
Strategic Hamlets in South Viet-Nam

A Survey and a Comparison



Milton E. Osborne

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Strategic Hamlets in South Viet-Nam

THE CORNELL UNIVERSITY SOUTHEAST ASIA PROGRAM

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Milton E. Osborne

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PREFACE

The strategic hamlet program was adopted in South Viet-Nam as a key counter-insurgency measure, and the great reliance placed on it was partly a result of the earlier success of the project of resettlement in Malaya during the period of the Emergency there. In the large-scale village resettlements undertaken in South Viet-Nam the Malayan experience was seen by many observers both as an example and as an assurance that resettlement would answer many of the basic problems raised by the insurgency. For in Malaya the defeat of the Communist guerrillas was indeed closely linked with the re-location of Chinese squatters in new villages where they were brought under Government control and protection.

In this study of the strategic hamlets in South Viet-Nam Mr. Milton Osborne has, therefore, examined the program and appraised its effectiveness, while comparing it with the resettlement operation in Malaya during the 1950s. By examining the differences between the situation faced by the Malayan Government in its contest with the Chinese guerrillas, and that faced by the Government of the Republic of Vietnam in countering the insurgency within its territory, Mr. Osborne has been able to provide an illuminating perspective for understanding the failure of the program in South Viet-Nam.

Mr. Osborne, who is a fellow in Cornell's Southeast Asia Program specializing in Southeast Asian History, has some personal knowledge of the area about which he writes, having served in the Australian Embassy in Cambodia, and having visited Viet-Nam several times, most recently in January 1963. Because of the problems of source material, he wishes to stress that the conclusions he reaches must be regarded as tentative and open to revision as further material becomes available.

Ithaca, New York
April 14, 1965

George McT. Kahin
Director

INTRODUCTION

War has been an integral part of the peasant's life in Viet-Nam for nearly twenty years. Throughout this period the insurgent forces, both in fighting against the French and later in the current war in South Viet-Nam, have relied heavily on the techniques of guerrilla warfare. Taking many of their leads from the Communist Chinese revolutionaries, the insurgents have recognized the importance of linking political action with their military efforts. An effective counter to this combined politico-military action has, demonstrably, been difficult to find. Events in other areas of the world have shown the need to combat such a challenge in social, political and economic terms, as well as through military action. This necessity was recognized, at least in principle, in Viet-Nam. Both the agrovillage and strategic hamlet programs were presented by the South Vietnamese Government as having social and political goals in addition to their military importance.

It can now be seen that neither of these programs succeeded. By the end of 1961 the agrovillage program, which brought considerable peasant opposition, could be seen as a failure. Events since the overthrow of the Diem regime, in November 1963, have brought the lack of success of the strategic hamlet program into sharper relief, although it is possible to present considerable evidence, which was available before Diem's fall, to show that the strategic hamlet program never had the success which was claimed for it in official circles. The strategic hamlet program deserves study for a variety of reasons. It was only one aspect of the extremely complex situation in South Viet-Nam but its study throws considerable light on more general developments. The program had, too, intrinsic interest as part of the confrontation between representatives of the international ideological conflict. This is not to suggest in any way that these were the terms in which the Vietnamese peasants saw the program. But it was the view of the United States, as the chief supporter of the South Vietnamese Government. And it may be observed that the developments in Viet-Nam have had a larger international audience. The program had a further interest in a world situation in which the realities of nuclear power have brought increased emphasis on wars of infiltration and subversion.

The challenge mounted by the insurgents in Viet-Nam was not the first of its type. The Communist insurrection in Malaya and the Huk rebellion in the Philippines have certain surface similarities to the events in Viet-Nam. The surface similarities between the Malayan Emergency and the insurgency in South Viet-Nam, in particular, were frequently invoked in support of the strategic hamlet program and they continue to be invoked by United States officials in the post-Diem period. In Malaya large scale resettlement was used as an important factor in isolating the Chinese Communist insurgents from the Chinese squatter communities which had been a major source of food and personnel for the insurgents. The Malayan experience, moreover, was seen as sufficiently relevant by the South Vietnamese and United States Governments for a team of British experts to be brought to South Viet-Nam. These experts were led by Brigadier R. G. K. Thompson who had been closely associated with the resettlement schemes organized in Malaya during the Emergency.

This paper seeks to present the development of the strategic hamlet program in South Viet-Nam and to discuss the extent to which the events in Malaya during the Emergency were relevant to the problems faced by the established Government in Saigon. Additionally, it seeks to document some of the commentary on the strategic hamlets from both the friends and enemies of the South Vietnamese Government. In the case of the commentary from South Viet-Nam's friends, it is impossible not to note the almost constant tone of optimism. This optimism is symptomatic of a major problem faced in preparing this study. This was the almost total lack of public statements from any of South Viet-Nam's supporters which reflected the deteriorating situation in that country from 1961 onwards. It is certainly not my suggestion that a government should compromise its own, or its allies', security by the release of truly sensitive information. But one is forced to wonder whether the constantly optimistic tone of government pronouncements -- especially those from the United States -- reflect not just a concern for security but, as well, an erroneous estimate of the situation. Even if the optimistic statements were prompted by security considerations alone, one must wonder about the long term problem of credibility. The fact that much of the testimony given by United States officials before Committees of the Senate and House of Representatives was suppressed, for security reasons, did make research on the situation more difficult.

Comment from North Viet-Nam, particularly in the form of radio broadcasts, has been used to gauge the attitude of that regime towards the strategic hamlet program. With some qualification, evidence from this source has also been used in an attempt to gauge the effects of the strategic hamlet program on the insurgents within South Viet-Nam. The much less frequently available broadcasts of the South Vietnamese Liberation Front -- the insurgents' political arm -- are, of course, more useful in this latter regard. The problem of bias is present in a marked form in these broadcasts. The very ease with which it may be recognized is an aid to analysis and it far from invalidates the material as a source of information.

The events in South Viet-Nam during the fifties and sixties, whatever the ultimate outcome of the struggle there, seem certain to engage the interest of political scientists and historians for many years. Lapse of time and greater personal experience of the area will, no doubt, provide the more detailed documentation which is beyond the scope of this essentially limited study. Yet it is possible to show in this paper that there was insufficient analysis of the differences between Malaya and South Viet-Nam when the implementation of the strategic hamlet program began. And it may be demonstrated that many warning signs of the failure of the program were available to those officials who, in 1963, were presenting the program as holding a real hope of quick success in the Vietnamese war. An account of the strategic hamlet program leaves the uncomfortable feeling that too many important political decisions were made on the basis of hope and supposition rather than on the basis of careful analysis of fact.

Milton E. Osborne

Ithaca, New York
March 20, 1965

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	vii
I. THE BACKGROUND	1
II. THE MALAYAN EXPERIENCE	9
III. THE STRATEGIC HAMLET PROGRAM	20
1. The Emergence of the Concept	20
2. Implementation	32
IV. EXTERNAL COMMENTARY	42
1. The Allies	42
2. North Viet-Nam	45
V. COMPARISONS AND CONCLUSIONS	52
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	58
APPENDIX	63

MAP. Republic of Viet-Nam - Provisional Divisions . . Frontispiece

TABLES

I. Some Selected Progress Figures on the Establishment of Strategic Hamlets	33
II. Strategic Hamlets Built or Under Construction as of January 16, 1963	34

A Note on Usage in This Study

The terms Viet-Nam and South Viet-Nam are used in this study to refer to the Republic of Viet-Nam. Where reference is made to the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam, that is North Viet-Nam, the appropriate qualification is used. Toponyms and the names of provinces are generally used in their Vietnamese form so that a reference will be made to Long-An province rather than to Longan. An exception to this usage is made in the case of those toponyms which come most often before the public without the use of the hyphen, for instance Saigon, Hanoi and Dalat.

An effort has been made to follow Vietnamese practice in the hyphenation of personal names. This study does not attempt, however, to indicate in any way the diacritics which form an essential part of written Vietnamese.

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I. THE BACKGROUND

Terrorism and guerrilla warfare are not peculiar to those countries of Asia where social or political inequalities have nurtured their growth. The events in such diverse countries as Kenya, Palestine, Cyprus and Algeria, following the Second World War, are testimony to the universal possibilities in the use of terror and guerrilla warfare as political instruments. In Asia, however, these unconventional forms of warfare have primarily been linked with communism, and hence they have assumed a place within the shadow of East-West confrontation. What Moscow and Peking call 'national revolutionary wars' are seen as part of 'Communist aggression' when viewed from Washington or London or, more appropriately, when considered by the established government in Kuala Lumpur, Manila or Saigon. The contrast in terms has, of course, more than semantic importance and emphasizes the political nature of guerrilla war. In two instances in Southeast Asia Communist guerrillas have challenged the existing government and failed in that challenge. In the Philippines the Huk guerrillas presented a major threat to internal security. They were contained, and their power negated, through the accomplishment and promise of social reforms, particularly land reform, which greatly reduced the grievances to which the guerrillas could appeal in seeking peasant co-operation.¹ The challenge from the Communist terrorists in Malaya during the Emergency had its own particular character as the result of the greater racial complexity of Malaya's population. In any attempt to analyze the basic reasons for the failure of the Chinese guerrillas in Malaya, reference has to be made to the steady pace of political development which made the rebels' criticism of colonialism a hollow propaganda effort. But even the briefest explanation of the Communist failure in Malaya would have to mention the effective government program of resettling the Chinese squatter communities. This program, which emphasized the extension of administrative control over the whole population, cut off the guerrillas from their most attractive source of food supplies and reinforcements. In South Vietnam there is a continuing Communist challenge to the Saigon Government -- a government supported by the United States and its allies. Developments over more recent months have suggested an increasing use of larger troop formations by the insurgents, but the contest continues to be based on the insurgents' guerrilla challenge.

Clearly guerrilla warfare calls for political and military responses different from those which are required in the case of a conventional

1. For a consideration of the Huk rebellion and the efforts to counter it see A. M. Scaff, The Philippines Answer to Communism (Stanford, 1955), F. L. Starnes, Magsaysay and the Philippine Peasantry: The Agrarian Impact on Philippine Politics 1953-1956 (Berkeley, 1961) and N. D. Valeriano and C. T. R. Bohannon, Counter-Guerrilla Operations: The Philippines Experience (New York, 1962). A brief survey of the problem of internal security is contained in Chapter XXXII of 'The Philippines' by D. Wurfel in G. McT. Kahin, (ed.), Governments and Politics of Southeast Asia, Second Edition (Ithaca, 1964).

military operation. Most importantly, guerrilla operations focus attention on the non-combatant population. Both sides in the struggle seek to involve the non-combatants, not necessarily through physical involvement as soldiers, but through personal political attachment to one side or the other. Where the war is fought in rural areas, the guerrillas depend on the rural population for food, shelter and for recruitment. The established government seeks to deny the guerrillas these resources. These are the basic positions. For the guerrilla, it is of prime importance to turn passive acceptance into active support. The provision of shelter when combined with the supply of information is an invaluable combination even before the physical involvement of the peasants in fighting is achieved. The converse is true for the government against which the guerrilla offensive is directed. But an unprotected passive population, in conditions where guerrilla warfare is conducted principally in rural areas, affords, at least, a minimum advantage to the guerrillas, since the established government is hindered in its operations.² This is the case since guerrillas, almost by definition, depend on being able to maintain themselves from the land without conventional supply lines and seek to exploit the local population. This 'exploitation' for food, shelter and information need not alienate the local population. Indeed, the evidence from Viet-Nam suggests that in a great many cases the guerrillas are welcomed. While conventional forces may hope for the aid of the population, they can function without it. A passive population, uncommitted to either side, permits the continued existence of guerrilla operations and hence provides the advantage just noted.

The successful commitment of the rural population's support to one side or the other can therefore be of vital importance to the resolution of a particular struggle. How to achieve that commitment will continue to be a matter for debate. The Malayan experience appears to suggest that an intermediate step must be interposed between passivity and commitment. This step is the provision by the established government of safety accompanied by social improvement, and increased opportunities in education and health. The success of the Malayan resettlement plans have made them a yardstick for progress in Viet-Nam where a variant program for settlement in 'strategic hamlets' began in 1961.³ By 1963, this program had become

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2. This is not offered as a startling new analysis in the examination of guerrilla warfare. But it is interesting to note that while the point may be implicit in the study by P. Paret and J. Shy, Guerrillas in the 1960's, Revised Edition (Princeton, 1962), it is not presented as an essential. Both the Malayan and Vietnamese situations appear to stress the hindering effect of a passive rural population on the effectiveness of government anti-guerrilla operations.
 3. Resettlement of population in time of war did not, of course, begin with Malaya. As Paret and Shy, op. cit., p. 46, point out, resettlement was used in the Boer War. Quite apart from the qualitative differences, there was an immense quantitative difference between the Boer War efforts and the later Malayan plans. Bernard Fall in The Two Viet-Nams, Revised Edition (New York, 1964) refers to limited French resettlement plans which were used in the war against the Viet-Minh -- see p. 372.

the central reference point for gauging progress in the South Vietnamese Government's contest with the Viet-Cong.⁴ A variety of factors suggest the importance of studying the strategic hamlet program in South Viet-Nam. For that country's Government and its supporters, as well as for its critics, the program became a test case for the Government's capacities to survive. Both Communist and non-Communist writers have appealed to the precedent of the Malayan experience as suggesting the inapplicability of attempts to transfer even the outlines of the Malayan techniques to Viet-Nam.⁵ The contrary attitude was expressed in the views of British and United States officials. Brigadier R. K. G. Thompson, a former Malayan Secretary of Defense who was closely linked with resettlement efforts during the Malayan Emergency, has worked in Viet-Nam since late 1961. He apparently found sufficient similarities between conditions in Malaya and those in South Viet-Nam to warrant the attempted application of similar techniques. Senior United States officials, such as Averell Harriman, the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, referred to the use of techniques applied in Malaya and the Philippines when testifying before Congressional committees. That the North Vietnamese Government was concerned with the possible implications of the strategic hamlet program can be clearly demonstrated through analysis of the propaganda emanating from Hanoi.⁶

There is, additionally, an interest in the South Vietnamese situation which goes beyond local concerns. Problems of subversion, particularly subversion operating through the rural population, seem likely to be present throughout Asia for many years. While recognizing the 'poverty of historicism', one may still seek insights in one situation which might, with validity, assist in understanding and explaining situations elsewhere. An analysis of the experience of resettlement during the Malayan Emergency is of considerable assistance in attempting to reach conclusions on the failure of the strategic hamlets in South Viet-Nam. A thorough analysis of events in Viet-Nam has much to reveal about both Asian and Western efforts to counter subversive war.

Viet-Nam's regional tragedy after the second World War had assumed international overtones by the time of the 1954 Geneva Conference.

4. Consider the following statement by President Ngo-Dinh Diem on 17 April 1963:

'The national policy of Strategic Hamlets is the quintessence of our truest traditions .d.

'... Indconstant progression, this movement has upset all the subversive maneuvers of the enemies of the nation.'

Vietnam Press (Saigon) week ending (henceforth w/e) 21 April 1963.

5. B. Fall, op. cit., p. 339, while recognizing the possible utility of strategic hamlets, is skeptical about the possibilities of utilizing Malayan security techniques in Viet-Nam because of the different circumstances. On a rather different basis Wilfred Burchett, the Communist propagandist, argues in his recent book, The Furtive War (New York, 1963), that not only were the circumstances different in Malaya but also that no clear military victory was gained there.

6. See Section IV of this paper for an analysis of North Vietnamese propaganda.

Militarily the North Vietnamese forces had gained political advantage at the cost of great losses of personnel. But while this political advantage had been sufficient to ensure French withdrawal, the losses sustained at Dien-Bien-Phu, and great internal economic difficulties, deterred the North Vietnamese regime from any immediate thrust at the new regime in the south.⁷ Quite apart from these internal considerations there was the threat posed by the United States support for South Viet-Nam with the risk for the North that precipitate action might bring massive intervention. In the war which had preceded this temporary stalemate the Viet-Minh Army had shown a recognition of the need to ensure local co-operation with its armed forces, even if it was not possible to obtain more than this. Penetration of the village, usually through the most underprivileged inhabitants, was a normal technique.⁸ The Commander of the North Vietnamese forces, Vo-Nguyen-Giap, has shown his awareness of the importance of the non-military population in his writings on warfare which show so much debt to Mao Tse-tung.⁹ The now celebrated 'sea' of the rural population in which the guerrilla 'fish' could swim had to be obtained whether through the ready co-operation of the peasants or through coercion. The events of more recent years have shown the manner in which the insurgent forces have been ready to use terror to achieve their aims. The execution of an official or the slaying of an unpopular landlord presents villagers with an effective object lesson.¹⁰

With a conventional attack on South Viet-Nam an impossibility both through problems of material cost and because of the danger of escalation into international conflict, North Viet-Nam in the post-Geneva period appears to have bided its time in efforts to dislodge the Diem regime. Prospects for the collapse of President Diem's Government must have appeared good, and one has only to consult western sources written at the time to realize the amazement with which the survival of the regime was greeted. Without the collapse of the Government in South Viet-Nam, and

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7. On the problems faced by the Hanoi regime see D. Lancaster, The Emancipation of French Indo-China (London, 1961) Chapter XIX, pp. 359-378. These problems are placed in perspective in P. J. Honey, Communism in North Vietnam (Cambridge, Mass., 1963) Chapter I, pp. 1-18.
 8. See Y. Paignez, Le Viet-Minh et la guerre psychologique (Paris, 1955), pp. 21-23.
 9. Vo-Nguyen-Giap, People's War: People's Army: The Viet Cong Insurrection Manual for Underdeveloped Countries (New York, 1962), p. 56 'The Viet Nam People's Army has always seen to establishing and maintaining good relations with the people' /Giap's emphasis/. See also G. K. Tanham, Communist Revolutionary Warfare: The Vietminh in Indochina (New York, 1961), pp. 140-144.
 10. There is ample evidence to show the use of terror -- A Threat to the Peace: North Viet-Nam's Efforts to Conquer South Viet-Nam, Part I published by the United States Department of State (Washington, 1961) and Violations of the Geneva Agreements by the Viet-Minh Communists published by the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam (Saigon, 1959, 1960) -- but it should be noted that it was generally selective in character.

with North Viet-Nam's avowed aim of controlling the whole of Viet-Nam and ousting the 'neo-colonialists', the strategy of guerrilla war was adopted. From 1958 the incidence of terrorist acts increased with the aim of destroying whatever confidence there was in the central Government.¹¹ Assassination of government-appointed village, district and provincial officials became common, although apparently the seriousness of the developing situation was discounted or underestimated by both the South Vietnamese Government and by its supporter the United States.¹²

The physical characteristics of the countryside in which these terrorist acts were committed were favorable to the insurgents, quite apart from the background of absentee landlordism which the Communists were skillful in exploiting.¹³ From late May until November the Mekong Delta region is flooded, travel by small boat is unrestricted and concealment easy. During the dry season concealment is more of a problem, but the abundance of canals, two major mountain redoubts and the scattered settlement pattern of the villages and hamlets again favor the rebels. The settlement pattern is of considerable importance and will be discussed later in this study. The Delta region of South Viet-Nam has, in fact, been an area of long-standing security problems and was certainly so during the French occupation of Cochin China. Of great importance to the success of the insurgents have been their opportunities for remaining undistinguishable from the rest of the population. Apart from their political convictions there was no means by which an insurgent could be distinguished from a peasant, once the insurgent had put down his weapons.

