

BRIEF HISTORY OF VIETNAM PACIFICATION PROGRAMS

Definition: "Pacification" as used in Vietnam is a broad term describing a combination of military, economic, social and political efforts to extend or restore government control in war torn areas.

1954-1957

Civic Action in Former Viet Minh Areas: After the 1954 Geneva Agreements, the Diem government undertook a pacification effort in areas of the South which had been controlled by the Viet Minh. Civilian teams, much like the current RD teams, were recruited, trained and moved into these recently vacated areas.

This effort showed early signs of success under a specially created Civic Action Directorate supported by the Field Service Division of USOM which had representatives in most provinces. When the activity was transferred to Ngo Dinh Nhu's control, the Field Services Division was gradually eliminated and USOM attention was directed toward more traditional technical assistance activities.

Re-settlement of Northern Refugees: As an ancillary to the above program and an additional security measure, Diem resettled refugees, many of them Catholics from the north in areas of the South which were under Viet Minh influence. This provided a measure of government influence in the areas concerned but had little effect on overall security.

1957-1960

A period of relative security during which the pacification effort particularly in the Delta was concentrated on implementation of Ordinances # 2 and 57 the GVN's basic land reform acts.

They provided for:

- a) regulation of tenant-landlord relations, particularly rent control;
- b) purchase of rice paddy acreages above 100 hectares (247 acres) for re-sale to tenants;
- c) purchase and re-distribution of French owned land.

These Ordinances were poorly administered and largely ineffective as pacification measures.

1959-1961

Agrovilles and Land Development Centers: Although security was deteriorating, these programs were conceived initially as socio-economic development devices and secondarily as security measures.

Agrovilles involved resettlement of isolated peasants into new towns along main transportation routes. The program was ineptly handled and caused resentment. Only a small fraction of the rural population was effected and the program was discontinued in 1961 after 23 agrovilles had been started.

Land Development Centers were conceived as a means of opening new lands in the virgin territory of the central highlands and re-claiming land in the Mekong Delta. In both cases it was a pioneering venture opposed by the US on technical and administrative grounds. Although they received considerable government support, these centers never became economically viable. They were poorly defended and when attacked, offered little or no resistance to the Viet Cong. Centers in the highlands caused considerable resentment among Montagnard tribal groups who saw them as a threat to their tribal lands.

1962-1963

Strategic Hamlet Program: was officially launched by government decree in February 1962 and became the basic Diem government response to the intensified Viet Cong guerrilla warfare which had been building since 1959. The program was patterned on successful experience in Malaya and both British and US advisors assisted in its development and implementation. The program was sound in concept but improperly carried out. The USOM office of Rural Affairs, created in 1962 to support the Pacification Program did not have personnel operating throughout the provinces until late 1962 by which time the program was well under way under Ngo Dinh Nhu's direction. Ngo saw the program primarily in terms of control, as a result there was an excess of forced re-location and other arbitrary government directed activities resulting in further peasant dissatisfaction from the central government. The program was conceived as a joint military/civil effort but the GVN military input was often irregular so that the security ring required for political, social and economic change in the hamlets was never adequately provided for the civilian effort.

1964-1965

New Life Hamlet Program: The USOM Rural Affairs concept of Strategic Hamlets emphasized assessing peasant motivation and responding with a program which would stimulate genuinely revolutionary economic, social and political development behind a framework of basic security. These concepts were carried over into the New Life Development Program, which was basically a continuation of the Strategic Hamlet Program under a new name, following Diem's overthrow in late 1963. The program continued to be severely hampered by government instability inefficiency and corruption and inability to provide basic security in the rural areas.

The advent of American combat forces in March 1965 marked a new phase in pacification. New and dynamic leadership was added to the Vietnamese effort with the appointment of General Thang as Minister of Rural Construction in late 1965.

1966

Revolutionary Development was substituted for Rural Construction as the title for the pacification effort. Increased commitments of ARVN and Free World Military forces to provide security for civil pacification; the creation of a new element (the Revolutionary Development teams) to serve as a catalyst for voluntary popular involvement; and more dynamic cohesive and effective GVN administration of the varied programs which make up the total effort are factors which we hope will distinguish Revolutionary Development from its predecessors. Under General Thang (now a "Super-Minister") the degree of total GVN involvement in Revolutionary Development has broadened considerably and GVN funds allocated for support of pacification programs has more than tripled in 1967.

AID/W

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