

The London School of Economics and Political Science

The Counter-Revolutionary Path: South Vietnam, the United States, and the Global Allure of Development, 1968-1973

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A thesis submitted to the Department of International History of the London School of Economics for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, October 2015.

Declaration

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the theory and practice of development in South Vietnam's Second Republic from the aftermath of the 1968 Tet Offensive to the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in 1973. Based on Vietnamese and American archival material, it explores the development approaches of both the South Vietnamese and United States governments. In particular, it examines the ways in which South Vietnamese elites and U.S. officials in Washington and Saigon responded to the various development paradigms on offer to postcolonial states between the 1950s and 1970s, namely modernization theory, community development, land reform, and an emerging neoliberal economics.

In doing so the dissertation makes three primary arguments. In contrast to much of the literature on the final years of the American War in Vietnam, this dissertation argues that development remained a crucial component of the United States' and South Vietnamese strategy after the Tet Offensive. It highlights both the continuities and changes in U.S. approaches to international development between the Johnson and Nixon years as well as arguing that debates about development strategies in Vietnam during this time presaged larger shifts in international development later in the 1970s. Secondly, it argues that South Vietnamese elites had a transnational development vision. They not only employed U.S. theories of development but also drew on the lessons offered by other states in the Global South, particularly Taiwan and South Korea. Finally, the dissertation argues that the South Vietnamese government employed development to earn domestic legitimacy and shore up its authoritarian governance.

The dissertation makes three historiographical interventions. Firstly, it illuminates U.S. development practice in the Nixon era. Secondly, the dissertation shows that South Vietnamese officials shaped development outcomes, thus granting agency that is largely absent from accounts of this period. Finally, it demonstrates that historians must place South Vietnam within the larger framework of decolonization and East Asian anti-Communism.

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Table of Contents	4
List of Abbreviations	5-6
Note on the Text	7
Acknowledgements	8-9
Introduction	10
Chapter One	58
Contested Visions: the Politics of Economic Reform in South Vietnam	
Chapter Two	100
“He Behaves Like an Economic Man”: Agricultural Development and Land Reform in South Vietnam	
Chapter Three	148
Creating Clean, Modern Citizens: Public Health in South Vietnam	
Chapter Four	190
“The City Will Always Win”: Urban Development in South Vietnam	
Conclusion	236
Bibliography	255

Abbreviations

ADB- Agricultural Development Bank

APC – Accelerated Pacification Campaign

ARVN- Army of the Republic of Vietnam

CAP- Community Action Programme

CDD- Community Development Directorate, CORDS

CIA- Central Intelligence Agency

CIA-FOIA- Central Intelligence Agency Freedom of Information Act Electronic
Reading Room

CIP- Commodity Import Programme

CORDS- Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support

DDRS- Declassified Documents Reference System

DENTCAP- Dental Civic Action Programme

DoD – Department of Defence

FCO- Foreign and Commonwealth Office Files

FHPA- Family Happiness Protection Association [Hội Bảo Vệ Hạnh Phúc Gia Đình]

FRUS- Foreign Relations of the United States

GMD - Guomindang

GVN- Government of the Republic of Vietnam

IPPF- International Planned Parenthood Federation

IRRI- International Rice Research Institute

ISI- import-substitution industrialization

JDG- Joint Development Group

KAP- Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices Survey

LBJL- Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

LTTT- Land-to-the-Tiller Programme

MACV- Military Assistance Command, Vietnam

MEDCAP- Medical Civic Action Programme

MEP- Malaria Eradication Programme

MLRA- Ministry of Land Reform and Agriculture

MOH- Ministry of Health

MORD- Ministry of Rural Development

MPW- Ministry of Public Works

NARA- National Archives and Records Administration

NLF- National Liberation Front

NSC- National Security Council

PAVN - People's Army of Vietnam

PRG- Provisional Revolutionary Government

PSDF- People's Self-Defence Forces

PTTDNCH- Phủ Tổng Thống Đệ Nhị Cộng Hòa (Office of the President of the Second Republic)

RD- Revolutionary Development

RVN- Republic of Vietnam

SRI – Stanford Research Institute

TTLTQGII- Trung Tâm Lưu Trữ Quốc Gia II (National Archives Center II)

TTU-VVA- Texas Tech University, Vietnam Virtual Archive

UKNA- United Kingdom National Archives

USAID- United States Agency for International Development

USD- Urban Self-Development Programme

VSD- Village Self-Development Programme

VSSG- Vietnam Special Studies Group

A Note on the Text:

While Vietnamese documents obviously include diacritics, U.S. documents do not include diacritics for Vietnamese personal names and place names. Therefore, I have included Vietnamese diacritics in my translations of Vietnamese documents in the footnotes but for the sake of consistency I have chosen not to include them in the main body of the text.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is the product of thousands of hours of reading and archival research, hundreds of hours of intensive language study and international travel, and tens of thousands of cups of tea and coffee. As I look over it now, I am reasonably proud of what I have accomplished though I know none of it would have been possible without the assistance of dozens of people and institutions.

This dissertation was supported by generous funding from LSE IDEAS, the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, the LBJ Foundation, the Roosevelt Studies Center, the Royal Historical Society, the Economic History Society and LSE's International History Department. I owe special thanks to Cato Stonex for his enormously generous sponsorship of the LSE IDEAS Stonex PhD Scholarship in International History.

One of the great pleasures of doing this dissertation has been making so many friends along the way. Among the current crop of graduate students and recent PhDs in the 'U.S. and the World' field are brilliant people who are passionate about their research and teaching, making the current state of the academic job market all the more depressing. So much of what I've learned about international development is the result of conversations and email exchanges with Paul Adler and James Lin. I will count myself very lucky if I am ever again on a conference panel as thought-provoking as ours at SHAFR 2013. Paul and James, as well as Daniel Bessner, Sean Fear, Vanessa Freije, Artemy Kalinovsky, Aaron Moulton, Will Mountz, Chris Miller, Stuart Schrader, and Tom Tunstall Allcock, all deserve thanks for reading portions of the dissertation, shaping my thinking and/or sharing their wisdom on what it is to be a historian. I have also been tremendously fortunate to meet and interact with senior scholars in my field. Mark Bradley, Nick Cullather, Chris Endy, Tom Robertson and Hang Nguyen commented on portions of this dissertation at various conferences. Their feedback, as well as conversations with Ed Miller and Daniel Immerwahr, proved instrumental in helping me (re)conceptualise and refine my project. I must also thank Bob Brigham, who sparked my interest in the Vietnam War through his wonderful graduate seminars at University College Dublin in 2007-2008, and thank Hang Nguyen again for writing more letters for me than she should have put up with!

Archivists at the National Archives in College Park, the LBJ Library, the Nixon Library and the Ford Library pointed me in the right direction when I might otherwise have been overwhelmed. In particular, John Wilson at the LBJ Library and Donna Lehman and Jeremy Schmidt at the Ford Library were very generous with their time. The prospect of conducting research in the Vietnamese archives was the most daunting (and exciting) part of the entire dissertation experience but it would have been even more daunting had my Vietnamese language teachers at the National University in Hanoi not been so helpful in preparing me. Cô Huong and Cô Mai deserve special thanks in this regard. Once I arrived at National Archives Center II in Ho Chi Minh City the archivists were very welcoming and extremely helpful, putting up with my questionable pronunciation and endless requests for photocopying. During my research trips to Saigon in 2013 and 2014, Tony Giusti, Ruairi Lamb, Kevin Li, Trinh Luu My, Haydon Cherry, Alec and Cat Worsnop, Bao Kham Chau, and Brett Reilly gave me plenty of reasons to spend as much time as possible away from my less-than-glamorous \$10 a night hotel room. Thanks too to Bao Kham Chau, Vu Minh Hoang,

Angie Thao Huynh and Le Ton Nghiem, who at various times helped me with some of the knottier problems of Vietnamese translation.

I could not have hoped for a better place to complete a PhD than the International History Department at LSE. Antony Best's HY501 seminars taught us what doing a PhD was all about. Tanya Harmer is both a great mentor and friend and a model academic to young scholars such as myself. I formed many of the best of ideas in this dissertation, as well as forming what I know will be lifelong friendships, during afternoon conversations in the International History Department's PhD study room and during evening pints in the White Horse. Anton Harder, Aaron Rietkerk, Taka Yamamoto, Cees Heere, Zhong Zhong Chen, Alessandro Iandolo, Pete Millwood, Natasha Telepneva, Rosie Coffey, Ollie Elliott, Jin Li Lim, Yu Suzuki, are brilliant historians and great people all! The saddest thing about completing this dissertation is the realisation that I will no longer get to see these wonderful people as much as I have during the past four years. Above all, I must thank my supervisor Arne Westad for all his help and guidance. Arne always ensured that I kept my eye on the big picture when I got too far down in the weeds. It was an honour and a privilege to work under the supervision of such an enormously talented historian and a true gentleman.

Friends listened to me grumble about the PhD and/or helped me take my mind off it. Joe Kilroy, Alistair McDonald, Paul McBride, and Jade Masterson Hally are true and dear friends. I must also thank my parents for all their love and support. They always supported every decision I made and never once asked why their Irish son wanted to spend four years of his life studying the American experience in Vietnam under the supervision of a Norwegian historian at an English university.

Finally, I could not have survived the few moments of triumph and many moments of despair during the production of this dissertation without Izzy, my partner in all things during the past 8 years. She endured absences- both physical and mental- but always supported me wholeheartedly. She is my true source of strength and inspiration. It is to her that I dedicate this dissertation.

Introduction

As he assumed the office of the presidency in 1969, Richard Nixon believed the United States faced a dramatically changed international environment which called for a new approach to the problems of postcolonial development. In the face of the costly, unending war in Vietnam and the failure of reform at home, the consensus around U.S. overseas development efforts had unravelled. The post-war development enterprise, whereby the United States provided bilateral aid for state-led projects in the postcolonial world, had proved a disappointment. It seemed to serve only short-term political objectives and achieved little economic growth. The United States faced a growing balance of payments problem and Congressional and public opinion had turned hostile to development assistance. Nixon therefore announced that the United States would no longer “seek to dominate the international development process” but would encourage initiatives from other industrialized nations and channel more U.S. aid through multilateral institutions like the World Bank. Moreover, Nixon looked to the postcolonial success stories such as Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore, and saw nations which had “discovered and applied the lessons of America’s own economic success”. In response to these lessons, Nixon decided that the United States would encourage private investment, population planning, and export-led growth. This new model of development would serve the Nixon administration’s broader national security goals by allowing “a number of lower income countries to mobilize manpower and resources to defend themselves”.¹

¹ Action Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, ‘The New U.S. Foreign Aid Program’, 14 July 1970, document no. 134, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976*, vol. IV, Foreign Assistance, International Development, Trade Policies, 1969-1972; ‘Special Message to the Congress Proposing Reform of the Foreign Assistance Program’, 15 September 1970, The American Presidency Project (available at

South Vietnam became the major site where the contest between new and old ideas about postcolonial development played out. Nixon's new strategy aimed to reduce the United States' global commitments and there was no more important place to begin this process than in Vietnam. During Nixon's first term the United States encouraged the South Vietnamese regime to implement an export-led growth strategy, stimulate private investment, institute a population planning programme, and mobilize international aid. Each measure aimed to increase the self-sufficiency of the regime as the United States' withdrew. Yet the breakdown of the post-war consensus was uneven and these new strategies did not immediately eclipse older methods of postcolonial development. At the same time as the Nixon administration and the government of South Vietnam (GVN) pursued new goals, they also implemented state-led modernization, land reform, and community development schemes which bore close resemblance to the postcolonial projects of the 1950s and 1960s.

This dissertation examines the theory and practice of development in South Vietnam from the aftermath of the 1968 Tet Offensive to the signing of the Paris Agreements in 1973. It examines the development approaches of both the South Vietnamese and United States governments. In particular, it explores the ways in which South Vietnamese political elites and United States policymakers and development practitioners responded to the various development paradigms on offer to postcolonial states from the 1950s to the 1970s, including modernization, community development, land reform, and an emerging neoliberal economics. The dissertation also seeks to uncover what U.S. development policies in Vietnam during the Nixon years can tell us about the United States' approach to the problems of postcolonial development on a global scale in the 1970s.

In doing so the dissertation makes three primary arguments. Firstly, it argues that development remained a crucial component of the United States' and South Vietnamese strategy after the Tet Offensive. Previous studies have argued that the United States abandoned efforts at development and nation-building in Vietnam after the Tet Offensive, focusing instead on high diplomacy and conventional warfare. No study has considered GVN policies and programmes in this area during this time.²

In its exploration of U.S. approaches to development after the Tet Offensive this dissertation highlights both the continuities and changes between the Johnson and Nixon years. On the one hand, the Nixon years saw the culmination of post-war U.S. involvement in land reform in Asia as well as the climax of the "Green Revolution" in South Vietnam which began during the final years of the Johnson administration. On the other hand, Vietnam offers a window on the United States' new development priorities in the 1970s including a focus on urban development and a turn toward more market-driven economic policies. The dissertation demonstrates how, after the Tet Offensive, U.S. officials implemented projects which drew on community development, modernization theory, land reform and neoliberal economics. In this sense, the dissertation challenges the historiographical trend which periodizes the Cold War into neat eras in which one development paradigm or another dominated. Examining the politics of development in South Vietnam in the late 1960s and 1970s one can see how

² See for example James Carter, *Inventing Vietnam: the United States and State Building, 1954-1968*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). David Biggs dedicates some attention to the post-Tet period in his wonderful study of nation-building but focuses little of this discussion on the goals and meaning of development for the GVN and U.S. government at this time. David Biggs, *Quagmire: Nation-Building and Nature in the Mekong Delta*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 210-225. Key studies of the Nixon administration's Vietnam policy that make no mention of development include Jeffrey P. Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998) and Larry Berman, *No Peace, No Honor: Nixon, Kissinger, and Betrayal in Vietnam*, (New York: Free Press, 2001). Part of the reason for the neglect of development issues has been the focus instead on counterinsurgency in the final years of the war. Counterinsurgency was essentially one aspect of development but even those scholars who examine it fail to understand it in these terms. See for example Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: the Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam*, (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1999); Richard Hunt, *Pacification: the American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds*, (Boulder, CO.: Westview Press, 1995); Thomas L. Ahern, *The CIA and Rural Pacification in South Vietnam*, CIA History, available at http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/48/3_CIA_AND_RURAL_PACIFICATION.pdf.

U.S. theories of development co-occurred, interacted and competed with one another in one arena of the Cold War. The discussions among U.S. officials and development practitioners on the problems of development in Vietnam both reflected old debates and presaged new ones that would come to the fore in international development later in the 1970s.

Secondly, the dissertation shows that South Vietnamese elites had a transnational vision which not only employed U.S. development theories but also drew on the lessons offered by other states in the Global South. In particular, South Vietnam's leaders and technocrats were drawn to the East Asian anti-Communist, authoritarian states of Taiwan and South Korea. Contrary to much of the orthodox literature which characterises the South Vietnamese regime as passive and inward-looking, this dissertation demonstrates that Saigon's development programmes were the result of an active engagement with the anti-Communist Third World and shows that the influence of these models proved equally as important to development during the final years of the war as did U.S.-South Vietnamese exchanges. South Vietnam's relationship with the United States was of course crucial, but the Thieu regime's development efforts must be placed within a global framework of Cold War anti-Communism. In macroeconomics, Saigon borrowed ideas from the South Korean, Taiwanese and Singaporean "developmental states". In the field of agriculture the regime seized on "miracle rice" developed at the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines and sought to learn from the land reform experiences of Taiwan, Iran, and other anti-Communist states. In public health, a group of South Vietnamese government and non-government actors, supported by the International Planned Parenthood Foundation, lobbied for a population planning program along South Korean and Taiwanese lines.

Of course, the RVN's transnational vision would have been irrelevant if, as so many historians suggest, its leaders were simply puppets of the United States. Contrary

to many accounts which marginalize South Vietnamese actors, this dissertation argues that they played important roles in shaping counter-insurgency, development and economic reform during the final years of the war. It demonstrates that development and counter-insurgency in particular were contested and that policies were the outcome of a negotiated process between South Vietnamese and U.S. actors. While South Vietnamese and U.S. officials saw eye-to-eye on some issues, other aspects of development were the source of disagreement both within and between the U.S. and South Vietnamese governments, as well as within both country's legislatures. Occasionally, the South Vietnamese view triumphed and at other times U.S. preferences carried the day.

Finally, the dissertation explains why, in a country wracked by violent conflict, the Saigon regime attempted development. As the prospect of political competition with the National Liberation Front increased in the aftermath of the 1968 Tet Offensive and the initiation of the Paris peace talks, the GVN saw counterinsurgency and development as powerful tools for extending the state's authority into the countryside and urban slums, for earning legitimacy in the eyes of the people, and for bulwarking its authoritarian rule.

At a June 1969 meeting of the Central Pacification and Construction Council [Hội Đồng Bình Định và Xây Dựng Trung Ương], South Vietnam's President Nguyen Van Thieu outlined his thinking in these terms. Thieu told his generals and ministers that if the government firmly controlled enough populated territory it could guarantee victory in the forthcoming electoral contest with the NLF. But votes would not be secured through coercion alone. Development projects would enhance the legitimacy of the regime and pay dividends at the ballot box. Speaking of the country's peasantry in typically paternalistic tones, Thieu said "we control them, we preserve their security, we nurture them, we develop them. We only ask that they vote for us, and that they don't vote for the Communists. We do a hundred things for them", Thieu went on, "we

request that they do just one thing for us, that they have affection for the National Government, that they like nationalism and that they vote for the nationalists”.³

Three weeks later, Thieu would make his most expansive peace proposal of the entire war. On July 11 1969 he announced that all political parties that renounced violence, including the NLF, could participate in nationwide elections. An electoral commission, in which the NLF could also participate, would oversee the elections and an international body would also supervise the process. The South Vietnamese government (GVN) would discuss the modalities of the election with the NLF and promised to abide by the results. Implicit in this proposal was the requirement that North Vietnamese troops withdraw from the South prior to the elections. “The other side claims that it controls 80% of the population of South Vietnam”, Thieu said. “We say that they dominate by force only a small portion of the population. Let these claims be put to the test of elections”.⁴

Thieu was no peacemaker and certainly no democrat. He had ascended to power through the ranks of the military and had a clear preference for authoritarian governance. He was a staunch anti-Communist and at one time believed that the only way to defeat the insurgency in South Vietnam was through military power. But by the middle of 1969, the character of the American War in Vietnam had changed. During the Tet Offensive in early 1968, the NLF and North Vietnamese had attacked most of South Vietnam’s towns and cities, delivering a massive psychological blow, if not a military defeat to the United States and GVN. In the wake of the offensive, the Johnson administration had initiated peace talks with North Vietnam and a political settlement,

³ ‘Pacification and Construction Seminar at Independence Palace, 20 June 1969, [Khóa hội thảo Bình Định Xây Dựng tại Dinh Độc Lập ngày 20.6.1969], folder 95, Phủ Tổng Thống Đệ Nhị Cộng Hòa (Office of the President of the Second Republic) (hereafter PTTDNCH), Trung Tâm Lưu Trữ Quốc Gia II (National Archives Centre II) (hereafter TTLTQGII), Ho Chi Minh City.

⁴ ‘Text of President Thieu’s Speech on Restoration of Peace in Vietnam’, 11 July 1969, Folder 12, Box 10, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 04- Political Settlement, Texas Tech University, Vietnam Virtual Archive, (hereafter TTU-VVA), Item no.: 2301012006.

rather than a decisive military victory, now appeared the most likely resolution to the war.

The Nixon administration, coming to office in January 1969, continued to move in this direction. Although Nixon harboured fantasies of military dominance, the new administration instead began the process of “Vietnamization”, whereby U.S. troops would be withdrawn as the South Vietnamese military grew and assumed a larger share of the fighting. Nixon combined this apparent de-escalation of the war with escalation beyond South Vietnam’s borders, secretly bombing communist sanctuaries in Cambodia and Laos, and launching invasions into those countries in 1970 and 1971 respectively. These escalatory moves were supposed to strengthen National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger’s negotiating position in secret talks with Hanoi’s representatives which began in August 1969. For the Nixon administration, Vietnamization offered a way for the United States to disengage from Vietnam, buying time on the home front to continue the war while building up Saigon’s military strength. It offered the possibility that South Vietnam might survive the U.S. withdrawal, leaving U.S. credibility intact.

Although long hostile to any dealings with the NLF, by late 1968 Thieu had come around to the idea and started working to bring his compatriots along with him. Not only was the United States searching for a political solution, but the NLF had suffered massive losses during the Tet Offensive and the RVN had made substantial security gains during the Accelerated Pacification Campaign which began in November 1968. For RVN leaders, the principal weapons in the political contest with the NLF were security and development. If the regime could control enough populated territory, organize the people, and deliver the fruits of development, it could create a viable political community in both the countryside and the cities that would turn its back on the NLF and support the GVN. Meanwhile, economic reform and development would

strengthen the RVN economy and gradually reduce South Vietnam's critical dependence on U.S. aid.

In addition to offering an incentive for the South Vietnamese people to support and vote for the GVN, bottom-up community development and counterinsurgency schemes were at the centre of Thieu's vision of governance. After the Tet Offensive, the GVN expanded the village and hamlet elections it had re-established in 1967, devolved power to the villages, made funds available for popularly-elected and locally implemented community development projects, and redistributed land to tenant farmers. In 1970, the government extended some of these policies into South Vietnam's urban areas. Villagers and urban dwellers were also compelled to join a citizens' militia, the People's Self-Defence Forces (PSDF), to defend their communities against Communist penetration. Each of these programmes was intended to draw peasant farmers and the urban poor to the side of the GVN. The goal was to create self-governing, self-developing, and self-defending local communities which would not place a demand on overstretched national resources.

Mobilizing the people in the villages and urban neighbourhoods to participate in self-defence and self-development projects, and granting peasant farmers land, aimed to foster links between Thieu at the centre of Vietnamese politics and the villages and urban wards at periphery. By decentralizing counterinsurgency and development responsibilities to local communities, Thieu hoped to undermine other intermediate power brokers such as political parties, Corps Commanders and province and district chiefs. Village level political participation, in the form of elections, self-defence, and community development, would therefore serve as a substitute for national-level politics.

The GVN also employed top-down, modernization projects including economic reform and planning, population control, and the high-yield rice varieties of the Green

Revolution. These projects aimed to generate economic growth and contribute to both village and national self-sufficiency. But even if they were unsuccessful in this regard, they had considerable psychological value in the war against the Communists.

Modernization projects demonstrated the GVN's technological edge over the NLF or signaled to the people that the government's development vision was more compelling than that of the revolutionary forces arrayed against it. Modern rice varieties, GVN planners hoped, would return the country to rice self-sufficiency but would also have a profound psychological effect on peasant farmers, convincing them that the technologically-endowed GVN was the wave of the future. Economic reform and national planning aimed to reduce the RVN's dependence on U.S. aid. But economic policy was just as important for what it represented as what it achieved. The GVN's economic policymakers pointed to reforms to convince the people that the RVN was a developmental regime just like the other, more prosperous, anti-Communist East Asian nations.

Some scholars have dismissed Thieu's July 1969 peace proposal as a publicity stunt, while others believe it demanded so much of the NLF that the revolutionaries were hardly likely to accept it. Certainly, it fell far short of the NLF's May 1969 "Ten Point Peace Plan" and even Nixon's May 14 peace proposal.⁵ Yet between 1969 and 1972, Thieu genuinely believed that it might be possible convince North Vietnam to withdraw its troops from the South and have a political contest with the NLF as part of a

⁵ Pierre Asselin, *A Bitter Peace: Washington, Hanoi, and the Making of the Paris Agreement*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 18-19; John Prados argues that because the RVN constitution prohibited Communism, the NLF would have had to renounce its political beliefs in order to participate in elections. John Prados, 'The Shape of the Table: Nguyen Van Thieu and Negotiations to End the Conflict' in Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger, *The Search for Peace in Vietnam 1964-1968* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 360; George Veith takes Thieu's proposal more seriously though is certainly too generous, noting "the Communists seemed allergic to a concept that most Westerners and the democratically inclined Vietnamese Nationalists had long accepted: political compromise that offered power sharing through free and fair elections". George J. Veith, "'A Short Road to Hell': Thieu, South Vietnam, and the Paris Peace Accords' in Natalie Huynh Chau Nguyen ed. *New Perspectives of the Vietnam War: Essays on War, the Diaspora, the South Vietnamese Experience and the Continuing Impact*, (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, 2015), 24; on the May 1969 peace proposals see Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 139.

settlement. A more valid condemnation of his proposal is that he hardly planned for the elections to be fair. In any case, the NLF and its patrons in the Vietnamese Workers' Party in North Vietnam rejected Thieu's proposal, demanding that he step down and that a coalition government take his place.

Thieu's belief in the possibility of GVN-NLF political competition continued to inform his method of governance until late 1972. Two events changed Thieu's approach. In response to North Vietnam's 1972 Spring Offensive Thieu cancelled hamlet and village elections, backtracking on the process of devolution which had begun in 1967. In October, Thieu was presented with a draft peace agreement worked out by the United States and North Vietnam. The draft contained no provision for the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from the South. Thieu demanded revisions but was unable to secure this crucial change. The Paris Agreements also assigned an important role to the "Third Force" in the post-agreement political process. Composed of neutralists, the "Third Force" would occupy the space between the GVN and the NLF on the body overseeing the ceasefire and subsequent election. Thieu believed that "Third Force" elements were Communist lackeys.⁶ Under these conditions, after 1973 Thieu moved against any neutralist sentiment and his rule became even more arbitrary and authoritarian. Prior to the Paris Peace Agreement development served as a tool of governance and a means of fostering popular loyalty in the struggle against the NLF. It also aimed to enhance the economic and political viability of the regime. After January 1973, in the face of declining U.S. aid and an unworkable peace agreement, development was merely a matter of survival.

⁶ Berman, *No Peace, No Honour*, 149. For the final rounds of negotiations in final months of 1972 and January 1973 see Berman, *No Peace, No Honour*, 140-220; Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*, 291-355; Asselin, *A Bitter Peace*, 55-180.

Historiography

This dissertation engages with and contributes to two areas of historiography: the history of development and the American War in Vietnam. Since Nick Cullather's call in *Diplomatic History* in 2000 for historians to treat "development *as* history" rather than as a methodology, the historiography of U.S. foreign relations has seen an outpouring of literature on development. This explosion has been further encouraged by an increasing tendency for historians to frame the Cold War as a contest of competing models of development in the Global South.⁷ While development is a contested and subjective term, this literature focuses on the efforts of the United States, the Soviet Union, international and non-governmental organisations, and postcolonial states to accelerate the process of economic, social, and political change in the postcolonial world. In the field of U.S. foreign relations history, the formulation and implementation of modernization theory has held a privileged place in this scholarship.⁸

Historians have highlighted the roots of post-war theories, particularly modernization, in earlier discourses of development. With its Eurocentrism and its faith in science and technology as the engines of human progress, modernization theory owed a good deal to Enlightenment philosophy. It also shared many principles with development discourses of the late colonial era, particularly those that eulogised about the potential for technology to "uplift" and "improve" non-Western societies. The work of U.S. non-government organizations in China in the interwar years and New Deal

⁷ Nick Cullather, 'Development? It's History', *Diplomatic History*, vol. 24, no. 4, (2000), 641-653; Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁸ Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2003); Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: Nation-Building in the Kennedy Era*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Michael E. Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); David Engerman et al eds., *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

programmes in the United States in the 1930s also helped shape Cold War era development.⁹

Despite its pre-war roots, modernization theory was a direct response to decolonization and the Cold War. Aware that patronage was readily available for physical scientists who could produce research that would assist the United States' Cold War goals, many social scientists began to reorient their focus and methodologies to serve the same ends.¹⁰ Research on the problems of developing peasant societies, which many American leaders felt the United States did not understand, appeared a promising arena of study. In the 1950s and 1960s, as the focus of the Cold War shifted from Europe to the new nation-states in Asia and Africa, social scientists sought to develop a theoretical framework that would help American policymakers as well as Third World elites understand and guide postcolonial development. These modernization theorists took the nation-state as their unit of analysis as a response to decolonization and the post-war global order, as well as the only recent emergence in 1930s social science research on the concept of the "national economy".¹¹ In another important shift from the Enlightenment and colonial eras, modernization theorists saw "underdevelopment" as a cultural, rather than biological deficiency on the part of Third World peoples.¹²

Modernization theorists argued that all states passed along a linear path from tradition to modernity. Although they claimed their theory to be universal, they based

⁹ Michael Adas, *Dominance by Design: Technological Imperatives and America's Civilizing Mission*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 33-184; Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982); David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 14-39; Amanda Kay McVety, *Enlightened Aid: U.S. Development as Foreign Policy in Ethiopia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5-36.

¹⁰ Mark Solovey, *Shaky Foundations: the Politics-Patronage-Social Science Nexus in Cold War America*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2013); Christopher Simpson ed., *Universities and Empire: Money and Politics in the Social Sciences during the Cold War* (New York: New Press, 1999).

¹¹ Mark T. Berger, 'Decolonisation, Modernisation and Nation-Building: Political Development Theory and the Appeal of Communism in Southeast Asia, 1945-1975', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 34, no. 3, 421-448; Timothy Mitchell, 'Economists and the Economy in the Twentieth Century', in George Steinmetz ed., *The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences: Positivism and its Epistemological Others*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 126.