In central Viet-Nam settlement along the coast differs from that of the Delta, with a more concentrated village pattern. The proximity of the mountains to the coastal plains again provides suitable cover for the rebels. The sparsely settled hinterland occupied by the various tribal minority groups was further promising territory for rebel activities. These mountain areas while of limited importance, in terms of population density, provide strategic opportunities for passage from South Viet-Nam to Laos and North Viet-Nam. Moreover, the population in these mountain areas has a long history of conflict with the plains dwellers. But if this area was, and remains, important in Communist strategy, it was in the south that the insurgent activities were most intensive. It is possible to build up some picture of the form which anti-Government activity took

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11. R. Scigliano, South Vietnam: Nation Under Stress (Boston, 1963), p. 138 gives a figure of 40 Viet-Cong assassinations of officials each month during 1958.
 12. The optimistic views of United States officials emerge particularly clearly in testimony given before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. See, for instance, United States Congress, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Situation in Vietnam (Washington, 1959, 1960).
 13. In J. L. Finkle and Tran Van Dinh, Provincial Government in Viet Nam: A Study of Vinh-Long Province (Saigon, 1961), one of the extremely useful reports prepared by the Michigan State University Advisory Group working in Viet-Nam, the authors draw particular attention to this problem -- pp. 63-64. They record the comment of a provincial official that the insurgents have been able to make the Government land program appear oppressive.

in the Mekong Delta. Although this picture risks inaccuracy through generalization, it appears to have overall validity. Communist policy aimed first at isolating the hamlet and village from the Saigon Government. In this aim the traditionally self-contained nature of the Vietnamese village was of more assistance to the insurgents than to the Government. Interviews with the inhabitants of a village in Vinh-Long Province probably had a wide application when they brought the following statement:

The villagers do not want to take sides. They are more interested in making a living than in getting into trouble.¹⁴

And in the same interview the failure of the Central Government to establish its presence in a meaningful way was also made clear:

It is dangerous in my village because the civil guard from the district headquarters cross the river to the village only in the daytime. Before sunset they return to the district, leaving the village unprotected at night. The village people have no protection from the Viet Cong so they will not inform on them to the authorities.¹⁵

There is also considerable evidence to show that the South Vietnamese Army's response to the insurgency problems posed by Viet-Cong activities was frequently such as to alienate the traditionally suspicious rural people. Punitive artillery barrages on villages suspected of sheltering Communist agents, or the indiscriminate use of artillery and bombings, have certainly played a part in Government operations.¹⁶ The Viet-Cong's execution of an official is an act of terrorism but it involves only one man and it can be cloaked in the guise of 'people's justice.' An artillery barrage is indiscriminate in its destruction of life and property. Furthermore, unlike the rebel's action it is damage inflicted by an outsider. The rebel can show himself to be a man of the people, eating and

14. J. D. Donoghue and Vo-Hong-Phuc, My-Thuan: The Study of a Delta Village in South Vietnam (Saigon, 1961), p. 17.

15. Ibid.

16. The relaxation of restrictions on press reporting in Viet-Nam, following the overthrow of the Diem Government, has brought more frequent accounts of the extent to which Government forces employ artillery and bomb attacks against villages which are believed to shelter insurgents. The following are a few references to the practice -- D. Warner, The Last Confucian (New York, 1963), p. 129; J. A. Rose, 'The peasant is the key to South Vietnam' in New York Times Magazine, 8 April 1962; E. G. Lansdale, 'Viet Nam: Do We Understand Revolution?' in Foreign Affairs, Vol. 43, No. 1 (October 1964), pp. 84-85.

Shelling of villages appears to have been one of the factors leading to an exodus of members of the Khmer minority from areas of South Viet-Nam during February and March of 1961. Groups of these refugees fled into Cambodia.

working with them, dressed in the same manner and appealing to the peasants' interests in intensely personal matters such as land-ownership. In the areas where Government control was weakest, the Communist opposition could work relatively slowly to win the population from a passive position to one of at least partial support.¹⁷ In other areas, the Communists could at least ensure that the rural population would not co-operate readily with the forces of the Central Government.

Estimates of Communist strength in South Viet-Nam by the end of 1960 vary, but a figure of perhaps 10,000 active insurgents may be cited. Except for occasional terrorist acts in the cities, their activities were concentrated in the countryside where counter-insurgency forces were inadequately prepared to meet their challenge. The army was being trained largely for conventional operations, on the assumption that the chief threat to the Diem regime would be in the form of military invasion from the north.¹⁸ But there had been recognition of the importance of denying the insurgents the co-operation of the peasantry. The realization of the importance of such a strategy was reflected in the Agrovillage scheme which began in 1959, and which, again, will be discussed in greater detail later in this study. In very broad terms the scheme envisaged resettlement, on a large scale, of peasants who were mostly outside Government control and protection. For a variety of reasons the scheme was not very successful and by the second half of 1961 the concept of the strategic hamlet, again principally designed to gain greater security by protecting the peasant, had begun to develop. By March 1962, the Strategic Hamlet program was, in terms of policy quite apart from execution, possibly the most assiduously promoted effort of the Government. In a situation where South Viet-Nam's supporters have often felt the need for reassurance, strategic hamlets were hailed by them as an imaginative answer to an intensely complicated problem. From Hanoi the hamlets were condemned vigorously and frequently. In spite of the clear disintegration of much of the program in 1963, there have been indications of the desire of South Vietnamese and American authorities to continue with some similar plan. This was shown in the advocacy of a military policy of 'clear and hold' when General Khanh came to power in January 1964. The continuing interest of United States officials in some form of resettlement program, and in the Malayan experience, was again reflected in General Westmoreland's visit to Malaya in June 1964

17. D. Warner, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-129 gives a description, based on captured documents, of the slow but successful penetration of an entire village by Viet-Cong agents. It is noteworthy that, by comparison with the Malayan insurgency, the South Vietnamese Government has made much less use of captured documents to serve its propaganda efforts.

18. On this matter the comments made by Colonel Pham-Ngoc-Thao, who was closely associated with the Agrovillage and Strategic Hamlet schemes, when he spoke at Cornell University on 20 May 1964, are interesting. At the time he spoke the Colonel stated that Government forces in South Viet-Nam had a ratio of one conventional forces soldier to one unconventional or guerrilla forces soldier. By contrast the Viet-Cong operated on the ratio of one conventional soldier to six guerrilla forces soldiers.

For some details on Colonel Pham-Ngoc-Thao's career see the 'Man in the News' section of the New York Times, 20 February 1965.

just before he assumed command of United States military forces in Viet-Nam. The deteriorating situation in the countryside has, however, been a severe limitation on the development of the policy. There has been an effort to gain support for the Government through the development of 'new life' hamlets in which loyalty to the Government is rewarded with medical and agricultural supplies. But for the purposes of study, the Strategic Hamlets ended with the fall of President Diem.

II. THE MALAYAN EXPERIENCE

The onset of the Malayan Emergency in 1948 thrust the problem of the Chinese squatters in Malaya into the forefront of political and military thinking. Squatting had first developed as a significant practice during the early thirties. The worldwide economic slump had a severe effect on the Malayan economy which depended so heavily on primary products. There was, in turn, an effect upon the labor force. Many of those who were unemployed as the result of the great depression were Chinese and some of these sought the solution to their problems in squatting on unoccupied land. There they could maintain themselves by subsistence farming. Some squatters occupied their land on the authority of temporary occupation licenses, but most had no legal sanction for their occupation. Even when the economic climate improved a number of squatters continued to live on their illegally occupied land.

The next important development for the growth of squatting was the Second World War. During the Japanese occupation of Malaya, the Chinese suffered considerable mistreatment at the hands of the invaders. In an effort to avoid this, and as a means to meet the demands made for food by the Japanese, many Chinese turned to squatting. These squatters were seen to have an immediate utility when the British administration returned at the end of the war. There was an acute shortage of food in areas of Malaya and Singapore and the squatter farmers were able to supply this most essential commodity. Just how important squatters in Johore were to the Singapore market is illustrated by the manner in which vegetable shipments to Singapore declined substantially after resettlement began in Johore.¹ A combination of a need for food and weakly administered land regulations combined to permit the squatters to remain largely untouched by authority in the years immediately following the war.

Despite their political and sociological importance, the Chinese squatter communities in Malaya have received only a limited amount of academic attention, and this mostly as a passing note in the consideration of some larger topic. The need for study of the squatters was emphasized as early as 1947 when Professor Raymond Firth made a survey of problems susceptible to research and study in Malaya.² While the attention which

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1. Statements on the utility of the squatters as providers of food appear in the Annual Report of the Malayan Union, 1947 (Kuala Lumpur), p. 7.

Details of the decline in food imports into Singapore from Johore after resettlement are recorded in Federation of Malaya, Legislative Council Minutes and Council Papers, Paper 33, 1952, Resettlement and the Development of New Villages in the Federation of Malaya, p. 317.

2. R. Firth, Report on Social Science Research in Malaya, Mimeographed version (Singapore, 1948).

Kernial Singh in 'The Saga of the Malayan Squatter,' Journal of Southeast Asian History, Vol. 5, No. 1, March 1964, pp. 143-177 discusses the question of resettlement from the position of a human

(continued)

Professor Firth gave to the squatters in his report was quite brief, he pointed to two most important characteristics of the squatters and their communities. He stressed the essentially spontaneous nature of the squatter settlements and the impermanence of these settlements. By contrast with the normal pattern of Chinese rural settlement in Malaya, the squatters frequently exploited the soil which they cultivated in a manner which brought quick returns but which led to the exhaustion of the soil in a very short time.³ The suggestions provided here of fragmented communities with a scantily developed social structure is of particular interest for its contrast with Viet-Nam. Indeed, the squatter settlements could in no way be regarded as cohesive social units. Those writers who have discussed the squatters in Malaya have generally divided them into three principal groups. First, there were those who settled on the edge of urban centers and gained employment in the town or city nearby. The second, and from the point of view of this study the most important group, were those who took up land in the rural areas. These were persons who had settled in rural areas, often on forest land which they cleared and cultivated, and in the main they had adopted this form of life during the Japanese occupation. A third group consisted of those squatters who settled on the fringes of estates and from there provided the labor for plantation and mining enterprises.⁴ This general pattern appears to have been widespread throughout Malaya.⁴ As a result of the breakdown of land administration during the Second World War, some squatters were able to settle on the largely unexploited Malay reserves. The number of squatters approached half a million. While there were squatters in all the Malay states, their numbers were concentrated in the west coast states of Johore, Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan.⁵

Before considering the position of the squatters during the Emergency period, it is of interest to note some of the features of the years immediately following the end of the war in Malaya. Through their

geographer. The problem of the squatters will, no doubt, be considered by Anthony Short in the official history of the Emergency which he is preparing for the Malaysian Government. Short is a contributor to Malaysia (ed.) Wang Gung-wu (New York, 1964) with a section on the Emergency, pp. 149-160.

Lucian Pye, Guerrilla Communism in Malaya: Its Social and Political Meaning (Princeton, 1956), provides a thorough analysis of the motivations of the Chinese guerrillas in the Emergency period. See also, the same author's, Lessons from the Malayan Struggle Against Communism (Cambridge, Mass., 1957).

Victor Purcell, Malaya: Communist or Free (Stanford, 1954) discusses the squatters within the framework of the overall Emergency situation.

3. R. Firth, op. cit., p. 19.

4. On the nature of the squatters see E. H. G. Dobby, 'Recent Settlement Changes in South Malaya,' The Journal of Tropical Geography, Vol. 1 (Oct. 1953), pp. 2-3 and Ooi Jin-bee, 'Mining Landscapes of Kinta,' The Journal of Tropical Geography, Vol. IV (Jan. 1955), Chapter VII.

5. The Fight Against Communist Terrorism in Malaya issued by the Office of Information, London (1953), p. 20.

association with the resistance to the Japanese the Chinese members of the Malayan Communist Party gained much political kudos, at least in the Chinese community. With the end of the war they endeavored to translate this prestige into political action in the form of strikes and demonstrations against the returning British administration. They had some initial success in demonstrating their power to organize industrial stoppages but they did not succeed in preventing the administration from carrying out its functions. Nevertheless, the period before the declaration of the Malayan Emergency was an extremely difficult one for the Government. Demonstrations and strikes in the urban centers were matched by a very real degree of insecurity in the rural districts. The Malayan Communist Party acted against those whom it suspected of being supporters of the Kuomintang, killing some and threatening others. Of the utmost importance to later developments in Malaya was the open nature of the Communist challenge in the early postwar years. This fact, combined with the association which members of the British wartime guerrilla Force 136 had had with Chinese Communists in Malaya, meant that when the Malayan Communist Party changed its tactics to armed subversion the authorities had considerable information about the insurgents.⁶ Although it was necessary for the Malayan Government to reorganize its police intelligence service in the face of the increased challenge, it seems clear that the security forces faced the Emergency well informed on the identity of many of the insurgents.⁷

The great importance of the squatters, and of the program to resettle them, lay in the nature of the Communist rebellion in Malaya. It was essentially a Chinese insurgency in which the Malays, the 'people of the country', were not actively involved as opponents of the existing regime. It is proper to note, however, that there was an element of 'civil war' to the situation in Malaya although, as will be suggested later in this study, there was no true analogy with the developments in South Viet-Nam. But within the Chinese community in Malaya lines were drawn on the basis of support for the Kuomintang and the Malayan Chinese Association, on the one hand, and the Chinese and Malayan Communist Parties on the other. When the armed rebellion began the insurgents struck from jungle bases against the staff of isolated plantations, mines and against Government outposts. To maintain themselves the insurgents depended on the squatters for food, information and recruits. In addition to those engaged in fighting, the insurgents had a secondary organization known as the Min Yuen or People's Army. In the insurgents' overall plans the squatter villages, after serving as supply bases, were to become the first 'liberated areas.'⁸ The Min Yuen units were recruited from the squatter communities. Either through sympathy, or through fear of reprisal, the Communist insurgents obtained a high degree of co-operation from many of

6. F. Spencer-Chapman, The Jungle is Neutral (London, 1949), provides an interesting account of the association between the British and Chinese guerrillas during the Second World War.

7. L. Pye, op. cit., pp. 88-89.

8. Resettlement and the Development of New Villages in the Federation of Malaya, details cited footnote 1, p. 9 of this paper. p. 327.

the half million squatters in Malaya. The problems devolving from the existence of squatter communities were quickly recognized by the Government in Malaya but there was no firm knowledge of the size of the squatting population. A committee to determine this and to consider means of meeting the problem presented to internal security from the existence of squatters was established in December 1948. It completed its report in January 1949.⁹

The Committee's report noted that one of the most striking features of the squatter communities was the fact that they were outside the normal processes of administration. This, taken with the assistance the squatters were providing the insurgents, made it essential that the squatters should be brought under administrative control.¹⁰ The Committee did not believe that the assistance rendered to the rebels indicated a commitment to the rebels' aims. It argued, on the contrary, that in most cases the squatters were without sympathies either way, 'but necessarily succumb to the more immediate and threatening influence -- the terrorist on their doorstep against the vague and distant authority of the Government.'¹¹ The Squatter Committee's recommendations laid the guidelines for the later settlement and resettlement plans. The chief features of these recommendations were:

(i) to settle the squatters, wherever possible, in the same areas which they already occupied.

(ii) to resettle squatters in alternative suitable areas when the settlement of existing areas was not possible.

(iii) to repatriate squatters who refused to accept settlement or resettlement on the terms offered.

and most importantly the following paragraph which is quoted in full:

Whether the situation is one of settlement or resettlement the Committee wishes to emphasise that the provision of effective administration is a sine qua non. No scheme can succeed unless the authority of the Land Office is firmly re-established and a proper respect for law and order inculcated. This will entail the provision of adequate communications, police stations, schools and health facilities and the like and will necessarily have to be borne in mind in selecting the areas for settlement and resettlement. On these lines the Committee feels that these areas could become part of the settled areas of the country.¹²

9. Consulted as, Federation of Malaya, Paper to be laid before the Federal Legislative Council by Command of His Excellency the High Commissioner, No. 3 of 1949, Report of Committee Appointed by His Excellency the High Commissioner to Investigate the Squatter Problem (Kuala Lumpur, 1949) (henceforth Squatter Report).

10. Ibid., p. 2, para. 7.

11. Ibid., p. 3, para. 8.

12. The recommendations appear on p. 4 of the Squatter Report.

Even with the early recognition of the threat to security involved in the existence of the squatter communities, it was not until early 1950 that any substantial resettlement was carried out.¹³ An immediate step was taken, however, which aimed at limiting the effectiveness of the Chinese guerrillas. This was the repatriation or detention of Chinese suspected of having aided the insurgents. Under Regulation 17 D, promulgated in January 1949, the Malayan Government detained 6,343 persons between January and October 1949. Of this number, 740 were repatriated to China.¹⁴ The change of government in China in 1949 restricted the use which could be made of repatriation.

