over the Malayan government they made needed changes in the New Village effort to meet alterations in the MCP insurgency. Similar U.S. efforts in Vietnam were blocked; the adjustments of the program (so vital to the Malayan situation) were not made and thus the effort was doomed.
Epilogue

As the U.S. involvement in the Vietnamese conflict increased to include a large troop commitment by 1965, the counterinsurgency effort decreased at points, but never stopped. Programs following the New Life Hamlets such as Rural Redevelopment and Accelerated Pacification showed much improvement over the Strategic Hamlet Program and offered some hope for increasingly war weary American leaders. Even though these programs were increasingly successful, peasant support lost in the and the corruption indicative of the early pacification programs were detrimental to the war effort's success. At the same time, Robert Thompson finished his service with BAM in 1965 and returned to England. He was not finished as he served the Johnson and Nixon administrations as an expert advisor on the Vietnamese situation until the end of the Second Indochina War in 1975. During this time, he saw his counterinsurgency doctrine applied and with much success, giving he and his American counterparts hope that the war might be won. Serving as Nixon's
representative in Vietnam, Thompsons returned to Vietnam 8 time before war's end to evaluate the situation. The internal fighting of and lack of rural support for the GVN ended this possibility however, as the regime of President Thieu fell to the North Vietnamese in a few short weeks during 1975. As the eventual collapse of South Vietnam proved, the damage done by the Strategic Hamlet Program and the disorganization of the Vietnamese system were problems that would not allow for a U.S.-GVN victory.

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Vita

William Thomas Dod was born on July 18, 1966 in balmy Norfolk, Virginia. Moving with his parents to Roanoke, Virginia and St. Louis, Missouri, he returned to Roanoke, where he spent his primary and secondary school career. By reading history books, especially those concentrating on military history, he developed a love for the subject. A brief divergence to Engineering during his late years of high school and first years of college ended in 1987, when he became a history major graduating with a B.A. from V.P.I. & S.U. in May of 1988. Not satisfied with his short exposure to Blacksburg, he has pursued a Master’s Degree in American History at his undergraduate institution.