¹² Adas, *Dominance by Design*, 160-161. Nonetheless, in dealing with Third World leaders and peoples, social scientists and policymakers continued to explain shortcomings in essentializing and racist terms.

their vision of modernity on the United States at mid-century. All the “new nations” were “traditional”: economically unsophisticated, fearful of change and passive toward nature. Modern society, sociologist Edward Shils elucidated, meant an economy based on “rational technology”, education, urbanization, and industrialisation. Modernization theorists overlooked each nation’s different experience with colonialism and historic role in the world economy. Despite its ahistoricism, modernization theory was itself situated in a particular historical moment. The post-war economic order or Bretton Woods system, one scholar suggests, “underlay the whole idea of development as it was conceived from the 1950s onwards”. This system encouraged states to manage their economies and engage in national economic planning. Under Bretton Woods “the goal of development was growth; the agent of development was the state and the means of development were... macroeconomic policy instruments”.¹³ For modernization theorists, the development process required planning by technocrats, statisticians and engineers. The new governments would have to intervene in the economy, control the rate of savings and investment, and build factories, roads, and irrigation systems. These projects would transform the psychology of the peasant, compelling him to identify with the state. Modernization was thus an elite experiment, as urban technocrats devised social engineering projects and imposed them on supposedly malleable peasant societies.¹⁴

In this literature, the periodization of development paradigms has occupied a good deal of scholars’ attention. Modernization theorists found favour with and

¹³ Colin Leys, *The Rise and Fall of Development Theory*, (Oxford: James Currey, 1996), vi, 10-11.

¹⁴ Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future*, 1-5. Although modernization theory existed on more interventionist side of the economic spectrum the goal was the integration of new states into an American-led and market-oriented global capitalist order. The key works of modernization theory include but are certainly not limited to: W.W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1960); Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East*, (Free Press of Glencoe: Collier-Macmillan, 1964); Lucian W. Pye, *Politics, Personality, and Nation Building: Burma’s Search for Identity*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962); Marion J. Levy, *Modernization and the Structure of Societies: A Setting for International Affairs, 2 Vols.*, (Princeton: University Press, 1966); Max F. Millikan and W.W. Rostow, *A Proposal: Key to an Effective Foreign Policy*, (New York: Harper & Bros, 1957).

powerful positions within the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.¹⁵ Several studies have examined the influence of modernization on United States development efforts in the Third World in these years.¹⁶ Michael Latham, in one of the earliest histories of modernization theory, argues that modernization became an “ideology” in the 1960s in large part because it was a synthesis of older ways of American thinking about progress and development. There was no strict correlation between academic modernization theory and modernization-as-policy, Latham argues. Rather the kind of thinking associated with modernization theory became a lens through which U.S. policymakers viewed the Third World.¹⁷

Subsequent scholarship has teased out and complicated the rise of modernization-style thinking and traced it back further. David Ekbladh sees the era of modernization beginning in the 1930s and extending to the late 1960s. In response to the twin threats of Communism and Fascism, “a vital new formulation crystallized” in U.S. liberalism in the 1930s and manifested itself in “the big plan”. The “grand synecdoche” of modernization, Ekbladh argues, was dam construction, modelled on the United States’ Tennessee Valley Authority. Over the course of the next 30 years private citizens, philanthropic organizations, and the U.S. government exported this model to the Third World.¹⁸ Nick Cullather and Matthew Connelly have shown that it was NGOs and the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations who paved the way in the fields of agriculture, public health, and population control prior to 1945.¹⁹ After World War

¹⁵ For example Walt Rostow, the MIT economic historian and author of the bible of modernization, *The Stages of Economic Growth*, rose to become Johnson’s National Security Advisor. See David Milne, *America’s Rasputin: Walt Rostow and the Vietnam War*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008).

¹⁶ Larry Grubbs, *Secular Missionaries: Americans and African Development in the 1960s*, (Amherst, M.A.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009); Jeffrey F. Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy: the Alliance for Progress in Latin America*, (New York: Routledge, 2007); Matthew F. Jacobs, *Imagining the Middle East: the Building of an American Foreign Policy, 1918-1967*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

¹⁷ Latham, *Modernization as Ideology*, 8.

¹⁸ Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission*, passim.

¹⁹ Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America’s Cold War Battle against Poverty in Asia*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 25-71; Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: the Struggle to Control World Population*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

Two, however, development acquired a new strategic rationale. Stephen Macekura and Amanda McVety show that President Harry Truman's Point IV programme, beginning in 1949 and based on the notion that technical assistance would lead to economic and political development in a direction favourable to U.S. interests, laid the ground for the acceptance of modernization projects later on.²⁰

Particularly useful for the purposes of this dissertation are those studies which have examined the ways in which Third World actors received and reinterpreted U.S. ideas about modernization.²¹ These historians have shown that postcolonial elites may have shared modernization theorists' faith in science, technology, and planning, but social scientists and American policymakers frequently found these elites did not follow their prescriptions to the letter. For the new leaders, development was much more about charting the quickest route from "underdevelopment" to modernity than it was a means of showing ideological commitment in the Cold War. Leaders in non-aligned India were as likely to adopt Soviet-style central planning as military leaders in U.S.-aligned Indonesia. Theorists and policymakers believed that economic convergence with the American model would lead to cultural convergence but found that modernizing nations often built on their historical, cultural and local particularities. Rather than simply

²⁰ Amanda McVety, 'Pursuing Progress: Point Four in Ethiopia', *Diplomatic History*, vol. 32, no. 3, (2008), 371-403; Stephen Macekura, 'The Point Four Program and U.S. International Development Policy', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 128, no. 1, (2013), 127-160. Other scholars have noted that the Eisenhower administration initiated a shift toward modernization-style projects during the late 1950s, laying the foundations for Kennedy's Alliance for Progress in Latin America, Thomas Tunstall Allcock, 'The First Alliance for Progress? Reshaping the Eisenhower Administration's Policy toward Latin America', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1, (2014), 85-110; Bevan Sewell, 'Early Modernisation Theory? The Eisenhower Administration and the Foreign Policy of Development in Brazil', *The English Historical Review*, vol. 125, no. 517, (2010), 1449-1480.

²¹ Gregg Brazinsky, *Nation-Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans, and the Making of a Democracy*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Bradley R. Simpson, *Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and U.S.-Indonesian Relations, 1960-68*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), Thomas C. Field, *From Development to Dictatorship: Bolivia and the Alliance for Progress in the Kennedy Era*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014); Edward G. Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the fate of South Vietnam*, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

imposing their plans, U.S. policymakers had to achieve development goals by working through and negotiating projects with local power brokers.²²

Scholars have argued that the military corollary to modernization theory was counterinsurgency. Rather than focusing on the destruction of the enemy's main forces, counterinsurgency operated at the village level and sought to eradicate the enemy's political operatives, and win peasants over to the side of the government through political, social and economic reforms. For the Kennedy administration modernization and counterinsurgency seemed a promising formula for fighting the brushfire wars in the Global South.²³

In practice, the United States used modernization projects less for economic development and more for short-term political goals, including destabilizing moderate regimes and strengthening or facilitating the emergence of more authoritarian ones. Although modernization theorists had always demonstrated a fascination with the military as a modernizing institution, as the 1960s progressed the military appeared to some policymakers to be the only institution capable of conducting modernization projects, which in turn became increasingly violent and coercive. For Third World governments, modernization and counterinsurgency would allow them to project their power into the country's interior. As such these projects channelled money to Third

²² Nathan J. Citino, 'The "Crush" of Ideologies: the United States, the Arab World, and Cold War Modernization', *Cold War History*, vol. 12, no. 1, (2012), 89-110; McVety, 'Pursuing Progress', 373-374. David C. Engerman, 'West Meets East: The Center for International Studies and Indian Economic Development' in Engerman et al eds., *Staging Growth*, 199-224. Some postcolonial states sought a way between the U.S. and Soviet models. See Jeffrey Byrne, 'Our Own Special Brand of Socialism: Algeria and the Contest of Modernities in the 1960s', *Diplomatic History*, vol. 33, no. 3, (2009), 427-447. There were other development paradigms for Third World nations to draw on too. Many nonaligned countries favoured dependency theory, which argued that the terms of world trade were fundamentally stacked against primary commodity producers in the Global South and offered import-substitution and stricter economic regulation as the solution. Craig N. Murphy, 'What the Third World Wants: an Interpretation of the Development and Meaning of the New International Economic Order', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 1 (1983), 63-65.

²³ Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 28-31, 287-292; Latham, *Modernization as Ideology*, 151-208; Ron Robin, *The Making of a Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 185-205.

World militaries, strengthening their role in national politics and paving the way for military-led coups.²⁴

In general, studies of modernization have argued that these projects failed because of hubris. Taking James Scott's critique of "high modernism" as their starting point, many of these scholars argue that those who designed modernization projects had faith in technocratic solutions that bore little applicability to local social, political, economic or cultural realities.²⁵

One critique of studies privileging modernization is that they conflate all development efforts with modernization theory, when recent scholarship has demonstrated U.S. approaches to development were considerably more pluralistic. Modernization theory was just one approach to the problem of postcolonial development.²⁶ In the 1950s and 1960s, Edward Miller argues, U.S. development practitioners could be divided into "high" and "low modernists". "High modernists" advocated large-scale, top-down projects that would transform the physical environment, inspiring awe in peasant societies. On the other hand, "low modernists" endorsed small-scale, bottom-up, participatory and, low-tech approaches such as land reform and community development. Miller highlights that these approaches often co-existed.

Daniel Immerwahr calls Miller's low modernists "communitarians". They saw community development as "development without modernization". Whereas modernization schemes tended to be imposed by central institutions, community development decentralized decision-making. Such projects empowered local

²⁴ Field, *From Development to Dictatorship*; Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy*; Simpson, *Economists with Guns*. For modernization theory and the military see John J. Johnson, ed., *The Role of the Military in Underdeveloped Countries*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962).

²⁵ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

²⁶ Cullather, *The Hungry World*, 53-108; Miller, *Misalliance*, 56-84; Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: the United States and the lure of Community Development*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Nicole Sackley, 'Village Models: Etawah, India, and the Making and Remaking of Development in the Early Cold War', *Diplomatic History*, vol. 37, no. 4, (2013), 749-778.

communities to select and carry out their own development projects. This approach never dominated, Immerwahr concedes, but it helped shape the development plans of several postcolonial states. The attraction of community development for leaders in the global south was that it was economical and less dependent imports of Western technology and capital. Community development's emphasis on self-help and self-sufficiency allowed the new states to mobilize surplus rural labour at little cost. It also appealed to those Third World leaders who idealized village life and objected to the erasure of local cultures through urbanization and industrialization. Community development's greatest failing, however, was that it often most benefitted local elites and never addressed unequal distributions of wealth and power. Most importantly for the purposes of this study, Immerwahr demonstrates that community development could become a tool for authoritarian governance. Advocates of community development saw such projects as a means of strengthening social solidarities at the village level. But in the Philippines, President Ferdinand Marcos inverted this, using community development to bypass provincial and municipal power holders and to reach directly into the villages. Community development, it seems, could be used to strengthen the centre, just as much as it could strengthen the periphery.²⁷

Modernization theory came under attack in the U.S. social sciences in the late 1960s and foreign aid fell out of favour with the U.S. Congress.²⁸ Yet, as one scholar argues, development in the late sixties and seventies only saw a shift away from large infrastructural projects to population control and Green Revolution technologies. The central tenets of "modernization theory-*cum* policy" continued to inform these efforts, and were backed by development institutions such as the United States' Agency for

²⁷ Immerwahr, *Thinking Small*, 122.

²⁸ Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission*, 226-238.

International Development (USAID), the World Bank, and philanthropic foundations.²⁹ Indeed, Nick Cullather argues that by the late 1960s the high modernism of the Green Revolution triumphed over community development and land reform. Immerwahr, on the other hand, shows that community development projects continued alongside modernization schemes in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This dissertation demonstrates that community development, modernization, and land reform could co-occur as part of the same development package.

Studies of the politics of nation-building and development in Vietnam have focused overwhelmingly on Ngo Dinh Diem's First Republic (1955-1963). The orthodox interpretation argues that the United States "invented" South Vietnam and installed Ngo Dinh Diem as president. As such, Diem's regime had no popular support and South Vietnam was not a viable political entity. In this reading Diem was a tradition-bound mandarin and his appeal to Americans lay largely in his Catholicism. George Herring argues that Diem "had no blueprint for building a modern nation or mobilizing his people". The seeming political stability under Diem, David Anderson argues, convinced the Eisenhower administration that nation-building was working and such readings overlooked fundamental flaws in Diem's regime including dependency, illegitimacy, and repression.³⁰

In recent years the historiography of the Vietnam War has undergone what one scholar has referred to as a "South Vietnamese turn".³¹ Previously marginalised from the study of the war, historians are attempting to restore agency to the South Vietnamese state and society, viewing both as important players in shaping the course

²⁹ Brad Simpson, 'One, Two, Three, Many Modernizations', *Reviews in American History*, vol. 40, no. 1, (2010), 162; Brad Simpson, 'Indonesia's "Accelerated Modernization" and the Global Discourse of Development, 1960-1975', *Diplomatic History*, vol. 33, no. 3, (2009), 479.

³⁰ George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: the United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2002), 59; David L. Anderson, *Trapped by Success: the Eisenhower Administration and Vietnam, 1953-1961*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Carter, *Inventing Vietnam*; Seth Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man in Asia: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia, 1950-1957*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

³¹ Andrew Preston, 'Rethinking the Vietnam War: Orthodoxy and Revisionism', *International Politics Review*, no. 1, (2013), 37-39.

and outcome of the conflict.³² The politics of nation-building and development has occupied a central place in this post-revisionist scholarship. Rather than viewing development as something American officials did *to* South Vietnam, as much of the orthodox literature on the war does, work employing Vietnamese archives has shown the importance of Vietnamese actors in these processes.

In restoring agency to the South Vietnamese regime, these scholars have accepted many of the conclusions of orthodox historians about the failings of South Vietnam and the United States involvements but have provided a much richer and more nuanced account of the war. These scholars have challenged the orthodox view of Diem and have shown that his emergence as leader of South Vietnam was largely his own doing. Miller and Catton in particular argue that Diem was a conservative modernizer with a unique vision for South Vietnam, one which clashed with that of his American patrons. Although Diem appropriated and reinterpreted some aspects of community development and modernization theory, he melded these with the philosophies of Personalism and Confucianism, as well as his understanding of Vietnamese culture, conditions, and needs.

The single greatest threat to the accomplishment of Diem's nation-building goals was the growing insurgency within the South. During the First Indochina War (1946-1954), the Viet Minh, a communist-led nationalist group had built a broad anti-colonial front. They assassinated landlords and French colonial officials, reduced rents, and redistributed land. This secured widespread support among the peasantry. Under the

³² Miller, *Misalliance*; Philip E. Catton, *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam*, (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 2002); Geoffrey C. Stewart, 'Hearts, Minds and Cong Dan Vu: The Special Commissariat for Civic Action and Nation-Building in Ngo Dinh Diem's Vietnam, 1955-1957', *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 6, no. 3, (2011), 44-100; Jessica Chapman, *Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and 1950s Southern Vietnam*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013); Matthew Masur, 'Exhibiting Signs of Resistance: South Vietnam's Struggle for Legitimacy, 1954- 1960', *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 2, (2009), 293-313; Van Nguyen Marshall, 'Student Activism in Time of War: Youth in the Republic of Vietnam, 1960s-1970s', *Journal of Vietnam Studies*, vol. 10, issue 2, 43-81; Nu-Anh Tran, 'South Vietnamese Identity, American Intervention, and the Newspaper *Chinh Luận* [Political Discussion], 1965-1969', *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1-2 (2006), 169-209.

terms of the 1954 Geneva Accords, Viet Minh cadres had been required to regroup north of the 17th parallel though many remained behind in the south. As Diem consolidated his rule in the late 1950s, these cadres began taking limited military actions against ARVN forces. But leaders in Hanoi were divided as to whether to focus on nation-building and development in the North or violent revolution in the South to unify the country. Under pressure from militant North-firsters as well as cadres in the south, and fearful that these might soon be wiped out, in January 1959 Hanoi endorsed the limited actions already underway in the South and began to send cadres down the Ho Chi Minh trail. At the Third Party Congress of the Vietnam Workers' Party in 1960, Hanoi paved the way for the creation of the National Liberation Front, a resurrection of the Viet Minh strategy. The NLF developed a political and guerrilla infrastructure in the villages and once land tenure problems had been resolved, encouraged the adaptation of policy to local conditions. By incorporating villagers into various liberation associations, the NLF encouraged self-rule in the hamlets and consciousness about the struggle movement.³³

Diem's development goals envisioned the mobilization of manpower by fostering a "spirit of voluntarism and self-sacrifice" among the population. Through a series of rural programmes- land development, Agrovilles, and Strategic Hamlets – Diem hoped to establish the GVN's presence in the countryside, increase agricultural output, cement political loyalty to the Saigon regime, and gain strategic advantage against the communists.³⁴ Diem's preference for villagers' self-sufficiency, however, meant that development projects were often under-resourced. As such, the burden of development projects fell on the peasantry, who did not always respond with

³³ Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong: the Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam*, (Cambridge, 1966), 113, 287.

³⁴ Catton, *Diem's Final Failure*, 58-59; Miller, *Misalliance*, passim.

enthusiasm.³⁵ Other scholars have highlighted the considerable pluralism of South Vietnamese society as a barrier to Diem's goals. Jessica Chapman has shown that several politico-religious groups besides communists contested Diem's rule. It was in opposition to these groups, she contends, that Diem established his authoritarian state.³⁶ The post-revisionists agree that Saigon's development policies, particularly the regime's exacting and coercive demands on peasants' labour, and the suppression of political opposition played a significant role in the escalation of the war. Diem's policies created a great deal of rural resentment and proved a boon to the insurgency.

Writing in 1990, George Herring noted that "in much of the writing on the war, the South Vietnamese are conspicuous by their absence". While this is no longer the case for the Diem years, the South Vietnamese continue to be side lined from the historical narrative after 1963 and, in particular, we have little knowledge of domestic politics and nation-building during the Second Republic.³⁷ What we are left with is a rather flat caricature. Some histories acknowledge that some competent Vietnamese existed such as Kien Hoa Province Chief Tran Ngoc Chau, head of the National Training Centre Colonel Nguyen Be, and first Minister for Revolutionary Development Nguyen Duc Thang.³⁸ Other scholars are divided as to whether the South Vietnamese

³⁵ Stewart, 'Hearts, Minds and Cong Dan Vu', 67; Miller, *Misalliance*, 180-182. These scholars also note that the regime's policy prescriptions were couched in the abstract and opaque language of Personalism and proved difficult for local officials to implement.

³⁶ Chapman, *Cauldron of Resistance*, 6. Chapman argues that domestic politics was shaped by debates about decolonization, nationalism, religion, and regionalism more than communism and anti-communism. She also argues that Diem's policies pushed many members of the politico-religious sects to join the NLF.

³⁷ There exist a number of memoirs, biographies, and witness testimonies from politicians, military officials and bureaucrats in the Second Republic which, while useful, are biased and in some cases painfully self-serving. See for example Nguyen Tien Hung and Jerrold L. Shecter, *The Palace File*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1986); Bui Diem with David Chanoff, *In the Jaws of History*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987); Duc, *The Vietnam Peace Negotiations*; Nguyen Cao Ky with Martin J. Wolf, *Buddha's Child: My Fight to Save South Vietnam*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001); K.W. Taylor ed., *Voices from the Second Republic of South Vietnam (1967-1975)*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2014); Cao Van Vien, *The Final Collapse*, (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1983); Stephen T. Hosmer et al, *The Fall of South Vietnam: statements by Vietnamese Military and Civilian Leaders*, (New York: Crane, Russak, 1980).

³⁸ For Tran Ngoc Chau see Thomas L. Ahern, *The CIA and Rural Pacification in South Vietnam*, CIA History, available at http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/48/3_CIA_AND_RURAL_PACIFICA

leaders were puppets, with one historian going so far as to say RVN leaders were merely “pawns” in the United States’ Cold War game, or whether their resistance, obstructionism, or incompetence were responsible for the United States’ failure in Vietnam.³⁹ For some scholars, it was the absence of political leadership in Saigon that frustrated American attempts to build a nation in South Vietnam. The RVN, Jefferson Marquis tells us, “lacked strong, like-minded leaders with whom U.S. managers could collaborate in shaping a new, American-inspired political reality”. Fredrik Logevall says that there were some dedicated anti-Communist nationalists in South Vietnam, though never in sufficient numbers. “Overall, incompetence, corruption, and infighting characterized the political leadership in Saigon”. Others note that the U.S. struggled to achieve its goals in part because, as Herring says, “the United States could not get the South Vietnamese to do what they wanted... as their commitment increased, their leverage diminished”.⁴⁰ Richard Hunt, in one of the most thorough studies of counterinsurgency in Vietnam, essentially concludes that the United States did not have enough leverage over the GVN.⁴¹ If the GVN leaders really were puppets, then it is understandable that they should be marginalized from the story. But if it is the case that the United States could not get RVN officials to do what they wanted them to do, then RVN agency, ideas, plans, and policies matter.

In the years after 1963, the joint U.S.-South Vietnamese effort suffered from two critical flaws: the absence of a coherent counterinsurgency strategy and a crisis of

TION.pdf, 124-135; for Nguyen Be see Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 242-249; for Nguyen Duc Thang see James McAllister, ‘What can One Man do? Nguyen Duc Thang and the Limits of Reform in South Vietnam’, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2009). The American admiration for these men rested largely on their seeing eye to eye with certain Americans as to how the war should be fought.

³⁹ Randall B. Woods, *Shadow Warrior: William Egan Colby and the CIA*, (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 308.

⁴⁰ George C. Herring, “‘Peoples Quite Apart’: Americans, South Vietnamese, and the War in Vietnam”, *Diplomatic History*, vol. 14, no. 1, (1990), 1; Jefferson P. Marquis, ‘The Other Warriors: American Social Science and Nation Building in Vietnam’, *Diplomatic History*, vol. 24, no. 1, (2000), 81; Fredrik Logevall, “‘There Ain’t No Daylight’: Lyndon Johnson and the Politics of Escalation”, in Mark P. Bradley and Marilyn B. Young eds., *Making Sense of the Vietnam Wars: Local, National, and Transnational Perspectives*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 94.

⁴¹ Hunt, *Pacification*, 279.

political legitimacy in Saigon. Not only was the GVN unable to stamp its authority on the countryside but it faced persistent opposition in the cities. Some scholars have identified this lack of legitimacy as one of the principle shortcomings of the U.S. war effort.⁴²

Between 1964 and 1968, one of the shortcomings of pacification was that it meant different things to different people and there was a never an overarching conceptual idea for how it should operate, nor could the United States and GVN even agree on a preferred term. U.S. and GVN officials disagreed as to the level at which to fight the war, whether it should focus on political operatives and guerrillas in the villages or main forces in the jungles and highlands. They also disagreed about the level of government through which policy should be executed, whether the Corps, province, district, or village. But broadly speaking pacification was a combination of counter-insurgency and development. Generally, it meant concentrating on the villages rather than fighting the NLF and North Vietnamese main force troops by surrounding the population with government forces, rooting out communist political operatives, holding elections, delivering goods and services to the population, and carrying out development projects. All this sought to eliminate the grievances which encouraged peasants to take up arms, integrate these areas into the political and economic life of South Vietnam and to secure the loyalty of the population. The goal of pacification was therefore to establish the writ and legitimacy of the government in rural areas. The hope was that this would strengthen South Vietnam so much that the NLF and Hanoi would have to abandon their goals. Part of the resistance to this effort was that many ARVN and U.S. military leaders believed in military victory, whereas pacification could only offer a political victory or, more likely, a political stalemate.

⁴² James McAllister, “‘A Fiasco of Noble Proportions’: the Johnson Administration and the South Vietnamese Elections of 1967”, *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 73, no. 4 (2004), 619; Gregory Daddis, *Westmoreland’s War: Reassessing American Strategy in Vietnam*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 161.

Following Diem's overthrow by his generals in November 1963, the Military Revolutionary Council abandoned the Strategic Hamlet Program but failed to replace it with a new counterinsurgency concept. Rural pacification largely came to a standstill as military leaders conspired against one another in as many as twenty coups and countercoups, with brief periods of civilian rule followed by military takeovers. Even those ARVN officers interested in pacification believed that it was a pointless endeavour as long as there was no meaningful government in Saigon. In late 1963, Hanoi endorsed the strategy of "General Offensive, General Uprising" which sought a rapid build-up of conventional military forces to precipitate the collapse of the Saigon regime prior to U.S. intervention.⁴³ The GVN lost control of hundreds of villages in 1964. In the autumn of that year, Hanoi began sending units of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), down the Ho Chi Minh Trail.⁴⁴ By the following spring the GVN was close to collapse. In the absence of any leadership in Saigon the United States intervened and took control of the war. Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston show that the Johnson administration did this despite ambivalent domestic and allied opinion and many administration policymakers' own reservations about the chances for success.⁴⁵

Orthodox historians maintain that U.S. military commander William Westmoreland did not understand counterinsurgency and as such fought the wrong war in Vietnam. Rather than seeking out the NLF's operatives and establishing the GVN's rule in the villages, Westmoreland launched "search and destroy" missions against NLF and PAVN main force units in the hope that he could generate a 'body count' so high that the U.S. and GVN would reach a "crossover point" where they killed more troops than the enemy could put into battle. These historians often cite the "Program for the

⁴³ Nguyen, 'The War Politburo', 15-16.

⁴⁴ *The Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), vol. 2, 515-623; McAllister, 'What can One Man do?', 123; Asselin, *Hanoi's Road to the Vietnam War*, 3.

⁴⁵ Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: the Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of the War in Vietnam*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Andrew Preston, *The War Council: McGeorge Bundy, the NSC, and Vietnam*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Long-Term Development and Pacification of Vietnam”, a 1966 study which was at least an implicit criticism of Westmoreland’s strategy and argued for a shift in priorities from the main force war to the villages, as well as social and political reform.⁴⁶ More recently, historians Gregory Daddis and Andrew Birtle have argued that Westmoreland developed a much more comprehensive strategy than has ordinarily been accepted which included aspects of counterinsurgency, civic action, and attempts to win over the South Vietnamese population. Both Daddis and Birtle argue that Westmoreland’s strategy was in keeping with the main tenets of PROVN and that no strategy could focus exclusively on counterinsurgency without first taking on the major units of the NLF and PAVN. Daddis concludes it is possible to devise a sound strategy and still lose.⁴⁷

Pacification received something of a boost in the second half of 1965 with the return of a semblance of political stability in Saigon. In June 1965, a faction of “Young Turks” came to power, with Air Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky and General Nguyen Van Thieu at the helm as Prime Minister and Chief of State respectively. Ky and Thieu showed more interest in pacification than any GVN leaders since Diem. Ky appointed Nguyen Duc Thang as Minister of Rural Construction, who one scholar says was the only ARVN general that U.S. officials “universally recognized to be exceptional”. In January 1966, Thang formed the Rural Development (RD) cadre which became the cornerstone of Vietnamese pacification efforts until the Tet Offensive. Based on a concept developed by Kien Hoa province chief Tran Ngoc Chau and the CIA’s Political Action Teams, RD consisted of armed and mobile 59 person teams trained in nationalist ideology at the National Cadre Training Centre in Vung Tau.⁴⁸ The RD cadres’ goal

⁴⁶ George C. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: a Different Kind of War*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 73-74; Lewis Sorley, *Westmoreland: the General who Lost Vietnam*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2011), 104-105.

⁴⁷ Daddis, *Westmoreland’s War*, passim; Andrew Birtle, ‘PROVN, Westmoreland, and the Historians: A Reappraisal’, *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 72, no. 4, (2008), 1213-1247.

⁴⁸ Ahern, *CIA and Rural Pacification*, 124-132.

was to win the rural population over to the side of the government. Once an area had been secured, RD cadres carried out “a staggering array of tasks” including restoring local government, enlisting the participation of the villagers in community self-help projects, providing medical assistance, and increasing access to agricultural credit. However, RD teams suffered from poor political education and from high attrition and desertion rates. By the end of 1966 the government could claim to have secured only one third of the country’s hamlets.⁴⁹ Senior ARVN officers continued to show little interest in pacification while South Vietnam’s four Corps commanders ran their areas like personal fiefdoms and controlled the appointment of province and district chiefs. Thang, in particular, believed that only by decreasing the power of the Corps Commanders could Saigon “exert control throughout the country”.⁵⁰

At the Honolulu Conference in February 1966, Johnson demanded that U.S. officials and the GVN pay greater attention to pacification. For Johnson, development might legitimise his war and offered a means of directly countering the insurgency in the southern countryside. U.S. officials tended to respond to such exhortations by focusing on the organizational mechanisms of pacification. Each U.S. agency involved in pacification jealously guarded its sphere of influence and there was almost a total lack of coordination among them. But the focus on management meant little critical reflection on the underlying premises and assumptions of pacification. Following three conferences - at Honolulu in February 1966, Manila in October 1966, and Guam in March 1967- pacification received renewed emphasis as the GVN made promises to dedicate more resources to the effort and the U.S. managerial machinery was reorganized. This culminated with the establishment of Civil Operations and

⁴⁹ McAllister, ‘What can One Man Do?’, 118; Hunt, *Pacification*, 36-37; CIA Directorate of Intelligence, ‘Intelligence Report: the Situation in South Vietnam (Weekly)’, 20 February 1967, *Declassified Documents Reference System* (hereafter *DDRS*), Document No.: CK3100015760; ‘Revolutionary Development Program for April, 1966’, 31 May 1966, *DDRS*, Document No.: CK3100454122.