With the promulgation of Regulations 17 E and 17 F, in 1949, the Government was free to begin resettlement and regroupment.¹⁵ Resettlement, as the word implies, involved the compulsory transfer of squatting families, sometimes to areas at some distance from their previous homes. Regroupment, on the other hand, usually took place on estates where squatters, who had been scattered around the perimeter, were concentrated into one settlement which could more easily be kept under surveillance. Following the preparation of the further report -- The Squatter Problem in the Federation of Malaya¹⁶ -- resettlement and regroupment accelerated and by the end of 1952 some 470,000 persons, eighty-five percent of them Chinese, had been brought under Government control.¹⁷

Altogether, between 1950 and 1960 some 530,000 persons were relocated in the New Villages, which were the essential accompaniment of resettlement.¹⁸ In general these villages, during the Emergency, were surrounded by barbed wire and entry to and exit from them during the night was strictly policed. The efforts for resettlement were most important in the west-coast states which have already been listed and it was in these states that the greatest amount of terrorist activity took place.¹⁹

The military importance of resettlement was emphasized by the elaboration of the Briggsd Plan which linked resettlement with measures to deny

13. Federation of Malaya, Legislative Council Minutes and Council Papers No. 14 of 1950, The Squatter Problem in the Federation of Malaya. p. B91 notes that Regulations 17 E and 17 F under which resettlement and regroupment took place were not introduced until May and August 1949 respectively. On p. B102 it is noted that by March 1950 only 4,465 persons had been resettled and 2,396 regrouped. In addition, 11,683 had been settled -- i.e. given legal sanction to occupy the land which they were using. Some 300,000 still remained to be brought under administrative control.

14. Ibid., p. B90.

15. Ibid., p. B91.

16. Details cited in footnote 13, page 13 of this paper.

17. The Fight Against Communist Terrorism in Malaya, op. cit., p. 20.

18. Kernial Singh, 'The Saga of the Malayan Squatter,' loc. cit., p. 159.

19. The Fight Against Communist Terrorism in Malaya, op. cit., p. 20.

all contact between the squatters and the insurgents. Under the Plan the police forces became responsible for the protection of the resettled villages, and for preventing food from the squatters reaching the terrorists. It was official practice not to undertake resettlement without establishing a police post to ensure protection for those within the new village. The army was left free to pursue the terrorists, destroying their bases and ambushing their movements. This policy is lucidly explained in the actual directive issued in connection with the Briggsd Plan. The strategy was:

(a) To dominate the populated areas and to build up a feeling of complete security which would in time result in a steady and increasing flow of information coming from all sources.

(b) To break up the Communist organizations within the populated areas.

(c) To isolate the bandits from their food and supply organizations in the populated areas.

(d) To destroy the bandits by forcing them to attack the security forces on their own ground.²⁰

This directive was issued in May 1950. Malaya's rugged topography contributed to the success of this plan and the accompanying military operations. While there were some opportunities for growing food in the jungles, and as it later became clear in areas occupied by the aboriginal population, none of the alternatives compared with the easy acquisition of food supplies from the squatters who had been living on the fringe areas of the jungle.²¹

Two features of the Briggsd Plan deserve particular attention. The effectiveness of the operation owed a great deal to the successful meshing of all interested departments and services into the unified plan under central control. The strategy of the Briggs' Plan was thus pursued and developed under the overall supervision of the Federal War Council which, under the chairmanship of the High Commissioner, included the Chief Secretary, the Secretary for Defense and the chiefs of the armed forces and the police.²² Another important aspect of the Briggs' Plan was the decision to implement it from south to north. Having made the judgment that the situation was gravest in Johore, this area was given priority and troops

20. Quoted in H. Miller, Menace in Malaya (London, 1954), p. 139. It may be noted that at the time the Briggs' Plan was issued the Government referred to the insurgents as 'bandits'. This term, which was found to have a certain glamor, was later changed to 'Communist terrorist.'

21. End of the Emergency issued by the Ministry of Information, Kuala Lumpur (1960) in Appendix F, pp. 1-2 gives some insight into the problems of guerrilla contact with the aborigines. Of particular interest is the account of the aborigines during the Emergency contained in D. Holman, Noone of the Ulu (London, 1958).

22. Federation of Malaya, Annual Report 1950 (Kuala Lumpur), p. 3.

were concentrated there. Even with this concentration it is interesting to note, particularly for later comparison with Viet-Nam, that resettlement was not completed in Johore until May 1951, and even then it was felt that some sacrifice of desirable features had been made.²³ There had therefore been a lapse of over two years between the presentation of the first report on the squatters and the completion of resettlement in Johore. The numbers involved in resettlement were approximately 66,000.²⁴

Militarily, the combination of resettlement and intensive anti-guerrilla operations was a success. By concentrating an immensely superior numerical force for operations against the Communists, the British Government in Malaya assured a swift response to any Communist attack. At the same time there were sufficient forces to pursue a relentless effort against the terrorists in their jungle retreat. Captured Communist documents showed that the technique was recognized as potentially dangerous to the insurgent interests from very early in the Emergency, and these documents showed the very great concern which the insurgents had for the role which the squatters assumed. As early as 1949 a captured Communist document revealed this latter concern:

Our greatest weakness is that we have not sufficient strength to protect co-operative villagers. Therefore, our environment becomes more and more difficult, especially from the financial and provision supply aspects. We suffer from unreliable information, non-co-operation of the people and difficulty of movement.²⁵

The insurgents mounted counter propaganda to undermine the efforts of the resettlement officials with the hope of frustrating the operation. They claimed in this propaganda that resettlement would not involve one move, but many moves, and urged the squatters to stay in their communities. Pamphlets putting forward these arguments were distributed amongst the squatters by the insurgents.²⁶

In reviewing the Malayan experience of a Communist insurgency, one is struck by the overall efficiency of the Government efforts to counter the challenge. There was a marked concern for detail. This does not mean there were no mistakes. In the early stages of the resettlement program Government forces destroyed squatter settlements without fully developed plans to accommodate the squatters. This brought resentment and a greater readiness on the part of the squatters to co-operate with the Communists.²⁷ Fortunately this

23. Resettlement and the Development of New Villages in the Federation of Malaya, details cited in footnote 1, p. 9 of this paper. p. 312.

24. The Squatter Problem in the Federation of Malaya, details cited in footnote 13, p. 13 of this paper. p. B102.

25. Federation of Malaya, Federal Government Press Release PR 5/49/100 of 12 May 1949, Captured Communist Document.

26. The Squatter Problem in the Federation of Malaya, details cited in footnote 13, p. 13 of this paper. p. B93.

27. K. Pelzer, 'Resettlement in Malaya,' The Yale Review, Vol. XLI, No. 3 (March 1952), p. 398.

was recognized, and the practice was abandoned. In Johore state, for instance, the resettlement program followed three distinct and detailed steps. Before resettlement began there was a census of the squatters and note was taken of the manner in which they earned their living so as to ensure that on movement they could be placed in a position to continue their occupation. Secondly, land was selected which could be defended and which at the same time provided sufficient agricultural opportunities. The third major step involved the Government explaining to the squatters what was intended in resettlement; why it was taking place; and what advantages they, the squatters, would receive.²⁸ That the squatters did receive material advantage is quite clear, although it is apparent that, at least in the early stages, there was considerable variation in the extent of their benefits. In general, however, new villages were provided from their inauguration with facilities which had been absent from the squatter communities. These facilities included schools, dispensaries and improved public services. The school in particular became a focus for the resettled squatters. Above all, the new villages brought the squatters within administrative control.

The establishment of the new villages, the denial to the Communists of their contacts with the villagers inside and assurance of administrative control over the villages were not the end of the Government's efforts in the resettlement program. Indeed, it was shown that it would have been dangerous if resettlement had not involved a continuing plan.²⁹ Many squatters were reluctant to move at first. Others who accepted the Government proposals that they should move nevertheless asked the resettlement officers to make it appear their resettlement was not voluntary, but rather something carried out under Government pressure. Once moved, discontent could come if the authorities were not able to show that in resettling, the squatters were, indeed, freed from Communist surveillance. There was also resentment if the Government had difficulties in providing the new settlements with essential services, or if the promised improved living standards did not materialize. It was clear that being isolated from the Communists had an initial and considerable effect on the squatters' attitudes.³⁰ But relief was not a continuing feeling and it needed to be primed and sustained. This was done by showing the squatters that resettlement could lead to the acquisition of land with title, as well as to physical security. An abundance of unused land in Malaya permitted the establishment of new villages without too many physical problems. Problems did arise, however, when the land which was used to establish a new village formed part of a Malay Reserve. Malay interests, jealous of their position as the 'people of the country,' resented the use of land previously reserved for them. When land titles were given, the initial tenure period was for about thirty

28. Ibid., p. 399.

29. The problems involved in capitalizing on physical resettlement with political orientation are discussed by O. W. Wolters, 'Emergency Resettlement and Community Development in Malaya,' Community Development Bulletin, Vol. III, No. 1, December 1951. See particularly p. 6.

30. Resettlement also had the desired effect of dislocating the Communist effort.

years.³¹ Perhaps too little attention has been given to the fact that the insurgents in Malaya had acted harshly against squatters who had not proved co-operative. Fair treatment from resettlement officers was at times, therefore, in direct contrast to the actions of the insurgents.³²

The successful resolution of the Malayan Emergency cannot be divorced from the steady progress towards independence which took place during the 1950's. This fact was a counter to Communist propaganda which characterized the British position as 'imperialist'. Whatever arguments may be advanced to show that Malaya emerged as a Malay-dominated country politically, when Merdeka was proclaimed in 1957, the fact that there was a Chinese party associated with the development of Malayan independence was important and recognized. And this party, the Malayan Chinese Association, had been closely connected with the resettlement program. It may be suggested that some of the propaganda used by the Malayan Chinese Association was too sophisticated for the squatters with its stress on the future of all races in Malaya. On the other hand, the Malayan Chinese Association was a Chinese party which could be seen by the squatters as giving its support to the Government settlement program.

The skillful use of propaganda is obviously of the greatest importance in a guerrilla warfare situation, and in Malaya there were conditions which favored the established government in the propaganda field. But the Government also illustrated its readiness to move beyond the obvious use of propaganda. One of the more imaginative efforts in this regard was the use of surrendered enemy personnel (S.E.P.'s) to rally the resettled population. Many of the guerrillas emerged from the jungle disillusioned with a life which forced them to live under harsh physical conditions and with the constant threat of attack from the Government security forces. Well treated when they surrendered, these S.E.P.'s frequently underwent an apparently genuine reaction against the life which they had led as guerrillas. This reaction was channelled into addresses which the S.E.P.'s gave before audiences of resettled squatters.³³

One cannot escape being struck by the many basic differences between the Malayan and Vietnamese situations in the attempts by their governments to overcome a Communist insurgent challenge. In Malaya the guerrilla offensive was mounted almost entirely by a racially and culturally distinct section of the population, and support or co-operation with the guerrillas came from that one section of the population. The potentially most powerful political group in the Malayan population, the Malays, opposed the actions of the guerrillas and were, in any case, suspicious of the Chinese

31. Ooi Jin-bee, 'Rural Development in Tropical Areas With Special Reference to Malaya,' Journal of Tropical Geography, Vol. 12, March 1959, see Chapter VII.

32. K. Pelzer, 'Resettlement in Malaya,' loc. cit., p. 398. See also J. H. Brimmell, Communism in South East Asia (London, 1959), pp. 327-328.

33. See J. B. Perry Robinson, Transformation in Malaya (London, 1956), pp. 47-53 which describes the use of S.E.P.'s as a propaganda medium and pp. 155-159 for broadcast propaganda by S.E.P.'s.

as a group. At every level, and particularly amongst the rural population, the insurgent Chinese were isolated from the Malays. Only very rarely in the Malay kampongs could the guerrillas expect to find any assistance. When the squatter villages on the edge of the jungle were removed, the chief sources of supply for the insurgents were removed also. The Government forces had an immense numerical superiority over the guerrillas with some 300,000 Government personnel, in various capacities, facing a maximum of perhaps 8,000 guerrillas.³⁴ Of great significance was the fact that the Malayan Police, whose duties included the extremely important task of guarding the new villages, were largely Malay in origin.

The fact that the contest took so long, before the end of the Emergency could be proclaimed, stresses the potency of guerrilla tactics and the high cost to the defending community. The Malayan jungles provided the guerrillas with a sanctuary, but not a privileged one, since the effective resettlement of the squatters enabled the Government to concentrate on extended jungle operations, leaving the villages guarded by police. The Siamese border area presented some initial problems, and was never fully closed to the guerrillas, but from the start efforts were made to deny this area to the guerrillas. In later years arrangements were made with the Thai Government to supervise the border on a joint basis and to permit Malayan forces to cross the border in hot pursuit. The Government had other advantages in Malaya. The fact that Malaya is largely surrounded by sea, rather than having a series of land borders, prevented the ready supply of arms and supplies to the insurgents from the outside. Extensive patrolling by British ships negated most attempts to land arms in this way. And on the west coast, where the bulk of the terrorist incidents took place, the Government was able to take advantage of the excellent road system to move troops to and from areas as conditions dictated. These are all aspects of a situation which contrast with the developments in South Viet-Nam where the challenge to the Government has come from a group which is ethnically the same as its opponents and where privileged sanctuaries do exist.

Can it be argued that there are, in fact, similarities between the Malayan and Vietnamese situations, given some of the broad and important differences which have been outlined? If similarities do exist, they would appear to lie in military rather than in social or political considerations. Success was achieved in Malaya by effectively isolating the insurgents from that section of the population which was either inclined or capable of co-operating with them. From a purely military point of view the resettlement operations were desirable because this isolation forced the guerrillas to initiate action on the Government's terms and permitted the Government to choose the areas where it would

34. G. Z. Hanrahan, The Communist Struggle in Malaya (New York, 1954), p. 75 gives the following breakdown of the Government forces. There were some 40,000 regular British and British Commonwealth troops, including Air Force and Naval units. These, it might be noted, included some of the British Army's most highly regarded troops. The Police Forces numbered 70,000 while there were some 200,000 Home Guards. The Home Guard had importance for static guard duties.

fight. The logistical problems encountered by the insurgents when the squatters could no longer supply them with food became the insurgents' paramount concern.³⁵ Even though the Government could never completely cut off all supplies to the insurgents, it could force them to 'channel their supply lines.' And because of Government surveillance it was extremely difficult for the insurgents to gain recruits from the resettled areas.

There appear to have been some military similarities between the situations in Malaya and South Viet-Nam. This assumes, as it appears to be correct to do, that the passivity at best and co-operation at worst, of the villagers has been of prime importance to the survival of the insurgent forces in Viet-Nam. It is a matter for discussion whether the apparent military similarities are diminished, or even completely outweighed, by the differences which have already been outlined. Attention needs to be directed towards the sociological implications of resettlement in South Viet-Nam since, unlike the circumstances which obtained in Malaya, there were areas in South Viet-Nam where relocation efforts had to be carried out among peasants who had held their land for some generations. And, unlike the squatters in Malaya, these were cohesive communities with established social structures. Without diminishing these differences it is probably correct to note that both the squatters in Malaya and the rural peasantry in South Viet-Nam shared a tradition of resistance to Government interference in their affairs. At the same time, as the result of a common background of Confucian ideals, there was some tendency in both cases for the Chinese squatters and the Vietnamese peasants to judge their Governments on moral grounds when they came into contact with them. In suggesting that there may have been military similarities between the insurgencies in Malaya and South Viet-Nam, there is no intention to argue that military considerations outweigh all others. Indeed, the success of the military effort and of resettlement in Malaya came through association with developing independence and through the ethnic character of the insurgents. But the recognition of the political and social problems which underlie the conflict in South Viet-Nam should not disguise the need which there has been throughout the insurgency for military accomplishment. The challenge from the Communists in South Viet-Nam has been political in aim but politico-military in character. An attempt to place the question of the general utility of the Strategic Hamlet program in its proper context forms part of the next section of this study.

³⁵ L. Pye, op. cit., p. 98.

III. THE STRATEGIC HAMLET PROGRAM -- 1. The Emergence of the Concept

Vietnamese settlement in Cochinchina is of relatively recent date. This fact has led to some differences in the settlement pattern of that area when compared with the Vietnamese heartlands in the north and along the coastal littoral of central Viet-Nam. As the Vietnamese advanced into the southern areas, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they made use of settlement techniques which sound an echo of the fortified hamlets of more recent years. Settlement advanced behind dinh-dien and don-dien (agricultural and military colonies respectively) which served the purpose of developing the newly acquired territory and of protecting it if need be.¹ But while it seems likely that in the early period of Vietnamese settlement the colonists grouped together in the traditional close pattern of settlement, this did not remain the norm. Villages in the Mekong Delta area of Viet-Nam spread out along the rivers, canals and paths in a long, extended fashion with each farmer living close to his land. Hickey in his study of southern villages maintains that the relatively recent establishment of these villages has lessened the attachment to old Confucian ideals and forms of behavior.² One may need, therefore, to qualify the comments made by Paul Mus on the Vietnamese village as a close-knit entity when one considers the south, since there is some suggestion that the sense of cohesiveness was not so great. Although, by contrast with Malayan squatter communities, the southern villages should certainly be regarded as established and cohesive communities. And Mus's picture of the peasant within the village as isolated from the central authority of his country seems true for the south, as do his comments on the peasants' view of the 'mandate of heaven'.³ In the case of this concept, it seems clear that the peasant's estimation of the Government's authority and desirability would hinge on the effectiveness of the administration. If the Government proved unable to protect him and his family, then it was, presumably, no longer blessed by the 'mandate'. Close identification between the Vietnamese peasantry and the central government has never been a tradition. Authority, of a more or less efficient nature, was vested in the hands of the mandarin and later in the representative of the French colonial administration. Provided authority afforded protection, and did not interfere too closely in the daily life of the village, it was acceptable.

Another characteristic of the agricultural areas of the Mekong Delta was the high incidence of agricultural indebtedness.⁴ This provided both

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1. Le-Thanh-Khoi, Le Viet-Nam: Histoire et Civilisation (Paris, 1955), p. 359.
 2. G. C. Hickey, 'Problems of Social Change in Viet-Nam,' Bulletin de la Societe des Etudes Indochinoises, n. ser., Tome XXXIII, No. 4, 1958, p. 413.
 3. P. Mus, Viet-Nam, Sociologie d'une guerre (Paris, 1952), pp. 23, 32 and *passim*.
 4. D. Lancaster, op. cit., p. 65. See also footnote 13, p. 5 of this study.

nationalists and Communists with a leverage point in attempting to gain the support of the landless, or almost landless peasants in the south. Some areas in the Delta region had a long history of being without effective Government control outside the urban centers. This was the case, in particular, for the Ca-Mau Peninsula area and for sections of the Plain of Reeds. Some areas almost adjacent to Saigon had, by the early 1960's, been under effective Communist control for nearly two decades.⁵ But even where the situation was not so extreme the Saigon Government still had to contend with a population weary of war and living in a settlement pattern which made Government surveillance difficult. The existing social discontent among the peasantry was heightened by the increasing awareness of the opportunities for a better life which could come through improved schools and health facilities. Failure by the Government to provide these services presented a fertile ground for Communist agitation and subversion when the insurgents increased their activity in 1958 and 1959. The first substantial reaction to the problem of rural subversion and guerrilla activities came with the institution of the Agrovillage Plan.

The Agrovillage program was usefully documented in an article by a Vietnamese official who was closely associated with the plans to resettle population within these proposed self-contained and protected communities.⁶ In addition it is possible to compare the official picture of the development of the program, in one important instance, as presented in a Government brochure,⁷ with the less complimentary view of the program provided by a United States observer connected with the Michigan State University Advisory Group in South Viet-Nam.⁸ While resettlement had been necessary for the refugee groups who had come to the south, from the beginning of the Diem regime, wholesale regroupment of the resident population was not envisaged before 1959. Colonel Pham-Ngoc-Thao, who was closely connected with resettlement both in the Agrovilles and in the Strategic Hamlets, has noted that the virtues of resettlement for security reasons were brought to the notice of the Saigon Government through the initiative of a provincial chief in the Can-Tho area. Faced with difficulties in retaining control over the rural population, this official moved some of the population into a protected area and resettled them. The maneuver appealed to the central authorities who, in February 1959, began to implement resettlement plans based on a division of the population into loyal and disloyal groups.⁹

5. This was admitted by Ngo-Dinh Nhu, for an area only 25 miles north of Saigon. See his speech on opening a strategic hamlet at Chu-Chi in Vietnam Press, w/e 1 April 1962.

6. Nguyen-Khac-Nhan, 'Policy of Key Rural Agrovilles,' Asian Culture, Vol. III, July-December 1961, No. 3-4, pp. 29-49.

7. Cai-San: The Dramatic Story of Resettlement and Land Reform in the 'Rice Bowl' of the Republic of Viet-Nam issued by the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam (Saigon, n.d.).

8. J. J. Zasloff, 'Rural Resettlement in South Vietnam: The Agrovillage Program,' Pacific Affairs, Vol. XXXV, No. 4, Winter 1962-1963, pp. 327-340.

9. Statement by Colonel Pham-Ngoc-Thao in address at Cornell University on 20 May 1964.

Those suspected of having contacts with the Viet-Cong, or known to have relatives in the north, were placed in qui-khu, while those considered loyal were placed in qui-ap. These resettlement areas were separate from each other, although not infrequently they were set up close together along major communication routes such as roads and canals. The overriding consideration behind these settlements was a security one. In the words of the Vietnamese official:

d.. The unique /sic. is 'special'dneant?/ problem of public security inspired these measures. No consideration of /an/ economic or social nature had been viewed /considered/. Removed from their plot of ground and their habits the transplanted families found themselves living deprived of everything in an unknown place, often far away from the land which they had been working. Some help, often inadequate, was given them and it was left to the initiative of the local authorities.¹⁰

This settlement technique brought protests. Loyal families felt themselves wronged and in a number of cases families of senior Government officials were grouped with the suspect families because of having relatives in North Viet-Nam. The protests which followed this measure brought a Government re-assessment and a report on the situation by Pham-Ngoc-Thao which was finally translated into the Agrovillage Scheme.¹¹ In his report Thao stressed the need to combine resettlement with appropriate economic and social measures. He warned against separating the population into 'loyal' and 'disloyal' groups, noting that in his own case he had relatives in North Viet-Nam. He also argued that resettlement zones should be established in areas where living conditions were suitable for the maintenance of the resettled population.

From this report the policy of establishing agrovilles developed. In a letter sent to officials within the Presidency on 13 April 1959 President Diem called for the selection of localities for the construction of 'key rural agrovilles' with the aim of 'improving the village standard of living, and of carrying on with success the Government's cultural, social and security program.'¹² The officials of the Presidency completed their initial planning by July 1959.¹³ Because of the existing

10. Nguyen-Khac-Nhan, 'Policy of Key Rural Agrovilles,' loc. cit., p. 32.

11. J. J. Zasloff, 'Rural Resettlement in South Vietnam: The Agrovillage Program,' loc. cit., p. 330.

12. Nguyen-Khac-Nhan, 'Policy of Key Rural Agrovilles,' loc. cit., p. 33.

13. J. J. Zasloff, 'Rural Resettlement in South Vietnam: The Agrovillage Program,' loc. cit., p. 330 gives an insight into Government procedures in instituting agrovilles by quoting the text of a letter from the Government Delegate for South Viet-Nam to all provincial chiefs. It read in part: 'Chiefs of all districts are ordered discreetly to take up relations with the presidents of village sections of the National Revolutionary Movement, groups of friends, members of councils of notables of the villages, hamlet chiefs, and with representatives of the population so that these groups spontaneously /sic./

(continued)

resettlement schemes, the plan called for development which made use of the resettlement already instituted. In its planned form the 'key rural agrovillet' scheme envisaged that by 1963 between 300,000 and half a million persons would have settled in agrovilles.¹⁴ It is interesting to note this comparatively restrained figure when compared with the later strategic hamlet program which was to cover the entire population in a shorter period. Even though the scale of resettlement was smaller, it is apparent that many of the problems which were later to plague the strategic hamlet program were experienced during the development of the agrovilles. Most strikingly, those who were resettled usually did so reluctantly since resettlement resulted in their being removed some distance from the land which they normally worked.¹⁵ In an effort to counter this problem the Government; at least in theory, provided cash incentives, assistance in the construction of a new home and the prospect of better services within the agrovilles. But to construct the agrovilles involved draining land, building canals and roads and erecting houses. For this the labor of local peasants was required, a fact which apparently aroused resentment.¹⁶ As with the later strategic hamlets, the Saigon Government placed considerable importance on the philosophical and social values which it was believed were inherent in the agrovilles. President Diem referred to the scheme as designed 'to build a new society founded on social justice and brotherhood.'¹⁷ Despite the theory of the operation it is not clear, from the evidence which is available, the extent to which there was any real effort made to link the resettlement envisaged under the agrovillage experiment with true security for the peasants. This stands in stark contrast with the constant concern for security of the resettled squatters which marked the efforts in Malaya. Moreover, the official Vietnamese statements on resettlement did not take up the question of the peasants' attitude towards, and concern about, removal from the village dinh.¹⁸

The plan ceased to be promoted in 1961, after the high hopes for its success were not achieved, and Government efforts were transferred to the

call for the opening of conference under the presidency of the chief of district. At these conferences, the policy of the National Government will be praised, the policy and actions of the Communists will be condemned....

14. Nguyen-Khac-Nhan, 'Policy of Key Rural Agrovilles,' loc. cit., p. 36.
15. J. J. Zasloff, 'Rural Resettlement in South Vietnam: The Agrovillage Program,' loc. cit., p. 336.
16. Ibid., pp. 333-334.
17. Quoted by Nguyen-Khac-Nhan, 'Policy of Key Rural Agrovilles,' loc. cit., p. 29.
18. The dinh represents the spiritual center of Vietnamese hamlet and village life. The village cult has its ceremonies at the dinh, and the building represents a most important entity to the peasants. Removal from the dinh, as well as removal from proximity to ancestral graves, must have been a severe blow to the peasant. For an account of the dinh in a delta village and its significance see G. C. Hickey, Village in Vietnam (New Haven, 1964), pp. 214-232.

strategic hamlets. In two years only 23 agrovilles were inaugurated.¹⁹ An analysis of the scheme's failure is aided by the observations made by J. J. Zasloff who, while in Viet-Nam as Smith-Mundt Professor of Political Science at Saigon University, participated in Michigan State University's survey of provincial administration. He observed the functioning of an agroville at Tan-Luoc, in Vinh-Long Province, and also made supplementary observations at Cai-San, an agroville in the same province. This latter agroville was the subject of a South Vietnamese Government brochure, as has already been noted. It is very instructive to compare the reports of the foreign observer and the Government. The picture presented by the Government is of happy peasants who had found at Cai-San the many services and facilities which they had previously lacked; of land provided for the peasants by the Government; and of housing materials supplied so that the peasants might build themselves a satisfactory new home.²⁰ In fact, it appears that the resettlement area chosen for the peasants was a bare one, without shade trees. The peasants were provided with insufficient funds to build houses which would satisfactorily replace those which they had had to vacate. Rice fields which the peasants had previously tended were now up to six kilometers from the peasants' houses and it was necessary to dig canals at low wages. The land which the Government provided for the peasants had to be purchased from the Government at the price which the Government had paid the previous owner. A very similar picture emerged in Zasloff's study of Tan-Luoc agroville. Here, evidently on orders from Saigon, the peasants were not remunerated for their labor on the canals and roads which were built for the agroville.²¹

Criticism of the agrovilles came from both the Viet-Cong and from the non-Communist opposition in South Viet-Nam. The Communists apparently recognized that relocation, whatever opposition it aroused amongst the peasants, represented a real challenge to their plans for subversion at the rural level. The district chief concerned with the development of Cai-San, for instance, was first warned not to go to the agroville and the provincial chief for the area was shot by the insurgents.²² Discontent with the agrovilles also formed part of the manifesto issued by the Caravelle group which included in its list of complaints the following:

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19. J. J. Zasloff, 'Rural Resettlement in South Vietnam: The Agroville Program,' loc. cit., p. 332.
 20. Cai-San: The Dramatic Story of Resettlement and Land Reform in the 'Rice Bowl' of Viet Nam, op. cit., pp. 11-12.
 21. J. J. Zasloff, 'Rural Resettlement in South Vietnam: The Agroville Program,' loc. cit., passim. According to Stanley Karnow in an article 'Diem Defeats His Own Best Troops,' The Reporter, 19 January 1961, at the Vi-Thanh agroville 20,000 peasants were moved to construct the agroville which, when it was completed, could only hold 6,200 persons. See also New York Times, 19 March 1961.
 22. This was observed by J. J. Zasloff and commented upon by Colonel Pham-Ngoc-Thao in his address of 20 May 1964. On the threats against officials see J. J. Zasloff, 'Rural Resettlement in South Vietnam: The Agroville Program,' loc. cit., p. 335.

...dTens of thousands of people are being mobilized for hardship and toil to leave their work and go far from their homes and fields, separated from their parents, wives and children, to take up a life in collectivity, to construct beautiful but useless agrovilles which tire the people, lose their affection, increase their resentment and most of all give an additional terrain for propaganda to the enemy.²³

Evidence of Communist concern over the agrovilles should warn against completely dismissing their possible utility in countering a guerrilla subversion. But clearly the execution of the plan had the gravest faults, and these invalidated the possible advantages in the concept. Peasants were resettled in unsuitable areas, compensation was insufficient and the problems of administration in a newly independent country, aggravated by emergency conditions, undoubtedly led to speculation which further increased the difficulties of implementing the scheme. If the agrovilles were to succeed, much greater attention to matters likely to cause discontent would have been required. By the middle of 1961 a new term was appearing in the official news bulletin, Vietnam Press -- this term was 'strategic hamlet'. Although the scheme for instituting strategic hamlets on a national scale was not officially inaugurated until March 1962, it is certain that its genesis predates that time.

While agrovilles were still the official government resettlement policy, a reference appeared in Vietnam Press, for the week ending 24 July 1961, which noted the visit by Ngo-Trong-Hieu, the Secretary of State for Civil Action, to a number of 'tactical hamlets' in areas of strategic importance. One week later an item in the same press bulletin recorded the establishment of the 'first three strategic hamlets organized earlier this month [i.e. in July 1961] in Vinh-Long Province.'²⁴ These hamlets, Vietnam Press reported, had been successful as a counter to the activities of the Viet-Cong. For the remainder of 1961 there were various references to strategic hamlets. 'Hundreds' were established in Quang-Ngai province of central Viet-Nam; a model hamlet was constructed in Vinh-Binh province, and so on.²⁵ In these initial references the strategic aspects of the hamlets were stressed. Thus, the fact that the hamlet kept the villagers from contact with the insurgents was emphasized. This was to be achieved, it was reported, by the construction of physical barriers. But it was also

23. Ibid., p. 337. A full translation of the manifesto, with some minor differences, is contained in B. Fall, The Two Viet-Nams, op. cit. Appendix III. The Caravelle group took its name from Saigon's most modern hotel, the Hotel Caravelle, where it frequently met. Ironically, President Diem's brother, Bishop Thuc, was one of the directors. The group was made up of professional men, most with some experience of official office in the closing days of the French period. Their manifesto had little, if any, effect when it was presented and the Government took no immediate action. But in the period following the attempted coup d'etat of November 1960 most of the group were arrested. Some were released shortly after, others were held without trial. See New York Times, 1 May 1960 and 13 November 1960. See also R. Scigliano, op. cit., pp. 84-85.

24. Vietnam Press, w/e 30 July 1961.

25. Ibid., w/e 6 August 1961, w/e 3 September 1961.

stated that the villagers' loyalty to the Government would be strengthened as the result of increased social services in the hamlets.

It was during this early period that the British Government sent its Advisory Mission to South Viet-Nam, headed by R. G. K. Thompson, a former Secretary for Defense in Malaya and a man closely associated with the formulation of measures to counter the insurgents in Malaya. The announcement that a British Mission would be sent came on 18 September 1961 and the leader of the mission arrived in Viet-Nam on 30 September 1961.²⁶ Major discussions had also been held between the South Vietnamese and United States Governments, in the latter months of 1961, aimed at improving the general economic and social situation in Viet-Nam.²⁷ The development of strategic hamlets should probably be seen as an important part of this larger strategy although not necessarily as a direct development from the discussions. While it was never explicitly stated, there does seem considerable reason to believe that the strategic hamlet scheme was the personal concept of President Diem's brother, Ngo-Dinh Nhu.²⁸ Nhu did, in any event, play a large part in the organization of the scheme. He presided over the committees which discussed the program and addressed classes of cadres for organizing strategic hamlets. It was Nhu, more than anyone else, who formulated the involved 'philosophical' background for the hamlet program which, although one cannot suppose that it had much relevance for the peasants who were involved in the program, is interesting and important as a reflection of the whole character of the Diem regime. As a purely practical matter, one of the reasons behind the new form of settlement lay in the failure of the agrovilles. The name agrovillage having become synonymous with limited success, or lack of success in a great many cases, needed to be replaced with something else. The term strategic hamlet in part served this purpose.²⁹

In physical character, and by comparison with the previous agrovilles, the strategic hamlets were generally planned to be on a smaller scale. Instead of being intended to contain many thousands of people, as was the case with the agrovilles, many of the strategic hamlets were projected to contain fewer than a thousand persons. The strategic hamlets were to be developed from existing settlements, which would be fortified, or, where the settlement pattern required, a new and fortified hamlet was to be

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26. Times (London), 18 September and 2 October 1961. According to D. Warner, op. cit., p. 17, Thompson found the situation in Viet-Nam much worse than he had expected, but with sufficient similarities to Malaya to warrant experimentation on the same lines.
 27. These were the discussions which took place between United States and Vietnamese officials headed, respectively, by Dr. Eugene Staley and Dr. Vu-Quoc-Thuc. See New York Times, 10 June and 19 July 1961, and 5 January 1962.
 28. The nearest to an explicit statement appears in a South Vietnamese Government booklet, Viet-Nam's Strategic Hamlets (Saigon, 1963) where on page 5 Nhu is noted as the '... architect and prime mover of the program.'
 29. Statement by Colonel Pham-Ngoc-Thao -- address at Cornell University, 20 May 1964.

erected. It does not seem correct to contrast developments in Viet-Nam with those in Malaya on the basis that resettlement was used in Malaya while in Viet-Nam protection was attempted on the spot.³⁰ Certainly, according to the official Vietnamese reports, the strategic hamlets were to be developed from both resettlement and consolidation of existing communities.

It is an interesting comment on the administrative practices of the South Vietnamese Government, under the Diem regime, that in the case of both the agrovilles and the strategic hamlets the committees responsible for their administration were not established until after the program had started. The Inter-Ministerial Committee for Strategic Hamlets, with the responsibility for all matters connected with the program, was not established until February 1962, some seven months after the references to strategic hamlets began appearing in the official news reports. The Committee was established by Presidential decree on 3 February 1962.³¹ It had representatives from the Ministries of the Interior, Defense, Education, Civic Action and Rural Affairs. Although the establishment of many strategic hamlets had already been reported, the new committee was enjoined to prepare plans for establishing strategic hamlets throughout the country; to unify policies and methods; to fix time limits for implementing its plans; and to co-ordinate the efforts of the various agencies concerned with the establishment of hamlets. The official press agency reported that a corps of inspectors was to be established to supervise control of the scheme, and that provincial committees, set up on the same basis as the central committee in Saigon, were to be established.³² Courses for civil servants whose work connected them with the strategic hamlets were instituted and by February 1962 some 1,500 civil servants were reported as having completed nine three-day courses of training related to strategic hamlets.³³ These courses were later changed into more intensive fifteen days' training in 'sociology, economics, administration budgets, politics, etc. and three days of field work in mock attacks and defense against the enemy.'³⁴ It is apparent, therefore, that the statement made by the South Vietnamese Government, that the hamlets program was instituted in March 1962, does not give a true picture of the development of the plan.³⁵ Clearly, various pilot projects had begun before then,

30. A statement making this distinction was attributed to Roger Hillsman in Viet-Nam's Strategic Hamlets, op. cit., p. 28.