⁵⁰ McCallister, ‘What Can One Man Do?’, 137. McAllister also highlights that the behavior of ARVN troops, which included beating up civilians and stealing livestock, did much to undermine the work of the RD cadres.

Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) in May 1967. CORDS was integrated into the U.S. military command with Robert Komer, serving as Westmoreland's civilian deputy, taking responsibility for the overall management of pacification. CORDS placed U.S. military and civilian advisers alongside their South Vietnamese counterparts down to the district level. USAID continued to run economic stabilization, public works and public health. This remained the way the U.S. pacification and development machinery was organized until 1973.⁵¹

The managerial machinery was just one shortcoming of pacification, however. The U.S. and GVN failed to develop an overarching strategic concept for pacification. Equally as problematic, between 1965 and 1968 pacification projects continued to suffer from a lack of GVN and ARVN interest. Where GVN officials did show interest, projects designed in Saigon or in the province and district capitals were imposed on rural villages and lacked popular participation. Unlike the redistributive policies of the NLF, these projects at best focused on boosting rural incomes but left the social relations of rural South Vietnam unchanged. Furthermore, so much of the countryside was either firmly in the NLF's hands or was so heavily contested that RD cadres could only operate in about 40% of the country and in many areas pacification and development were not possible at all.

With increased rural security after the Tet Offensive, pacification would assume a different character as South Vietnamese leaders took greater interest in the subject and developed a more coherent conceptual approach. Rather than simply pumping money into the country's villages this new approach sought to purposely undermine the power of the Corps Commanders and the province and district chiefs, and instead emphasised popular mobilization, decentralization and socio-economic reform at the village level. The key change after Tet was the prospect of political competition with the NLF. This

⁵¹ *The Pentagon Papers*, vol. 2, 515-623; Hunt, *Pacification*, 88-91; Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 72-81.

compelled Saigon's leaders to take pacification more seriously as a means of maintaining the regime in power, establish the authority of the government across the country, and increasing its popular legitimacy and a base of support in the countryside.

While the ARVN and U.S. military tried to get to grips with counterinsurgency and development in the countryside, the GVN's political position in the cities remained fragile. In the years after Diem's overthrow, successive governments faced vocal student and Buddhist opposition. Much of this popular opposition to the government was based on its illegitimacy. Certainly, many objected to the government's stance on the war, but conflict also centred on the transition to legal and constitutional government as well as the distribution of political power among different civilian and military groups, with the religious and regional identities they carried.⁵²

The clearest indication of the GVN's difficulty establishing its authority and legitimacy in urban areas prior to the Tet Offensive was the 1966 Buddhist "Struggle Movement" in the northern provinces of the country. In response to the military's continued monopoly on power, these protesters demanded the return of legal and constitutional government and the participation of the NLF in political life. Further illustrating Saigon's difficulties in asserting its power throughout the country, the local Corps Commander Nguyen Chanh Thi, sided with the protesters, as did his replacement, and dissident ARVN units soon promised to resist any effort by Saigon to reassert its control in the north.⁵³

⁵² 'National Intelligence Estimate Number 53-66: Problems of Political Development in South Vietnam over the Next Year or So', 15 December 1966, CIA Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, (hereafter CIA-FOIA), Document No.: 0001166478.

⁵³ Intelligence Note from the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Hughes) to Secretary of State Rusk, 19 March 1966, document no. 99, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1964-1968, vol. IV, Vietnam, 1966; Robert J. Topmiller, *The Lotus Unleashed: the Buddhist Peace Movement in South Vietnam, 1964-1966*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 33-91; Thomas Ahern, *The CIA and the Generals: Covert Support to Military Government in South Vietnam*, CIA History, released 19 February 2009, 41-42; available at http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/48/1_CIA_AND_THE_GENERALS.pdf; accessed 17 December 2014.

Although the GVN soon moved against the dissident units and crushed the protest movement, the combination of U.S. and civilian Vietnamese demands for the return of a legal government compelled the regime to hold elections for a constituent assembly. Despite CIA meddling and a Buddhist boycott, the September 1966 election had a respectable turn out and returned a mix of regional and religious representation. Many politically active Vietnamese saw the election as positive manifestation of the military's willingness to return to legitimate rule. Nonetheless, the Military Directorate made it clear that it would not tolerate a challenge to the military's role in politics and the Constituent Assembly considerably scaled back proposals which would have endowed the legislature with greater powers. Even so, the proposed National Assembly would still have some real authority if the executive branch proved unable to capture it.⁵⁴

The Constitution of the Second Republic of Vietnam was promulgated on 1 April 1967. It called for presidential elections and, problematically for the United States, both Ky and Thieu planned to run. If there was to be a military victory, Ky was the preferred candidate for most U.S. officials. A Thieu victory, two State Department staffers noted, "would be considered a victory for the status quo... and for conservatism in the political, economic, and social fields". On the other hand, one scholar argues, U.S. officials were virtually unanimous that a joint Ky-Thieu ticket would be disastrous because it would make the electoral competition impossible for civilian candidates and would play extremely badly in South Vietnam and internationally. But despite the exhortations of Ky's supporters and U.S. officials, Thieu refused to step aside.⁵⁵

The senior generals met at an Armed Forces Council meeting in June and came to an agreement that U.S. officials had feared: Thieu would head the military ticket with

⁵⁴ Ahern, *The CIA and the Generals*, 42-50; 'National Intelligence Estimate Number 53-66: Problems of Political Development in South Vietnam over the Next Year or So', CIA-FOIA; CIA Directorate of Intelligence, 'Intelligence Report: the Situation in South Vietnam (Weekly)', 20 February 1967, *DDRS*, Document No.: CK3100015760.

⁵⁵ McAllister, "A Fiasco of Noble Proportions", 625-639.

Ky as his Vice Presidential candidate. The generals agreed that as president Thieu would be a “figurehead” and Vice President Ky would be “de facto in command”. As a result of his refusal to step aside in the interest of military unity, Thieu had suffered a loss of prestige among the generals for “his total preoccupation with and concentration of his own personal ambitions”.⁵⁶ The generals also drew up a plan for a “Secret Military Committee” to maintain control of government after the election, described as “a scheme for ‘guided democracy’ in which half a dozen generals would decide finally what is good and bad for the country”.⁵⁷

Thieu and Ky used the GVN machinery to get out the vote and barred some potentially popular candidates from running. The remaining 17 civilian candidates had few campaign funds and the GVN deliberately obstructed their campaigning.⁵⁸ On election day the Thieu-Ky ticket won 35% of the vote, much less than U.S. officials expected and much to the despair of several candidates who condemned the military regime’s fraudulent practices.⁵⁹ The military victory was somewhat ameliorated by the promulgation of the constitution and the return of a legal government. Phan Quang Dan, imprisoned by Diem’s regime for three years in the early 1960s, might have spoken for many civilian non-Communists when he said that Thieu “must recognize that we are all behind him, that this is a time for bold leadership and that if such leadership is provided there would be few genuine nationalists who oppose him”.⁶⁰ Many of the civilians who would join the government in subsequent years, Dan included, had resigned themselves to a permanent military regime with a veneer of civilian participation.

⁵⁶ ‘Agreement between Chief of State Thieu and Prime Minister Ky that Thieu, as President, will be a figurehead and Ky, as Vice President, will retain principal control after the elections’, 2 July 1967, CIA-FOIA, Document No.: 0000447082.

⁵⁷ McAllister, “‘A Fiasco of Noble Proportions’”, 647.

⁵⁸ Ahern, *The CIA and the Generals*, 55-56.

⁵⁹ Telegram from the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State, 13 September 1967, document no. 320, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. V, Vietnam, 1967.

⁶⁰ Walt Rostow (Washington) to the President (LBJ Ranch), 27 December 1967, Vietnam 1E (1) 10/66-12/67, Post Inaugural Political Activity [1 of 3], National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Box 61, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum, Austin, TX (hereafter LBJL).

There was, therefore, some cause for optimism in Washington in the autumn of 1967. The United States had finally reorganized its pacification management machinery under a single civilian authority and integrated it into the military chain of command. Even if the election had been of questionable transparency, it did appear to herald the return to constitutional and stable government in Saigon after years of coups and outright illegitimate rule. Worryingly, however, it appeared that the Thieu-Ky rivalry would continue to grow. Almost immediately after the election Thieu moved to isolate his Vice President from decision-making. The U.S. administration was acutely aware of the continued problems of public perception of its ally and the war effort in the United States. Washington therefore passed a message to Saigon from Johnson requesting that Bunker, Komer and Westmoreland “search urgently for occasions to present sound evidence of progress in Vietnam”. Joining the public relations campaign back in Washington, on November 21 Westmoreland told an audience at the National Press Club that the United States had reached a point “where the end begins to come into view”.⁶¹

The Tet Offensive shattered these illusions, compelling the Johnson administration to reassess its strategy and to abandon hope of military victory. Facing sharp divisions within his administration, a huge erosion of public support, and Democrat challengers to his presidency, on March 31 Johnson announced a partial bombing halt and reiterated his previous offers for peace, as well as announcing that he would not run in the 1968 election. Exploratory peace talks began between U.S. and North Vietnamese representatives in Paris in May but made no progress as neither side had any intention of offering substantive concessions.⁶²

⁶¹ Walt Rostow to Ambassador Bunker, 27 September 1967, Vietnam 1C (1), 3/67-10/67, Revolutionary Development Program [2 of 2], Box 58, Vietnam Country File, National Security File, LBJL; Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 145-147.

⁶² Asselin, *A Bitter Peace*, 7; Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 151-177. Herring argues that the administration did not really change tack after March 31. Johnson, Rusk and Rostow continued to harbour hopes of military victory until the very end of the administration but the basic readjustment, a partial bombing halt

The beginning of the talks raised the possibility of a cease-fire and political settlement to the war. With this in mind, each side geared up for political competition. The NLF began to establish “liberation committees” in the countryside to enhance its claim to represent the South Vietnamese people.⁶³ Another NLF front group, the Alliance for National, Democratic and Peace Forces sent operatives to urban centres to mobilize support for a coalition government. Each of these moves provoked considerable anxiety in Saigon. The GVN feared that NLF participation in the peace talks would confer legitimacy on an illegal organization and constitute the first step toward a coalition. When the United States and North Vietnam agreed to expanded four party talks in October 1968, Saigon therefore refused to send representatives to Paris.⁶⁴

Robert Komer and his deputy William Colby believed that they had the best strategy for the political contest with the NLF. Following the Tet Offensive, Hanoi ordered NLF forces to continue their assaults against South Vietnam’s cities, resulting in devastating casualties. As they retreated after the failed “mini-Tet” offensives in May and August, the United States subjected them to massive B52 bombings. U.S. and ARVN forces then leapfrogged NLF units, attacking them from the rear as well as assassinating NLF political operatives who had surfaced during the offensives.⁶⁵ This devastating violence created a political vacuum in many parts of the countryside and

and negotiations, was forced by those who felt there was no end in sight under the current strategy. This changed the nature of the war and the U.S. strategy from one focusing on military victory to one seeking a settlement.

⁶³ Viet-Nam Documents and Research Notes Document No. 47 “People’s Revolutionary Administrations”: A Progress Report, 31 December 1968, Folder 04, Box 03, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 05 - National Liberation Front, TTU-VVA, Item No.: 2310304009.

⁶⁴ Truong Nhu Tang with David Chanoff and Doan Van Toai, *A Viet Cong Memoir: An Inside Account of the Vietnam War and Its Aftermath*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 132-147; Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 151-177; Larry Berman, *Lyndon Johnson’s War: the Road to Stalemate in Vietnam*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 176-203; Robert K. Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy: the NLF’s Foreign Relations and the Vietnam War*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 77-80. By far the single biggest threat to the GVN was the emergence of the NLF’s Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) in June 1969. The PRG challenged the GVN both domestically, by serving as a rallying point for anti-GVN elements, and internationally, by competing for diplomatic recognition as the official government of South Vietnam.

⁶⁵ Ngo Vinh Long, ‘The Tet Offensive and its Aftermath’ in Marc Jason Gilbert and William P. Head eds. *The Tet Offensive*, (Westport, CT.: Praeger, 1996), 89-123; Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 168.

with the prospect of a ceasefire in place, Komer and Colby wanted the GVN to fill this vacuum by rapidly extending its control into the countryside.

Both Colby and Komer were concerned, however, that the U.S. military did not understand the fundamental ways in which the war had changed since Tet and with the initiation of negotiations. In mid-September, Colby therefore briefed U.S. military leaders that the purpose of the Liberation Committees was to support Communist claims of political legitimacy and authority in the countryside during the peace talks. The solution was “a vigorous extension of security and political presence by the government, with American support” in order “to meet any VC political challenge to [the GVN’s] sovereignty”. This would be achieved by local security forces, while the GVN would establish “democratic legitimacy in the villages” to counter the claims of the Liberation Committees. Westmoreland’s successor, General Creighton Abrams, endorsed Colby’s reasoning.⁶⁶

If some U.S. officials like Colby believed that the GVN had to extend its authority into the villages, they believed that building a strong, nationwide, anti-Communist political party was the other side of the same coin. Much of the time this effort received the priority attention of the U.S. embassy, the CIA station, and Colby himself. Indeed, far from the neat picture of village-based pacification that Colby paints in his memoirs, his initial reaction to the Tet Offensive was very different. In the days immediately after the offensive, a group of CIA officers known as “the brethren”, including Colby, composed a memo known as “Operation Shock” in which condemned the GVN as incompetent, corrupt, and uncommitted to the war effort. They recommended that Thieu be given 100 days to get the GVN house in order and if he failed to do so the United States should replace him and reserve its position on further aid. During the hundred day period Ky would be charged with organizing a political

⁶⁶ William E. Colby with James McCargar, *Lost Victory: A Firsthand Account of America’s Sixteen Year Involvement in Vietnam*. (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1989); Hunt, *Pacification*, 155.

front uniting all anti-Communists “to develop the country and free it of Viet Cong terror”.⁶⁷

The question of how to organize non-Communist political forces in South Vietnam for political competition with the Communists was one of the main points of contention between Thieu and the United States, and an area in which U.S. officials found they had little leverage and little success. CIA analysts had long complained that there was a lack of national political cohesion in South Vietnam, with a multiplicity of urban-based political groups each seeking only to further their narrow goals.⁶⁸ U.S. embassy and CIA officials repeatedly pressured Thieu to unite South Vietnam’s non-Communist elites. The preferred method was anti-Communist fronts, coalitions of fragmented political parties and trade unions which might become the foundation for a broad-based nationwide political party that could get behind the GVN. Thieu’s office, on the other hand, was sceptical of the unity, representation and leadership abilities of such groups.⁶⁹ So while Thieu showed some interest in such fronts, it was largely to please the United States. In May 1968 he launched the Lien Minh, an umbrella group comprised of a labour union and two anti-Communist fronts which had formed just after the Tet Offensive. Bunker complained that Thieu offered no leadership to the group. When the ambassador asked Thieu to use the GVN machinery to support the group, Thieu deflected, telling Bunker he would prefer to see the Lien Minh grow naturally and that he wanted people to view it as independent of the government.⁷⁰

No doubt, Thieu squandered chances for anti-Communist unity. The return to constitutional government in 1967 combined with the shocks of the Tet Offensive in

⁶⁷ Ahern, *The CIA and the Generals*, 73-74; Woods, *Shadow Warrior*, 283-284.

⁶⁸ ‘National Intelligence Estimate Number 53-66: Problems of Political Development in South Vietnam over the Next Year or So’, CIA-FOIA.

⁶⁹ ‘Some current problems public opinion, international and domestic press is keeping track of, inquiring about’ [Một số vấn đề hiện đang được dư luận và báo chí ngoại quốc cùng như trong nước theo dõi, thắc mắc], March 1968, folder 790, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

⁷⁰ U.S. Embassy Saigon to Secretary of State, Saigon Tel 44649, 12 December 1968, Vietnam 1C (4)-A 10/68- 1/69, Revolutionary Development Program, Box 60, Vietnam Country File, National Security File, LBJL.

1968 offered a much greater reason for anti-Communists to unite. Certainly, he viewed strong political parties and front groups in Saigon as threats to his authority but he also doubted that these factions could be united. Instead, Thieu had a very different vision of governance, one that he believed was more fitting for Vietnamese society than Western concepts of political organization and more appropriate in the contest against the Communists. Thieu wanted to bypass elite Saigon politics, strengthen the executive and devolve limited authority down to the village level. Development was a crucial component of this vision of governance because popular participation in development projects would create a sense of community, offering the peasantry an alternative to participation in national and pluralistic party politics. The goal was a mobilized but depoliticised population.

Thieu repeatedly made clear to his U.S. patrons what his intentions were for political organization. In a meeting with Secretary of Defence Melvin Laird in March 1969, Thieu said South Vietnam had more politicians than businessmen and they refused to work together. Thieu said he would try to unite them but first, and more importantly, he believed that “building a base in the countryside” through hamlet and village elections and development projects was more important than uniting politicians in Saigon, many of whom had no popular following. “I have called for a revolution in the countryside to win popular support” Thieu told Laird.⁷¹

U.S. officials continued to push for non-Communist fronts even after Thieu had elaborated and had begun to implement his vision of governance. In May 1970, Bunker again asked Thieu about the prospects that the parties of his anti-Communist front might finally cooperate. Thieu was not enthusiastic about “the old political leaders... the old

⁷¹ ‘Meeting of Secretary of Defense with President Thieu’, 8 March 1969, Vietnam- Secretary Laird’s Trip to Vietnam, March 5-12, Box 70, Vietnam Subject Files, National Security Council (NSC) Files, Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA., (hereafter Nixon Library).

trees have to die away and new trees grow up in their place”. Instead, Thieu told Bunker:

the way to develop political organization and support for the government was to begin at the village level through the development of village government, giving villages autonomy, getting the people involved in their own development efforts; through the Land to the Tiller program; through the organization of cooperatives of various kinds; getting the people to feel that they need each other and need the government; in turn the government should support them.⁷²

Bunker appears to have gotten the message, reporting to Nixon shortly after that “Thieu has taken the position that the politicians must first demonstrate their ability to work together and to mobilize the masses at the village and hamlet level for the political competition to come”.⁷³

For Thieu, this kind of village-based development could bulwark his authoritarian governance without encouraging genuine democracy or the nurturing of a political elite that might threaten the stability of his regime. In this respect there were valuable lessons to be learned from other authoritarian states. Many South Vietnamese political elites admired other anti-Communist governments because they believed authoritarianism was a preferable form of social organization and political decision-making. These states appeared to achieve the goals of development more efficiently because of the absence of political pluralism. Pham Kim Ngoc, the South Vietnamese Minister of Economy noted his admiration for Singapore’s “authoritarian government” because it could “get things done without too much politicking”.⁷⁴ In the middle of 1968

⁷² ‘Meeting with President Thieu, May 3, 1970’, Vietnam Special Studies Group [1 of 2], Box 118, Vietnam Subject Files, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

⁷³ Douglas Pike ed., *The Bunker Papers: Reports to the President from Vietnam*, (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1990), vol. 3, 689.

⁷⁴ ‘Salient points made by Pham Kim Ngoc, South Vietnam’s Minister of Economy, during his visit to Singapore (2-5 May 73)’, Memcon-Singapore Aug. 4, 1973, National Security Adviser: Saigon Embassy Files Taken by Amb. Graham Martin (copies), 1963-1975 (1976), Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, MI., (hereafter Ford Library).

a group of prominent South Vietnamese calling themselves the National Anti-Communist Forces wrote to Thieu, condemning his plan to appoint the supposedly too moderate Tran Van Huong as Prime Minister. “We believe”, they wrote, “the present situation of the country requires a Hitler (though he was a dictator) or a Mustapha Kemal (though he was licentious) in order to save the day”.⁷⁵ Authoritarian leaders, it seemed, got results.

South Vietnam’s leaders justified their authoritarianism by arguing that the Vietnamese people were not ready for Western-style, liberal democracy and that, in any case, the RVN was a democracy of sorts. Nguyen Phut Tan, author of a then widely cited history of modern Vietnam and an expert in the Office of the Special Assistant for Political and Cultural Research in the Presidential Palace, argued that the West had taken many centuries to reach “political maturity and active democratic freedoms”. “Freedom and political equality require the political maturity of the entire population”, Tan noted, “... in other words, the degree of freedom and equality goes with this level of maturity”.⁷⁶ In an interview with journalist Oriana Fallaci in January 1973 Thieu said that “democracy as they have it in America, or as you have it in Europe, cannot exist here yet. We’re not ready for it”. Nonetheless he also claimed that South Vietnam was “the most democratic country” when compared to others in the region. “Maybe not as democratic as you would like”, Thieu said “but democracy is not a standard that can be applied in an identical way everywhere”.⁷⁷

In some respects, Thieu was not being disingenuous. In the years after the Tet Offensive the GVN would implement its vision of governance through three pillars of rural development: “restoring village traditions, implementing the democratic rule of

⁷⁵ ‘Letter from National Anti-Communist Forces to RVN President, Vice President, and Prime Minister’, 4 May 1968, folder 790, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

⁷⁶ Nguyễn Phút Tấn, Office of the Special Assistant to the President for Political and Cultural Research [Phụ Tá Đặc Biệt về Nghiên Cứu Chánh Trị Văn Hóa], 11 March 1970, folder 113, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

⁷⁷ Oriana Fallaci, *Interview with History*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977), 69.

law, and modernizing rural life”.⁷⁸ In 1967 the GVN re-established hamlet and village elections restoring the tradition of village autonomy for the first time since Diem and Nhu, having abolished these elections in 1956, briefly reinstated them in strategic hamlets.⁷⁹ The idea was also to introduce limited democracy; peasants could usually only vote for one of two or three approved candidates. The government would greatly expand these elections in subsequent years. Modernizing rural life on the other hand included the introduction of new high-yield rice varieties, fertilizer, agricultural credit, and land reform to boost rural incomes, giving peasants another reason to support the government. In attempting to restore tradition and modernize life, the GVN shared with other postcolonial elites the tendency to both romanticise rural life and desire to reform it.

As Colby and Komer were formulating their ideas for the post-Tet political competition, the GVN was doing the same. In a cabinet meeting in August 1968 GVN leaders discussed rural development plans for the following year. Rather than pouring resources into insecure areas as in the past, the government would focus on restoring security in these areas, applying only a light development touch. Elsewhere, the government would focus its development efforts on consolidating villages that had relatively good security and had held local elections. In these villages the GVN would encourage “the full participation of the people”, creating opportunities for self-government and allowing villagers to select development projects through community consensus. This marked a significant departure from previous strategies whereby province officials imposed programs on distant villages; it also marked a shift from modernization to community development. But along with the “benefits” of “community development” was the “responsibility” of “community security”. Villagers

⁷⁸ ‘Pushing forward the 1968 Rural Construction Program’ [v/v xúc tiến chương trình Xây Dựng Nông Thôn 1968], 1 June 1968, folder 57, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

⁷⁹ Miller, *Misalliance*, 236.

would be expected to join the People's Self-Defence Forces to fight against the Communists, which along with the better equipped Popular Forces and government cadres were now placed under the authority of the popularly elected village chief.⁸⁰ By restoring elections, encouraging community development projects, and forming PSDF units, Saigon sought to implement a model of decentralized governance that would allow peasants to participate in self-government, self-development and self-defence.

In a series of seminars in each of South Vietnam's four military regions in the late summer and early autumn of 1968 Thieu drove these points home. He told his commanders that if the Communists saw that they could not win militarily, they would turn to political war. The GVN's pacification and development program would therefore decide "the survival of the nation in a time of war as well as peace". The key elements were territorial security, strong local government, and development projects to improve rural living standards and to revive the rural economy. "We must base [social values]" Thieu told his province chiefs "on the following standard: community security and community prosperity within which the citizens voluntarily participate in programmes that bring benefits to their villages and their families".⁸¹ Once these programmes had been satisfactorily completed, "one man, one vote" elections could occur. The people would vote for anti-Communist nationalists and South Vietnam "will have a strong, national government".⁸² Thieu was evidently already thinking in terms of political competition even if he had not yet settled on the exact modalities.

⁸⁰ 'Main points regarding rural construction raised at the cabinet council meeting, 22 August 1968' [Những điểm chính yếu về XDNT nêu trình trong phiên họp hội đồng nội các ngày 22-8-1968], folder 57, PTTDNCH- TTLTQGII.

⁸¹ 'Summary of suggestions, queries, and obstacles that the province chiefs of Military Region II presented at the Rural Construction seminar, 2 October 1968 at Pleiku' [Tóm Tắt những đề nghị, thắc mắc và trở ngại do các tỉnh trưởng thuộc vùng 2 chiến thuật trình bày trong Buổi hội thảo XDNT Ngày 2-10-1968 tại Pleiku], folder 58, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

⁸² 'RVN President's Guidance in Rural Construction Seminars in the 4 Military Regions (military region 4 on 23 August 1968, military region 3 on 27 August 1968, military region 1 on 27 September 1968, and military region 2 on 2 October 1968)' [Hiệu Thi của Tổng Thống VNCH trong Buổi Hội Thảo Về Xây Dựng Nông Thôn tại 4 Vùng Chiến Thuật (vùng 4 chiến thuật ngày 23-8-68, vùng 3 chiến thuật ngày 27-8-68, vùng 1 chiến thuật ngày 27-9-68 và vùng 2 chiến thuật ngày 2-10-68)], folder 58, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

Although the GVN had begun to outline a new vision for counterinsurgency and development in the countryside, as of the autumn of 1968 Thieu was still thinking in terms of consolidation. U.S. officials, on the other hand, wanted urgency. Pacification was placed on hold for months after Tet despite Komer's attempts to persuade Thieu to take the offensive. In the face of continued NLF and North Vietnamese attacks against urban areas Thieu preferred to concentrate on reconstruction and defence of the cities. Having secured Abrams' endorsement and aware of Thieu's preference for consolidation, on October 1 Komer and Colby sought to convince the RVN president of the merits of an Accelerated Pacification Campaign (APC). Based on the CORDS-designed Hamlet Evaluation System, the goal of the APC would be to consolidate control in A, B, and C-rated hamlets and upgrade 1,000 less secure D and E hamlets to a minimum C rating by the end of January 1969.⁸³ Although concerned that the APC might stretch development cadres thin and possibly lead to regression in secure areas, Thieu endorsed the campaign plan. Indeed, while the Americans emphasized local security and attacks on the NLF infrastructure, Thieu's main focus was on the development aspects of the campaign. He recommended that in the more secure A, B and C hamlets territorial forces would provide security while the GVN pursued "a program of perfect administration and development". In D and E hamlets, where there was to be no PSDF, ARVN regular forces would provide a screen for RF troops while RD cadres conducted "limited political organization and administration" and "limited development programs". In the NLF controlled V hamlets the ARVN would continue to bombard the NLF and, aside from periodic civic action, there would be no political or

⁸³ Based on a host of subjective questions about local political, military and economic conditions, the HES rated the security status of each of the country's hamlets. A, B and C indicated relative GVN control, D and E denoted contested hamlets, while hamlets under NLF control were rated as V.

development efforts. This remained the pattern of development for the next several years.⁸⁴

U.S. and ARVN forces launched the APC on November 1. They established rural security posts in villages' central hamlets and along roads and canals and regained control of many NLF areas in the countryside. In other areas outlying hamlets were bombed and shelled, forcing the population in hamlets previously controlled by the revolutionary forces to relocate around GVN posts.⁸⁵ While historians have often written about South Vietnam's urban refugee crisis it is quite likely that the majority of population displacement in these years, particularly in the Mekong Delta, actually occurred within individual villages as peasants were forced to abandon these outlying hamlets.⁸⁶ In pacified hamlets 16-17 and 39-50 year old males were made to join the PSDF, while women and children served as medics and porters. The idea was to compel villagers to identify with the GVN but it placed everyone on the battle lines. Nineteen sixty-eight also saw the reinvigoration of the Phoenix programme, an effort to better coordinate South Vietnam's disparate intelligence services and use this information to capture or kill the NLF's political operatives and sympathisers. RVN citizens were expected to contribute to this intelligence gathering effort, further exposing non-combatants to violence. It was no longer so easy to be a 'fence-sitter'.

Facing this onslaught, NLF and PAVN units strategically retreated over South Vietnam's borders, losing contact with their support base. Other units disobeyed orders to retreat. Instead they broke down into village and hamlet sized units, operating in depopulated areas, focusing their attacks on the PSDF and the territorial forces, and

⁸⁴ 'Pacification Counter-Offensive – Joint Meeting with GVN October 1', Saigon Tel 39342, 3 October 1968, Vietnam 1C (4)-B 10/68-1/69, Revolutionary Development Program, Box 60, Vietnam Country File, National Security File, LBJL.

⁸⁵ David Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930-1975*, (Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe 2003), vol. 2, 1119-1156; Hunt, *Pacification*, 224.

⁸⁶ For South Vietnam's urban refugee crisis see Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of A War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience*, (New York: New Press, 1985); Robert K. Brigham, 'Vietnamese Society at War', in David L. Anderson ed., *Columbia History of the Vietnam War*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 317-332.

proselytizing among those villagers they could still reach. While the PAVN remained a formidable force, particularly in the northern provinces, for the moment the NLF was exhausted. This was especially true in the Delta, the most densely populated part of the country and its surplus rice-producing area. Historically restive Long An province was pacified by 1969 and Binh Duong in 1970. In 1971, David Elliott writes, “the revolution reached its lowest ebb in the conflict”.⁸⁷

While there were contradictions between rural violence and development, the GVN believed it could extend its reach down to the villages, gain peasant loyalty and encourage a sense of anti-Communist community and economic growth by concentrating development efforts on those areas of the country that Saigon controlled. Following the APC the government estimated that it controlled almost 80% of the population. In these areas projects would be carried out “in the spirit of community development” with the principle that “the people do, the government helps, and the cadres guide” [dân làm, chính phủ giúp và cán bộ hướng dẫn].⁸⁸ With this goal in mind, in 1969 the GVN launched its major community development effort, the Village Self-Development Program, which devolved VN\$1,000,000 (about US\$8,500) down to every village that had held elections. Villagers would meet at assemblies to discuss and vote on local development projects such as animal husbandry, sanitation, or classroom construction. They would then supplement central government funds with their own money and labour. The goal was to restore “the vitality and authority of the villages through democratic activities of the rural people”.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Long, ‘The Tet Offensive and its Aftermath’, 89-123; Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*, vol. 2, 1126, 1220-1245.

⁸⁸ ‘Briefing summarising the Special Pacification Offensive and the 1969 Pacification and Construction Plan’ [Bản Thuyết trình về Tổng Kết kế hoạch Tấn Công Bình Định Đặc Biệt và Kế Hoạch Bình Định Xây Dựng năm 1969], 27 February 1969, folder 92, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII; ‘Guidance on the Pacification and Construction Policy for 1969’ [Huấn thị chỉ đạo đường lối ‘Bình Định và Xây Dựng’ cho năm 1969], undated, folder 110, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

⁸⁹ ‘Chương trình tự túc phát triển xã’ [Village Self-Development Program], 24 February 1969, folder 109, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

Richard Nixon came to office in 1969 promising to end the war and achieve a “peace with honour” but his administration spent the first several months searching for a strategy. Civilian agencies, the U.S. military, and the embassy in Saigon were in general agreement that the South Vietnamese military could not, in the spring of 1969 or “in the foreseeable future”, stand up to a combined NLF/PAVN threat, but they were divided as to whether the ARVN could even handle the NLF threat without continued U.S. assistance. The gains that had been made in pacification were tenuous and partly the result of Hanoi’s strategic retrenchment. Building up the ARVN was necessary but a political settlement was now the most likely outcome and the United States’ focus “needs to be increasingly on political actions”. All agencies agreed that political mobilization on the anti-Communist side was “both the most crucial and weakest area” and its success would be based “primarily on the extent to which [the GVN] can provide security, an alternative to the NLF, and social and economic progress”.⁹⁰

By the autumn of 1969, Nixon had finally settled on the policy of “Vietnamization”, whereby the United States would withdraw troops as South Vietnamese forces grew and assumed a greater burden of the fighting. Nixon had asked for Thieu’s endorsement of Vietnamization when the two leaders met at Midway in June 1969. Aware of the complicated domestic political climate that the Nixon administration faced in the U.S., and having told Secretary of Defence Melvin Laird in March that he supported an American drawdown, Thieu agreed. The GVN found it easier to acquiesce in light of the military and pacification successes of 1968 and 1969. Furthermore, the GVN was willing to accept Vietnamization in the expectation that U.S. military and economic assistance would continue for some time to come and that withdrawals would not proceed at such a pace as to endanger the GVN.⁹¹

⁹⁰ ‘Summary of Interagency Responses to NSSM1’, 22 March 1969, document 44, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, vol. VI, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970.

⁹¹ David L. Prentice, ‘Choosing “the Long Road”’: Henry Kissinger, Melvin Laird, Vietnamization and the War Nixon’s Vietnam Strategy’, *Diplomatic History*, first published online March 4, 2015,

Despite continued U.S. aid, Vietnamization would place enormous demands on the RVN's manpower and material resources, intensifying the need for self-sufficiency. Therefore, in the conviction that pacification in countryside was moving in the right direction, in 1969 and 1970 the GVN began to turn its attention to other areas of concern, including the economy, agricultural modernization and land reform, public health projects, and pacification and development in the cities. Each of these measures sought to win people over to the side of the government, generate economic growth, increase the self-sufficiency of villages and urban neighbourhoods, and contribute to the long-term viability of the RVN. It is to these issues that this dissertation now turns.

Chapter one examines efforts at economic reform during the final years of the war. By the late 1960s South Vietnam was critically dependent on U.S. economic aid. Vietnamization would not only require the South Vietnamese to take over a larger burden of the fighting but also meant greater South Vietnamese self-financing. If the GVN could not generate more of its own resources and reduce its dependence on U.S. aid, then the state might face economic collapse and counterinsurgency projects at the village level would prove irrelevant. This chapter demonstrates the pluralism and contested nature of economic reform in South Vietnam during the final years of the war. Economic reform was a negotiated process both within and between the United States and South Vietnamese governments. U.S. policymakers were divided as to whether the United States' goals were best served by long-term development or short-term stabilization. Saigon's economic policymakers also disagreed among themselves, with some preferring the use of market mechanisms while others saw an important role for the state. Regardless of their stand, all South Vietnamese economic officials looked to Taiwan and South Korea as their key models for economic development. Despite these

doi: 10.1093/dh/dhv002; Larry Berman, *No Peace, No Honor: Nixon, Kissinger, and Betrayal in Vietnam*, (New York: Free Press, 2001), 49-52; Robert D. Schulzinger, *A Time for War: the United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 263-277; James H. Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost Its War*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008), 43-45.

contested visions, the GVN had some modest successes in this field up to 1972. But the economy was then badly hit by a combination of renewed enemy offensives, reductions in economic aid, and the shocks of the global economy in the early 1970s. Saigon weathered these storms but the record shows that the Thieu regime could not have remained in power after 1975 without large, though gradually declining, volumes of U.S. and international aid.

If the GVN were to win the war through security and development it had to do so in the country's villages. The next two chapters demonstrate the regime's agriculture and public health policies. In both fields, the GVN used bottom up and top-down strategies to transform the economic and social behaviour and political identities of Vietnamese peasants. Saigon's agricultural development and public health policies were once again the result of an active engagement with other anti-Communist states in East Asia. Chapter two explores Saigon's use of miracle rice, community development, agricultural credit, and land reform. It argues that each of these policies contributed to significant rural change including increased output, greater commercialization of agriculture, and rural prosperity. But Saigon struggled to transform this change into political support or economic growth. Chapter three explores the government's public health policies. In particular, it focuses on the Sanitary Hamlet Programme, an attempt to reform the hygienic practices of peasant families, and a population planning programme, promoted by a South Vietnamese NGO and its GVN and international supporters. In its attempt to reform hygienic practices, the Sanitary Hamlet Programme highlights the continuities of colonial and postcolonial public health projects, while pointing to the ways in which postcolonial elites could both idealize and be repelled by village life. This programme also demonstrates the tensions between community development and modernization in the sense that it was both participatory and aimed to radically modernize rural practices. Population planning advocacy in the RVN

demonstrates the power of particular global development ideas regardless of local conditions and needs. Certain elites believed that population planning was simply something that postcolonial states did. They believed it was essential to the RVN's economic survival because social science and the international population control movement said it was so. This was in spite of South Vietnam's inadequate demographic data and much more immediate threats to the survival of the state.

Chapter four examines the intersections of war and development in South Vietnam's cities, particularly in Saigon. Following the Tet Offensive, the South Vietnamese-U.S. effort in the cities focused on reconstruction and security. By 1970, the GVN and U.S. team in South Vietnam believed that security in the countryside had so improved that it was time to turn attention to urban areas. At first, in a trend that mirrored the War on Poverty in the United States, the GVN imported its rural development strategy into the cities. This effort focused on neighbourhood militias and popularly-selected community development projects. GVN urban planners also preferred deurbanizing strategies, building new towns or encouraging the growth of smaller ones. By 1971 however, U.S. officials were convinced that neither community development nor deurbanization were likely to resolve South Vietnam's urban crisis and began to advocate more comprehensive urban and regional planning as the solution. This shift in approach reflected global trends in urban development.

Macroeconomics, agriculture, public health, and urban development were four areas of key concern to social scientists and development practitioners in the middle decades of the 20th century. These case studies allow us to examine development on a number of different levels. Firstly, there are few examinations of development in the Nixon years but these four case studies allow us to see how U.S. paradigms and priorities shifted in these particular fields. Secondly, examining these case studies in South Vietnam allows us to explore the ways in which the RVN and U.S. officials in

Vietnam responded to global development trends. Finally, each chapter casts light on agency in the U.S.-South Vietnamese relationship, explaining where the United States predominated and where South Vietnamese were able to implement their ideas.

This dissertation employs material from archives in Vietnam and the United States. It is based on research at the Johnson, Nixon and Ford Libraries as well as extensive research in the CORDS papers at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. Documents from the Republic of Vietnam are housed in National Archives Center II in Ho Chi Minh City. I make use of the Office of the President of the Second Republic collection as well as the Office of the Prime Minister, the Security and Development Council, the Ministry of Public Works, and the Ministry of Public Health collections. The records of some ministries are not yet available to researchers but many of the most important documents produced by these ministries passed through the President and Prime Minister's offices. Although the above-listed collections are open to researchers and finding aids are available, there are limitations to the amount material researchers can gather. These include total restrictions on photography, limits on photocopying and delays in processing requests. Given the differences in procedural arrangements between Vietnamese and U.S. archives, it is inevitable that researchers will end up with much larger quantities of material from the U.S. side than the Vietnamese. Still, combining these Vietnamese materials with those from the United States it is possible to see where U.S. and South Vietnamese officials agreed or disagreed about nation-building and development goals, and to see whose vision won out.

Chapter One

Contested Visions: the Politics of Economic Reform in South Vietnam

Writing to Gerald Ford in September 1974, Nguyen Van Thieu urged the U.S. president to convince the U.S. Congress to increase military and economic assistance to South Vietnam, so that it might achieve “an economic take-off”.⁹² Thieu’s use of modernization theorist Walt Rostow’s term for the point at which developing nations begin the transition to economic maturity must have seemed somewhat anachronistic to Ford. Not since 1968 had a man who believed in the efficacy of modernization theory occupied the White House. The theory had informed U.S. relations with the developing world during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations but by the time Nixon took office this was no longer the case. Economic modernization as a nation-building tool in the postcolonial world, which held such appeal in the highest levels of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, was of little concern in the realpolitik-obsessed Nixon and Ford White House.⁹³ This reflected a shift within the social sciences themselves. By 1970, social scientists from all sides of the political spectrum were attacking modernization theory and, no longer confident in the discourse of development that they had championed in the early 1960s, modernization theorists were submitting their ideas to thorough re-examination.

Thieu’s use of Rostow’s rhetoric was also misleading. In the 1970s the main tenets of modernization-as-development, if not academic modernization theory itself, continued to inform projects for many Third World states and international development institutions. But whereas modernization theorists in the 1950s and 1960s offered the

⁹² Nguyen Van Thieu to President Ford, 19 September 1974, *DDRS*, Document No.: CK3100272785

⁹³ Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution*, 142; Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future*, 219-223.

United States as the ultimate development model for postcolonial nations, by the late 1960s, as the failures of early postcolonial development gave way to military modernizing regimes, Third World nations were as likely to look to one another as they were to the United States or the Soviet Union. Arne Westad has noted that Third World revolutionaries drew inspiration from the Cuban and Vietnamese communist examples but that this was often based on very superficial knowledge of the revolutions, or what might be called “creative misunderstandings”.⁹⁴ In much the same way, authoritarian, counter-revolutionary regimes sought to borrow ideas from one another. Brad Simpson demonstrates that although the United States facilitated authoritarian development in Indonesia, U.S.-trained technocrats were as likely to look for inspiration from developmental states such as Japan, Taiwan, Korea and India as they were to look at U.S.-style liberal capitalism.⁹⁵ Although South Vietnamese leaders did demonstrate interest in modernization theory and often adopted its idiom, they too were more interested in learning from other actors in the Global South. They explicitly referenced these countries’ development experiences when implementing policy. But the lessons learned were not always faithful to the historical evidence. The meaning of these models was up for debate; different actors deployed these states-as-models in intellectual and policies debates about South Vietnamese development. In addition, their applicability to South Vietnam was suspect.

Despite South Vietnam’s dependence on the United States and its constrained agency in some fields, three factors created space for South Vietnamese to shape economic policy in the years after the Tet Offensive. Firstly, although the United States sought to direct the GVN’s economic policies measures through support, advice, or pressure, at every turn the Nixon administration subordinated economic reform to the stability of the Thieu regime and, equally as significantly, to what was acceptable to the

⁹⁴ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 158.

⁹⁵ Simpson, *Economists with Guns*, 252.

GVN. Secondly, there existed significant disagreement on the U.S. side on the purpose of economic reform. At a time when the United States was withdrawing from Vietnam, U.S. officials were divided as to whether economic policy should aim to stabilize the economy and therefore Thieu's regime or whether it should lay the foundations for long-term economic development. Debates within the administration and between U.S. policymakers in Washington and Saigon reflected the breakdown in the post-war economic consensus, with some continuing to favour Keynesian methods of economic analysis and others who favoured greater reliance on market forces. Thirdly, the United States was only able to get the economic reforms it desired in South Vietnam because certain GVN officials who could influence Thieu broadly shared similar ideas about economic liberalization.

Into this space, Saigon's technocrats were able to project their vision of South Vietnam's economic future. While many U.S. officials saw reforms as stabilization efforts, South Vietnamese policymakers thought of them in developmental terms and viewed them as complementary with Saigon's overall development vision. Of course, the GVN had to do this for the purposes of legitimacy. No postcolonial regime in the era of decolonization could hope to command the support of its people if it failed to present a picture of a better tomorrow. GVN policymakers claimed that they were laying the groundwork for the kind of economic growth that more successful Asian anti-Communist nations had experienced. In all of these discussions the image the East Asian developmental states- particularly Taiwan and South Korea- loomed large. Saigon officials attempted to draw on the lessons of Taiwan and Korea and to employ them in modernization efforts or use these models as rhetorical justification for their policies in bureaucratic battles.

The Saigon regime's economic goals after the Tet Offensive were calibrated, above all else, to maintaining Thieu in power. Already facing a major inflation problem

and a woeful balance of payments, the Nixon administration's policy of Vietnamization presented Saigon with further economic challenges. The U.S. military presence in Vietnam provided the GVN with one of its main sources of revenue and as troops withdrew GVN revenues would decline. Meanwhile, the increase in South Vietnamese armed forces would require greater GVN spending. After the Tet Offensive the government therefore sought to raise revenues by increasing domestic production, boosting exports, and improving taxation, as well as reducing consumption through austerity measures. The government also sought to curb inflation to prevent domestic unrest. The GVN walked a careful line. If reforms proved too harsh, the regime's support base might desert it or it might face urban, non-communist opposition. If reforms did not go far enough, the regime might face economic collapse. Up to 1972, the GVN's economic policies achieved some encouraging results and many economic indicators markedly improved, although these gains often came at the expense of domestic support. Yet forces beyond the control of the GVN, including a recession caused by the U.S. withdrawal, North Vietnam's 1972 offensive, the 1973 oil crisis and global rise in prices, placed the GVN in a dire economic position.

Scholars have paid scant attention to economic issues in the final years of the American War in Vietnam. Despite its centrality in the thinking of both U.S. and South Vietnamese officials, we know little about the Second Republic's macroeconomic policy and what role it played in the outcome of the war. While the works of Douglas Dacy and Nguyen Anh Tuan are useful for highlighting GVN reforms in the Nixon-Ford years, both works are entirely devoid of human agency. We do not learn who made decisions and with what motivation.⁹⁶ Gabriel Kolko, on the other hand, addressed these

⁹⁶ Douglas C. Dacy, *Foreign Aid, War, and Economic Development: South Vietnam, 1955-1975*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Nguyen Anh Tuan, *South Vietnam Trial and Experience: A Challenge for Development*, (Athens, OH.: Ohio University Center for International Studies, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1986).

issues in a rather overdetermined treatment of South Vietnam's economic crisis in the final years of the war. Kolko argues that South Vietnam's economic collapse was inevitable by the late 1960s. "To the degree that the magnitude of economic and social problems transcended the political mechanisms for dealing with them", Kolko argues "the entire RVN system was foredoomed to fall into a potentially decisive impasse".⁹⁷ The reality suggests that events were far more contingent than Kolko argues.

While historians have highlighted the influence of modernization theory and community development in the early years of the South Vietnamese state, the First Republic's macroeconomic model was arguably closer to the school of dependency theory. As a more nativist regime than Thieu's, Diem's technocrats were more interested in endogenous growth models and were more likely to be found quoting dependency theorist Hans Singer than modernization theorists like Walt Rostow.⁹⁸ Diem aimed to form domestic capital through the development of the agricultural sector, reducing dependence on foreign aid and laying the groundwork for future industrial development.⁹⁹ Although he was less interested in using macroeconomic tools, Diem's government also engaged in economic planning and launched its First Five Year Plan in 1957. One technocrat associated with the plan noted that this was a "semi-official program of action" rather than strict policy guidance in part because many of the most significant programs of the Diem era, such as the Strategic Hamlet Programme, existed outside the plan.¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless, the first plan signalled the development impulses of the early South Vietnamese state and it assigned the state the central role in capital formation and the allocation of resources. In particular, and in marked contrast with what would occur in the early 1970s, planners during the Diem era

⁹⁷ Kolko, *Anatomy of A War*, 460.

⁹⁸ Vu Van Thai, 'Technology in Focus- the Emerging Nations: Commentary', *Technology and Culture*, vol. 3, no. 4, (1962), 620-623; on Third World 'nativist' regimes in the Cold War see Westad, *The Global Cold War*.

⁹⁹ Stewart, 'Hearts, Minds and Cong Dan Vu', 68; Vu Van Thai, 'Our Concept of Development: Economic, Social and Political Improvement', *Vital Speeches of the Day* 26, no. 12, (1959), 101-102.

¹⁰⁰ Vu Quoc Thuc, 'National Planning in Vietnam', *Asian Survey*, vol. 1, no. 7, (1961), 4-8.

believed that the export-oriented economy during the colonial era had caused deprivation in Vietnam. Diem's Director-General of the Budget Vu Van Thai said that rather than attempting to generate exports, development activities in South Vietnam should focus on meeting domestic demand for food, clothing, and housing through import-substitution industrialization.¹⁰¹

The interregnum between Diem's overthrow in 1963 and Nguyen Van Thieu's consolidation of power in 1967 was marked by political instability in Saigon and escalating violence in the countryside. Production and marketing of South Vietnam's principal crops- rice and rubber- declined precipitously. As the government lost large areas of rural territory to the NLF, the U.S. aid program sought to prevent urban unrest by dampening inflation. The U.S. war effort in Vietnam required heavy in-country spending, generating full employment and a huge increase in Vietnamese purchasing power. The resultant rise in demand led to severe inflation. In an effort to soak up excess money, the Commodity Import Program (CIP) flooded South Vietnamese cities with American consumer goods. The CIP provided the GVN with counterpart funds and import duties, the principal sources of government revenue. The CIP also created an import-dependent economy, contributing to a terribly skewed balance of payments and a standard of consumption for some urban classes out of sync with the country's level of economic development. Historians have noted that South Vietnam's urban entrepreneurial class, rather than investing in productive enterprises, took advantage of these conditions. The CIP reduced rather than eliminated inflation, allowing importers to hoard goods until prices rose, reaping massive windfall profits.¹⁰²

In a bid to deny resources to the enemy, the GVN ran a highly regulated economy, with licenses and permits required for most transactions. This led to pervasive corruption in which civil servants and the military were heavily implicated. Imported,

¹⁰¹ Thai, 'Our Concept of Development', 102; Tuan, *South Vietnam Trial and Experience*, 44.

¹⁰² Carter, *Inventing Vietnam*, 222-225.

government-subsidised rice deflated domestic production in favour of urban stability, while the grossly overvalued piaster proved a disincentive to investment in manufacturing and industry and created the conditions for a thriving currency black market.¹⁰³ For all historians have written about Lyndon Johnson's desire to export the Great Society to South Vietnam, prior to the Tet Offensive American aid and GVN policy was geared towards military objectives, privileging urban dwellers and short-term stability over rural producers and long-term development.¹⁰⁴

Between January 1965 and December 1966 the cost of living rose by 125% and the CIA reported that inflation presented "the greatest threat to governmental security". Inflation had "increased dissatisfaction with the government and has provided the Viet Cong and other opponents with an exploitable popular issue". Indeed, among the protesters' many criticisms of the government during the Buddhist struggle movement in the spring and summer of 1966, one of the principal complaints was the impact of rampant inflation on ordinary Vietnamese.¹⁰⁵ In the middle of 1966, the GVN Minister of Economy noted, the stability of the economy was "seriously endangered".

Economic reforms including devaluation and import liberalization in June 1966 failed to alleviate these problems in large part because of congestion in Saigon's port. When it functioned as designed, CIP imports would absorb purchasing power and curb inflation. But in 1966, Saigon port proved incapable of handling the massive quantity of imports.¹⁰⁶ It proved difficult for the GVN to get a handle on the economy in other ways too. The CIA reported that "through a highly organized economic system, the VC exercise considerable control over the production, processing, and movement of many

¹⁰³ Dacy, *Foreign Aid, War, and Economic Development*, 12.

¹⁰⁴ Lloyd Gardner, *Pay Any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam*, (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1995), 193; Kristin Ahlberg, *Transplanting the Great Society: Lyndon Johnson and Food for Peace*, (Columbia, MO.: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 175-176; Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 67.

¹⁰⁵ 'National Intelligence Estimate Number 53-66: Problems of Political Development in South Vietnam over the Next Year or So', CIA-FOIA; Topmiller, *The Lotus Unleashed*, 51.

¹⁰⁶ 'Economic Stabilization and Development Plan for 1967', *Kinh Tế Tập San*, [Economic Bulletin], no. 3-4, 1967.

commodities essential to South Vietnam's economy, including rice, salt, timber, charcoal, and rubber". The NLF could therefore influence the supply and prices of basic commodities. "Covertly and overtly, militarily and economically, the VC can deny the GVN considerable financial and material resources".¹⁰⁷ Even rumours circulated among the merchant and banking communities about impending devaluation or commodity shortages created price spikes and influenced prices on the currency black market.¹⁰⁸

As with military and political issues, the latter half of 1967 saw some South Vietnamese official optimism about the economy. With the port congestion problem resolved, things appeared to be improving. Minister of Economy and concurrently Governor of the National Bank Nguyen Huu Hanh was pleased to report that prices had stabilized as a result of the GVN's "crash import program" and its build-up of security stocks of basic commodities, while there had been a slight drop in the price of black market dollars and gold, indicating somewhat greater confidence in the piaster.¹⁰⁹ On the eve of the Tet Offensive, however, USAID officials in Washington felt they still had not achieved some of their basic economic goals in Vietnam. They felt the government had to raise tax revenues, do more to combat corruption, and reduce subsidies, regulations and other inefficiencies in the economy. These steps were "a most important means of convincing the American people that the Vietnamese are taking on an increasing share of the burden of winning the war".¹¹⁰

Although the main thrust of economic and monetary policy between 1965 and 1967 was aimed at stabilization, GVN economic officials never lost hope for the possibility of long-term economic development. Nor did U.S. officials, if only to

¹⁰⁷ CIA Directorate of Intelligence, 'Intelligence Memorandum, South Vietnam: Economic Trends and Recent Developments', February 1969, Box 62, Vietnam Subject Files, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

¹⁰⁸ CIA Directorate of Intelligence, 'Intelligence Report: the Situation in South Vietnam (Weekly)', 30 January 1967, *DDRS*, Document No.: CK3100015741.

¹⁰⁹ 'A Review of the Economic and Monetary Situation of Vietnam', *Kinh Tế Tập San*, no. 7-8, (1967).

¹¹⁰ Secretary of State to U.S. Embassy Saigon, 'Economic Policy - 1968', Saigon Tel 88432, 22 December 1967, Vietnam 1B (1)a 1/66-12/67, Economy Activity and Planning, Box 58, Vietnam Country File, National Security File, LBJL.

present the American war effort in constructive terms. In a bid to do just that, Johnson dispatched David Lilienthal, one of the pioneers of the Tennessee Valley Authority, to head up a Joint Development Group (JDG) with the GVN's representative Vu Quoc Thuc. The JDG started its work in early 1967 and teams of Vietnamese and U.S. investigators began researching agriculture, industry, and regional development, among other topics. The idea was to explore areas for South Vietnam's long-term development, in spite of the ongoing conflict. Lilienthal, drawing on his experience with the TVA, was particularly enthused about harnessing the power of the Mekong River. David Ekbladh argues that prior to the Tet Offensive this appeared a promising means to rescue South Vietnam and the rest of the region from its state of underdevelopment. After Tet, it seemed that river development might help salvage the United States' reputation in Asia. But when the final plan was produced in 1969, it was greeted with derision from a Congress tired of the war and largely ignored by the Nixon administration.¹¹¹

With the Tet Offensive and the Congressional backlash against foreign aid beginning in the late 1960s, the orthodox story goes, the United States abandoned all hope for economic development in South Vietnam. But scholars have largely failed to examine the politics of economic reform in Vietnam during the final years of the war. This chapter addresses this gap in the historiography. During the Nixon administration's first term of office, U.S. and GVN officials in Washington and Saigon debated the relative merits of stabilization and economic development as a means to handle the stress that Vietnamization placed on the RVN economy.

¹¹¹ Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission*, 212-225.

The Tet Offensive, Vietnamization and the South Vietnamese Economy

The Tet Offensive presented the GVN with a number of new economic problems. By 1968 the United States was struggling to pay for the war in Vietnam and one of the key considerations for U.S. policymakers in the wake the Tet Offensive was whether the continued prosecution of the war at current or higher levels was economically feasible.¹¹² Even shortly prior to the Tet Offensive, USAID administrator William Gaud had told Thieu that “much of the United States balance of payments difficulty is the result of U.S. support of the Vietnamese cause”. Gaud asked Thieu to undertake measures including spending more GVN foreign exchange in the United States and taxation to meet inflation. Congress and the American people now expected these measures of countries receiving financial assistance. Thieu said he would take such measures though he noted that he was reluctant to implement taxes that would increase the cost of living and that he now had a new legislature to deal with which would prove an obstacle. In an indication of how weak his plans were to remedy the situation, he told Gaud he would search for taxation measures that did not require legislative action and would not cause price rises.¹¹³

The Tet Offensive changed the calculus. As a result of the first wave of attacks, the GVN Minister of Economy reported a decline in production and a likely VN\$8bn drop in government revenues. Added to this, an estimated VN\$5bn increase in GVN expenditure to reconstruct the cities and aid war victims was likely to generate serious inflation. The government estimated a US\$322m budget deficit in 1968. To deal with this massive shortfall it was urgently necessary to reconstruct damaged industries, encourage a resumption of commerce and regularize supply.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 158.

¹¹³ U.S. Embassy Saigon to Secretary of State, Saigon Tel 16309, 18 January 1968, Viet 1B (2), 1/68-9/68, Economic Activity and Planning [2 of 2], Box 58, Vietnam Country File, National Security File, LBJL.

¹¹⁴ ‘Present State of the Economy and Problems Harmonizing Supply’ [Hiện tình kinh tế và vấn đề điều hòa tiếp tế], folder 2913, 28 February 1968, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

In the aftermath of the second wave of attacks in May, there was talk in Saigon of impending economic collapse. As a result of government deficit spending, there was a dramatic increase in the money supply but a relatively modest increase in prices. Hanh concluded that people must be hoarding cash in response to the offensives. The prospect of this money being injected into the economy once the people's confidence was restored might, along with GVN spending, lead to critical levels of inflation. Given these difficulties, it is not surprising that some GVN technocrats, if not Thieu, had already begun to think in terms of austerity. The only solution, Hanh argued, was to reduce the government deficit by curbing expenditure and increasing revenues in order "to avoid serious disruptions in the economic as well as social fabric of our nation". The alternative was for the GVN to continue deficit spending by borrowing from the National Bank and compounding inflation, a more arbitrary and less equitable way to finance government spending than increased taxation.¹¹⁵

Hanh's predictions proved overly pessimistic, however, and by late summer Saigon appeared to have weathered the storm. The economy had gradually recovered and inflation had remained relatively mild throughout 1968. As the Johnson administration passed responsibility for Vietnam to the Nixon White House, however, the CIA estimated that inflation would be much worse in 1969 and might reach levels of 40-60% as the GVN increased its spending to pay for expanded defence costs.¹¹⁶

South Vietnamese economic viability was a critical factor if Vietnamization was to succeed. It would convey a message to Hanoi and perhaps convince members of the U.S. Congress that South Vietnam was a going concern. Economic collapse, on the other hand, would put paid to U.S. efforts to Vietnamize the war. However, senior U.S. administration officials at first tended to overlook the economic requirements for and

¹¹⁵ 'Speech delivered by Mr. Nguyen Huu Hanh, Governor of the National Bank at Luncheon Meeting of the American Chamber on June 13 1968', FCO 15/574, United Kingdom National Archives (hereafter UKNA).