31. Vietnam Press, w/e 11 February 1962.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid., w/e 18 February 1962.

34. Ibid., w/e 20 May 1962.

35. Viet-Nam's Strategic Hamlets, op. cit., p. 4.

In a personal and unofficial communication to the writer Colonel C. T. R. Bohannon, USAR (ret.), who has served as a counter-insurgency consultant in both the Philippines and South Viet-Nam, noted that the full implementation of the Strategic Hamlet Program dates from an even later date. He suggests that the program proper did not really develop until after the implementation of 'Operation Sunrise' -- see the succeeding section of this paper for some discussion of this operation.

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although the later date possibly does indicate a greater degree of Government control over the operations than had existed previously.

In his many speeches made in connection with the hamlet program, Ngo-Dinh Nhu explained that, at least for him, the strategic hamlets represented more than just a security measure. The program was, he said, central to the moral development of the whole country and the purest formulation of the personalist philosophy which was the official political philosophy of the regime. The same theme was echoed by his brother the President. Personalism in Viet-Nam was an ideological mixture distilled from the writings of the Catholic personalist philosophers of the 1930's, who had particularly attracted Ngo-Dinh Nhu, with added elements to give it an Asian, and more particularly a Vietnamese, content. In the very broadest terms, it offered an alternative to the systems of Marxist Communism and laissez-faire capitalism and stressed the individual's development within collective institutions. This philosophy was a constant point of reference for official acts and pronouncements during the Diem regime. Courses in 'Personalism' were part of the training of Vietnamese officer cadets and civil servants.³⁶

Some of the 'spiritual' aspects of the strategic hamlet program emerge in the following statement taken from President Diem's address to the Civil Guard on the occasion of its Seventh Anniversary in April 1962. At that time Diem said:

... strategic hamlets represented the basic elements in the war undertaken by our people against our three enemies: communism, discord and underdevelopment. In this concept they also represent foundation of the new Vietnamese society where values are reassessed according to the spirit of the personalist revolution where social, cultural and economic reform will improve the living conditions of the large working class down to the remotest villages.³⁷

Nhu seldom missed an opportunity to stress the 'revolutionary personalist character of the national policy regarding strategic hamlets.'³⁸ Under the new plan, Nhu argued, friends would be separated from enemies; new values would be established in which wealth and position were not synonymous; and the population would be freed from the prospect of arbitrary

It may be noted, however, that the information provided by Vietnamese Government sources 'claimed' the existence of a program from early 1962. This appears to be a further example of the problems involved in dealing with official South Vietnamese source materials.

These early efforts must nevertheless be seen as part of the continuing effort to find some means of dealing with rural insurgency so that the resettlement programs of late 1962 and early 1963 were in a direct line of descent.

36. On the place of 'Personalism' in South Viet-Nam see John C. Donnell, 'Personalism in South Vietnam,' in Wesley Fishel (ed.), Problems of Freedom: South Vietnam Since Independence (New York, 1961), pp. 29-67.

37. Vietnam Press, w/e 15 April 1962.

38. Ibid., w/e 3 June 1962.

arrest.³⁹ It is particularly interesting to note one passage from an address by Nhu as a reflection of the tactics which had been used by the South Vietnamese Army in the war against the insurgents. Referring to the fact that guerrilla warfare was a war waged without a front, Nhu went on to say:

... Since we did not know where the enemy was, ten times we launched a military operation, nine times we missed the Viet-Cong, and the tenth time, we struck right on the head of the population.⁴⁰

Finally, in noting the appeals to the philosophic worth of the strategic hamlets, it may be noted that the program was announced as an experiment in 'grass-roots' democracy. Under the plan democratic institutions were to be extended to the lowest level with the election of the hamlet council to be carried out by the hamlet population.⁴¹

As an aspect of the 'military revolution' embodied in the hamlets the Government apparently, or at least officially, envisaged that the hamlets should become self-sufficient in their own defense. According to the South Vietnamese Government's own statement, the hamlet self-defense forces would be armed by the Government for six months. After this time the loaned weapons would be withdrawn and the hamlet defenders would then be dependent on those weapons which they had been able to capture from the Communist insurgents.⁴² This statement either represented a form of encouraging the villagers to greater zeal or, if it was in fact policy, was an extremely dangerous proposal. Such a policy, if pursued, presented the possibility of villages being left defenseless after an initial period of resisting the insurgents; an unenviable prospect.

Because of their 'revolutionary' character strategic hamlets were not to be confined to the rural areas. The Government planned for, and later implemented, an urban equivalent to the strategic hamlets. These were known as 'strategic quarters.' The cities of Saigon, Hue, Dalat and Danang were all allotted a target number of strategic quarters within which the same aims of self-sufficiency and social revolution were to be sought.⁴³

Combined with these efforts in the lowlands and cities of South Vietnam were the plans designed to establish greater security in the highland areas. Security in the highlands has been a problem of the greatest importance throughout the insurgency since it has been through these areas occupied by tribal peoples that infiltration of men and equipment has taken place. The relations between the Saigon Government and the various ethnic minorities were strained throughout the Diem regime. Much of this strain resulted from the traditional rivalries and distrust between the lowland Vietnamese and the mountain tribal peoples who are different in

39. Viet-Nam's Strategic Hamlets, op. cit., p. 19 quoting Nhu on 23 August 1962.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., p. 9 quoting Nhu on 23 August 1962.

42. Ibid., p. 10.

43. Vietnam Press, w/e 31 March 1963.

both their ethnic origins and their culture from the Sinicized Vietnamese. There were, however, additional factors which, during the Diem regime, added to the distrust already existing. Most notably, the South Vietnamese Government attempted to ensure the security of the highland areas, and partly to solve its refugee problem, by resettling many of the refugees who came south from North Viet-Nam, after the Geneva Accords, in the highland areas. This was seen by the tribal peoples as the appropriation of their lands without due recompense. Vietnamese officials who came in contact with the tribal peoples did not always disguise the contempt which they felt for these 'outlanders.' Moreover, the situation in South Viet-Nam contrasted sharply with what was, at least, the form of relations between the North Vietnamese Government and its minorities. In North Viet-Nam the Government has stressed the right of minorities to local autonomy and worked intensively to gain their support.⁴⁴ The minorities in the south are not unaware of these facts and the Hanoi regime has stressed the differences in the treatment of minorities in its radio propaganda. The events of September 1964, at which time the tribal peoples around Ban-Me-Thuot staged a temporary revolt and killed many Vietnamese officers, are an index of the tensions which exist between the Government and the minorities.⁴⁵ Official publications gave accounts of resettlement of tribal peoples in fortified villages and hamlets, but even more than was the case for the lowland areas it is difficult to estimate just how extensive and effective this resettlement was.⁴⁶ It is certain that the traditional antipathies posed a very considerable problem for the implementation of the program.

From the United States point of view one of the clearest statements of the concepts underlying the strategic hamlet program came with the publication in August 1963 of a booklet Notes on Strategic Hamlets.⁴⁷ Prepared by the United States Operations Mission in Viet-Nam, the text was drafted in May 1963. The Notes point to some mistakes, particularly in the location of hamlets and an excessive concern with quantitative goals, but the overall view is an optimistic one -- the state of the program is compared with that of the Allied troops during the Normandy landings, a successful landing has been made but it has to be exploited.

44. The problem of relations between the North Vietnamese Government and its minorities is discussed in some detail in B. Fall, Le Viet-Minh (Paris, 1960) Part 2, Chapter 2, pp. 86-95.

45. See New York Times for the period 21 to 28 September 1964.

46. See for instance Vietnam Press, w/e 7 July 1963 and New York Times, 30 January 1962 which reports the forcible movement of a tribal group into a village.

47. Notes on Strategic Hamlets, published by the Office of Rural Affairs, USOM Saigon. In an insert dated 15 August 1964 the following comments are made on Notes on Strategic Hamlets:

By the time the finished Notes in English came off the press /that is in August 1963/ it was clear that the Strategic Hamlet program had largely ceased to progress, and within a month evidence of successful Viet Cong counter-attacks were available.

The principal concern of the Notes is, however, to provide the conceptual framework for the strategic hamlet program. It was seen, according to this document, as a way of bringing the peasants to commit themselves to the South Vietnamese Government. Protection, the document recognizes, was only one of the essentials of the program. The peasant had to be motivated to oppose the Viet-Cong because he believed that it was in his interest to do so.

III. THE STRATEGIC HAMLET PROGRAM -- 2. Implementation

Official reports on the implementation of the strategic hamlet program give a glowing picture of steady progress. These reports came not only from the South Vietnamese Government itself, but also from those governments which supported the South Vietnamese efforts. On 17 April 1963 President Diem celebrated the first anniversary of the approval given to the hamlet program by the South Vietnamese National Assembly. In his speech he admitted that earlier settlement plans had not been entirely successful. Those who criticized Viet-Nam, however, had failed to take account of the 'creative genius, the capacity of invention and the tenacity of our people.' The plan which had emerged and which was solving the country's problems was the strategic hamlet program, 'the quintessence of our truest traditions .d. the pure outgrowth of our ancestral virtues.d'

After only one year, the irresistible movement of strategic hamlets had already gone far beyond the original tactical objective. In constant progression this movement has upset all the subversive maneuvers of the enemies of the nation, and it has, in addition, strongly shaken the foundations of their very organization.

At the same time that general security grows, the foundations of the personalist revolution take root in the countryside bringing the certainty of victory for the Just Cause..d.¹

The Government news bulletin, Vietnam Press, contained a continual listing of new hamlets constructed and inaugurated. The most striking feature of these reports was the apparent rapidity with which hamlets were constructed, a fact later emphasized by the revelations of poorly fortified hamlets and falsification of the numbers of hamlets completed. Since it had become a matter of national policy to construct hamlets, a provincial official could not afford to lag in reporting his target of hamlets completed. The planned total of hamlets was between 11,000 and 12,000 which, it was claimed, would shelter the entire population.² An analysis of the hamlet program during the various phases of its development is made difficult through the way in which the Government presented its statistics. Frequently the references to completed hamlets were linked with statistics for hamlets 'under construction' or 'nearly completed.' Some representative figures on the development of the hamlet program in selected provinces appear on the following page as Table I. Table II gives the most complete figures on the hamlet program supplied by the South Vietnamese Government in January 1963. It is noteworthy that different figures

1. Vietnam Press, w/e 21 April 1963.

2. References to proposed total number of hamlets varied from time to time. Consider the following references -- Vietnam Press, w/e 14 April 1963, 11,143; ibid., w/e 14 July 1963, 11,270; ibid., w/e 13 October 1963, 11,864.

Table ISome Selected Progress Figures on the Establishment of Strategic Hamlets

The sources used are official, either Vietnam Press, the Government news bulletin, or Viet-Nam's Strategic Hamlets (Saigon, 1963)

Gia-Dinh Province

March 1962 - 68 hamlets under construction; April 1962 - 6 completed; January 1963 - 146 completed; June 1963 - 289 completed; July 1963 - 266 completed. Comment: Note the disparity between the last two figures.

Dinh-Tuong Province

March 1962 - 6 hamlets completed; April 1962 - 28 completed; May 1962 - 36 completed; August 1962 - 64 completed; January 1963 - 82 completed; June 1963 - 165 completed. Comment: The increase between January and June 1963 appears disproportionately large by comparison with the previous figures, even if they are accepted as accurate. Does this represent an attempt to meet a quantitative goal regardless of other considerations?

An-Xuyen Province

May 1962 - 4 hamlets completed; January 1963 - no figures available. Comment: This province is one of the most severely affected by the insurgency and the failure to provide figures in January 1963 is probably an accurate indication of the difficulties experienced.

Overall Totals

<u>Total Population Housed in Hamlets</u>	<u>Total Hamlets</u>
7,267,517 housed in hamlets completed or in progress. Figure given by President Diem on <u>7 October 1962</u>	...
4,322,234 housed in hamlets. Figure given by Minister for the Interior <u>14 October 1962</u>	3,235
January 1963	4,121
February 1963	4,124
April 1963	5,917
8,150,187 housed in hamlets. Figure given by President Diem <u>7 July 1963</u>	5,917
8,737,613 housed in hamlets. Figure given by <u>Vietnam Press, 14 July 1963</u>	7,205

Comment: Note the various discrepancies in overall figures and the apparent lack of change in the official figures for the number of hamlets completed between April and July 1963.

Table II

**Strategic Hamlets Built or Under Construction
as of January 16, 1963***

Province or City	Number of Strategic Hamlets			Total Population of Province or City	Population of the Strategic Hamlets
	Planned	Com- pleted	Under con- struction		
Ninh-Thuan	124	116	3	134,375	131,920
Quang-Tri	498	411	34	259,849	227,942
Quang-Ngai	414	347	15	648,353	527,225
Binh-Thuan	180	136	28	234,264	189,966
Khanh-Hoa	281	202	3	221,718	174,987
Phu-Yen	242	175	61	331,092	259,736
Vinh-Binh	570	367	15	537,677	379,502
Vinh-Long	247	162	25	536,671	362,621
Long-Khanh	99	50	25	108,158	71,922
Gia-Dinh	293	146	65	705,309	395,112
Quang-Duc	56	9	20	30,158	16,602
Kien-Phong	189	80	49	246,343	132,663
Kien-Tuong	66	59	7	56,043	29,984
Binh-Dinh	675	353	45	784,766	418,542
Darlac	316	48	102	176,243	86,518
Tay-Ninh	173	80	61	288,184	60,106
An-Giang	495	246	138	732,001	345,055
Dinh-Tuong	424	82	64	694,433	309,316
Lam-Dong	203	42	22	61,162	25,933
Binh-Tuy	45	8	34	56,153	22,509
Binh-Long	67	17	27	59,003	21,777
Ba-Xuyen	565	58	154	573,547	201,838
Phong-Dinh	169	66	53	395,437	130,392
Phuoc-Thanh	28	5	11	49,414	16,325
Binh-Duong	151	51	46	302,654	98,696
Thua-Thien	432	98	137	451,821	145,926
Bien-Hoa	180	53	65	235,468	70,997
Tuyen-Duc	69	16	10	32,981	9,750
Quang-Tin	309	79	60	348,724	95,646
Kien-Giang	246	89	61	354,476	95,526
Kon-Tum	242	76	166	102,261	26,336
Quang-Nam	537	102	127	573,742	133,011
Pleiku	229	26	61	153,038	31,741
Kien-Hoa	582	74	50	537,343	105,389
Chuong-Thien	235	59	6	269,921	52,630
Long-An	400	70	35	492,946	73,906
Phuoc-Tuy	162	23	83	136,977	18,697
Phuoc-Long	69	32	37	44,729	5,443
Phu-Bon	147	11	72	49,545	4,102
An Xuyen**					
Da-Lat	42	36	6	49,574	31,002
Saigon	430	223	99	1,275,000	661,086
Da-Nang	27	18	8	110,630	36,826
Hue	24		7	106,102	

*Extracted from Viet-Nam's Strategic Hamlets.

**Figures not available.

did emerge from the same source and, on at least one occasion, the figures presented by President Diem do not seem to have agreed with those furnished by the Minister of the Interior.

As an illustration of the difficulties involved in trying to work from South Vietnamese Government statistics on the hamlet program the following instances may be cited. In June 1963 Vietnam Press reported that 289 strategic hamlets had been completed in Gia-Dinh province, while in July, the same source reported that the figures for completed hamlets was 266.³ On 1 October 1962 President Diem stated that 7,267,517 persons were sheltered in hamlets which had been completed or were in the process of completion.⁴ On 11 October 1962, the Minister for the Interior reported that 4,322,234 persons were sheltered in hamlets.⁵ It is also interesting to note that the same number of hamlets were reported as completed in April 1963 as was given for the following July suggesting either a sudden stop in the erection of strategic hamlets or a previously inaccurate report. These inaccuracies and the evidence which has subsequently become available must make all the official figures on the strategic hamlets open to severe doubt. This was emphasized in comment upon the hamlet scheme from United States officials within South Viet-Nam when the program was reviewed after Diem's overthrow. With a scepticism in marked contrast to earlier enthusiasm one commentary noted:

... From the very inception of the Strategic Hamlet Program it was apparent that many of these provincial Vietnamese officials did not fully understand the concept, and were so frightened by the pressures from the President [that is Diem] and his brother that they would employ any measures from forced labor and confiscation to false reporting, to achieve the quantitative goals set. Although these tendencies were at first restrained, the pressures for 'reporting' steadily increased, while at the same time the influence of US advisors lessened, as a result of errors and misunderstandings on both sides.

Many good hamlets were, in fact, constructed in the first half of 1963, but too few realized that mechanical construction and 'completion' of the Strategic Hamlets in themselves meant little in terms of winning the support of the population to the GVN [Government of Viet-Nam]. Too often, the tactics employed in the construction phase, especially when coupled with neglect thereafter, produced an effort opposite to that intended -- even as they appeared to serve one of the basic aims of making the people aware of the government's concern for their welfare.⁶

3. Vietnam Press, w/e 23 June 1963 and w/e 14 July 1963.

4. Ibid., w/e 7 October 1962.

5. Ibid., w/e 14 October 1962.

6. Extracted from Some Comments on the Counter-Insurgency Program of Vietnam and USOM. (Saigon, 1964) In forwarding this paper to the writer the Agency for International Development made the following comments. The Agency noted that the paper was 'an informal, unofficial paper'. It also noted that 'The statements are accurate,

(continued)

Colonel Pham-Ngoc-Thao, who followed his appointment with the agro-village program with a similar one for the strategic hamlet scheme, has indicated that after an initial success as a result of the new policy, the central authorities pressed for the rapid erection of hamlets so that they were built at a rate which jeopardized the whole program.⁷ The number which was erected was too great for the hamlets to be given adequate protection by the security forces and, at the same time, the rate at which they were built prevented them from receiving proper construction. There was thus a combination of poor protection and unsatisfactory construction, facts which must have made the task of persuading a peasant to participate in the program even more difficult.