¹¹⁶ CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, 'Intelligence Memorandum, South Vietnam: Economic Trends and Recent Developments', February 1969, Box 62, Vietnam Subject Files, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

consequences of any new strategy in South Vietnam. To develop such a strategy, the new administration issued National Security Study Memorandum 1 in January 1969, asking the foreign policy establishment to answer a series of questions about Hanoi's intentions and capabilities, South Vietnamese military effectiveness, rural security, the political climate, and U.S. operations. The South Vietnamese economy was not considered.¹¹⁷

USAID and the U.S. embassy in Saigon, on the other hand, spent much of the first half of 1969 trying to negotiate an economic stabilization package with the GVN. A growing budget deficit, the result of expanded spending on the armed forces, was having a dangerous inflationary impact. The United States withheld \$40m in CIP funds as leverage in the stabilization negotiations but Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker secured the release of the funds, arguing that the United States could not afford a confrontation with the GVN at a time when it was asking Saigon to assume a greater burden of the fighting. But Bunker told Thieu that the GVN would have to increase tax revenue and consider devaluation to combat inflation before the end of the year.¹¹⁸ USAID also warned GVN leaders that given dwindling Congressional appropriations, they could not expect AID to continue bailing them out. USAID director John Hannah asked that Nixon raise these issues with Thieu at Midway while Kissinger asked the president to warn Thieu that "our ability to assist the GVN economically is dependent to a degree" on the conclusion of an agreement "which [Thieu] is reluctant to face for political reasons".¹¹⁹ As the year progressed and no stabilization agreement emerged, others within the U.S. administration and the Federal Reserve voiced concern that inflation in

¹¹⁷ National Security Study Memorandum 1, 21 January 1969, document no. 4, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, vol. VI, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970.

¹¹⁸ Pike ed., *The Bunker Papers*, vol. 3, 694.

¹¹⁹ John A. Hannah Memorandum for the President, 'Stabilization Negotiations in Vietnam', 3 June 1969, National Security Council Files, Vietnam Subject Files, Box 71, Presidential Trip Vol. 1, Nixon Library; Henry A. Kissinger Memorandum for the President, 'Your Meeting with President Thieu at Midway, June 8', 4 June 1969, NSC Files, Vietnam Subject Files, Box 71, Midway Meeting with President Thieu Briefing Book Vol. 1, Nixon Library.

Vietnam, if not addressed, risked undermining the United States' military and political goals. Dean Moor of the National Security Council noted in July 1969 that inflation, a budget deficit, and economic mismanagement were "beginning to sap some of the government's vitality in attempting to build a competitive position against [the] Communists in a future post-war environment".¹²⁰

Thieu believed harsh economic reforms would undermine his ability to consolidate political control, crucial in any future political competition with the Communists. Previous experience with economic reform dragged up bitter memories. Devaluation in 1966 had, as Vice Minister for Finance Nguyen Anh Tuan put it, left "a nasty taste in the mouth". It had been politically unpopular and had not appeared to solve the country's economic problems.¹²¹ In 1969, Thieu faced challenges to his grip on the presidency and was yet to fully assert his control over the National Assembly. As such he was loath to undertake economic measures that would require legislative approval or result in political backlash.¹²²

Still, Thieu and the GVN had little choice but to face the fundamental economic challenge that Vietnamization presented. Not only did hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese depend on the dwindling U.S. presence for employment but Vietnamization would also mean an increase in GVN spending to expand the armed forces as well as a dramatic decline in GVN earnings. Approximately half of U.S. economic aid to South Vietnam came from Department of Defense (DoD) purchases of local currency to pay for goods and services in Vietnam. The DoD bought this local currency at a rate of \$1 to 118 piasters, a level far below the real value of the South Vietnamese currency. The

¹²⁰ Memorandum from Dean Moor of the Operations Staff of the National Security Council to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), 1 July 1969, document no. 92, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, vol. VI, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970; Reed J. Irvine to Arthur F. Burns, 'Vietnam Stabilization Efforts', 3 October 1969, The Inflation in Vietnam Oct-Nov 1969, Box 75, Vietnam Subject Files, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

¹²¹ Nguyen Anh Tuan, 'The Financial Situation in Vietnam', (Saigon: Council on Foreign Relations, 1969).

¹²² Pike ed., *The Bunker Papers*, vol. 3, 682.

GVN could use these dollars to buy untied imports, which it could also tax at higher levels than imports under the CIP. Therefore, devaluation would reduce GVN revenue from DoD purchases of local currency. This, in addition to price rises and their attendant political consequences, was the primary reason why South Vietnamese policymakers were opposed to devaluation. Although the DoD increased its in-country purchases as Vietnamization began, as U.S. troops levels dropped DoD procurements would too, making it difficult for the South Vietnamese to fund imports necessary to finance the budget and to dampen inflation. To deal with the economic problems created by the U.S. withdrawal, Washington would compensate for the loss of DoD purchases with additional economic assistance but Washington also expected the GVN to enact reforms to raise revenue.

Facing these challenges and potential political dangers, the GVN moved slowly on the economic front. While economic development was subordinated to military goals and political stability up to 1975, the period also saw economic Vietnamization. By the middle of 1968, following a General Mobilization law, one in six adult males fought in the armed forces.¹²³ Such a large defence establishment put a serious strain on the economy over the next several years. Nonetheless, for some technocrats in Saigon, increased rural security after Tet and the imperatives of Vietnamization had shifted the war to a different plane. As Tuan noted, the “lull in enemy aggression” meant that “the hurricane which previously assailed the political and military fronts has now turned its fury on the economic and financial front”.¹²⁴ The period saw South Vietnamese efforts to remedy the economy with a view to long-term stability and growth. While the ultimate goal was economic independence, Saigon’s policymakers viewed this as a

¹²³ Robert K. Brigham, ‘Dreaming Different Dreams: The United States and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam’, in Marilyn B. Young and Robert Buzzanco eds., *A Companion to the Vietnam War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 150.

¹²⁴ Tuan, ‘The Financial Situation in Vietnam’.

long-term project and anticipated that the United States' commitment would continue for many years to come.

The Search for Models

In discussions with representatives of the Task Force on Foreign Aid in the autumn of 1969, Nixon and Kissinger gave an indication of their preference for new approaches to economic development. The development “success stories to date” Nixon affirmed, “have occurred mainly in environments where the private sector played a major role”. Forget about “ideas of proper political organization” Nixon told the task force, military leaders “may be the most stabilizing force in most countries”. The United States should not focus on health and housing projects but on GNP growth and should help countries that “follow economic approaches, particularly reliance on the private sector, which we consider feasible in leading to real development”.¹²⁵ Kissinger's comments were even more striking. He told the task force members “we are near the end of the Marshall Plan period in which the rest of the world could be shaped by U.S. programs” and that the case made for aid in the 1950s and 1960s was “no longer relevant”. Kissinger believed that “other industrialized countries” should “take care of particular LDCs [Less Developed Countries] where they have strong historic interests”. The thrust of Nixon's message on his recent world tour had been that “countries should assume more responsibility for shaping their own progress especially in terms of its intellectual foundations”.¹²⁶ If post-war development theory was supposed to provide a guide for Third World elites as much as for U.S. policymakers, Nixon and Kissinger's comments amounted to a disavowal of the entire post-war development enterprise. Not only did they foresee a smaller role for the postcolonial state in the process of economic

¹²⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, 2 September 1969, document no. 120, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, vol. IV, Foreign Assistance, International Development, Trade Policies, 1969-1972.

¹²⁶ Meeting with Members of Peterson Task Force on Aid, 16 October 1969, *FRUS*, vol. IV, Foreign Assistance, International Development, Trade Policies 1969-1972, 1969-1976.

development, they also saw a diminished role for the United States. What was called for instead was a Nixon doctrine for development. In the future, regional powers and industrialized nations would offer more economic aid, while Third World nations could no longer expect U.S. social scientists and development professionals to conceive of and execute development plans.

The GVN, as it turned out, was already looking beyond the United States, searching for both intellectual and substantive solutions to its economic woes in regional and even global terms. In a speech to the Japanese Federation of Economic Organizations (Keidanren) while on a goodwill tour of Japan in early 1969, Nguyen Xuan Oanh, a Harvard trained economics PhD and former South Vietnamese Prime Minister, called on Japan “to help provide security to the Southeast Asian community” through “Japan’s own Marshall Plan for post-war Southeast Asia”.¹²⁷ Oanh’s plea was part of a larger effort by Saigon to establish better diplomatic and economic relations with regional anti-communist nations. As Lien- Hang Nguyen has noted, in the middle of 1969 Saigon’s Political Warfare Department reported that given their shared experience as divided anti-communist states, Saigon should align itself more closely with Taiwan, Korea and West Germany. Saigon needed to establish cultural and economic exchanges with the ultimate goal of an anti-communist economic bloc in Southeast Asia.¹²⁸

Efforts to forge closer ties with the non-communist nations of Southeast and East Asia had limited impact however. Japanese economic aid did increase after 1968, amounting to about \$65 million by 1974.¹²⁹ This was, in part, the result of the Nixon and Ford administrations’ efforts to encourage Japan and multilateral institutions to pull up the foreign aid slack in Asia. Southeast Asian nations, on the other hand, were cool

¹²⁷ Nguyen Xuan Oanh, ‘Collective Security in Southeast Asia, Economic Development, and Japan’, (Saigon: Council on Foreign Relations, 1969.)

¹²⁸ Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War*, 141-160.

¹²⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, 20 November 1974, President Ford Memcons (2), Box 16, NSC East Asian and Pacific Affairs Staff: Files, (1969), 1973-1976, Ford Library.

on the idea of South Vietnamese membership in ASEAN. Indonesia's staunchly anti-communist regime was even reluctant to establish formal diplomatic relations with Saigon. Despite South Vietnamese efforts on this front, the two countries went no further than establishing chambers of commerce in one another's capitals.¹³⁰

On the other hand, the anti-Communist nations of Asia served as important models for governance, macroeconomic policy, and development projects. For Saigon, the examples of South Korea and Taiwan were particularly important. As truncated, anti-communist and authoritarian, military-led states facing communist adversaries, they were obvious allies. As states at a more advanced stage of development, they offered attractive models of authoritarian development. Both countries had sent troops and technical advisers to assist South Vietnam in the fight against Hanoi, albeit not for entirely altruistic reasons.¹³¹ Vietnam also hosted economic cooperation conferences with both Taiwan and South Korea, forging closer ties between South Vietnamese economists and policymakers and their Taiwanese and Korean counterparts.¹³²

GVN economist Nguyen Tien Hung claimed that Thieu had two framed portraits of his role models on his office wall, one of the South Korean leader Park Chung Hee and the other of the Taiwanese leader Chiang Kai Shek.¹³³ Hung suggested Thieu was "a very traditional Asian leader" who viewed American relations with Asia in Confucian terms and admired Park and Chiang for their military prowess. However, both Park and Chiang had, by the late 1960s, presided over periods of sustained economic growth which had considerably strengthened their nations against their

¹³⁰ Telegram from the Embassy in Australia to the Department of State, 14 January 1970, document no. 279, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, vol. XX, Southeast Asia, 1969-1972.

¹³¹ Brazinsky, *Nation-Building in South Korea*, 137. Brazinsky highlights that Seoul was motivated by financial gain.

¹³² 'ROC, Republic of Vietnam to tighten economic ties', *Taiwan Today*, 18 January 1970. (available at: <http://taiwantoday.tw/ct.asp?xItem=157404&CtNode=103>; retrieved 14 March 2014); 'Embassy Saigon's Mission Weekly, September 28- October 4, 1973', Telegram 17446, 4 October 1973, 1973SAIGON17446, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG59, National Archives, College Park, MD., (hereafter NARA II): General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed 12 November 2014).

¹³³ Hung, *The Palace File*, 79.

enemies and Thieu was no doubt impressed by this. Prior to meeting Nixon at Midway in June 1969, Thieu visited Seoul and Taipei. Afterwards, Thieu wrote to both men, telling Park that he returned to Saigon with “a new sense of confidence in our common cause”, and Chiang that he benefited greatly from his “wise counsel”. He was deeply impressed by the economic achievements of both countries under Park and Chiang’s “inspiring leadership”.¹³⁴

By the late 1960s, both Taiwan and Korea had achieved, from Saigon’s perspective, enviable levels of growth. In 1965, USAID closed its mission in Taipei, in acknowledgement that Taiwan had “graduated” from economic assistance programs.¹³⁵ Taiwan had achieved remarkable progress in agriculture, so much so that in the late 1950s it began to export its agricultural development model. The Sino-American Joint Commission for Rural Reconstruction sent teams of Chinese agricultural advisers to dozens of countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, including Vietnam.¹³⁶ In manufacturing, Taiwan had established three export-processing zones, which the RVN Ministry of Finance calculated employed almost 50,000 workers and exported approximately US\$240m worth of manufactured goods per year by 1972.¹³⁷ Korea had also achieved modest manufacturing-based growth by the late 1960s before turning to heavy industry and electronics. Exports rose dramatically, from just \$54.8m in 1962 to \$250.3m in 1966.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Letter from Nguyen Van Thieu to Chiang Kai Shek, 20 June 1969, folder 1644, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII; Letter from Nguyen Van Thieu to Park Chung Hee, 21 June 1969, folder 1644, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

¹³⁵ Nick Cullather, ‘Fuel for the Good Dragon: the United States and Industrial Policy in Taiwan, 1950-1965’, *Diplomatic History*, vol. 20, no. 1, (1996), 1.

¹³⁶ T.H. Shen, *The Sino-American Joint Commission for Rural Reconstruction: Twenty Years of Cooperation for Agricultural Development*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970); on the role of the Taiwanese advisers in South Vietnam see also David Biggs, ‘Small Machines in the Garden: Everyday Technology and Revolution in the Mekong Delta’, *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 46, no. 1, (2012), 47-70.

¹³⁷ ‘Vietnam Customs delegation’s Observation Tour Report of free ports and export-processing zones in Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan (21 August 1973 to 12 September 1973)’, [Phúc Trình Cuộc Du Hành Quan Sát tại Singapore, Hong Kong, Trung Hoa Quốc Gia (từ ngày 21-8-73 đến ngày 12-09-1973) về miễn quan cảng khu chế xuất của phái đoàn quan thuế Vietnam], folder 26513, Phu Thu Tuong, TTLTQGII.

¹³⁸ Brazinsky, *Nation-Building in South Korea*, 147.

In looking to Taiwan and Korea, the GVN was not simply searching for an American model mediated through the experience of developing countries. Neither the Koreans under Park nor the Guomintang in Taiwan followed American advice when it suited them not to and American advisers often expressed frustration with Taiwanese and Korean policy. In addition, Taiwan and South Korea offered an alternative model of governance that appealed to the GVN: depoliticised masses, loyal to the authoritarian state and mobilized for economic development. For Saigon, as a regime suffering from a crisis of legitimacy, Taiwan and South Korea appeared legitimate, economically successful and authoritarian; an appealing combination. Although Taiwan and Korea had achieved much higher levels of economic growth, from their vantage point in Saigon, RVN officials could imagine South Vietnam charting the path to a similar economic future. But drawing on the lessons of Taiwan and Korea presented RVN officials with the tricky problem (experienced by scholars since) of establishing what those models actually were and as such there was considerable divergence of opinion. In addition, claiming their applicability to Vietnam required overlooking some inconvenient historical realities.

While scholars debate the degree to which U.S. officials tolerated state intervention in the Taiwanese economy, most agree that significant intervention occurred. The Guomintang (GMD) state controlled the levers of the economy by encouraging growth in targeted sectors through tariffs and easy access to capital. Long-range planning created rewards and penalties for certain economic behaviour. The state attempted to control consumption, savings, and investment through fixed prices, wages, and interest rates. Taiwan protected infant industries through import-substitution

industrialization (ISI) and focused on internal growth, turning to exports only when the limits of ISI had been reached.¹³⁹

The “free market” interpretation of Korea’s growth contends that the economy was stagnating in the late 1950s as a result of an “inward-looking” ISI policy which protected inefficient industries and discouraged exports. A series of reforms in 1965, including exchange rate reform, reductions in tariffs, and increased real interest rates, represented a turn to an export-led development strategy. These reforms, the free market view contends, mobilised savings for investment, allowed Korea to use its comparative advantage in labour-intensive manufacturing exports, and placed competitive pressure on inefficient domestic producers. A broader body of scholarship argues that the state continued to play an interventionist role similar to the GMD after these reforms with limits on imports, preferential treatment for large firms, and continued subsidies for ISI.¹⁴⁰

There were substantial differences between Taiwan and South Korea on the one hand and South Vietnam on the other, including their contrasting colonial experiences. Several scholars have noted the importance of the legacies of Japanese colonialism in laying the foundations for the developmental states in Taiwan and Korea.¹⁴¹ Although Japanese colonialism was brutal, legacies included a large, strong bureaucracy with considerable reach, a factor critically absent from South Vietnam. In Taiwan, Japanese colonial authorities had established a commercialised agricultural system based on small owner-operators employing technological advances as opposed to low-tech rice production on the Mekong Delta’s large latifundia during French colonial rule in

¹³⁹ Cullather, ‘Fuel for the Good Dragon’, 2; Alice Amsden, ‘The State and Taiwan’s Economic Development’ in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Peter B. Evans et al, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 88-90.

¹⁴⁰ Ha –Joon Chang, ‘The Political Economy of Industrial Policy in Korea’, *Cambridge Journal of Economics* vol. 16, no. 2 (1993), 130-132.

¹⁴¹ Alice Amsden, ‘The State and Taiwan’s Economic Development’, 78-106; Atul Kohli, ‘Where Do High Growth Political Economies Come From? The Japanese Lineage of Korea’s “Developmental State”’ in Meredith Woo-Cumings ed., *The Developmental State*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 93-136; Brazinsky, *Nation-Building in South Korea*, 149.

Vietnam.¹⁴² After 1949, the GMD's bureaucratic reach allowed it to exert control down to the village-level agricultural economy, determining prices and making farmers dependent on the state through virtual monopolies on credit and fertilizer. In Korea, during the colonial era the state had forged productive alliances with the principal economic classes.¹⁴³ Taiwan benefited from coming under the American umbrella during the Korean War, while South Korean economic growth was driven, in no small part, by participation in the Vietnam War.¹⁴⁴ South Vietnam had no such war to profit from. In addition, the military in both states was eventually co-opted into or had a vested interest in the economic development strategy. This was in stark contrast to South Vietnam where the burdensome military complex, corrupt government and military personnel, the absence of an industrial class, and continued rural devastation detracted from economic development.

Thieu saw a mixed economy in the Taiwan model. Taiwan's economic success was down to a combination of "free enterprise and government planning".¹⁴⁵ While private investment and business were to be encouraged, in the field of agricultural development, Thieu saw an important role for the state. He believed that Taiwan's rural development model which included state interventions in the form of land reform, agricultural modernization, and farmers' organizations was the "most important reference point" for South Vietnam.¹⁴⁶

Others in the RVN bureaucracy used Taiwan, Korea and other models from the Global South to lobby for a more liberal, free market economics. In a speech before the

¹⁴² Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hemery, *Indochina: an Ambiguous Colonization, 1858-1954*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 120-122.

¹⁴³ Kohli, 'Where Do High Growth Political Economies Come From?', 96.

¹⁴⁴ Chalmers Johnson, 'Political Institutions and Economic Performance: the Government-Business Relationship in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan', in Frederic C. Deyo ed., *The Political Economy of the New Asian Industrialism*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 157.

¹⁴⁵ Joint Communique Issued by President Nguyen Van Thieu and President Chiang Kai Shek, 3 June 1969, *Taiwan Review*; (<http://taiwanreview.nat.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=148456&CtNode=103>; retrieved 17 August 2014).

¹⁴⁶ 'Chinese Experts Boost Farm Techniques' in *Vietnamese Agriculture: A Progress Report*, (Washington D.C.: Embassy of the Republic of Vietnam, 1972), 66.

Saigon Chamber of Commerce in September 1969, newly appointed Minister of Economy Pham Kim Ngoc, an LSE-trained economist, suggested that the solution to South Vietnam's economic troubles already existed in the development experience of Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Pakistan, Turkey, and Iran. South Vietnam could address its woeful balance of payments deficit by drawing on the lessons of these countries which included austerity and the redirection of consumption toward savings and investment. The GVN would use the profit motive to induce private investment in areas of comparative advantage in the primary sector and manufacturing. Some degree of ISI was acceptable but no country, Ngoc argued, that has sought "economic independence through very high tariffs and a closed economy has ever developed successfully". Exports of rural commodities such as rice, rubber, timber, and fish would not only help address the balance of payments gap but would raise rural incomes, an important element in the battle against the National Liberation Front.¹⁴⁷ The lessons learned it seems were austerity, export-led development through the exploitation of rural resources, the promotion of foreign investment, and a place on the capitalist periphery.

This was a sanitised picture; Ngoc did not mention these regimes' preference for authoritarian governance. Nor did he mention each states' use of import-substitution and intervention in the economy. Ngoc's vision of South Vietnam's economic future encapsulated the ideas of several civilian technocrats, including Minister of Finance Nguyen Bich Hue, a graduate of Paris' Ecole National d'Administration and Hue's successor Ha Xuan Trung, who held an MA in economics from Yale. These men had previously worked in national and private banking circles and were close to Ly Luong Than and Nguyen Cao Thang, two wealthy Saigon businessmen who provided slush

¹⁴⁷ 'Toward the Economic Development of Vietnam: A Speech Delivered to the Saigon Chamber of Commerce and Industry by Minister of the Economy Pham Kim Ngoc', 12 September 1969, FCO 15/1077, UKNA.

funds for Thieu.¹⁴⁸ They attained senior positions in the RVN in the years after the Tet Offensive and were able to push through a series of liberalizing reforms. USAID's terminal report on economic assistance to South Vietnam credited the positive economic reforms in this period to a "change in economic leadership" in the late 1960s composed of "American-trained professionals with high regard for the merits of a free enterprise system".¹⁴⁹ These liberalizers strengthened the United States' hand in pressuring the GVN to reform because they shared many of the same ideas. Ngoc was a particular favourite with the Americans. Bunker told Nixon that he was "first rate, the best man they've got in the cabinet".¹⁵⁰ Yet their commitment to the free market was often more rhetorical than real. Ngoc, Hue and Trung realised that only the state could foster private enterprise and during their tenure the GVN regularly intervened in the market. Still, the ideas of these liberalizers clashed with those who advocated greater state planning and those, particularly senior officers in the military, who advocated stricter government control. Given that Thieu saw free enterprise and government intervention as complementary components of Taiwan's development strategy, he was easily pulled between these divergent constituencies.

The Romance of Export-Led Development

The liberalizers' initial experience with reform was far from positive. A U.S.-GVN stabilization agreement finally negotiated in late 1969 called for a combination of additional U.S. aid and GVN fiscal and economic reforms.¹⁵¹ In response, Ngoc and

¹⁴⁸ *Who's Who in Vietnam*, (Saigon: Vietnam Press Agency, 1969); 'Government Changes', 29 October 1973, FCO 15/1809, UKNA; Kolko, *Anatomy of a War*, 217; Allan E. Goodman, *Politics in War: the Bases of Political Community in South Vietnam*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 117-118.

¹⁴⁹ Dacy, *Foreign Aid, War, and Economic Development*, 13.

¹⁵⁰ Conversation Among President Nixon, the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker), and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), 16 June 1971, document no. 220, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, vol. VII, Vietnam, July 1970- January 1972.

¹⁵¹ William Rogers, Memorandum for the President, 'AID and PL480 Programs for Vietnam- FY1970', 20 October 1969, The Inflation in Vietnam, Oct-Nov 69, Box 75, Vietnam Subject Files, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Henry Kissinger, Memorandum for the President, 'Economic Stabilization in Vietnam', 1

Hue introduced an austerity tax on imports but this failed to dampen demand. Fearing a decline in its foreign reserves, the GVN introduced import licensing restrictions which led to further hoarding, speculation and price rises. The reform proved deeply unpopular, badly hit the urban middle-class and was heavily criticised in the National Assembly. The cost of living rose by 53% between July 1969 and July 1970 decimating fixed, public sector wages. According to the CIA, in the spring of 1970 the government faced the real possibility that it might fall or be overthrown due to economic unrest. Saigon faced growing protest from students and ARVN veterans and it seemed that Thieu might be forced to make scapegoats of Ngoc and Hue.¹⁵² Some South Vietnamese officials resented the new demands being placed on the GVN. Many felt that the distortions in the economy were American-made and that the South Vietnamese were now being compelled to tighten their belts. One South Vietnamese economic official told journalist Robert Shaplen “you created an economic Frankenstein monster here by making this a big war, and now you are telling us that we have to learn almost overnight to be austere and take care of ourselves, when we all know this is a long process and that there is no such thing as instant Vietnamization”.¹⁵³

Massive inflation in late 1969 and 1970 sparked intra-administration discussion in Washington in the spring and summer. The Treasury, offering the most radical option, wanted the GVN to assume the full economic burden of Vietnamization; a solution that was inconceivable for most U.S. officials as it might have led to a South Vietnamese collapse within months. Economists in the DoD, consistently the most forceful advocates for an overhaul of economic policy, offered an alternative option. In a report that Secretary of Defence Laird passed to Nixon in July 1970 with a cover

November 1969, The Inflation in Vietnam, Oct-Nov 69, Box 75, Vietnam Subject Files, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

¹⁵² CIA Intelligence Memorandum, ‘South Vietnam: National Cohesion and Vietnamization’, 20 August 1970, Box 92, Vietnamization (Jul-Dec) vol. 3 (1 of 2), Vietnam Subject Files, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

¹⁵³ Robert Shaplen, *The Road from War: Vietnam 1965-1971*, (London: Deutsch, 1971), 316-317. Shaplen did not disclose the identity of his informant, describing him as one of the Vietnamese charged with straightening out the economy and someone who was ordinarily pro-American.

memo warning that “our economic plans constitute perhaps the weakest link in the Vietnamization process”, DoD economist William Ford called for a long-term approach. Ford complained that U.S. economic policy had thus far focused only on propping up the RVN economy by controlling inflation and was premised on the assumption that no economic development was possible while the war continued. But the only way that South Vietnamese resources could replace American aid was by encouraging economic growth. Greater domestic taxation, the mobilization of savings and encouragement of foreign investment, would all help but the most promising means for achieving this goal was to institute a flexible exchange rate which would create the correct economic incentives for growth.¹⁵⁴

Ford was supported by Deputy Secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs G. Warren Nutter and fellow DoD economist Stephen Enke. Nutter had worked on his PhD in economics under the supervision of Frank Knight, one of the founders of the Chicago school of economics. Nutter was one of the founders of the Thomas Jefferson Center of Studies in Political Economy at the University of Virginia, which along with the Chicago school led the charge against the state intervention in the economy in the 1950s and 1960s, laying the ground for the neoliberal turn in the 1970s.¹⁵⁵ Nutter and Enke wanted the GVN to institute a flexible exchange rate for all but DoD purchases. This, they believed, would help recover \$100m per year in windfall profits, removing the need to ask Congress for more money and would generate about \$85m of exports a year within a short time. If the administration officials needed

¹⁵⁴ ‘An Economic Strategy for Vietnam’, 18 July 1970, Vietnamization (Jul-Dec 70) Vol. 3 (2 of 2), Box 92, Vietnam Country Files, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

¹⁵⁵ Steven G. Medema, *The Hesitant Hand: Taming Self-Interest in the History of Economic Ideas*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 142-143.

evidence of the efficacy of such a policy, Enke claimed, they need only ask Milton Friedman.¹⁵⁶

But a report by a team of Rand Corporation and AID economists despatched to Saigon in June and led by Charles Cooper established the consensus view. The Cooper team reported that additional U.S. aid and reforms which would “dovetail” with current GVN plans was the only option that would neither increase Saigon’s dependency on the United States nor “impair the effectiveness” of the regime.¹⁵⁷ The Vietnam Special Studies Group (VSSG) and Laurence Lynn of the National Security Council (NSC) believed that the assumptions of the DoD recommendation were unproven and might have unforeseen political consequences. Besides, the GVN was opposed to devaluation. For many in the administration the key concern was whether the GVN could enact reforms without precipitating a drop in the standard of living for major income groups such as the already suffering urban middle and working classes and public sector employees. The Cooper report appeared to satisfactorily address these concerns. But the report’s authors, as well as administration officials in Washington, believed more dramatic reforms would be necessary in the future, perhaps after the 1971 Vietnamese presidential election.¹⁵⁸

The Cooper report and VSSG recommendations became the basis for National Security Decision Memorandum 80 which attempted to balance the perhaps irreconcilable goals of political stability and development. It called for export promotion and increased domestic taxation but the Saigon government would not be

¹⁵⁶ ‘Dr. Enke’s Comments on Economic Paper’, 14 July 1970, VSSG Meeting July 23, 1970, Vietnam Special Studies Group Meetings, Box H-002, Bombing and Economics [5 of 5], National Security Council Institutional Files, Committee Files (1969-1974), Nixon Library.

¹⁵⁷ ‘The Economic Situation and Outlook in Vietnam’, 22 June 1970, Box 92, Vietnamization (Jul-Dec 1970), vol. 3 [2 of 2], Vietnam Country Files, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

¹⁵⁸ ‘Near Term Economic Prospects for Vietnam’, 20 July 1970, VSSG Meeting July 23, 1970, Vietnam Special Studies Group Meetings, Box H-002, Bombing and Economics [2 of 5], National Security Council Institutional Files, Committee Files (1969-1974), Nixon Library; ‘Memorandum for Dr. Kissinger: Vietnam Economic Options’, 21 July 1970, VSSG Meeting July 23, 1970, Vietnam Special Studies Group Meetings, Box H-002, Bombing and Economics [2 of 5], National Security Council Institutional Files, Committee Files (1969-1974), Nixon Library.

forced to devalue the piaster. Total aid of \$750m would be the ceiling for FY71 and beyond. As domestic production and South Vietnamese exports increased, U.S. assistance would decline. But NSDM80 warned that pursuing these goals should not jeopardize Vietnamization.¹⁵⁹

Despite the very obvious barriers to export-led “take-off” in South Vietnam, which some American officials acknowledged, there is scant evidence that Vietnamese officials questioned the wisdom of such an approach.¹⁶⁰ Even before the Nixon administration issued NSDM 80, in early 1970 the Ministries of Finance and Economy reported that the basic problem with generating export-led growth lay in the unrealistic exchange rate and requested that the government establish a fund to subsidise exports at a higher level. These subsidies would be reduced as the war diminished and the difference between the official and real exchange rate declined.¹⁶¹ In September and October 1970, in response to the demands of NSDM80 for reform, the government raised interest rates and enacted a partial devaluation. The October reform introduced a parallel exchange market with different exchange rates for different transactions and acted as a subsidy on exports. Highlighting the complexities of Saigon politics and economic reform, the Senate diluted the package. The Australian ambassador suspected that Senators did not want to be associated with the hardship the reform would cause in urban areas.¹⁶² Indeed, the economic reforms during the final years of the war, all with a view to boosting exports, pushed against policies of the mid-1960s that privileged urban areas, and along with land reform, expanded agricultural credit, and subsidised agricultural inputs, swung economic advantage towards the countryside.

¹⁵⁹ NSDM 80, 13 August 1970, document no. 23, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, vol. VII, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972.

¹⁶⁰ Brash to Gordon, 6 December 1971, FCO 15/1487, UKNA. Brash reported that Samuel Berger, number two at the U.S. embassy, and Frank Pascoe, a USAID official in Vietnam, were both very skeptical about Saigon’s export prospects.

¹⁶¹ ‘Request for a fund reserved for subsidizing exports in 1970’, [v/v xin ngân khoản dành riêng cho việc trợ cấp xuất cảng năm 1970], undated, folder 2508, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII. Although the document is undated it refers to decisions made at the recent Economic and Financial Committee meeting on 8 January 1970.

¹⁶² ‘The Economic Measures of October 1970’, FCO 15/1361, UKNA.

In February 1971, in a bid to keep the pressure on the South Vietnamese, Nixon requested his Ambassador-at-Large for Foreign Economic Policy Development David Kennedy to visit Saigon. Kennedy could tell Saigon officials that the United States would continue to offer “substantial amounts of economic assistance” as long as they implemented the “necessary improvements”.¹⁶³ Ngoc’s talking points for discussions with Kennedy reveal that the South Vietnamese were not simply responding to U.S. pressure however. Ngoc emphasised that the South Vietnamese effort now needed to be “development-minded, reorienting the economy toward production”. He again stressed the need to focus on areas of comparative advantage and, in line with the policy of “Bettering the Image” of the government, the GVN would enact a better investment law and privatize public enterprises, selling shares to civil servants and military personnel, the first step in a program of “popular capitalism”.¹⁶⁴ Meeting with Ngoc and Hue in early March, Kennedy criticised complicated import and customs procedures, the high cost of labour, and corruption, all of which discouraged investment. Kennedy recommended better collection of taxes in rural areas and further exchange rate reform. He told the ministers that if the GVN implemented further reforms the United States would be ready to support South Vietnam to progress to a position similar to Taiwan and South Korea. Kennedy’s recommendations, Hue reported to Thieu, were not contrary to the Saigon’s economic and financial policy. The Ministry of Finance believed that Kennedy’s visit demonstrated that the U.S. government wanted to once more determine what the GVN policy was, allowing the United States to clarify its aid program for Vietnam. The visit, Hue noted, was an opportunity to show that the GVN

¹⁶³ ‘Meeting between the President and Ambassador Kennedy in the President’s Oval Office, 25 February, 1971, *DDRS*, Document Number: CK3100696832.

¹⁶⁴ ‘Six suggested points for discussion with Mr. David Kennedy’ [Đề nghị 6 điểm để thảo luận với Ông. David Kennedy], undated, Folder 2574, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII. Ngoc used the phrase ‘capitalisme populaire’.

was carrying out a program that would lead to “self-sufficiency and self-strengthening”.¹⁶⁵

Kennedy’s criticism of corruption was certainly justified. From the “tea money” village and hamlet officials extorted from peasants for routine paperwork to the top leadership, corruption appears to have infected every level of the GVN. An informant even alleged that ARVN Generals took their Vietnamese piasters to Hong Kong, one of the few markets for the currency, where Chinese Communist agents would exchange it for U.S. dollars and then funnel the piasters back to the North Vietnamese and NLF units operating in South Vietnam.¹⁶⁶ The United States placed pressure on the GVN to clean up and Saigon made periodic attempts to remove corrupt military and civilian officials. But the GVN never came close to resolving the problem and both Americans and South Vietnamese officials came to see it as part of the fabric of society. As Kissinger told Nixon, South Vietnamese tend “tacitly to accept corruption as normal – as do societies in some other Asian countries”. Only a few weeks after meeting with Kennedy, Ngoc told an audience at the American Chamber of Commerce in Saigon that corruption was “present in every country in this region. Some are better than others, but I believe that in some of these countries, conditions are hardly any better than they are in Vietnam”.¹⁶⁷ While it is impossible to measure the real impact of corruption on the South Vietnamese economy, there is no doubt that it accounted for a major drain on resources.

In their conversations with Kennedy, Ngoc and Hue placed more emphasis on what the GVN planned to do, rather than what it had done to that point. But timing was

¹⁶⁵ ‘March 8 1971 meeting at the Ministry of Finance with the delegation of Ambassador David Kennedy’ [Cuộc tiếp xúc ngày 8-3-1971 tại Bộ Tài Chánh với phái đoàn Đại Sứ David Kennedy], 8 March 1971, Folder 2574, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

¹⁶⁶ Dick Flaspohler to George Jacobsen, undated, Memos and Messages/Mr. Jacobsen/Visits, Box 14, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, 1967-1973, RG472, NARA II.

¹⁶⁷ Henry Kissinger, Memorandum for the President, ‘Corruption in the GVN’, 7 October 1969, Vietnam/Corruption in SVN, Box 70, Vietnam Country Files, NSC Files, Nixon Library; ‘Minister of Economy Pham Kim Ngoc’s Speech Delivered at the American Chamber of Commerce on April 15, 1971’, FCO 15/1487, UKNA.

of crucial concern for the Thieu regime in enacting potentially politically destabilizing reforms. In 1970 and 1971, the GVN faced considerable pressure from the U.S. Congress to devalue exchange rate for DoD and U.S. personnel purchases in Vietnam. Congress justifiably condemned this false exchange rate as “a hidden subsidy” for the Vietnamese economy. The administration realized the GVN would have to devalue sooner or later to avoid Congressional ire but it wanted to delay the action for as long as possible so that DoD purchases could compensate for declining AID appropriations.¹⁶⁸ Senior administration officials pressed the GVN to take steps in other areas that would improve the image of the regime in the United States. In a meeting with Thieu in July 1971, while referring to continued U.S. assistance, Kissinger suggested that “the South Vietnamese should discuss reforms which would free the economy somewhat”.¹⁶⁹ But Saigon would only act when it was ready. Thieu faced what he thought would be a tightly contested election in 1971 and the government was not willing to risk economic unrest.

Moreover, U.S. officials were once again divided as how best to proceed with reforms. Charles Cooper, the lead author of the 1970 AID/RAND study, was now economic counsellor in the Saigon embassy and had primary responsibility for negotiating economic stabilization and reform with the South Vietnamese. To David Kennedy it seemed Cooper was “an absolute disaster” and Kennedy wondered why anybody had sent him to Saigon. Warren Nutter agreed that Cooper “seemed to be acting erratically to the situation and didn’t seem to know what to do next”. In the spring and summer of 1971, the administration also awaited the results of ten separate economic development studies before making further decisions. Many of these studies

¹⁶⁸ ‘Vietnam and the Hidden Subsidy (Inequitable Currency Exchange Rates): Eight Report by the Committee on Government Operations’, 16 December 1971, Folder 08, Box 01, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 11 – Monographs, TTU-VVA, Item No.: 2390108004. Accessed 17 December 2014; ‘Vietnamization Meeting with Secretary Laird’, 13 October 1971, Historical Project – Vietnamization Meetings, 1971 (5), Box A73, Melvin R. Laird Papers, Ford Library.

¹⁶⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, 4 July 1971, document no. 231, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, vol. VII, Vietnam, July 1970- January 1972.

aimed to model the inflationary impact of different reforms. Nutter dismissed such studies as “a waste of time”. The more important issue was “long-term reforms” and everyone agreed on the basic requirements.¹⁷⁰ “We continue to face this bureaucratic contest”, NSC staffer K. Wayne Smith told Kissinger, “between those who want to rely on a ‘seat of the pants’ feel for the Vietnam economy and those who support analysis”.

At a conference to determine the best path for South Vietnamese economic development at the U.S. Embassy in Singapore in late May, and from which South Vietnamese representatives were conspicuously absent, a vague consensus was reached. Attendees concluded rather lamely that the South Vietnamese should be encouraged to continue moving the economy toward a “free market”, establish realistic public investment priorities, and improve the climate for private and foreign investment. The seminar report noted some “doubts that there is a clear cut or universal case for the economic desirability of [an] export industry as compared to import substitution”. Nonetheless, the participants concluded that Saigon should study the means for stimulating exports and search for export markets. These ideas became the basis for Cooper’s negotiations with the South Vietnamese economic team for post-election reform.¹⁷¹

In November 1971 the GVN launched by far its most dramatic economic reform package to date. British observers reported that U.S. officials privately admitted to have inspired the reforms, if not their timing.¹⁷² Yet U.S. records show the degree to which Ngoc and new Minister of Finance Ha Xuan Trung, who succeeded Hue in mid-1971,

¹⁷⁰ ‘Vietnamization meeting with Secretary Laird’, 19 April 1971, Historical Project – Vietnamization Meetings, 1971, (2), Box A73, Melvin R. Laird Papers, Ford Library; ‘Vietnamization meeting with Secretary Laird’, 28 April 1971, Historical Project – Vietnamization Meetings, 1971, (2), Box A73, Melvin R. Laird Papers, Ford Library; ‘Vietnamization meeting with Secretary Laird’, 12 May 1971, Historical Project – Vietnamization Meetings, 1971, (2), Box A73, Melvin R. Laird Papers, Ford Library.

¹⁷¹ K. Wayne Smith to Kissinger, ‘Vietnam Assessment – Economic Issues’, 2 June 1971, Vietnam Ad Hoc Group – 1971 (7), Box 104, U.S. National Security Council Institutional Files 1974-1977, Ford Library; ‘Economic Development Seminar, Singapore, 26-28 May 1971’, Economic Development Seminar, Singapore, Box 98, CORDS Reports and Analysis Directorate, Analysis Div., Command Information Publications, 1967-1972, RG472, NARA II.

¹⁷² R. Brash to D. McD. Gordon, 6 December 1971, FCO 15/1487, UKNA.

were instrumental to the design and implementation of the reform. At a meeting on August 19 the GVN economic team handed U.S. officials a 150 page economic programme for 1972 which included “plans for reform in almost every nook and cranny of economic policy” and four days later they provided a list of more specific import and exchange rate reforms. U.S. embassy officials reported that they were “somewhat surprised by apparent decisiveness of GVN economic team at this juncture. However, proposed reforms so close in spirit and substance to mission views, which it reflects, that we believe this initiative should be wholeheartedly supported”. The embassy also reported that it was unsure whether Thieu would support the proposed reforms, despite Ngoc and Trung’s confidence that they could convince him.¹⁷³ Put simply, U.S. officials had a broad outline of the reforms required and the GVN economic team were able to provide the specifics largely because their ideas were in consonance with those of U.S. embassy officials. Above all, the United States needed Ngoc and Trung on the inside to convince Thieu of the merits of the reforms.

In addition, the package bore the hallmarks of the GVN liberalizers, who once again played on the symbolism of the Asian tigers. Introducing the proposed reforms in November 1971, Ngoc and Trung wrote that “following the experience of many countries such as Taiwan, Korea and Singapore, free enterprise is the soundest and most effective path to economic development”. The ministers called for the removal of economic restrictions and the encouragement of private investment. The government would encourage exports through further devaluation, the reduction of import duties which had acted as protectionism for local industries, and a shift of resources from ISI to exports.¹⁷⁴ Announcing the reform package, Thieu spoke of the GVN’s determination

¹⁷³ U.S. Embassy Saigon to Secretary of State, Saigon Tel 13769, 26 August 1971, E1 VIETS, 1/1/71, Box 801, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, RG59, NARA II.

¹⁷⁴ ‘Economic and Financial Reform Program of Autumn 1971, Documents Volume 1: General Explanations, Joint Ministries of Economy and Finance’ [Chương trình cải cách kinh tế tài chính mùa thu 1971, tài liệu tập 1: giải thích tổng quát, Liên Bộ Kinh Tế Tài Chính], Folder 32458, Phủ Thủ Tướng, TTLTQGII.

to open up the economy and to encourage foreign and South Vietnamese private investment in production and exports. The GVN would soon enact an investment law to support such ventures. The development of exports, Thieu said, was “a top priority in the national effort to achieve economic independence”.¹⁷⁵

In their outline of the November reforms Ngoc and Trung attempted to undermine certain other civilian economists and technicians within the GVN who had a marked preference for planning and who were lobbying Thieu to strengthen the state’s planning functions. “Only a small number of countries in the world” the ministers wrote, “have the required capacity and means to apply a direct and detailed control system necessary for the harmonisation of a planned economy”. In a country with as poor administration as South Vietnam “it would be hard to carry out economic control in an effective manner”.¹⁷⁶ While the men had a point about the problems of planning for a state lacking bureaucratic reach and data collection, all of this was in stark contrast to their model states of Taiwan and Korea. Although both Taiwan and South Korea were pursuing export-led development models by the 1970s, this was after long periods of import-substitution. Even as both Taiwan and Korea turned to an export strategy, the state continued to play the central role in the economy and engaged in long-term planning. The GVN’s 1971 economic package bore more than passing resemblance to South Korea’s 1965 reforms mentioned above. While Ngoc and Hue presented the reforms as reorienting the economy toward the market, in South Korea similar reforms had left plenty of room for continued intervention. Indeed, in announcing the package, Thieu not only stressed export promotion but also import-substitution.¹⁷⁷ Interpretations

¹⁷⁵ ‘President of the Republic of Vietnam’s Announcement About the Investment and Export Development Policy, 15 November 1971’ [Tuyên cáo của Tổng Thống Việt Nam Cộng Hòa về chính sách phát triển đầu tư và xuất cảng, ngày 15 tháng 11 năm 1971], *Kinh Tế Tập San*, no. 11-12, (1971) 13-15.

¹⁷⁶ ‘Economic and Financial Reform Program of Autumn 1971, Document Volume 1: General Explanations, Joint Ministries of Economy and Finance’.

¹⁷⁷ ‘Economic Reform in South Vietnam’, 26 November 1971, FCO 15/1487, UKNA.

of economic reforms were malleable, dependent on the meaning individual policymakers attached to them.

While for some technocrats the improved security situation in 1969-1971 was cause to remove government restrictions on the economy, others believed that security offered stability and an opportunity to return to planning and state guidance of the economy. In June 1970 the Special Assistant for Planning in the President's office, Tran Dai Trung, suggested that Thieu appoint a committee to draft a Five Year Plan.¹⁷⁸ Pursuing this idea, at the end of 1970 Thieu told Deputy National Security Advisor Alexander Haig and Ambassador Bunker that U.S. withdrawals had "raised serious concerns among the people". In the hope of convincing the people of a continued American commitment to South Vietnam he said the GVN would have to develop "a long-range economic plan which would reflect continued U.S. participation".¹⁷⁹ Thieu was hinting at the performative aspects of planning. Like other Third World leaders, Thieu recognized that an economic plan was a prerequisite for securing international and bilateral assistance. Whether he believed in the merits of planning or not, Thieu believed a plan would be a useful tool in legitimising his rule and gaining continued U.S. support. In June 1971, Thieu therefore established a Ministry of Planning and National Development. Minister Le Tuan Anh and the Director General of Planning were responsible for heading up the committee to draft the plan. Although Ngoc and Trung had deputies on the committee, they did not sit on it themselves.¹⁸⁰ It is not entirely clear why Thieu decided to place economic functions in several different ministries. He may have wanted to divide and conquer his ministers, ensuring that none gained too much power. In any case, the divisions between those who advocated private

¹⁷⁸ 'Establishing a Five Year Plan and Organizing a Planning Agency' [Thiết lập kế hoạch ngũ niên và tổ chức cơ quan kế hoạch], 2 June 1970, Folder 2720, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

¹⁷⁹ 'Meeting between President Thieu, Ambassador Bunker and General Haig', 17 December 1970, document no. 91, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, vol. VII, Vietnam, July 1970- January 1972.

¹⁸⁰ *Four-year National Economic Development Plan, 1972-1975*, (Saigon: Directorate General of Planning, 1972).

enterprise and those who saw a more important role for the state sowed the seeds for rivalry and conflict within GVN economic circles. These tensions would explode after the Paris agreements, with the interventionists ultimately ousting the liberalizers.

Outlining its strategy in early 1972, the Ministry of Planning noted that recent military, political, and economic developments had created a favourable environment for economic planning. The Communists had been forced to return to low level guerrilla warfare and through hamlet and village elections the GVN had established “democratic foundations” down to the hamlet-level. Planning, however, was contingent on the continued territorial security of the country, the maintenance of the current low tempo of the war, improved administration, and the continued support of friendly countries. These were uncertain assumptions in a war torn country and a volatile global economy. In addition, the Ministry’s strategy highlighted that if Taiwan and South Korea offered something to aspire to, they also provided Vietnamese planners a yardstick against which to measure South Vietnam’s poor economic performance. South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines provided planners with economic indicators and statistics on savings, investment, and exports, which only confirmed the imbalances and inadequacies in the South Vietnamese economy.¹⁸¹

Due to the “grave deficiencies” in data collection, the authors of the plan noted, they had drawn together various schemes of Saigon ministries, the Postwar Development Plan of David Lillienthal’s Joint Development Group, as well as documents from other countries, notably Taiwan and South Korea. One government economist working on modelling the plan employed Rostow’s rhetoric to suggest that increases in exports were a precondition of “economic take-off”. With the prospect of reductions in U.S. aid, Tran Thanh Dang wrote, South Vietnam must try to increase

¹⁸¹ ‘Ministry of Planning and National Development: National Economic Development Policy’ [Bộ Kế Hoạch và Phát Triển Quốc Gia: Sách Lược Phát Triển Kinh Tế Quốc Gia], January 1972, folder 2717, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

exports and reduce imports to fill the large foreign aid gap. But the government must also maintain price levels, a prerequisite for development and social stability.¹⁸² The plan called for both agriculture supporting and export-oriented industries as well as import-substituting industries using domestic raw materials. Government intervention by planning would depend on the constitution, historical and cultural traditions, and the level of development and would “decrease as the private sector and economy grow in strength”.¹⁸³ Thieu described the plan as the “guiding light” in the journey to “stability and self-reliance from the present state of underdevelopment and foreign aid dependence”. The goal was self-sufficiency in food and agricultural diversification that could provide raw materials for light industry, paving the way for “large-scale industrialization and modernization”. Despite the conflicting visions of whether government planning and intervention or free enterprise would achieve economic growth, the apparent successes of Taiwan, Korea and Singapore moved GVN planners from internal growth models in the early 1960s to export-led development by the early 1970s.

Although much of the talk of public versus private investment, and ISI versus export-led development was fanciful, the South Vietnamese had placed the economy on a footing far more likely to result in economic growth than any time since the early 1960s. In late 1971 inflation was down to 10-15% - the lowest level since 1964-, savings and receipts from exports and taxation were up, while devaluation had “virtually eliminated” windfall profiteering and considerably undercut the currency black market.¹⁸⁴ Nonetheless the November 1971 reforms had exposed the regime to further criticism, again demonstrating the degree to which economic reform was contested in South Vietnam. General Duong Van ‘Big’ Minh, Thieu’s main challenger

¹⁸² ‘Modelling and Backup Method for the Five Year Plan’ [Mô thức đại tượng và phương pháp dự phóng cho kế hoạch ngũ niên], undated, folder 2720, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

¹⁸³ *Four-year National Economic Development Plan, 1972-1975*.

¹⁸⁴ Dacy, *Foreign Aid, War, and Economic Development*, 14.

in the presidential election before dropping out of the race, noted “that a dark future is waiting for our people”. The devaluation of the piaster and the rise in prices would mean more misery. The reforms, Minh said, only aimed to protract and widen a war “belonging to foreigners”.¹⁸⁵ Others were clearly concerned by the degree to which recent reforms would subject South Vietnam to the whims of global capital. One National Assembly deputy said “the country will henceforth be exploited by foreign capitalists to the detriment of the people”.¹⁸⁶

For many GVN technocrats and U.S. officials, however, the November 1971 reform package appeared to usher in a new era, one of development rather than stabilization. Indeed, the reforms came to be known, perhaps a little hyperbolically, as the “Autumn Economic Revolution”. The London *Financial Times* called the June 1972 investment law which resulted from the reforms “the most liberal such law in existence in Asia” and the government also established a well-capitalized Economic Development Fund.¹⁸⁷ The United States was especially pleased that Thieu had taken such a strong personal interest in economic policy. In a speech before the American Chamber of Commerce in Saigon, Cooper noted that economic development had been placed, for the first time, on the same level as defence and pacification. The government had shown itself to be committed to a liberal economy, in which private enterprise and foreign investment would play the leading role. In what was surely a swipe at his enemies Nutter and Enke in the Department of Defense, Cooper said “Milton Friedman might not much appreciate the changes that have occurred here, but all of you with experience doing business in the developing world certainly should be greatly impressed”. South

¹⁸⁵ ‘Text of General Big Minh’s Comments on Economic Measures’, 16 December 1971, E1 VIETS, 1/1/71, Box 801, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, RG59, NARA II.

¹⁸⁶ ‘Reactions to New Economic Measures: Legislative Prospects’, U.S. Embassy Saigon to Secretary of States, Saigon Tel 18647, 27 November 1971, E1 VIETS, 1/1/71, Box 801, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, RG59, NARA II.

¹⁸⁷ Stewart Dalby, ‘How Saigon Has Begun to Woo the Capitalists’, *Financial Times*, 12 June 1973.

Vietnam was “ripe for development”, Cooper said. “Of course the job would be easier if the war would end”.¹⁸⁸

Unfortunately, the war refused to end. For most GVN officials the relative security of 1969-1971 provided the entire logic for economic liberalization or state-led planning, depending on one’s preferences, and they even began to speak of a post-war era. Former Director of the Agricultural Development Bank and later Deputy Prime Minister for Economy and Agriculture Nguyen Van Hao noted that the “Autumn Economic Revolution” had aimed to reform the entire structure of the economy “to step into a period of development” and had appeared to promise great things to come. But 1972 was an inauspicious year to begin economic planning or to jump start economic development in Vietnam and globally. The North Vietnamese Offensive which began in March, put paid to the pretence of the Four Year Plan and the growth promised by the liberalizers. The offensive saw a major contraction in domestic production and created another 800,000 refugees. The government revised the 1972 budget upwards twice to deal with increased defence and refugee costs. In addition, Hao noted, 1972 was the first year that the South Vietnamese economy felt the real impact of U.S. troop withdrawals. As many as 100,000 Vietnamese in the service of U.S. military and civilian organizations lost their jobs. Although the government had managed to close the yawning balance of payments gap by US\$100m in 1972, Hao concluded that other major economic indicators had gone in the wrong direction which “does not allow us to adopt an optimistic attitude”.¹⁸⁹

The prospects for 1973 did not appear promising. The National Bank anticipated an even larger budget deficit in 1973, a drop in foreign exchange reserves due to the

¹⁸⁸ ‘The Economic Future of the Republic of Vietnam – A Speech at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Saigon by Mr. Charles A. Cooper, Economic Counsellor U.S. Embassy, Saigon. 16 March 1972’ [Trong lại kinh tế VNCH- diễn từ của Ông Charles A. Cooper, sứ Thần Cố Vấn Kinh Tế Tòa Đại Sứ Mỹ Saigon đọc tại Phòng Thương Mại Hoa Kỳ Saigon ngày 16 tháng ba 1972], folder 2718, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

¹⁸⁹ ‘Statement on the Economic Situation in 1972’ [Nhận định tình hình kinh tế 1972], Spring 1973, folder 2729, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

decline in U.S. spending, and further unemployment. At the same time, the GVN could not limit imports without an adverse impact on prices and production. Whatever the efforts made, it would be difficult to keep prices increases at 1972 levels.¹⁹⁰ Little did GVN officials realise that, after January 1973, these problems would be compounded by factors beyond their control, namely the 1973 oil shock, the decline in the real value of U.S. economic aid, and the presence of tens of thousands more North Vietnamese troops competing for resources with the regime in the south.

Conclusion

Vietnamization presented U.S. and South Vietnamese economic officials with a complex set of problems and placed near impossible demands on the South Vietnamese economy. These demands drove policymakers in Saigon in two directions – one reasonably free market and the other somewhat dirigiste- both in part inspired by the Taiwan and Korean models. Despite the contested vision in Saigon, the economy was placed on a sounder footing for development in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Many economic indicators including receipts from exports, domestic savings, and taxation rose considerably. These reforms often generated domestic backlash, both popularly and in the National Assembly. Nonetheless, the reforms initiated were never radical enough to address the economy's fundamental inadequacies. While GVN technocrats and planners might have waxed lyrical about South Vietnam's future among the Asian Tigers, economic reform was always secondary to political stability. As this was the case, the demands of Vietnamization could not have been met without continued, though gradually declining, U.S. and international aid. After 1973, this would become increasingly unlikely in the context of the global economy, the continuing war, Thieu's increasingly illegitimate rule, and U.S. domestic politics in the 1970s.

¹⁹⁰ 'General Survey of the Economic and Financial Situation in Vietnam', *Kinh Tế Tập San*, No. 5-6, 1973.

The South Vietnamese regime was a dictatorship but clearly there was a degree of pluralism in terms of its development vision. Technocrats such as Ngoc, Hue and Trung saw free enterprise and a diminished role for the state as the best way to promote development. But even they sometimes had to acknowledge that, in a volatile economy and in the absence of other forces, the state had to intervene. Others such as Thieu and Anh, while making a rhetorical commitment to private enterprise, saw the state as playing a crucial role in guiding the economy through planning, controls, and import-substitution. But all sides in the debate believed that export-led growth was the key to South Vietnam's modernization and economic survival. This represented a shift away from the endogenous growth model of the Diem era. Above all, this demonstrates that economic development policy reflected the Saigon regime's attraction to the model offered by the East Asian developmental states.

Examining South Vietnamese economic policy in the years after the Tet Offensive tells us a good deal about South Vietnamese agency and dependency on the United States during the final years of the war. South Vietnamese actions were taken in response to the external environment – U.S. pressure and the perceived success of the Taiwan and Korean development models- but equally as importantly in response to the internal environment, particularly the tempo of the war and strength of certain political constituencies within South Vietnam at different times. While the U.S. was able to get the reforms it wanted in 1969-72, this was because it had allies in the GVN who already believed in a more liberal development policy. Between 1969 and 1971, Ngoc, Hue and Trung's hand was strengthened by their ability to convince Thieu that reforms were what the U.S. wanted and that further aid was dependent on these decisions. They were also able to point to Thieu's model states of Korea and Taiwan to justify these moves. During this period, Thieu's perception that the war was going reasonably well as well as his need for continued U.S. support made him far more likely to enact the reforms that

these technocrats advocated. After the Paris Peace Agreement, as will be seen, the U.S. was far less concerned about South Vietnamese macroeconomic policy and, in light of the deteriorating security situation, those who opposed the liberalizers were able to assert their authority.

An examination of economic reform in the post-Tet years begs the question of why, in the face of such overwhelming obstacles, did U.S. and South Vietnamese officials adopt a strategy based on exports and foreign investment? For a regime that hoped to achieve export-led take-off, export figures should have been a major cause of concern. Exports of rubber, fish, and plywood in 1972 amounted to \$23 million while imports in the early 1970s were between \$700-750 million per year.¹⁹¹ Foreign investment would prove an equally wishful method of attracting economic support as long as the war continued. Yet successive U.S. and South Vietnamese decisions on the RVN economy called for the expansion of exports and private investment as the main solutions to the economic crisis. Why did South Vietnamese pursue these goals? On the one hand, drawing on Taiwan and South Korea provided a useful rhetorical tool. The lessons offered by these states' export-oriented model, however ill-defined it was and whatever its distance from South Vietnamese reality, offered an attractive narrative that RVN technocrats could employ to describe the tasks of the present and to draw a picture of the future. On the other hand, it was not entirely unrealistic for South Vietnamese leaders to imagine their country as the next Taiwan or South Korea. While there were certain dissimilarities, there were many similarities between the three countries. Above all, the primary cause of South Vietnam's economic troubles was not the inadequacies or corruption of its authoritarian leaders but the ongoing war. A look at agricultural development, a subject to which this dissertation now turns, shows the degree to which

¹⁹¹ 'Import issues and the establishment of a thrifty and austere way of life' [Vấn đề nhập cảng và việc tạo lập một nếp sống cần kiệm, khắc khổ], 1 August 1973, Folder 3031, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

the war, more than any other factor, undermined the GVN's ability to capitalize on the tremendous rural changes that occurred in South Vietnam after the Tet Offensive.