Yet there is evidence to suggest that in the early stages of the program some degree of progress was achieved. It is interesting, for instance, to note that the British Advisory Mission in Viet-Nam apparently saw some success in the work which they had undertaken. This was revealed when Thompson, the chief British adviser, was interviewed in Washington in April 1963, and when he discussed the program later in the same year.⁸ Additionally, the weight of Communist propaganda directed against the strategic hamlet program can probably be fairly taken as an indication of real concern for the dangers to the insurgent cause posed by the possible success of the program. In an attempt to document this initial success one encounters considerable difficulty because of lack of detailed evidence on this phase. What reporting there is on the hamlets is generally concerned with the later period when failures were frequent and mistakes many. What does appear clear is that much of the difficulty encountered in the development of the strategic hamlet program stemmed from the decision to expand at a rapid rate. This tactic was contrary to the advice given by those in Viet-Nam who had had previous experience in Malaya.⁹

but, taken out of the context of the shared knowledge to whom it was addressed, are incomplete and possibly misleading.^d

The comments in the paper provide a very real contrast to the hopes expressed, and the statistics provided in Notes on Strategic Hamlets, op. cit. In releasing this earlier document in Washington in August 1964, the Agency for International Development noted the absence from the text of emphasis on the heed for continuing evidence of government concern for the well-being of the hamlets.^e

7. Colonel Pham-Ngoc-Thao in address at Cornell University, 20 May 1964.

8. Newsweek, 15 April 1963 reported, '... Calling on President Kennedy last week, Thompson reported the plan ... is working effectively.^e Thompson was the 'Englishman' interviewed by P. J. Honey in Saigon and quoted in Honey's 'Vietnamese Notebook,' Encounter, Vol XXI, No. 6, December 1963. On the basis of available evidence, it must be asked whether the statement attributed to Thompson in Newsweek did not require considerable qualification.

On the initial success of the program see also R. Scigliano, 'Vietnam a Country at War,' Asian Survey, Vol. III, No. 1, January 1963, p. 50.

9. D. Warner, op. cit., p. 17 records Thompson's concern for the excessive speed of the program.

Some of the errors made and difficulties faced by the planners of the strategic hamlet program are revealed in a review of one of the most widely publicized operations associated with the scheme, 'Operation Sunrise.' Just to the north of Saigon is one of the most thoroughly Communist-infiltrated areas of South Viet-Nam. This is the area around Ben Cat in which the insurgents have long operated among the peasants. When threatened by Government forces they have retreated into uncultivated areas or dispersed among the rural population. It was in this region that 'Operation Sunrise' began in March 1962.¹⁰ Since many of the peasants were reluctant to move, coercion had to be used to implement the plan. Peasant houses were destroyed and, according to one report, there was no attempt to provide compensation, as had been done in Malaya, to soften the harshness of moving.¹¹ Indeed, it seems probable that little of the money allocated for distribution to the resettled peasants ever reached them. In 'Operation Sunrise' the United States Information Service provided the resettled peasants with a pamphlet, Towards the Good Life, with the aim of encouraging them to accept their lot. There is no evidence which permits an evaluation of the impact of such a pamphlet, but scepticism seems in order. Some mistakes and omissions in the implementation of 'Operation Sunrise' seem to have been quite unnecessary. One of the first hamlets constructed under the operation was at Bou-Tuong and it was to this hamlet that the United States Secretary for Defense was taken during his visit to Viet-Nam in May 1962. Mr. McNamara was shown a display in which the hamlet responded to a mock Communist attack. He found upon enquiry that in the event of a genuine attack the hamlet had no means of contacting the nearest army post other than by runner. An appeal for help using this method, he was told, would take four hours.¹² This discovery led to United States insistence on the installation of radios in hamlets to assure contact. The incident points to the lack of planning in the development of the hamlets.

Captured documents were reported to have shown the extent of Communist concern over 'Operation Sunrise.'¹³ The area in which the plan was implemented later came under Communist attack and some of the first hamlets established during the operation were overrun by the insurgents. Communist attacks against hamlets which had been established or fortified as part of the strategic hamlet program followed a general pattern. As a primary objective the insurgents struck at the radio transmitters in the hamlets to isolate the inhabitants from Government aid. As normal practice the insurgents destroyed the walls or fortifications around the hamlets, an action which emphasized the failure of the Government to provide the protection which it promised. The various social and economic benefits which were supposed to accompany the hamlet program did not materialize in the

10. Fairly detailed reporting on 'Operation Sunrise' was given in the New York Times. See particularly 29 March 1962 and 4, 8 and 20 April 1962. See footnote 35 in the preceding section of this paper.

11. In reporting this operation for the New York Times, Homer Bigart noted the lack of compensation and made reference to the frequent appeal to Malayan experience, 'This harsh, desperate measure was approved by the Americans because it worked so well for the British in Malaya.'

12. New York Times, 11 May 1962.

13. Ibid., 13 May 1962.

face of the Communist harassment of Government representatives, or through the control which the insurgents exercised over the whole area. School-teachers were killed and anti-malarial teams were attacked. The general over-extension of the plan played into the insurgents' hands.¹⁴ In some areas Government control was so weak that, while the insurgents permitted the establishment of strategic hamlets, the villagers allowed the insurgents to pass through the fortifications without any attempt to stop them.¹⁵

While the scattered nature of the evidence hinders generalization, there is evidence to suggest that in the absence of an army unit nearby the hamlets were unable to defend themselves. Some information provided by Vietnam Press on a hamlet in Long-An province illustrates this. In this particular strategic hamlet there were reported to be 1,389 persons in an area of 130,000 square meters. The hamlet was surrounded by a fence of 3,200 meters in length and was defended by 182 young men and 236 young women. Only 120 of the young men had undergone any military training.¹⁶ Even if one assumes the facts provided here are correct, a picture emerges of peasants left to defend a sizable perimeter with little training. This is quite apart from the question of the provision of weapons to the peasants. There seems reason to believe that far from providing peasants with weapons for six months as was official policy, the Government often provided no weapons at all, or inadequate and out-of-date weapons at best. The fact that some members of the Long-An hamlet, just mentioned, had received military training should be qualified by the report that of the 197,858 combatant youth who were to defend strategic hamlets only 60,496 were reported to have had any training and only 19,879 were armed -- just over ten percent.¹⁷ Again, it is a matter for speculation whether the experience of the hamlet of Phmoc-Nguon in Vinh-Long province was not more general. There, the provincial chief had been allocated fourteen tons of barbed wire for each hamlet's defense. In fact he received ten tons for 163 hamlets, making the secure fortification of the hamlets impossible.¹⁸

The over-extension of the hamlet program was clearly a problem by the end of 1962. By the middle of 1963 there were public reports of the concern, for the dangers involved in too rapid a development of the program, which had been expressed by United States officials. This official United States concern for the program finally led to the establishment of a special committee, composed of representatives of the various American agencies in Viet-Nam, to consider the situation. The conclusions of this committee noted the difficulties faced by the strategic hamlet program because of the traditional settlement pattern in the Delta region. Echoing earlier criticism of the South Vietnamese Army, the report noted a

14. R. Scigliano, 'Vietnam: Politics and Religion,' Asian Survey, Vol. IV, No. 1, January 1964, p. 672, estimated that in the latter months of 1963 the Government controlled less than 20 percent of the hamlets in the Mekong Delta area.

15. G. C. Hickey, Village in Vietnam (New Haven, 1964), p. 54.

16. Vietnam Press, w/e 8 April 1962. This hamlet was located in an area described as once being the 'property' of the Viet-Cong.

17. Vietnam Press, w/e 21 April 1963.

18. D. Warner, op. cit., p. 14.

tendency for the Army to be largely concerned with static duties. While this protected some of the hamlets, it meant that there was no follow-up against the Communist forces. As an overall conclusion the committee suggested that the time had arrived when a re-evaluation of the whole hamlet program was required.¹⁹ The South Vietnamese authorities were aware of the criticism which was levelled at the speed with which the hamlet program was being implemented. President Diem answered this charge himself on 25 September 1963. In an interview with a representative of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, Diem said that he favored the approach of building hamlets quickly, since to build them slowly gave too great an opportunity to the Communists to mobilize the people to raze the hamlet. This is an interesting comment for what it reveals of the lack of Government control in the rural areas.²⁰ If any confirmation is needed of the picture which emerges of a construction program which was either too quickly, or too poorly, carried out, it may be found in the policy statement issued by General Khanh following his seizure of power in January 1964. In a policy statement of 7 March 1964 General Khanh noted:

The previous Strategic Hamlet program followed the principle of building a great many hamlets very quickly. Consequently these hamlets gave only an appearance of defense but could not achieve the desired results. This program has created many injustices and corrupted low level cadres.²¹

The statement went on to note that the program would be started again, this time with emphasis on quality rather than quantity in construction and protection.

Lack of source material is a limiting factor in any attempt to chronicle the attention given to settlement programs in the highland areas of South Viet-Nam under the strategic hamlet program. Vietnam Press made many references to 'montagnardst' fleeing from the extortions of the Viet-Cong and of Government plans to settle these refugees. In July of 1962, for instance, there was a report of nearly 100,000 'montagnardst' fleeing from the Viet-Cong in the central plateau region.²² By the beginning of 1963 there were reports of hamlets completed and of tribal people settling in them. In April 1963, 170,194 'montagnardst' were reported resettled in strategic and tactical hamlets in the highland areas.²³ This figure was increased to 209,025 in July 1963.²⁴ On the basis of the figures provided for the lowland areas, these reports must be assumed to be far too optimistic. Moreover, with an estimated tribal population of 700,000, the

19. New York Times, 23 October 1963.

20. Radiopress (Tokyo) 'Vietnam News,' 25 September 1963 reporting President Diem on 5 September 1963.

21. Policy and Program of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam as Announced by General Nguyen Khanh the Prime Minister on 7 March 1964 issued by the Embassy of the Republic of Vietnam, Washington, p. 3.

22. Vietnam Press w/e 22 July 1962.

23. Ibid., w/e 21 April 1963.

24. Ibid., w/e 7 July 1963.

number brought under Government control as the result of resettlement would, on the basis of these official figures, still appear to have been less than fifty percent of the total. Once again it is important to note that the Hanoi Government directed its propaganda to take advantage of the antipathies between the hill peoples and the Saigon -- lowland -- Government.²⁵ Yet with all these reservations it is appropriate to note that independent observers have accorded the efforts in the highlands some success.²⁶

The program for establishing strategic hamlets virtually ceased with the overthrow of the Diem Government. The insurgents took advantage of the confusion which followed the November 1963 coup d'etat to attack a considerable number of fortified hamlets.²⁷ Then, in December 1963, the Provisional Government took the decision to halt the building of new strategic hamlets -- whether any hamlets had in fact been constructed in the period following the overthrow of President Diem is not revealed from public sources. At this time it was stated to be Government policy to consolidate those hamlets which had already been constructed.²⁸ As noted earlier in this section, General Khanh's Government committed itself to continuing a modified form of the hamlet program in which care rather than haste was to be the guiding principle. Then in March 1964 the Saigon Government recorded the dissolution of the Inter-Ministerial Committee for Strategic Hamlets without comment.²⁹ Reporting from Viet-Nam throughout 1964 gave little evidence of the construction of any program on the same scale as that envisaged in the strategic hamlet scheme. A system of 'new life' hamlets was begun in 1964 in which apparent loyalty to the Government is rewarded by donations of food, medical and agricultural supplies.³⁰ The Malayan experience has not been forgotten and efforts are still made to benefit from it. In June 1964 General Westmoreland, and other officials concerned with the war against the insurgents, visited Kuala Lumpur to consider ways in which the lessons of the Malayan insurgency might be applied against the Communist insurgents in South Viet-Nam.³¹ But despite the references to 'new life' hamlets and the continuing interest in the methods of resettlement used in the Malayan

25. See Section IV of this study.

26. R. Scigliano, op. cit., p. 182 observed that the Government's efforts in the highland areas met with a fair degree of success.

27. For reports on this see New York Times, 26 November and 21 December 1963.

28. Ibid., 13 December 1963 for an account of this decision.

29. Vietnam Press, w/e 14 March 1964.

30. A. Nathan, 'New Life in Vietnam,' Far Eastern Economic Review, Vol. XLIV, No. 4, 23 April 1964, pp. 200-203r

31. Straits Budget (Kuala Lumpur), 24 June 1964 reports Westmoreland's visit under a 14 June 1964 dateliner. Westmoreland was accompanied by Thompson, from the British mission in Viet-Nam. The report noted that Thompson supported the strategic hamlet concept but indicated that its use had been over-extended in South Viet-Nam.

See also New York Times, 18 June 1964r

Emergency, it seems clear that events throughout 1964 gave the Saigon Government, and its supporter the United States, little opportunity for developing any program comparable to the planned size of the strategic hamlet program.

IV. EXTERNAL COMMENTARY -- 1. The Allies

It must be concluded that South Viet-Nam's allies seized upon the strategic hamlet program in a search for encouraging news in a difficult situation. They promoted the concept with only a limited mention of the problems which beset the program. This is perhaps understandable. In the period from 1959 onwards, events in South Viet-Nam have produced a bleak record of Government defeats and a failure by the Government to solve its pressing problem of internal security. Viewed as a new proposal the strategic hamlet program appeared imaginative and it was reassuring in the manner in which it recalled the successful anti-Communist operations in Malaya. Initially, moreover, there appears to have been some limited success in the application of the program.¹ Throughout 1962 and into 1963 statements by South Viet-Nam's supporters stressed the new theme. If there was some justification for these laudatory comments in the early period of the program, one must ask whether they had not become routine by 1963. Many of the later statements smack of an effort to find at least one issue which could be presented in a favorable light. There is of course the more disturbing possibility that the information which was being passed to Washington was inaccurate and did not receive sufficiently rigorous analysis.

Scarcely a senior western official, when questioned about the situation in Viet-Nam, failed to mention the hamlet program as an indication of progress against the insurgents. The United States Secretary of Defense, Mr. McNamara, referred to the effectiveness of the program when he visited South Viet-Nam in May 1962.² This was the position he maintained when he testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee in October 1963.³ Similar statements of approval came from Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, General Maxwell Taylor, Admiral Felt and General Harkins.⁴ When asked to review the situation in Viet-Nam at the end of 1962, President Kennedy referred to the strategic hamlet program as one of those items which allowed him to say that while he did not yet see the 'end of the tunnel', the situation was 'in some ways lighter' than it had been a year before.⁵

1. See pp. 36-37 of this study. In retrospect, one should probably ask whether the survival of some of the hamlets initially was merely a reflection of insurgent preoccupation with other matters. At the same time due weight should be given to the concern expressed by the insurgents in the captured document produced as an appendix to this study.

2. New York Times, 12 May 1962.

3. Ibid., 4 October 1963.

4. All favorable statements were, naturally, carefully noted by the South Vietnamese news agency. For the individuals noted see Vietnam Press, w/e 3 February 1963; w/e 16 September 1962; w/e 22 October 1962; w/e 10 February 1963 respectively.

5. New York Times, 13 December 1962.

After the visit of a special United States military survey mission in January 1963, the head of the mission, General Wheeler, said:

... The strategic hamlet scheme is perhaps the greatest single factor in this encouraging development. The mission had found the situation in Viet-Nam generally encouraging and predicted the end of the war in three years. It is a program aimed directly at the people and provides them with defense against the isolation of the Viet-Cong.⁶

For Roger Hillsman, the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, the program remained an 'enormous success' in July 1963.⁷

Claims for the success of the strategic hamlet program were an essential part of Administration testimony before Senate and House of Representatives Committees. A typical example of this optimistic view is contained in the testimony offered by Seymour J. Janow, Assistant Administrator for the Far East of the Agency for International Development, to the Sub-committee of the House of Representatives Appropriations Committee when it considered Foreign Operations Appropriations for 1964.

At the national level the GVN Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam has formed an effective Interministerial Committee to coordinate and direct the strategic hamlet program and operations have been decentralized to provincial and hamlet levels through the device of provincial rehabilitation agreements covering the whole country that give the province chiefs and local officials the resources and authority to carry out programs.

A new sense of urgency and shorter reaction time has been established....⁸

Mr. Janow's testimony makes considerable use of the official figures provided by the South Vietnamese Government without any suggestion that there might have been inconsistencies in those figures.

Because of the greater involvement of the United States in the events in South Viet-Nam, statements about the success of the strategic hamlet scheme came most frequently from American officials. But similar statements

6. Quoted in Viet-Nam's Strategic Hamlets, op. cit., p. 29. The writer was in Saigon at the time of General Wheeler's visit. Both foreign and Vietnamese observers with whom the writer spoke failed to share General Wheeler's enthusiasm for the hamlet program. While noting its success in some areas, they were particularly concerned for the speed with which hamlets were being 'completed' in the Delta area. It was the opinion of these observers that the hamlets were frequently only 'strategic' in name.

7. Vietnam Press, w/e 28 July 1963.

8. United States Congress, House of Representatives, Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations on Foreign Appropriations 1964, Part 3 (Washington), p. 229. Testimony given 11 June 1963.

came from South Viet-Nam's other supporters. Note might be made, for instance, of approving statements from the British Lord Privy Seal, Edward Heath, and from the Australian Minister for External Affairs, Sir Garfield Barwick.⁹

As has already been suggested, at least two important questions arise as a result of the lavish praise heaped upon the strategic hamlet program by foreign official observers. Most importantly it must be asked whether foreign, and particularly United States, officials were in fact aware of the weaknesses and difficulties which the program faced by the end of 1962. If the officials were not aware of the difficulties which beset the program, it points either to a lack of objective reporting at some level in Viet-Nam or to an unwillingness by senior officials to face and admit the facts as they were. If, indeed, the officials were aware of the very grave difficulties, their wisdom in giving encouraging reports must be questioned now that the weaknesses of the hamlet program have been revealed, not only by newspaper correspondents but by the South Vietnamese themselves. And it is useful to remember that non-official criticism of the hamlet scheme had been made by the end of 1962. The history of the United States involvement in South Viet-Nam has been marked by encouraging official statements which have subsequently had to be withdrawn or modified very considerably. While propaganda is a normal part of modern government process, it may be argued that its use requires the greatest restraint. The propagation of information which later proves to be incorrect or unreliable can only damage the credibility of the government which provides such information. The optimism which has been recorded in this section contrasts starkly with the 1964 assessment, already recorded, that 'it was apparent that many of the provincial chiefs ... would employ any measures ... [including] false reporting to achieve the quantitative goals set.'¹⁰

9. See Great Britain and Ireland, Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 29 April 1963, Col. 702 and Vietnam Press, w/e 24 March 1963, respectively.