Chapter Two

“He Behaves Like an Economic Man”: Agricultural Development and Land Reform in South Vietnam

In January 1968 two farmers from My Phuoc Village in An Giang province drove down Nguyen Thuc Thong Street in Saigon on a Fiat 612, a medium size, heavy duty tractor. The men had bought the tractor in Saigon for VN\$550,000 (US\$4,600) and had waited 3 months for its delivery. They planned to return to An Giang, 170km away, where they hoped to hire out the tractor to fellow farmers, ploughing up to 300 hectares a season. These were “not sophisticated individuals” U.S. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker suggested, “but there was no doubt in their minds as to the profitability of the tractor. The entrepreneurial spirit is not lacking- the farmers saw a chance to profit by the application of a new (to them) technology and seized it”. Bunker was not alone in such assumptions. The central challenge of agricultural development in the Global South, it seemed to U.S. social scientists, development practitioners, and government officials, was to transform the psychology of the peasant. The tractor-riding men Bunker saw were the kind of individualistic, risk-taking and entrepreneurial farmers that United States officials and their South Vietnamese allies wanted to see in war-torn South Vietnam.¹⁹²

In the 1950s and 1960s development agencies overwhelmingly focused their efforts on the rural areas of the Global South. The countryside, where the vast majority of the world’s poorest lived, seemed the most likely source of communist insurgency. Indeed, in 1949 the Chinese Communist Party had risen to power on a tide of peasant support. These rural areas appeared to embody a pre-capitalist social and economic

¹⁹² Pike ed., *The Bunker Papers*, vol. 2, 300-301.

order. Many development projects aimed to erase this order, eliminate the grievances that might lead to rebellion, and integrate the postcolonial nations and their peasant populations into the global capitalist economy.

Social scientists were unsure of the value of agriculture to postcolonial economies. Early development theory framed the agricultural sector as merely a source of surplus labour for industrialization. Rice production in particular appeared to contribute little to development. In a process he called “agricultural involution” Clifford Geertz argued that peasant families worked harder for ever smaller increments in production. Intensification of input did not result in a corresponding increase in output per capita. Geertz argued that rice production hindered modernization because traditional cultivation methods absorbed surplus labour and although productivity kept up with population growth, it did not increase. By the early 1960s however, development economists such Theodore Shultz and Simon Kuznets argued that agriculture, and particularly small farmers, were drivers of development.¹⁹³

More than any other social scientists, modernization theorists believed in the necessity of transforming peasant farmers’ values as the route to economic development. Marion Levy, in one of the early works that would become part of the modernization canon- *The Family Revolution in Modern China*- argued that future-oriented people were open to the manipulation of their environment whereas tradition-bound people were fearful of change. MIT’s Centre for International Studies, in a report submitted to the U.S. Senate in 1960, suggested that agricultural modernization would require “radical changes... not only in the knowledge of these numerous producers but in their values, their perception of alternatives and their motivation”. Rostow in particular saw the importance of psychological transformation. “A requirement for take-

¹⁹³ Clifford Geertz, *Agricultural Involution: the Process of Ecological Change in Indonesia*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963); Patrick Allan Sharma, ‘Globalizing Development: Robert McNamara at the World Bank’, (PhD diss., University of California- Los Angeles, 2010), 171-172.

off”, Rostow believed “is... a class of farmers willing and able to respond to the possibilities opened up for them by new techniques, land-holding arrangements, transport facilities and forms of market and credit organization”. A small elite can stimulate growth but “especially in agriculture... a wider-based revolution in outlook must come about”. Modernization of agriculture would require a move away from subsistence mono-cultures to crop diversification, livestock rearing, mechanization, and the application of new technologies on the farm.¹⁹⁴

Once the psychology of the peasant farmer had changed, higher agricultural production could create a surplus that could then be invested in new industrial enterprises. The rural areas, with newly awakened, middle peasants with disposal income would become a new market for growing industries. Daniel Lerner said that this consumer penetration of countryside was a key goal of modernization. The Sears-Roebuck catalogue, Lerner suggested, was “the great symbol” of the “spread of consumption of urban products beyond the city limits”.¹⁹⁵

Despite the belief in the need to transform peasant society, there was no consensus about how to best approach the subject of agricultural development in the Global South. Late 20th century narratives of the success of the “Green Revolution” elide the many compromises and contestations that accompanied rural development in the first 25 years of the Cold War. “Modernizers”, Cullather argues, “imagined many attainable futures for Asia, and the alternatives of land reform, community development, TVA-style river valley development, farm-industry integration, and the ‘new strategy’ based on high

¹⁹⁴ Latham, *Modernization as Ideology*, 36; Center for International Studies, *Economic, Social and Political Change in the Underdeveloped Countries and Its Implications for United States Policy: a Study Prepared at the Request of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Center for International Studies, 1960), 102; Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth*, 50-51, 140-142

¹⁹⁵ Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society*, 61.

yielding varieties of wheat and rice each represented a distinct interpretation of the Asian condition and the goals to be sought”.¹⁹⁶

Of all the development paradigms that U.S. government and non-government organizations promoted, however, none occupied as prominent a place in the development tool box as land reform, community development, and the high-yield varieties of the Green Revolution. One scholar has suggested that these approaches succeeded one another, with the triumph of the Green Revolution in the late 1960s finally erasing the chances for more equitable programmes of land reform and community development that practitioners had promoted in the 1940s and 1950s.¹⁹⁷ This chapter demonstrates that in South Vietnam these paradigms could co-exist. Between 1968 and 1973, the GVN introduced high-yield ‘miracle rice’ varieties, initiated community development projects in the form of the Village Self-Development (VSD) Programme, and launched the Land-to-the-Tiller, a massive program of land reform. Added to this was the state-led introduction of huge amounts of agricultural credit on easy terms. For South Vietnamese and U.S. officials there was no apparent contradiction among these varied approaches. Each of these steps aimed to draw peasant farmers to the side of the government and contribute to economic development and village self-government. The miracle rice project sought to increase farmer income and return South Vietnam to a state of rice self-sufficiency. Farmers’ new found wealth would be channelled into the Village Self-Development Program (VSD), which sought to increase communal solidarity, forging closer links among the people and between the people and village authorities. Even more so than the miracle rice project and the VSD, land reform would provide the peasantry with clear evidence that their best interests lay with the government. The VSD and land reform represented a significant decentralization of power to the villages and a redistribution of the nation’s wealth. By

¹⁹⁶ Cullather, *The Hungry World*, 9.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, passim.

encouraging peasants to donate to local development projects and by allowing village governments to collect taxes on newly redistributed land, the projects also sought to increase village self-sufficiency at a time when national resources were stretched thin.

Modernization theory might have come under fire in the social sciences by the late 1960s, but social scientists continued to debate the economic behaviour of the Asian peasant. This was best encapsulated in the post-Vietnam War debate between James C. Scott and Samuel Popkin. Scott believed that peasants were inherently risk averse. Experiences of food shortages meant that peasants were more concerned about ensuring subsistence and avoiding failure than making profit. Peasant societies, although exploitative, guaranteed subsistence and peasants only rebelled when this subsistence was threatened. Such societies were not “radically egalitarian” Scott argued but had developed a “moral economy” which included certain forms of social insurance to protect those who suffered economic misfortune. The commercialization of agriculture and new forms of taxation and landholding during the colonial era had exposed peasants to fluctuating market forces and stripped away these forms of social insurance.¹⁹⁸

Employing the rational choice theory which had become so popular among Chicago School economists, Popkin argued that peasants were motivated by individual and family interests, not those of the village, political parties, or the nation. Popkin doubted that Scott’s “moral economy” had ever existed because it took too benign a view of village institutions and overlooked conflict within them. Instead Popkin argued that peasants were rational actors who made “many long-term as well as short-term investments” and both risky and risk-averse economic decisions.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

¹⁹⁹ Samuel Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: the Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

During the war itself, U.S. and South Vietnamese officials employed something akin to the “moral economy” and “rational peasant” models to understand peasant behaviour and to design development projects.²⁰⁰ Whether one accepted the concept of the moral economy or the rational peasant influenced the kind of nation-building and development projects one might advocate. Those who saw the Vietnamese peasant as inherently individualistic and rational tended to favour modernization projects which provided economic incentives and sought to integrate these farmers into the cash economy. Those who saw the peasants as essentially moral advocated community development projects which required that peasants pool labour and money for the greater good of the village.

The post-Tet GVN programmes sparked major changes in the countryside. Agricultural output and rural prosperity increased considerably. But the fruits of development were unevenly distributed. South Vietnam was environmentally diverse and development projects played out very differently in different areas of the country.²⁰¹ Farmers’ ability to benefit from GVN programmes was heavily dependent on their geographical location and the quality of their land, the degree of security in their village, and their access to GVN credit. The two men Bunker spotted on the tractor in Saigon hailed from An Giang province, touted as “the most pacified province in the nation”. As such American and South Vietnamese officials selected the province as a site for

²⁰⁰ Scholars have also used these models either as an interpretative lens through which to understand peasant behaviour in their post-war analyses or to describe the ways in which GVN and U.S. officials viewed the peasantry. Elliott uses the moral and rational peasant model to explain peasants support for or opposition to the revolution and the government; Stewart notes Diem imagined South Vietnam’s villages to be similar to the closed corporate villages Scott later wrote about. However, as Stewart highlights, due to different settlement patterns and economic relations Popkin’s model was probably more applicable to the Mekong Delta, while Scott’s model may be more applicable to the precolonial corporate village of the Red River Delta in northern Vietnam, Stewart, ‘Hearts, Minds and Cong Dan Vu’, 63-64; Jefferson Marquis argues that ‘conservative-populist’ social scientists were more likely to understand Vietnamese peasants in communal terms, while ‘liberal-nationalists’ viewed the Vietnamese peasant as a self-interested actor, Marquis, ‘The Other Warriors’, 83-92. Another study which demonstrates that U.S. officials used the rational actor model to understand peasant behaviour is Arthur Combs, ‘Rural economic development as a nation building strategy in South Vietnam, 1968-1972’, (PhD diss., London School of Economics, 1998).

²⁰¹ Biggs, *Quagmire*, 14-19, passim; Combs, ‘Rural economic development as a nation building strategy in South Vietnam’, passim.

experimental agricultural development and credit programmes. An Giang enjoyed much greater peace and prosperity, and much higher level of agricultural mechanization than other South Vietnamese provinces. Peasant farmers in the northern provinces, on the other hand, were at a distinct disadvantage to enjoy the benefits of the GVN's agricultural modernization and land reform projects, for reasons of both security and environment. Even as it pushed the NLF forces back after 1968, the government controlled much less territory in the northern half of the country and the refugee crisis there was far more acute. Had the war not raged so badly in the provinces in the north, population pressure, inferior rice land, and a poor agriculture infrastructure would still have placed these peasants in a weaker position. In ignoring these realities, Bunker spoke of the "entrepreneurial spirit" of these farmers in contrast to their more "traditional" counterparts, suggesting that a psychological transformation in peasant farmers was more fundamental to agricultural modernization than access to good land, credit, and security.²⁰²

Large numbers of wealthier peasants with the means to take advantage of GVN programmes thrived during the final years of the American War. This was particularly true of those wealthier farmers with good land in the Mekong Delta. After the Tet Offensive rice production in the Delta increased dramatically and there were numerous signs of prosperity and greater consumption. The GVN attempted to guide this process and direct the increased wealth into channels of support for the government but it struggled to harness these changes, both politically and economically.

Land Tenure and Agricultural Development in South Vietnam, 1954-1968

Between the 1880s and 1930s the French colonial state dredged canals and reclaimed hundreds of thousands of hectares in the Mekong Delta. Up to the 1920s an

²⁰² 'Anatomy of a Pacified Province... An Giang', 1968, Folder 11, Box 05, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 11- Assessment and Strategy, TTU-VVA, Item No.: 2120511001.

average of 73,000 Vietnamese per year settled along the Delta's new canals, only to discover that they had become tenants of French and wealthy Vietnamese landlords.²⁰³ In 1945, 2.5% of landowners owned 50% of the land while about 80% of farmers were tenants, meaning the Mekong Delta had among the highest concentrations of land ownership of any region in the world. Rental rates were often as high as 50% and usurious loans were common. Tenants had no protection against crop failure or floods, relying entirely on the benevolence of their landlords which was often not forthcoming.²⁰⁴ French colonial administrators and later many South Vietnamese officials believed that the peasantry accepted this as the permanent condition of their lives. Jeffrey Race has suggested "this fatalistic passive attitude" provided "a terrific stumbling block" and that the Viet Minh's "decisive destruction of this fatalism" was one of the enduring accomplishments of the revolution during the First Indochina War. Yet the revolution, Race argues, did not rile up passions that did not already exist.²⁰⁵

The Viet Minh was therefore able to secure a considerable amount of its support by addressing land ownership, the issue of greatest concern in the lives of the Vietnamese peasantry. The Viet Minh's programme included the assassination or coercion of landlords, and the reduction of rents and the redistribution of land. Other landlords fled to the towns and cities. Many peasants received land in return for their support of the revolution and some areas of South Vietnam where Viet Minh land reform had occurred would remain hotbeds of revolutionary support well into the 1960s.²⁰⁶

From its inception the South Vietnamese state was thus at a disadvantage. The land policies of Emperor Bao Dai's State of Vietnam (1949-1955) and Ngo Dinh

²⁰³ Biggs, *Quagmire*, 71

²⁰⁴ 'Land Reform- United States Economic Assistance to Viet Nam, 1954-1975', Viet Nam Terminal Report, Prepared by the Asia Bureau, Agency for International Development, December 31, 1975, 1.

²⁰⁵ Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 39.

²⁰⁶ William Duiker, *Sacred War: Nationalism and Revolution in a Divided Vietnam*, (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1995), 124-148.

Diem's Republic of Vietnam only served to compound this disadvantage. More often than not these reforms amounted to a reassertion of the privileges of the landlords that the Viet Minh, with the peasantry's support, had fought to abolish. In the dying days of the First Indochina War, the State of Vietnam introduced a number of ordinances that ostensibly included maximum rents of 15% and limitations on the size of landholdings. The reforms, USAID later reported, "were so watered down as to make it meaningless" and were not enforced largely because the government did not control the countryside.²⁰⁷ Upon his ascension to power in 1954, Diem continued land reform along much the same lines. Ordinance 2 of January 1955 established maximum rents of 15-25% and contracts to prevent competitive evictions. Ordinance 7 of the following month sought to promote agricultural production by providing protection for tenants on some 600,000 hectares of rice land that had been abandoned during and reclaimed after the French-Viet Minh war. These reforms sought to regularise the landlord-tenant relationship and increase production. The laws again went unenforced, while neither piece of legislation did anything to address the inequality of land ownership in the countryside. Indeed for many peasants, the creation of the Republic of Vietnam in 1955 simply meant the return of the landlords that the Viet Minh had chased out during the war against the French.²⁰⁸

Ordinance 57, promulgated in October 1956, was the most ambitious of the Diem-era reforms. It set a maximum rental rate at a still very large 100 hectares. Over this amount, the government would purchase land from the landlord and resell it in small parcels to tenant farmers. This high retention limit, over thirty times higher than post-war land reform programmes in Japan, Taiwan and South Korea, meant that only one-third of the cultivated rice land in the country was affected. By the mid-1960s the

²⁰⁷ 'Land Reform', AID Terminal Report, 3.

²⁰⁸ MacDonald Salter, 'The Broadening Base of Land Reform in South Vietnam', *Asian Survey*, vol. 10, no. 8 (1970), 726; Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 56-59; Charles Callison, *Land-To-The-Tiller in the Mekong Delta: Economic, Social, and Political Effects of Land Reform in Four Villages of South Vietnam*, (Berkeley: University Press of America, 1983), 42-43.

government had distributed only 40% of this land. Along the coastal plains of central Vietnam, where there were almost no holdings over 100 hectares, the programme had no impact. Despite the professed goals, Ordinance 57 was likely to make little contribution to higher agricultural productivity or encourage landlords to use their compensation to invest in industry simply because it impacted so little of the country.²⁰⁹

Both Edward Miller and Philip Catton have suggested that Diem paid lip service to land reform but was more interested in the redistribution of people, not land. He pursued this through his concept of Land Development. This programme involved relocating thousands of demobilized soldiers, refugees from North Vietnam and peasants from the densely populated central coast into unoccupied land in the Mekong Delta and central highlands. The idea was to “fill vacant territory with a contented population” and build a “human wall” that would defend the area in the name of Saigon. The programme would also boost agricultural production by opening up unproductive lands and encouraging a measure of agricultural diversification. This programme, had antecedents in the precolonial and colonial settlement of the Mekong Delta and the GVN would resurrect the idea in the 1970s in a bid to increase agricultural output and plant the countryside with loyalists of the Saigon regime.²¹⁰

Land reform practically ceased during the years of growing revolutionary control in the countryside and political instability in Saigon. By the mid-1960s, the Delta was still one of the worst regions in the world for landlessness. In 1967, a study by the Stanford Research Institute found that 70% of farming families were substantially or wholly dependent on tenancy. As a peasant in South Vietnam prior to 1970 the best chance of receiving land or reduced rents was if you lived in an area of revolutionary control and the NLF had killed, coerced or chase away your landlord. Conversely, as Bernard Fall suggested “whenever government troops reoccupied a given area” the

²⁰⁹ Catton, *Diem's Final Failure*, 52-53.

²¹⁰ Catton, *Diem's Final Failure*, 56-63; Miller, *Misalliance*, 160-171.

government “restores the old tenant-landlord” relationship. Until well into the 1960s, the establishment or reestablishment of GVN authority in the countryside went hand in hand with the return of rent-collecting landlords.²¹¹

Despite the absence of meaningful land reform, up to 1960 the RVN could still claim reasonably healthy agricultural and export sectors. Hanoi’s decision to escalate the struggle in the south in 1959 was at least partly motivated by the growing commercialization in the south and South Vietnam’s integration into the global capitalist economy.²¹² As the war escalated, however, the struggle for the rice crop grew with an obvious negative impact on agricultural output. Historian John Perkins has noted the centrality of food supply to national security, particularly in war time. “Neither armies nor urban workforces nor farmers can function to defend the nation if their food supply is interrupted, inadequate in quality or quantity, or unsafe. Targeting the enemy’s food supply... demonstrates the strategic importance of agricultural production”.²¹³ From the late 1950s onwards, the forces of the revolution emphasised the need for food self-sufficiency in liberated areas but as North Vietnamese troops infiltrated into the south, the strain on the food supply increased. Intelligence suggested that North Vietnam did not send enough rice down the Ho Chi Minh trail to meet the needs of PAVN troops operating in the south so these units depended on locally procured supplies. Particularly in the northern provinces of South Vietnam where rice was always in shorter supply and where PAVN troops operated most, the U.S. and GVN pursued rice denial operations which included the destruction of the crop in enemy-controlled areas and the burning of captured rice caches. On occasion, when the rice crop in enemy controlled areas appeared promising, the U.S. forces would airlift

²¹¹ Fall quoted in Roy L. Prosterman, ‘Land-to-the-Tiller in South Vietnam: The Tables Turn’, *Asian Survey*, vol. 10, no. 8 (1970), 751- 753

²¹² Dacy, *Foreign aid, war, and economic development*, 56-57; Asselin, *Hanoi’s Road to the Vietnam War*, 52-53.

²¹³ John J. Perkins, *Geopolitics and the Green Revolution: Wheat, Genes, and the Cold War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 13.

refugees into the area to harvest the rice, with U.S. and GVN forces providing security. One observer noted that such operations were designed not only to deny the NLF/PAVN food but “to convince all the populace living under enemy control to move into the GVN area to avoid food shortages”.²¹⁴

U.S. and South Vietnamese forces also sprayed herbicides and defoliants to deny the NLF and PAVN access to food and cover but such operations ruined crops and destroyed village economies. An even more destructive policy was the deliberate depopulation of the countryside to deny the enemy access to recruitment, tax revenue, and other forms of support. In a 1968 memo, Westmoreland noted that removing the revolutionary forces from the villages was “very time consuming” but removing the people from villages “can be carried out relatively quickly”. As the result of such policies, at least one third of the South Vietnamese population registered as refugees at one time or another between 1965 and 1972. This upheaval had obvious negative effects on the agricultural economy, to say nothing of Vietnamese village life.²¹⁵

The GVN and U.S. struggled to balance destruction with the need for agricultural development. In an address to the Armed Forces Congress in January 1966, Nguyen Cao Ky spoke of the need for crop diversification, mechanized agriculture, improved irrigation techniques, and livestock husbandry as evidence of progress. The following month at the Honolulu Conference, Lyndon Johnson expressed his desire to see higher agricultural output and rural electrification.²¹⁶ Despite such lofty rhetoric however, due to the escalating violence in the countryside South Vietnam went from the world’s third largest exporter of rice in 1963 to depending heavily on imported U.S. rice under the

²¹⁴ ‘Grim Reaper: A New Concept of Rice Denial in RVN’, 24 July 1970, Folder 05, Box 17, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 01 – Assessment and Strategy, TTU-VVA, Item No.: 2121705060.

²¹⁵ Daddis, *Westmoreland’s War*, 107-108; Carlyle Thayer, *War Without Fronts: the American Experience in Vietnam* (Boulder: Westview, 1985), 221.

²¹⁶ Christopher T. Fisher, “The Illusion of Progress: CORDS and the crisis of Modernization in South Vietnam, 1965- 1968,” *Pacific Historical Review* 75, no. 1 (2006), 35-36; Gary R. Hess, *Vietnam and the United States: Origins and Legacy of War* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990), 97; Hunt, *Pacification*, 70.

PL-480 programme. This imported rice not only granted the Johnson administration leverage to gain the reforms the United States wanted, but privileged urban stability over rural production.²¹⁷ Such was the South Vietnamese demand on American rice, however, that by 1967 the United States was struggling to meet its PL480 rice commitments around the world. President Johnson began to wonder whether subsidies might to be used to encourage Vietnamese to eat more wheat. The U.S. embassy eventually rejected this idea, believing that the preference for rice in Vietnam was so marked and that Vietnamese culture was so organized around rice consumption that it would never work.²¹⁸ As such efforts would have to be made to increase domestic rice production but past experience indicated that this would be an uphill battle. Despite a plethora of U.S. and government-sponsored rural development projects, in June 1966 Robert Komer could tell Johnson “it’s incredible that in 11 years in a rural country, even during wartime, we’ve accomplished so little in agriculture”.²¹⁹

What Komer did not realise was that major agricultural changes were already underway but the United States had not identified them and, in some cases, the GVN was impeding them. Over the next year and a half, however, U.S. officials began to detect these changes. USAID researchers suddenly discovered that as the canal infrastructure fell into disrepair farmers in the Mekong Delta had begun adapting portable motor-boat engines into pumps to manage water-levels in their paddies. These engines became available through the Commercial Import Program in 1963. By 1967 approximately 50,000 Delta farmers had bought one. Far from embracing this kind of development the GVN wanted to regulate it for fear that the engines were falling into

²¹⁷ Dacy, *Foreign Aid, War, and Economic Development*, 82; Ahlberg, *Transplanting the Great Society*, 175-206.

²¹⁸ Walt Rostow, Memorandum for the President ‘PL480 Rice for Vietnam and Indonesia’, 8 August 1967, Vietnam 1B (1)A, 1/66- 12/67, Economic Activity and Planning, Box 58, Vietnam Country File, National Security File, LBJL; ‘Substitution of wheat for rice in the Vietnamese diet’, US Embassy Saigon to Secretary of State, Tel Saigon 11200, 16 November 1967, Vietnam 1B (1)A, 1/66- 12/67, Economic Activity and Planning, Box 58, Vietnam Country File, National Security File, LBJL.

²¹⁹ Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Komer) to President Johnson, Washington, June 14, 1966, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1964-68, vol. 4, Vietnam, 1966.

the hands of the revolution. Despite these restrictions, the authors noted, “the economic revolution which is currently taking place in rural Vietnam is staggering”.²²⁰

In late 1966 the government also reduced subsidies on wholesale rice and increased the price of paddy, while maintaining the price of fertilizer. This proved an incentive to rural production and by the middle of the following year it appeared, at least to U.S. officials, to be stimulating a revolution in the countryside. In Ba Tri district in Kien Hoa, a Revolutionary Development priority area, observers noted that “consumerism is in full sway” as “as the good life filters out of Saigon and into the Vietnamese countryside”. Locals had swapped their black pyjamas for brightly coloured shirts and many households now had sewing machines, radios and a Honda motor bike.²²¹ In Tieu Can district in Vinh Binh, similar changes were occurring, despite the fact that several of the district’s villages remained firmly under NLF control. The conclusion that reporters drew was that better prices for agricultural products could stimulate rural change even where only minor security gains had been made.²²² U.S. embassy officials touring the countryside were particularly keen to understand these changes in terms of the economic behaviour of peasants. It was clear that wealthier farmers were making profit-maximizing investments but they were also pleased to report that some poorer farmers were making similarly “rational decisions”. After interviewing Mr. Nguyen Van Dong of Tan Phu New Life Hamlet in Vinh Long province, U.S. officials reported that despite his meagre means, Dong “does make some

²²⁰ Biggs, *Quagmire*, 207-210; Robert Sansom, *The Economics of Insurgency in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam*, (MIT Press, 1970), 167-168; ‘The Use and Impact of the Four Horsepower Gasoline Engine in Rural VN’, 6 October 1967, Vietnam 1C (2), 11/67- 12/67, Revolutionary Development Program [3 of 3], Box 59, Vietnam Country File, National Security File, LBJL.

²²¹ William Logan, ‘How Deep is the Green Revolution in South Vietnam?’, *Asian Survey*, vo. 11, no. 4, (1971), 321; ‘Economic Boom: Revolutionary Developments in Ba Tri’, 11 July 1967, Vietnam 1C (1), 3/67-10/67, Revolutionary Development Program [2 of 2], Box 58, Vietnam Country Files, National Security File, LBJL.

²²² ‘Provincial Economic Reporting – Tieu Can District, Vinh Binh Province’, 7 September 1967, Vietnam 1C (1), 3/67-10/67, Revolutionary Development Program [2 of 2], Box 58, Vietnam Country File, National Security File, LBJL.

attempt to allocate his resources so as to maximize his profits. In other words, he behaves like an economic man”.²²³

Historians have noted how the Tet Offensive shattered these changes almost before they began. They have used the NLF and PAVN’s offensive as a convenient narrative tool for ending their discussions of development and modernization. Others have assumed that the South Vietnamese state was so weak in the years after 1968 that it was unable to conduct meaningful development projects.²²⁴ Yet these changes continued and even accelerated after 1968 and scholars have paid this period scant attention. Innovations such as the adapted boat engines demonstrated the pervasiveness of “rational” farmers in the Delta and the degree to which such social and economic developments could occur outside of GVN and U.S. efforts. The way in which these changes had occurred as a corollary to the CIP, rather than as conscious policy, offered an important lesson for the future. After 1968 many GVN-led development interventions stimulated economic and social change but it was questionable to what extent the GVN could guide these processes, how much they would change the political loyalties of those who adopted them and whether the state could even harness these transformations to its economic advantage.

The Green Revolution Comes to South Vietnam

As South Vietnamese agricultural production declined in the mid-1960s, scientists at the Ford Foundation-funded International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines were cross-breeding rice to create high-yield varieties. Traditional rice

²²³ ‘Travel and Rural Prosperity in the Upper and Western Mekong Delta: Fall, 1967’, 14 December 1967, Vietnam 1C (1), 3/67-10/67, Revolutionary Development Program [2 of 2], Box 58, Vietnam Country File, National Security File, LBJL.

²²⁴ It is striking the number of accounts that focus on development in the Johnson years but do not explore beyond 1968. See for example: Cullather, *Hungry World*, 173-179; Fisher, ‘The Illusion of Progress’, even says that CORDS was ‘dispensed with’ in 1970. This is not the case; CORDS remained the main organization responsible for pacification and development until the Paris Agreements. Even though Biggs discusses some of the changes that occurred in the Delta after 1968, the GVN’s role remains largely absent from his analysis, Biggs, *Quagmire*, 207-219.

varieties produced lower yields, and their longer stems meant that even if they responded well to fertilizer, they would become top-heavy and fall over, or “lodge”. Moreover, traditional rice varieties could only produce one crop a year. IR8, the first strain of “miracle rice” developed in 1965 and released the following year, matured in 125 days, responded well to fertilizer and did not lodge, thanks to its shorter stem. It could produce yields two to three times higher than the two tonne average of varieties common to Southeast Asia, and in optimum conditions a farmer could grow two or even three crops a year.²²⁵

Official experimentation with miracle rice began in South Vietnam as a private initiative when Professor Ton That Trinh- consultant to the government and soon Minister of Land Reform and Agriculture - planted it in small plots in the Delta.²²⁶ When floods hit Vo Dat in Binh Tuy province in 1967 it offered a pretext for the GVN and American advisers to apply the new miracle rice seed on a wider scale. The floods had destroyed the crop and once the water had receded it would be too late to plant indigenous varieties. Because IR8 had a shorter growth cycle it was not too late in the year to plant it in Vo Dat. Village leaders and farmers were flown to an experimental plot at Hiep Hoa to convince them of the viability of the project. This demonstration effect would become a key principle in the GVN’s effort to spread HYVs in South Vietnam. The project required oversight by the GVN- pumps had to be repaired and farmers had to be “persuaded to continue farming during the holiday season”. The villagers planted the new rice in October and harvested it four months later, shortly before the Tet Offensive. According the GVN, IR8 saved the village from “starvation”.