10. See p. 35 of this paper.

IV. EXTERNAL COMMENTARY -- 2. North Vietnam

Propaganda from any source tends to appear sterile and repetitious when read divorced from the events with which it is concerned. The broadcasts which emanate from North Viet-Nam are certainly no exception to this rule. But a review of the material contained in these broadcasts is invaluable as an indication of North Vietnamese concern for the possible effect of the strategic hamlet program on the insurgent effort in the south. In contrast to the Malayan situation the paucity of captured Communist documentary material which has been made public makes it extremely difficult to judge the extent to which the strategic hamlet program did, in fact, affect the insurgents' efforts. Some insight can be obtained by examining the captured document which is incorporated as an appendix to this study. It probably can only be regarded as having validity for the area in which it was obtained -- that is in Tay-Ninh province. The North Vietnamese theoretician, Truong-Chinh, presented the following analysis of the situation in South Viet-Nam in 1960:

... every revolutionary action of our southern compatriots has also a double effect: it foils the U.S. imperialists' policy of intervention and enslavement, opposes the U.S. Diem oppression and exploitation of the people, wears down the enemy, and keeps and develops our forces... simultaneously, it actively defends the North, safeguards the common revolutionary base of the whole nation and supports the construction of socialism in the north.¹

Any effort which was mounted by the established Government in the south and which appeared likely to hinder the insurgents was attacked in propaganda from the north. It seems significant that in one of the earliest references to the new program of strategic hamlets the North Vietnamese Government criticized it because the hamlets would 'serve to cut-off contacts between the people's self defense units and the peasants.'² This cannot be ignored as an indication of Hanoi's concern for the potential utility of the hamlets. It is perhaps worth noting again that, in Malaya, it was shown that the development of counter propaganda by the Communists was a gauge of their concern for the outcome of resettlement.

The themes stressed in North Vietnamese propaganda on the strategic hamlets were quite varied. Possibly greatest attention was given to promoting the view that settlement in strategic hamlets was part of a plan to institute a giant concentration camp in South Viet-Nam. An awareness in the south of the various Government 'political re-education centers' would have lent credibility to this propaganda argument. As a typical example of this form of propaganda, a quotation may be cited from a broadcast over Hanoi Radio on 15 January 1962. This reported the demolition of houses to

1. Truong-Chinh (pseud. Dang-Xuan-Khu), 'Strategic Guiding Principles of our Party' from Hoc-Tap in March Ahead Under the People's Banner (Hanoi, 1960), p. 108.

2. New China News Agency over Hanoi dateline, 12 December 1961.

prepare for the movement of peasants into hamlets 'for military purposes and the easier herding of the people into concentration camps.'³ A familiar propaganda device may be noted here. Houses were demolished during the strategic hamlet program. This permitted the North Vietnamese to lay their own particular stress on an event which took place with the hope that their bias would be accepted. There were also frequent references to the former agrovillage program in North Vietnamese comments on the strategic hamlets. With an awareness of the discontent which had accompanied the agrovillage program, the North Vietnamese propagandists argued that the strategic hamlets were 'nothing other than miniature agrovillages.'⁴ Once they had been concentrated in the strategic hamlets, the Hanoi regime argued, the U.S.-Diem Government intended to exploit the peasants as part of its war effort by using them as coolies and soldiers. At the same time the new settlements were to be used for raising higher taxes.⁵

Another persistent theme in North Vietnamese propaganda criticism of the strategic hamlets linked the hamlets with the use of defoliant chemicals by the South Vietnamese and United States forces in an effort to destroy Viet-Cong jungle cover and food reserves.⁶ This technique had been used in Malaya and it was used in Viet-Nam after a certain amount of early hesitation. Although it is not possible to obtain exact information on the extent to which defoliants have been used in Viet-Nam, or on their effectiveness, some comment may be made about the problems involved in their use. It would seem that, as with artillery barrages and bombing, the use of defoliants has a considerable risk of alienating the very population which the Government sought to win to its side. The successful use of defoliants would demand great selectivity. Official secrecy prevents any accurate estimate of effectiveness of the technique, but some evidence does exist to show that on occasion the defoliants were misdirected with resultant adverse effect on the rural population.⁷ For Hanoi the use of defoliants provided an opportunity to condemn the United States and South Viet-Nam for engaging in chemical warfare.⁸ Hanoi claimed that the defoliant chemicals were used to force peasants to move into strategic hamlets by destroying their crops, or by killing people who refused to move from their villages. The North Vietnamese National Assembly condemned the defoliants and a protest was presented to the International Control Commission.⁹

3. Hanoi Viet-Nam News Agency (henceforth VNA), 15 January 1962.

4. Ibid., 4 February 1962.

5. Radio Hanoi, 17 March 1962.

6. Consideration of the use of defoliants was reported in New York Times, 19 January 1962 with further discussion in New York Times, 26 January 1962. There appears to have been United States concern, initially, for the possible adverse propaganda effects which could follow a decision to use the defoliants.

7. The insurgents have, at various times, promoted village demonstrations against defoliants.

8. Hanoi VNA, 24 January 1962.

9. Ibid., 26 April and 28 November 1962.

North Vietnamese propaganda consistently attacked developments in the south as stemming from the unholy United States-Diem regime alliance. Interestingly, the whole strategic hamlet scheme was condemned as originating at a meeting in Hawaii under Secretary of Defense McNamara.¹⁰ Genuine South Vietnamese concern for the independence of their country from foreign interference does exist. Appreciation of this concern has been an obvious consideration in propaganda from Hanoi. It is rare to see any mention of the South Vietnamese Government which does not mention the United States in conjunction. The following comment on 'Operation Sunrise' illustrates this point:

Everyone knows that Ben-Cat is part of Dan-Mot ... a province chosen as the objective of the 'sunrised military operation and experimental place for the new tactics ... of Harkins, aimed at assembling the people in strategic hamlets, separating the revolutionary forces from the people, and by this destroying the revolutionary forces.

then, referring to the fact that the insurgents had successfully ambushed South Vietnamese forces in the Ben-Cat area:

The military defeat of the U.S.-Diemists is a bitter blow in the face of the U.S.-Diemist psychological warfare liars.¹¹

Constant repetition of this theme was rewarded by some success. Robert Scigliano has noted that it was not uncommon for peasants in the countryside to address Government officials as My-Diem (American-Diem).¹² This phrase was not necessarily used with discourtesy, but the fact of its usage demonstrates how effectively Communist propaganda succeeded in linking the Diem Government with the United States in the peasants' minds.

The presence of a British aid mission was also noted and presented as a further example of foreign interference in the affairs of Viet-Nam. The propagandists appear to have been placed in something of a quandary in relation to the British Advisory Mission, however, since they were well aware of the success of the anti-Communist operations in Malaya. Shortly after Brigadier Thompson arrived in Viet-Nam, his presence was recorded by the North Vietnamese and he was noted as the 'former commander of terrorist operations against the Malayan people.'¹³ North Viet-Nam

10. Ibid., 16 May 1962.

11. Radio Hanoi, 27 June 1962.

12. R. Scigliano, op. cit., p. 158. The extent to which there was and is Vietnamese repugnance concerning the necessity to accept foreign aid is something which has been given too little attention in most discussions of the situation in South Viet-Nam. There were times during the later period of the Diem regime when disenchantment with United States advice became apparent at the highest levels. When General Khanh took power, the efforts by Secretary McNamara to boost Khanh's prestige had the opposite effect in some Vietnamese circles.

13. As one example see Hanoi VNA, 11 January 1962.

protested against the British mission as a violation of the British role as Co-Chairman of the Geneva Conference.¹⁴ But at least in radio programs the North Vietnamese Government did not try to compare the Malayan experience with the Thompson mission's efforts in South Viet-Nam. This was done, however, by the Australian Communist propagandist Wilfred Burchett. He has argued in his recent book, The Furtive War, that resettlement plans which were effective in Malaya have no application in South Viet-Nam. This is particularly so, in Burchett's view, because the British did not achieve a military victory in Malaya.¹⁵ In an oblique reference, or so at least it appears, to events in Malaya, a North Vietnamese broadcast of August 1962 referred to strategic hamlets as 'no more than a form adopted by imperialist countries against guerrilla war by oppressed people.'¹⁶

Much North Vietnamese propaganda consisted of accounts of the destruction of strategic hamlets by 'patriotic forces' or of exhortations to the people of the south to destroy the hamlets. In June 1962 Hanoi Radio reported that, according to information provided by the South Viet-Nam Liberation Front, forty-two hamlets had been destroyed since April 1962.¹⁷ In July of the same year, Hanoi reported that the Liberation Front had launched a month devoted to the destruction of strategic hamlets and it was stated that 'hundreds' had been destroyed.¹⁸ For the latter months of 1962 there were very frequent references in North Vietnamese broadcasts to the destruction of hamlets. In August 1962 it was reported that the South Viet-Nam Liberation Front regarded the struggle to destroy the hamlets as having assumed a 'mass character'.¹⁹ By November 1962 it was claimed that 1,500 had been destroyed by the South Vietnamese people while in January 1963 the extravagant claim was made that sixteen million people had participated in the struggle to destroy the strategic hamlets, the 'number one national policy of the U.S.-Diemists'.²⁰ The character of the propaganda against the hamlets is, perhaps, best captured in a broadcast from the clandestine radio of the Liberation Front. The Front discussed the progress of the hamlet program in the year following its official inauguration in April 1962. Claiming that only four thousand of the hamlets had been completed because of popular opposition, the radio described the events for the twelve months preceding April 1963:

A year ago the puppet National Assembly of Ngo-Dinh Diem in Saigon approved the creation of a bastard, whose father is American and whose mother is British and which was put forward by the witch adviser Ngo-Dinh Nhu after months of scheming by Staley and Thompson -- this is the state policy of 'strategic hamlets'.²¹

14. Ibid., 5 June 1962 and 26 July 1962.

15. W. Burchett, op. cit., p. 215.

16. Hanoi VNA, 7 August 1962.

17. Ibid., 14 June 1962.

18. Ibid., 13 July 1962.

19. Ibid., 19 August 1962.

20. Ibid., 28 November 1962 and 27 December 1962.

21. Clandestine Liberation Front Radio, 17 April 1963.

It is probably significant that there were constant references in propaganda broadcasts to the manner in which the destruction of strategic hamlets was carried out. The North Vietnamese reports regularly refer to the destruction of fences and barriers around the hamlets, frequently detailing the amount of barrier demolished. In a typical instance, Hanoi reported the destruction of 'twenty-seven kilometers of fences' belonging to forty hamlets.²² As another example, there was a report of a month of 'one hundred struggles' against the 'U.S. Diemist clique' in which twenty-five 'struggles' were directed against hamlets with the destruction of fences and walls.²³ These constant references to the destruction of fences would appear to suggest the real concern of the North Vietnamese authorities to see the destruction of those features of the hamlets which could prevent free movement in and out of them. Constant stress on the destruction of these barriers appears to have had the purpose of both discouraging the Government forces in their program and of encouraging the peasants to resist the program in a direct, and effective, way. The same references to the desirability of destroying established hamlets, and refusing to co-operate in the construction of new hamlets occurs in the propaganda directed to the tribal peoples of South Viet-Nam.²⁴ Broadcasts in Jarai and Rhade are features of North Vietnamese propaganda. In the case of these broadcasts, the appeal to the tribal peoples was couched in terms of a call from the ethnic minorities in the north to their brothers in the south.²⁵ A Rhade broadcast of 8 March 1962 reported 'thousands of people' destroying 'agrovilles' in Quang-Duc, while another of 27 June 1962 took up the theme that chemical warfare was being used to force highlands people into strategic hamlets in Quang-Duc and Quang-Ngai provinces. These broadcasts also urged non-co-operation. In one broadcast a Rhade speaker reported, giving the impression that he had recently participated in activities in South Viet-Nam, that:

... The minute Diem's forces burn down our village we start to build a new one.²⁶

Once again, the North Vietnamese urged a reaction to the Government activities involving the burning and destruction of the hamlets which had been established.

North Vietnamese propaganda showed an awareness of the southern settlement pattern and contrasted the concentration inherent in the strategic hamlets with the normal pattern. The North Vietnamese National Assembly referred to hamlets as trampling 'on the life, customs and freedom' of the people. And in a lengthy commentary beamed to South Viet-Nam, Radio Hanoi contrasted the life in the hamlets with the freer life of the peasants' own homes:

22. Hanoi VNA, 18 July 1962.

23. Ibid., 1 August 1962.

24. Radio Hanoi in Rhade, 8 March 1962.

25. Ibid., 15 November 1962.

26. Ibid., 9 August 1962.

... the free life among the fruit trees and under the shady coconut trees is a thing of the past. Paddy fields, gardens and houses that were located near roads leading to strategic hamlets have been destroyed.²⁷

Rather in contrast to this line of argument were the occasional calls for the establishment of 'fighting hamlets' -- the insurgents' answer to the fortified hamlets of Government policy. These 'fighting hamlets' were established in areas of South Viet-Nam where the insurgents not only controlled the countryside but had succeeded in organizing the peasants to resist Government attempts to enter their hamlets. With the stress on the need for freedom in the peasants' daily life there appears to have been an element of contradiction in the call for the establishment of 'fighting hamlets.' But it is noteworthy that a considerable number of the references to the 'fighting hamlets' came at the crisis period of United States relations with the Diem Government, a time when it seems likely that the Government forces were more than usually hampered by political problems in Saigon. In such circumstances, it may have seemed desirable for the insurgents to demonstrate their control in the countryside by the promotion of their own fortified hamlets.

Some miscellaneous points in the Communist propaganda campaign deserve mention. The destruction of strategic hamlets was considered of sufficient importance to be included in the twelve slogans issued by the South Vietnamese Liberation Front to celebrate its third anniversary. Slogan five read:

Develop the Ap-Bac emulation spirit, step-up all activities, expand guerrilla warfare to annihilate more enemy forces, resolutely destroy strategic hamlets, break the enemy grip, consolidate and expand the liberated areas.²⁸

Well aware of the tensions between Cambodia and South Viet-Nam, the North Vietnamese propaganda has not missed opportunities to charge the South Vietnamese Government with acts of violence against members of the Khmer minority group living in the south, which were the result of the strategic hamlet program.²⁹ In the period following the overthrow of the Diem Government, in November 1963, there were many claims from North Viet-Nam that the South Vietnamese peasants had taken advantage of the confused situation to destroy strategic hamlets.³⁰

27. Radio Hanoi, 30 January 1963.

28. Radiopress, 'Vietnam News,' 14 December 1963.

29. As an example see Radio Hanoi, 19 April 1963. The position of the Khmer minority in the Delta provinces of South Viet-Nam has been a matter of dispute between the Cambodian and South Vietnamese Governments for many years. The Cambodian claim, denied by the Vietnamese, is that 600,000 of their compatriots live under conditions of discrimination in South Viet-Nam. Saigon has challenged the figure given by the Cambodians and denied the claims of mistreatment.

30. Radiopress, 'Vietnam News,' 12 November 1963.

In introducing this section on North Vietnamese propaganda, it was suggested that repetition was a mark of propaganda from that source. It should also be recognized that the points which did receive constant repetition were ones which were shrewdly designed to appeal to the peasants in the south.³¹ The continual stress given to the suggestion that strategic hamlets were disguised concentration camps cannot have been unheeded by peasants aware of such camps and, at least in the Delta region, used to a scattered settlement pattern. The North Vietnamese promotion of the idea that the Government forces in the south were engaging in chemical warfare had potent propaganda possibilities. Fear of chemical warfare is universal but it would be particularly difficult for the rural population to grasp the difference between defoliants and other chemicals. The stress given by the north to the involvement of foreigners in the war was well chosen in a country where there is an undoubted suspicion of foreigners. This argument is given added point by the fact that the insurgents in South Viet-Nam are largely men of the south and to the extent that they receive help it comes from other Vietnamese. Indeed, it might almost be said that the true villain of the North Vietnamese comments on the strategic hamlets was Secretary of Defense McNamara rather than President Diem or his brother Nhu.

The volume of the propaganda broadcasts and comments on the strategic hamlet program do, at least, suggest the very real concern of the Communist opponents of the Diem Government that it might become a significant factor in the insurgency. At the same time, as this analysis has shown, the factors in the program which were offensive to the peasants in the south, whatever the overall outcome of the program, were emphasized time and again with what must be judged as considerable skill. Except for the closing months of the Diem regime, when there was more attention paid to the Buddhist crisis, criticism of the strategic hamlet program remained one of the principal themes of North Vietnamese propaganda. In order to analyze the extent to which this propaganda should be taken as an indication of concern, and the extent to which it was taking advantage of South Vietnamese Government mistakes, one would need to examine captured documents from the insurgents in the south. These have not been available in the preparation of this study.

31. Propaganda was seldom so clearly directed against the urban population of Saigon. There were, however, broadcasts which stressed the stifling atmosphere of life in Saigon following the institution of strategic quarters. See, for instance, Hanoi VNA, 13 August 1962.

V. COMPARISONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The failure of the strategic hamlet program in South Viet-Nam is an established fact. Explanation of the failure is given clarity through an examination of the superficially similar, but fundamentally different, situation which existed during the Malayan Emergency. The insight gained through comparison is separate from the too-ready appeals made to the Malayan experience by those in official positions. These appeals hinder rather than enlighten, although they do, of course, give added interest to the rigorous delineation of differences. In describing the very different factors which were involved in the two instances of Communist insurgency one highlights the problems which faced the planners of the strategic hamlet scheme but which were never really recognized in the development of the program. There is the basic question of how far the Malayan experience of a Communist insurgency offered a guide which could be followed in Viet-Nam. And in particular, how far was the resettlement of Chinese squatters in Malaya a valid model from which to develop the strategic hamlet program? The evidence presented in this study suggests that there were fundamental differences in the Malayan and South Vietnamese experiences which were more important than the fact that both countries experienced a challenge from Communist insurgents.

As has been stressed earlier in this study, the challenge in Malaya came from an ethnically separate group, the Chinese, who in most cases had had no long association with the country in which they mounted their insurgency. The support afforded the insurgents came almost entirely from the Chinese squatters. When these were resettled, a vital and eventually fatal blow was struck at the insurgents. The size of the squatter population permitted it to be kept under constant administrative control once resettlement had been carried out. Because of Malaya's physical character resettlement of the squatters presented the insurgents with logistical problems which were so pressing that they were forced to fight the Government military forces on the Government's terms. Resettlement and settlement in Malaya brought eventual success against the insurgents but it was not without its own problems. The resettlement officers had certain advantages in the pursuit of their program beyond the obvious consideration that most of those who were to be resettled were Chinese. The communities which were resettled were not long-established or particularly cohesive. The Emergency which developed in Malaya, although it came after a period of wartime occupation by the Japanese, did develop after a short, but important, period of relative peace. During the years 1946 to 1948 while there was a Communist challenge to the constituted Government it was an open challenge using open methods such as strikes and demonstrations. To note this is not to diminish the very unsettled character of the period 1945 to 1948. The leaders of the Malayan Communist Party were known and the police and security officials were alerted to the possible dangers of the future. The extent to which the authorities in Malaya were aware of the identity of insurgents throughout the Emergency is one of the striking features of the period.

The police role in Malaya was of a vastly different character from the part played by the South Vietnamese military forces in the efforts to

implement the strategic hamlet program. The police, during the Malayan Emergency, provided the indispensable security without which resettlement was of no value. Without constant protection, such as the Malayan police forces provided, the regrouping or concentration of population only makes them the more vulnerable to insurgent activities, including terrorism. It is not an overstatement to say that the establishment of a new village meant the establishment of a police station for the village. Once certain protection had been provided, then the development of social services could be undertaken with a real prospect of success. In Malaya the police were led by British officers and they were overwhelmingly Malay in origin. The first fact was important for the direction of the effort against the guerrillas. The second had importance since it meant that the Government's strategy was in the hands of an ethnic group already suspicious of the Chinese, with their suspicions confirmed by the events of the Emergency. The mobilization of over seventy thousand policemen, who were principally Malays, permitted the regular troops -- both Malayan and British Commonwealth -- to devote their full energies to tracking down the insurgents. This contrasts with the static role of the army in Viet-Nam.

In writings on the situation in Viet-Nam the size of the insurgent forces is often compared with the number of insurgents in Malaya, usually to emphasize the greater number in Viet-Nam by comparison with the number of insurgents in Malaya during the Emergency. This quantitative difference is, of course, important. But there is a qualitative difference¹ which should also be noted. On the admission of official United States sources, the casualty rate in South Viet-Nam during the period when the strategic hamlet program was in operation was of the order of one hundred government and civilian casualties per day with some five hundred violent incidents each week.¹ At the height of the Emergency in Malaya, the total annual casualties for the military, the police and civilians, including killed, wounded and missing, was 2,215 of whom 1,020 were wounded. This gives a daily casualty rate of less than seven per day.² A figure such as this gives a striking illustration of the differences between the situations in Malaya and Viet-Nam.

As the dependence of the guerrillas on the squatters showed in Malaya, food was a major problem for the continuation of the insurgency. The jungle provided a ready retreat, but it could not provide food. The same problem of food supplies does not exist in the Delta region of Viet-Nam. To some extent the jungle areas along the borders of Malaya and Thailand provided the guerrillas with a sanctuary which was never fully closed. But the size of this border area was limited -- certainly nothing of the same order as South Viet-Nam's frontiers which touch on three countries and are of a much greater length.

In South Viet-Nam the Communist challenge came after a brief period

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1. This figure was given by Averell Harriman in testimony before the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on 13 April 1962.
 2. Based on the figures given for 1951 casualties in Federation of Malaya, Annual Report 1952 (Kuala Lumpur), p. 13.

of calm but, in sharp contrast to Malaya, it had to be met by a Government which did not have any well-developed system of police administration throughout the country. While the security division of the South Vietnamese Government may have been efficient to some degree in the cities, this was certainly not the case in the countryside. With great concern, among both the members of the Diem Government and the United States military advisers in Viet-Nam, for the threat of an invasion from the north, little was done which prepared for the insurgent challenge in the countryside. The challenge came from people who were indistinguishable, in ethnic terms, from the supporters of the established Government or those peasants who did not have loyalties either way. While there was, and continues to be, infiltration and direction from the north, it seems certain that the bulk of the insurgents are people of the south. It is probably impossible to stress too strongly that the insurgency in Viet-Nam is a civil war and that this fact permeates the entire struggle. Senior officials in South Viet-Nam have close relatives in the north. For the peasants in the countryside the fact of having relatives in the insurgent movement must bring the gravest problems when the decision has to be made as to whether or not to help the insurgents.

When the agroville and strategic hamlet programs were introduced in South Viet-Nam, therefore, it was not a case of transferring an alien population with little social cohesiveness -- a task which still entailed many problems -- but an effort to resettle established communities with very strong ritual ties to the soil which they had occupied over periods at times exceeding one, and sometimes even two, hundred years. In addition there was the settlement pattern in the southern region of South Viet-Nam in which the peasants had been accustomed to live by their fields so that hamlets and villages were spread over considerable areas. Resettlement into a concentrated settlement pattern was alien and inconvenient for the cultivation of crops. While many of the resettled squatters in Malaya had, as squatters, supplemented their income through growing vegetables, a very large number derived their most substantial source of income from employment as miners and industrial workers. This meant that when they were concentrated into new villages and their movements circumscribed, the degree of interference in their lives was much less than was the case for the Vietnamese peasant. The latter when removed from his crops, or restricted from giving them the normal attention which the crops demanded, was understandably resentful. If this settlement program had been developed efficiently, and had been able, in some fashion, to take account of the social and economic problems involved, it might be argued that it would have had success in preventing the contact between the peasants and insurgents. Even if this assumption of efficiency and regard for social and economic considerations is made, it has to be noted that there are large areas of South Viet-Nam where resettlement would be of little use in trying to deny the guerrillas food. South Viet-Nam is a rice exporting country and it must be concluded that it is almost impossible to deny food to the insurgents in the Mekong Delta. The situation in the area of central Viet-Nam and in the highlands is different and here, at least, there was more theoretical likelihood of the strategic hamlet program having a utility so far as food denial was concerned.

When the program of resettlement in strategic hamlets began in South Viet-Nam it was, despite foreign aid and assistance, primarily a South Vietnamese operation. The unpopular decisions which had to be taken, and the implementation of these decisions, depended on the Vietnamese themselves. Unlike Malaya, there was no expatriate administrator who could take decisions and implement them. It is paradoxical that, while the North Vietnamese spared no effort to link the United States with the implementation of the program, the United States relationship with President Diem did not allow criticism to be made or responsibility for implementation to be taken. Reference has been made throughout the discussion of the strategic hamlet program to the inefficiency and lack of developed administrative procedures. The failure to provide barbed wire in sufficient quantities and to provide weapons and give proper protection to those who were forced to participate in the program were additional factors in a scheme which was handicapped, from the start, by insufficient consideration of the problems of developing resettlement in Viet-Nam. Little could be expected from peasants who were moved against their will, called upon to fight in a war in which they felt little interest yet left, on the whole, in situations where the insurgents could still assert their position.

In South Viet-Nam the lack of any long tradition of association between the peasants and the Government did not prevent an awareness that the central authorities were supported by a foreign power. The Government manifested its presence chiefly through the army and through forced resettlement. And it was the Government which, in the peasants' minds, represented the absentee landlords who sought rent on lands which the peasants had farmed without charge over many years. While the Saigon Government might speak of the horrors of 'land reform' in the north, this was merely an abstraction. The threat of having the landlords' power restored or having to pay rents on land which was tilled without rent costs was immediate.

It can clearly be demonstrated that the attempt to use the resettlement techniques of the Malayan Emergency risked failure from the outset. But the question still remains as to whether some form of resettlement held the key to countering the Communist insurgency in South Viet-Nam. Here one is entering the field of speculation. Possibly only the most general comments may be made, therefore. But, at least, some of the general considerations which deserved attention and analysis may be noted. The utility of resettlement as a counter to Communist insurgency in South Viet-Nam would always have been qualified by the fact that Communist agents had remained in the south after the signing of the Geneva Accords and by the fact that whole areas of South Viet-Nam had been under Viet-Minh control for a number of years. There is reason to believe that in many areas the structure of relationships between the Viet-Minh and the peasants remained after 1954. As has been noted earlier, the fact of Communist control in some areas of the south was admitted even by Ngo-Dinh Nhu. These facts presented a very real threat to the efforts of the Saigon Government and probably their presence could only have been negated by a genuine demonstration of the Government's intentions to deal with the rural problems of a countryside which had undergone both exploitation and war. Once the initial period of consolidation had passed, the Diem regime's response to the many grave problems which it faced was generally authoritarian and

unimaginative in character and of scant benefit to the peasants. Through concern for maintaining the loyalty of the urban population there was too little consideration for the countryside. With such a regime it is not surprising that there was little identity between the peasants and their Government. Moreover the power exerted by Ngo-Dinh-Nhu and his unreadiness to accept either criticism or advice stood in the way of successful implementation of the hamlet program.³ To the extent that Government presence was maintained in the countryside the insurgents recognized that the local official was a prime target. By eliminating the lower level officials the Communists could further isolate the peasants from the Government.

It seems proper to record the complication involved in the existence of a privileged sanctuary in North Viet-Nam. As has been emphasized throughout this study, the use of this term is not meant to imply that the insurgency in South Viet-Nam is conducted solely by Vietnamese from the north but rather that direction and some supplies have come from there. Support from the north is important but to lay stress on the numbers of men who have infiltrated from the north is to avoid recognition of the response which they have achieved in the south. Any analysis of the problems faced in countering the insurgency in South Viet-Nam must nevertheless make a note of the existence of this important sanctuary.

The factors which may be presented as having been important in the consideration of ways to counter insurgency in Viet-Nam quite clearly point to the difficulty of the task which had to be undertaken. In order to succeed the Saigon Government needed to provide the peasants in the countryside with protection, indications of a genuine desire to meet their problems and the evidence of a political system which took some account of their interests and aspirations. Given the situation which existed in South Viet-Nam, this form of Government interest would undoubtedly have had to be linked with military action. The attainment of social reforms required the protection of those who sought to introduce them. In the field of speculation it does seem possible to have envisaged the development of genuinely protected settlements under a much slower and less ambitious program than was ever considered under the strategic hamlet program.

Instead, an introspective regime pursued its policy on lines which took more account of 'philosophy' than practical problems and political realities. If Secretary of Defense McNamara emerges as the chief villain in North Vietnamese accounts of the strategic hamlet program, there can be little doubt that Ngo-Dinh-Nhu's influence over the strategic hamlet program was the greatest single factor leading to its failure. When all the differences between the situation in Malaya and that in South Viet-Nam have been recorded, one is still left with the conclusion that some form

3. In a personal and unofficial communication to the writer, Colonel C.T.R. Bohannon has spoken of the stranglehold which Nhu maintained over the administration of the program. Colonel Bohannon has noted the extreme fear of Nhu among Vietnamese civil servants which prevented them from providing him with news of failures and Nhu's own belief in his infallibility which made him contemptuous of advice and unready to accept criticism.

of rural control had to be established by the Saigon Government. That the strategic hamlet program did not approach the achievement of this goal was closely linked with Nhu's insistence on quantity rather than quality in hamlet construction and development. But the time for the establishment of a careful program of rural control and development was at least seven years ago. The continuing military deterioration which has taken place during 1964 must raise the gravest doubts as to the possibility of winning the support of the peasants for the enfeebled political structure in Saigon.

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APPENDIX

The following is a translation of a captured South Viet-Nam Liberation Front document dated 5 August 1963, from Tay-Ninh province. It is believed to have been prepared by a provincial committee of the Front for transmission to both higher and lower echelons. It is of interest that the document expresses some concern for the progress of the strategic hamlet program at a time when there was general deterioration in the implementation of the program. The document is reproduced as translated irrespective of syntax.

MEMORANDUM No. 58/CV

F. 99
5 August 1963

TO: F. 95

On the occasion of July 20th (Anniversary of the 1954 cease fire) efforts will be made to counter the herding of people and construction of Strategic Hamlets.

I. Since the 1st of the year, the enemy has concentrated all his efforts, engaged all his forces and employed the most savage methods to herd the people into Strategic Hamlets. He has obtained some results in extending his control, consolidating part of the areas under his control and causing more difficulties to our activities. Supported by the concentration camps, Strategic Hamlets, the enemy carries out more effectively a number of plans, such as drafting, pillaging, oppressing, terrorizing the people, confusing their morale, conducting economic blockade, appealing to surrender, etc.....

Our movement of struggle in the recent past has partly hampered the execution of above plans. It has limited his activities, loosened his control and caused an unquiet situation. In some areas the installations which were previously driven out have been re-installed. In others, the installations have been developed, consolidated and are capable of causing many difficulties and embarrassments to the enemy. But, generally speaking, we have not yet stopped or shoved back these enemy plots; on the contrary they are progressing rapidly. Such a situation has discouraged a number of cadres and Party members because the enemy has many capabilities of concentrating his efforts and terrorizing savagely in order to carry out these plots. But the main cause still rests in the deficiencies of our leadership, in our failure to fully realize the enemy plot, in our lack of efforts to concentrate forces, increase sabotage, intensify guerilla warfare, strengthen counter -- mop up activities for his attrition, employ in maximum the rudimentary weapons, employ the armed forces in countering the enemy herding of people into Strategic Hamlets.

In parallel with our developing movement of armed struggle, the movement against the herding of people into Strategic Hamlets was also intensified and obtained a number of considerable successes. In several areas, sabotage was conducted in series against 5 or 7 Strategic Hamlets and political, military and troop proselyting means were employed to initiate the people to sabotage 20 or 30 other Hamlets. Elsewhere, our

guerrillas built their secret caches and attacked the enemy right in Strategic Hamlets. Or we set up cells and proselyted the SDC, Combat Youth, Republican Youth to turn their weapons against the enemy, kill his troops and loosen his control. In particular, in some areas, the masses violently opposed their herding (into Strategic Hamlets) with all legal and semi-legal means and employed troop proselyting methods to embarrass the enemy and cause more confidence for the people. In spite of his efforts, the enemy is encountering many obstacles and showing many important weaknesses. More than ever, he is politically isolated. The morale of his troops and civil servants is sagging because of the heavy losses they have suffered. Most of the troops sympathize with and support the struggle by the people against the construction of Strategic Hamlets. The more Strategic Hamlets he constructs, the less capable the enemy will be to defend them because he is short of troops. If he disperses them, it will be easier for us to attack them with troop proselyting and to destroy them....

So, the weaknesses and difficulties of the enemy are our strengths and advantages. With our experience and countering methods, we will be capable of co-ordinating the political, military and troop proselyting actions to sabotage the concentration zones, Strategic Hamlets and to intensify the Movement if we have good determination and leadership.

II. To intensify strongly and rapidly the movement against Strategic Hamlets, we should restudy our plans and their execution. Following are some points to be reminded:

1) It is to be realized that the enemy plan to concentrate the people into Strategic Hamlets is due to his inability to control the people and the people's 'revolutionary tide'. For this reason, he must employ the military forces to imprison the people for his control, to isolate the people from the Revolution. This plan is part of the long range plot of MY DIEM's aggressive war; it is a matter of life or death for their regime. So, as long as they survive, they will be determined to carry out this Plan. In addition to their main efforts in the military field, they employ all their political, economic and cultural capabilities as well as all the measures of violence, bribery, cheating, appeal to surrender.... They have many capabilities and facilities, such as weapons, money, forces. In carrying out their plot, they encounter many unsolvable contradictions and the more efforts they make the more contradictions they will show.

2) Since the enemy plot is a long range military plan, it must be countered by a violent and long lasting people's guerrilla war. In the sabotage of Strategic Hamlets, the role of the people's armed forces is decisive while the masses of political forces are the backbone of the armed forces. The important role of Troop Proselyting should also be developed.

For the Plan against the construction of Strategic Hamlets, the following requirements should be met:

- In our base area, we should be determined not to let the enemy herd the people.
- In the strong areas, sabotage will be conducted from small scale to large scale until complete destruction and transformation of Strategic Hamlets into Combat Villages and Hamlets.
- In enemy controlled areas, we should loosen his control, raise the masses political movement, develop and build up the installations inside (the Strategic Hamlets) to ensure and preserve the outside activities. The secret self defense forces inside will be only employed to follow up the enemy situation; to eliminate secretly the cruel enemy elements and to co-ordinate their activities with the armed forces outside.

3) Because of above requirements, different methods will be applied for different areas:

- In our base areas, we should develop guerrilla warfare and anti-mop up actions against enemy herding of the people into Strategic Hamlets. For the existing Hamlets, determined efforts will be made to sabotage them.
- We should plan to sabotage in series the Strategic Hamlets in one area at a time. We should avoid the meaningless harassment which only makes the enemy more alert. A plan should be available to prepare the sabotage actions. When the concentrated forces are needed, careful planning should be made like for an attack on post in order to ensure the success. When sabotaging the hamlets one by one or in series, the first objectives in the hamlet should be rapidly secured for use as stepping stones for other actions. At the same time, preparation will be made against a possible enemy operation.
- In the areas where our forces are still weak, efforts should be made to eliminate the enemy village and Hamlets Council members, spies, and to destroy the Strategic Hamlets fence. For this latter mission, coordination should be made between the forces outside and inside the hamlets in order to ensure its success. Preparation should be adequately made for the forces inside the SH's until they are strong enough for the task.

In the areas where the enemy does not have troops, we should build up Combat Villages. In the areas which the enemy can reoccupy we should have a number of secret installations ready to operate within the enemy ranks while the outside forces should be prepared for action. In the areas where the enemy organizes and equips Combat Youth, Self-Defense Corps and Armed forces, we should make efforts to proselyte these forces to turn against the enemy and to Destroy the SH's.

For the elimination of Montagnard Village Council, actions should be carefully planned according to the masses aspirations and approved by the Province Committee. Efforts will be concentrated to attacks the armed 'nests' and seize their weapons for the Front, for the countering of SH construction. Our present mission also consists of helping the people's life, production and the defense of their interests.

Province, District and Village Committees will base on their past experiences to carry out successfully this Plan. They should concentrate all their efforts to destroy in series the Strategic Hamlets. This mission must be given first priority. The more he is defeated, the more the enemy will bang on this plot of his. Under any circumstances, we should never under-estimate him: the more success we obtain, the more efforts we will make to overcome the difficulties, to destroy the enemy plot, and to force him into a position without a way out until his total collapse in South VIET NAM.

Translation of document captured in Tay Ninh
Province, 15 August, 1963.