²²⁵ James Lang, *Feeding A Hungry Planet: Rice, Research & Development in Asia and Latin America*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 132.

²²⁶ The Ministry of Land Reform and Agriculture underwent a number of name changes between 1967 and 1975. For the sake of consistency Ministry of Land Reform and Agriculture or MLRA will be used throughout.

A USAID report claimed the Vo Dat experiment was “a stellar success” as the villagers “doubled the yield over local varieties” despite adverse conditions.²²⁷

The introduction of miracle rice recast development and military priorities. In January 1968, in the wake of the Vo Dat experiment, the Ministry of Land Reform and Agriculture (MLRA) launched an Accelerated Rice Production Program with the goals of planting 44,000 hectares to new varieties in 1968 and attaining agricultural self-sufficiency within four years. This was an ambitious goal for a war-torn country, heavily dependent on U.S. rice, but it indicates the hope that the GVN invested in the new varieties. One of the primary reasons the new varieties appealed so much to MLRA planners was that it seemed to simplify agricultural development. More rice could be grown without having to increase the acreage of land under government control.²²⁸ The GVN even renamed IRRI varieties “Than Nong (TN) rice” after the Vietnamese God of agriculture.

The MLRA informed Province Agricultural services that the increase in food crops, particularly rice was the key concern in 1968 and if services were short staffed they should terminate “sporadic programs” and focus on rice production instead.²²⁹ Following instructions from Washington, Westmoreland’s 1968 campaign plan in the Mekong Delta was “carefully coordinated with agricultural production and designed to minimize disruptions”. The sixteen provinces of the Delta and Long An province accounted for South Vietnam’s surplus rice-producing area, and seventy-five percent of the country’s total rice production. The rest of the country was deficient in rice supplies, relying on the Delta or imports to meet demand. U.S. and ARVN forces would provide

²²⁷ Logan, ‘How Deep is the Green Revolution in South Vietnam?’, 323-325; ‘Viet-Nam Bulletin - Miracle Rice Comes To Vietnam’, November 1969, Folder 01, Box 01, Michael R. Potaski Collection, TTU-VVA, Item No.: 16530101011. William Averill, ‘Agricultural Production Memo’, 10 May 1968, IR8 Program 1968, Folder 1601-11a, Box 6, MACV HQ CORDS, MR4/New File Dev Div, Agr Br, RG472, NARA II.

²²⁸ Tran Quang Minh, ‘A Decade of Public Service: Nation-Building during the Interregnum and Second Republic (1964-1975)’, in *Voices from the Second Republic*, 69.

²²⁹ Ministry of Land Reform and Agriculture, Directorate of Ag Affairs, ‘Than Nong Rice Program Implementation during 1968’, IR8 Rice Program – 1968, Box 6, MACV HQ CORDS, MR4/New File Dev Div, Agr Br, RG472, NARA II.

a shield for increased rice production and clear away key lines of communication to ensure that the rice got to market.²³⁰

In addition to miracle rice's ability to produce higher yields, it appealed to modernizers because it could act as a social solvent, transforming the work habits and psychology of the peasant farmer and in turn the entire agricultural economy. IRRI's work proceeded from the notion that peasants were not yet rational economic actors, but Green Revolution technology could make them so.²³¹ Because IR8 required higher applications of chemical fertilizer and pesticides, farmers would have to make potentially risky investments in return for higher yields and higher profits. As one American adviser put it, the new rice would "require substantial alteration of centuries old-farming habits and methods".²³² In other words, it was precisely the kind of technology modernizers had sought to pull the economically isolated peasant into an agricultural-industrial complex.

Much like American developmental thinkers and policymakers, GVN planners identified poverty as the cause of rebellion. The peasantry's support for the NLF, they believed, resulted from violent coercion and economic privation. Increases in rural wealth, these officials hoped, would undermine the NLF. Miracle rice was particularly promising in this respect, since it had the potential to break the peasants' bonds with the NLF by creating economic incentives that would encourage farmers to act in individual rather than communal interest.²³³ These economic incentives also encouraged farmers to produce larger surpluses which could feed South Vietnam's deficit areas and perhaps even generate exports. In this sense, the commercialization of agriculture would serve the interests of the fragile state. Although this alone would not resolve Saigon's

²³⁰ Walt Rostow to the President, 2 January 1968, Vietnam 1C (3)-B2 1/68-10/68, Revolutionary Development Program, Box 60, Vietnam Country File, National Security File, LBJL.

²³¹ Cullather, 'Miracles of Modernization', 241.

²³² 'The Development of Commercial Agriculture in Vietnam', November 1967, Program- Agr- 1-3-1970, Box 15, MACV HQ CORDS, MR4/New File Dev Div, Agr Br, RG472, NARA II.

²³³ Cullather, 'Miracles of Modernization', 250.

economic and political woes, it would demonstrate some measure of economic viability to U.S. and international audiences as well as to Hanoi.

Many of Saigon's development projects focused on incremental wealth increases in contrast to the NLF's redistributive policies.²³⁴ The miracle rice project proceeded from much the same point of view largely by default. Early strains of miracle rice required specific cultural conditions including level land and access to a manageable fresh water supply. Such conditions were far more prevalent in the central part of the Delta than in the rest of the country. Particularly in the country's northern provinces, where the war raged most violently, farmers rarely had access to a manageable water supply. Farmers could, and many did, grow miracle rice on suboptimal land, but they almost certainly could not double-crop or produce as high yields. The MLRA encouraged those peasants without adequate land to modernize within the limits possible. But the focus, director of cabinet in the MLRA Tran Quang Minh noted, was to create a "sizeable corps" of "progressive farmers".²³⁵ USAID framed the issue in similar terms, noting in 1969 that South Vietnam could once again export rice "even if only 30% of small farmers in Vietnam would engage in modern cultural practices".²³⁶ These were what the NLF termed "middle" and "rich peasants", those with sufficient access to land, inputs and credit to benefit from the Green Revolution. The GVN sought to harness these farmers' productive capacity. Thus, the miracle rice programme further aggravated social stratification in the countryside.

To get the programme started, the GVN and USAID distributed miracle rice kits and launched a "supervised credit" programme through which farmers received financial and technical assistance to grow miracle rice in return for a pledge to follow the correct cultivation practices. It was crucial, agricultural technicians believed, that

²³⁴ Jeffrey Race, 'How they won', *Asian Survey*, vol. 10, no. 8, (1970), 645.

²³⁵ 'Agricultural Development in Viet Nam', undated, Folder 01, Box 01, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 11- Monographs, TTU-VVA, Item No.: 2390101002.

²³⁶ 'The Proposed Rural Banking System in Vietnam', 22 August 1969, Production Support- 1971, Box 24, MACV HQ CORDS, MR4/New File Dev Div, Agr Br, RG472, NARA II.

early adoptees were successful so that their neighbours would replicate their efforts.²³⁷ Provincial agricultural services also established demonstration plots along well-travelled roads to ensure that passing farmers saw them. Advisers were encouraged to host field-days to show local farmers and officials the plots' success.²³⁸ Senior MLRA officials' belief that provincial agricultural cadre could guide the process of agricultural development proved as misplaced as their belief that the peasantry existed along a tradition-modernity axis, however. U.S. and South Vietnamese officials at the provincial level, found themselves struggling to control events, while peasant farmers proved once again the agents of innovation as the seed proliferated beyond GVN-controlled programmes. There was little need for concern that Vietnamese farmers would not adopt the new technology; by 1969, USAID estimated that at least 70,000 had independently done so.²³⁹ While the new rice reached some NLF areas, the need for fertilizer, credit and security dictated that most of these farmers were in GVN-controlled areas. The proliferation of the new rice was one of the project goals and was good news for agricultural output but it became clear almost immediately that tracking the number of plots and volume of rice and, by implication, the rationalization of the rice market would be "practically impossible".²⁴⁰

The GVN launched the Accelerated Rice Production Programme at an inauspicious time, just a month before the Tet Offensive. Civilian advisers followed American and South Vietnamese military forces, as they pulled back to defend towns and cities. Dikes and paddies were further damaged, and marketing links between the

²³⁷ 'Viet-Nam Bulletin - Miracle Rice Comes To Vietnam', TTU-VVA; 'Than Nong "Rice Kit" Project for Vietnam', 7 February 1968, IR-8 Rice Program- 1968, Box 6, MACV HQ CORDS, MR4/New File Dev Div, Agr Br, RG472, NARA II.

²³⁸ 'Important Principles in Carrying Out an Effective Demonstrations (*sic*)', 27 October 1970, Rice Production 1970, Box 17, MACV HQ CORDS, MR4/New File Dev Div, Agr Br, RG472, NARA II

²³⁹ David Biggs, 'Americans in An Giang: Nation Building and the Particularities of Place in the Mekong Delta, 1966-1973', *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3, (2009), 156-159. Combs, 'Rural economic development as a nation building strategy in South Vietnam, 1968-1972', 133-134; Cullather, 'Miracles of Modernization', 253.

²⁴⁰ Harry Lieberman to Louis Koffman, 30 May 1968, IR8 Program 1968, Box 6, MACV HQ CORDS, MR4/New File Dev Div, Agr Br, RG472, NARA II.

Delta and Saigon were disrupted for weeks. With a decline in security and increased transportation costs, rice shipments from the Delta to Saigon might drop dramatically, creating another disincentive to production. This disruption combined with U.S. rice shortages led the White House to predict major shortages in Vietnam by the end of 1968. Johnson expressed his concern just five days after the beginning of the offensive, again raising the idea of wheat consumption, telling his staff “be sure that we are trying to teach Indonesia and South Vietnam to eat wheat as quickly as possible, and start furnishing wheat in lieu of rice”. But he was also concerned about the political ramifications of rice shortages and price rises at a time when South Vietnam’s cities were under attack: “take whatever steps necessary to be sure we have surplus rice for Vietnam, so prices stay in line”. This decision to maintain the price of rice in the cities, at a time when transport and other costs had risen, badly affected farmers’ income in 1968.²⁴¹

Nonetheless, by April 1968 joint GVN-USAID surveys of the provinces suggested that damage was not as bad as originally suspected and the year’s rice production goals might still be met.²⁴² Average yields for the second harvest in the autumn of 1968 were more than double those of indigenous varieties.²⁴³ Despite the tremendous destruction in the countryside in 1968, rice shipments from the Delta to Saigon were slightly higher than 1967.²⁴⁴ Interviews with farmers in GVN-controlled areas suggest they were genuinely enthusiastic about the new rice varieties, and many

²⁴¹ Pike, *The Bunker Papers*, vol. 2, 402; LBJ/mf, 2 February 1968, Vietnam 1B (2), 1/68-9/68, Economic Activity and Planning [2 of 2], Box 58, Vietnam Country File, National Security File, LBJL; Logan, ‘How Deep is South Vietnam’s Green Revolution?’, 324-325.

²⁴² ‘Post Tet Rice Hectarage Capability 3 March 1968’, 22 March 1968, IR8 Program 1968, Box 6, MACV HQ CORDS, MR4/New File Dev Div, Agr Br, RG472, NARA II; ‘Vietnam’s Accelerated Rice Production Program’, 6 May 1968, IR8 Program 1968, Box 6, MACV HQ CORDS, MR4/New File Dev Div, Agr Br, RG472, NARA II.

²⁴³ ‘Agricultural Production Memo’, 30 October 1968, Agriculture Advisory File 1968, Box 6, MACV HQ CORDS, MR4/New File Dev Div, Agr Br, RG472, NARA II.

²⁴⁴ Pike, *The Bunker Papers*, vol. 3, 651.

associated their introduction with the government.²⁴⁵ Pleased with the results of the 1968 effort, the MLRA set a target of planting 200,000 hectares of TN rice for the following year, and Minister Trinh declared that “Vietnam will probably return to her position of a rice exporting country in the near future”.²⁴⁶

In September and November 1968 the government removed all restrictions on the rice transportation and then raised the wholesale price of imported U.S. rice. Given that the price of domestic varieties was largely determined by the availability and price of U.S. rice, Bunker said that this action “accomplished one of the major goals of U.S. economic policy in Vietnam, i.e. to raise rural incomes, and provide farmers with an incentive in the form of higher paddy prices”. For those who remained in NLF areas, the Ambassador reported, “economic life has a different cast... activity is stagnant and standards of living are primitive”.²⁴⁷

During the Accelerated Pacification Campaign which began in November 1968, the spread of TN rice closely followed military operations.²⁴⁸ Such was the violence of the APC that many peasants in areas previously under the control of the NLF were forced to relocate around GVN posts, while NLF forces continued to contest depopulated hamlets on the edges of these villages.²⁴⁹ GVN development projects bypassed those hamlets that remained under the control of the NLF. Only those with land close to GVN posts could benefit from government agricultural programmes, while many peasants found themselves far from their fields which had become free-fire zones.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁵ ‘Excerpted Comments from TN8 Farmers in the Provinces’, 31 October 1968, Agriculture Advisory File 1968, Box 6, MACV HQ CORDS, MR4/New File Dev Div, Agr Br, RG472, NARA II.

²⁴⁶ ‘Speech Delivered by the Minister for Land Reform and Agriculture on Dedication of the National Rice Production Training Center at Hiep Hoa’, 15 November 1968, IR-8 Rice Program- 1968, Box 6, MACV HQ CORDS, MR4/New File Dev Div, Agr Br, RG472, NARA II.

²⁴⁷ ‘Commerce Interieur’, *Kinh Tế Tập San*, no. 9-10, (1968); Pike, *The Bunker Papers*, vol. 3, 651.

²⁴⁸ Colby, *Lost Victory*, 266.

²⁴⁹ Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*, 1119-1156.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 1270-1271.

In an effort to reverse the trend of urbanization, in 1968 the government also began to encourage refugees and urban migrants to return to their native villages. Under the “Return to Village Programme” returnees qualified for benefits including cash, construction material and rice rations.²⁵¹ Many refugees returned to discover that violence continued unabated and often did not remain long. Some refugees accepted benefits but did not return to the countryside while others still were reluctant to abandon the economic opportunities they had discovered in the cities.²⁵² Urbanization remained the trend in South Vietnam during the final years of the war, but the GVN and their American advisers claimed that hundreds of thousands of refugees returned to their villages or resettled in new areas after 1968.²⁵³ Security in the countryside and the Return to Village Programme suffered a setback with North Vietnam’s Easter Offensive in 1972 but the programme continued after the Paris agreements.

While there was certainly a contradiction between development and violent military operations, increased government control in the Delta from 1969 to early 1972 opened up space for development projects in a way not seen since the early 1960s. Although the GVN acknowledged that less than fifty percent of the country’s arable land was under cultivation, 1969 was the first year in which the declining rice production trend was reversed, and the following year the MLRA claimed to have exceeded its target of 500,000 hectares of TN rice. Both American and GVN officials repeatedly suggested that self-sufficiency and exports were just around the corner.²⁵⁴

Even the reconfiguration of the global rice trade could not dampen these sentiments. Enthusiasm for the promises of miracle rice spread far beyond South

²⁵¹ Louis A. Wiesner, *Victims and Survivors: displaced persons and other war victims in Vietnam, 1954-1975* (London: Greenwood Press, 1989), 208.

²⁵² Brigham, ‘Vietnamese Society at War’, 329.

²⁵³ Robert H. Nooter, (Assistant Administrator Vietnam, Agency for International Development), “Testimony on U.S. Assistance Programs in Vietnam before the House Subcommittee on Foreign Operations and Government Information, Committee on Government Operations”, Congress Session 92:1, (21 July 1971), 17, *ProQuest Congressional*, Hearing ID: HRG-1971-OPH-0022.

²⁵⁴ *Vietnamese Agriculture: A Progress Report*, 73; ‘Agricultural Development Activities ‘70’, undated, folder 2558, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII; ‘Agricultural Development in Viet Nam’, TTU-VVA.

Vietnam. West Pakistan reportedly anticipated a bumper crop of rice in late 1968 thanks to IR8 and was studying markets in Europe for export. Even Laos, with historically the lowest yields in Asia, was hopeful that it could end its dependence on U.S. and Thai rice and could begin to export the new varieties.²⁵⁵ It must have come as great disappointment when these countries' governments discovered that new rice varieties had transformed the global market and potential for export. With so many rice-consuming nations approaching self-sufficiency, by 1969 export markets were shrinking and becoming increasingly competitive. The market now lay in aromatic and luxury strains of rice or in agricultural diversification.²⁵⁶ Nonetheless, the GVN did not abandon the hope of exports. Cao Van Than, the new Minister of Agriculture, wrote that the ministry's targets for 1970-1971 were to increase TN rice cultivation to meet domestic needs, with the goal of exporting 300,000 tonnes of non-TN varieties.²⁵⁷ This was extremely optimistic, as the economic incentives of South Vietnam's Green Revolution led most farmers to cultivate TN rice for the market. U.S. officials even began to worry that 1972 and 1973 might see rice surpluses that were difficult to export leading to a drop in peasant incomes or costly government subsidies. To deal with such an eventuality the GVN would have to encourage crop diversification and livestock development as soon as possible.²⁵⁸

The massive expansion of agricultural credit was also another major factor in sparking social and economic changes in rural South Vietnam after Tet, but like miracle rice its effects were uneven. The goal was to provide farmers with small loans to make the kind of risky investments necessary for the growth of the agricultural economy. In

²⁵⁵ 'Agricultural Production Memo: Improved Rice Varieties and Production Programs in Pakistan- Laos- Thailand- Indonesia and the Philippines', 21 August 1968, Agriculture Advisory File 1968, Box 6, MACV HQ CORDS, MR4/New File Dev Div, Agr Br, RG472, NARA II.

²⁵⁶ 'Viet-Nam Bulletin - Miracle Rice Comes To Vietnam', TTU-VVA.

²⁵⁷ 'Report for the Prime Minister Regarding Project Activities 1970-71' [Tờ Trình Thủ Tướng Chính Phủ về việc dự án hoạt động 1970-71], 18 September 1969, Folder 2698, PTTDNCH- TTLTQGII.

²⁵⁸ Charles A. Cooper (Minister-Counselor for Economic Affairs, US embassy Saigon) to John R. Mossler (Director, USAID), 'Some Current Economic Problems', 22 February 1971, folder 2574, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

the first seven months of 1968 the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) loaned US\$25.5m to 100,000 farmers and fisherman, a massive four and half times more than it had loaned during the same period in 1967. Most of these were short-term, low interest, small loans extended directly to farmers for crop production and livestock development. A further \$500,000 was loaned directly for farmers growing TN rice varieties but the CIA reported that the typically neglected farmers in I and II Corps in the north of the country struggled to access credit.²⁵⁹

The bank operated at the province level and the branch director was given considerable independence of action. Many of these provincial directors were motivated by profit and it seems likely that there was discrimination in the distribution of loans, with credit difficult to access for many. The Director of the ADB in An Giang, arguably the most peaceful province in the country, told cadres in the spring of 1968 not to lend to those with outstanding debts to the ADB, people over 60, widows, and military-aged people. Given the wartime situation many of those who remained working the land were women and the elderly. Provincial agricultural services complained that the ADB director's instructions would reduce by half the number already listed to grow TN rice.²⁶⁰ Farmers interviewed by CORDS officials, most of whom had secured loans, noted that the ADB only loaned to "people who have land, property, [a] garden, and who live in easy circumstances". For Nguyen Van Hao, the Director General of the ADB, the entire logic of the bank was "the monetization of the peasant economy". Although the bank loaned to poor farmers, Hao claimed, he justified lending to wealthy farmers on the grounds that they had a high sense of debt repayment and their entrepreneurial spirit would encourage the dynamic growth of credit and production. Loans were also predicated on the security conditions in the farmer's village and

²⁵⁹ CIA Directorate of Intelligence, 'Intelligence Report: the Situation in South Vietnam (Weekly)', 16 September 1968, *DDRS*, Document No.: CK3100291648.

²⁶⁰ 'Carrying out the TN8 Rice Program in the 1968 Rainy Season' [v/v thực hiện Chương Trình Lúa Thân Nông 8 mùa mưa 1968], 23 March 1968, IR-8 Rice Program – 1968, (Part 2 of 2), MACV, HQ CORDS, MR4/New File Dev Div, Agr Branch, Container 6, RG472, NARA II.

political loyalty, further restricting the ability of those in insecure or NLF-controlled areas to profit from agricultural development. The only other option for credit was the usurious, unofficial money lenders. More problematically, from the point of view of securing government support, research indicated that poor farmers were well aware of the ADB and felt that they were outside the scope of its operations. Agricultural credit was clearly more readily accessible for wealthier farmers in GVN-controlled areas.²⁶¹

In the first 18 months of its operation the ADB had loaned almost US\$52m, more than its predecessor the National Agricultural Credit Office had loaned during its 10 years of operation. By 1969, however, the bank was badly overextended and the central ADB was having difficulty providing funds to the provincial branches. Hao noted that the bank would only be able to expand to a certain point and even then would not be able to meet the needs of the country. To attract private capital into the banking system the government would have to encourage the establishment of a system of rural, private banks. The most obvious point of reference for South Vietnam in this regard, Hao believed, was the “very successful and rapidly expanding rural banks in the Philippines”. Deploying Rostovian rhetoric, Hao suggested that if South Vietnam could set up both a public and private banking system it would play “a vital role in the take-off of the economy” and bring “Vietnamese agriculture to a state of development which can be equal to that of any other neighbouring countries”.²⁶²

In July 1969, the National Bank laid out the conditions for private, rural banks and by autumn four were operating at the district level. The ADB provided some capitalization to match private funds. If farmers had trouble accessing money from the state-run ADB, they would find it even more difficult to obtain loans from the local private banks whose motivation was profit. The rural banks first opened in areas like

²⁶¹ Nguyen Van Hao, ‘The Agricultural Development Bank, A Vital Element in the Take Off of the Agricultural Sector in Vietnam’, (Saigon: Council on Foreign Relations, 1969); ‘Study of Rural Credit as it relates to Pacification in II, III, and IV Corps Tactical Zones’, 11 May 1969, PSG Studies/1969/Book 1, Folder 1, Box 8, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, RG 472, NARA II.

²⁶² Hao, ‘The Agricultural Development Bank’.

Thot Nhot in An Giang province which were essentially experimental agricultural towns that received priority attention for development projects. But the goal was to expand the system, eventually phasing out the ADB as a short-term lending institution and instead making it responsible for larger and longer-term projects. ADB officials again found useful models elsewhere in East Asia. In Taiwan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Japan, state run agricultural credit institutions had contributed to development through loans to long-term and large-scale infrastructural projects.²⁶³

If miracle rice and rural credit attempted to capitalize on rational peasants, the Village-Self Development (VSD) program aimed to appeal to the ‘moral economy’. Launched in rural areas in 1969, this grass-roots program sought to restore greater financial and decision-making autonomy to the villages. The program was designed to give villagers a voice in development, allowing them to agree on projects by majority consensus after discussions at public meetings. The GVN provided villages with funds and rural development cadre provided technical assistance, while villagers supplemented GVN funds with contributions of their own money and labour. Projects were modest in scope, such as animal husbandry and well construction, but the point was to allow villagers to express their felt needs, choose their own projects and to forge a greater sense of community in the process. Every village was provided with VN\$400,000 (about US\$3,350) to carry out projects costing between VN\$50,000-\$150,000, while villages that had already elected village councils were provided an additional VN\$600,000 to carry out projects in excess of VN\$150,000.²⁶⁴

The idea of the VSD, as one CORDS field evaluator put it, was to take advantage of growing rural prosperity and channel in it into community-building

²⁶³ ‘Ngân Hàng Nông Thôn’ [Rural Banks], *Kinh Tế Tập San*, no. 9-10 (1969); ‘Report on Observation of Agricultural Credit and Farmers’ Organizations in the Philippines, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan’ [Phúc trình về cuộc Quan Sát ngành tín dụng nông nghiệp và tổ chức nông dân tại Phi Luật Tân, Nhật, Đại Hàn, Đài Loan], 21 May 1970, folder 2458, Phủ Thủ Tướng, TTLTQGII.

²⁶⁴ ‘The Village Self Development Program’ [Chương trình tự túc phát triển xã], 24 February 1969, folder 109, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

ventures that would generate government support. “Prosperity by itself does not build identification with the governmental system”, John Figueira noted. “Substantial individual financial participation in the development of the community is essential. Until the administration of government assistance and local tax laws reflect this, village governmental poverty and stagnation will continue amid widespread rural individual prosperity”.²⁶⁵

For the VSD to work as designed, it was dependent on non-interference from district and province officials on the one hand, and on honest and competent village authorities on the other. Evidence suggests that where such village leadership existed the results of the program were reasonably good. Elsewhere province and district officials imposed their will or, more commonly, village authorities captured the decision-making process, chose projects without consulting the people and then failed to explain to purpose of the program to the villagers. As such many residents had no idea of the basic goals of the programme and showed little inclination to participate. If the VSD was to succeed in forging communal solidarity it was essential that local officials communicate its purpose and goals. The programme was designed to introduce limited direct democracy into the villages and forge stronger village links through popular participation in projects for the common good. It seems that this message was not always delivered to villagers. Such was the prevalence of hog-rearing projects that peasants in one village in Binh Duong understood the VSD entirely as a programme in which “the government gives us pigs to raise”.

U.S. officials expressed disappointment in local government’s failure to communicate the intent of the VSD programme but were equally as likely to argue that the programme was fundamentally ill-conceived. They pinned the blame for the failure

²⁶⁵ John S. Figueira, ‘The First Phase of the 1969 Pacification Program, Binh Dinh Province’, 8 July 1969, Situation Reports (Sitreps), Box 8, CORDS Historical Group Working Files, 1967-1973, RG472, NARA II.

of these projects on the absence of a moral economy. One observer noted “the people were generally hostile to the idea of raising animals together”. Reporting on the programme in the villages of Kien Phong province, CORDS evaluators wrote that “the concept of working together for the common good is somewhat alien to most rural Vietnamese. The people generally prefer to work independently, especially on income-raising projects”. Another CORDS official attributed the poor results of the programme to the “traditional reluctance on the part of many rural Vietnamese to form groups for the common good”.²⁶⁶ The evidence indicated that the GVN was struggling to build a sense of community at the village level which identified with the government. This was at the core of the GVN’s post-Tet strategy and the weaknesses of the VSD programme bode ill for Saigon. Individual farmers could benefit from new agricultural technologies and this might be economically useful but if the GVN could not harness their new found wealth into meaningful support then the VSD would be a political failure.

As the VSD faltered, Saigon began working on its most ambitious post-Tet effort to shape the political identities of peasant farmers: the Land-to-the-Tiller Programme. Historians note that the LTTT was “a massive attempt at social engineering” in that it sought to sway the peasantry to the GVN’s side.²⁶⁷ Several scholars argue that political results of the LTTT were ambiguous. The programme may have undermined support for the revolution by granting farmers permanent title to their land, but this support did not necessarily shift to the GVN. Peasants had made their decisions about political loyalty based on the NLF’s earlier land reform programmes or were increasingly motivated

²⁶⁶ ‘Village Self-Development Program/Binh Duong’, 8 October 1969, PSG Studies 1969/Book II, folder II, Box 8, CORDS Historical Group Working Files, 1967-73, RG472, NARA II; ‘Village Self-Development in Kien Phong Province’, 28 January 1970, PSG Studies 1970/Book 1, folder 1, Box 16, CORDS Historical Working Groups Files, 1967-1973, RG472, NARA II; ‘Analysis of Village Self-Development Program’, 19 May 1970, PSG Studies 1970/Book 1, Folder 3, Box 16, CORDS Historical Working Groups Files, 1967-1973, RG472, NARA II.

²⁶⁷ Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*, 1235.

simply by self-interest and a desire to survive.²⁶⁸ Scholars have also marginalized South Vietnamese actors from accounts of land reform after 1963. One historian notes “the escalation of U.S. war efforts in Vietnam after 1965, personnel changes in Washington and bipartisan congressional pressure generated a second push for land reform that culminated in the Land-to-the-Tiller Law of 1970”.²⁶⁹ While these factors were significant, such interpretations understate the degree to which the specifics of land reform were negotiated by South Vietnamese actors.

The United States certainly pressured the GVN to institute a land reform programme but there is little indication that Thieu was not basically amenable to the concept. In late 1967, just weeks after his election, Thieu told President Johnson that the GVN had begun working on a comprehensive land reform programme.²⁷⁰ On the other hand, U.S. officials were divided about its relative merits. Indeed, the lack of land reform in the years after Diem’s death was due as much to U.S. policies as to GVN inertia. From 1960-65, the U.S. mission in Saigon did not have a single official working full-time on land reform. Having pushed Diem to introduce land reform prior to 1963, U.S. policymakers in Washington and Saigon dismissed land reform as a serious issue as the war in the countryside escalated. Those working on land reform in South Vietnam in the late 1960s claimed that the inaction on the issue was due to the influence of a group of lower-echelon staffers in the Saigon embassy who believed that landlords, including many ARVN officers, were the final bastion of political stability and should not be alienated.²⁷¹ In their studies of land tenure in South Vietnam, social scientists Robert Sansom and Charles Callison pointed to a Rand Corporation study as the intellectual justification for this inaction. Edward J. Mitchell’s study concluded that

²⁶⁸ Ibid, 1235-1239; Eric M. Bergerud, *The Dynamics of Defeat: the Vietnam War in Hau Nghia Province*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 298-299.

²⁶⁹ David A. Conrad, “‘Before it’s Too Late’: Land Reform in South Vietnam, 1956-1968”, *Journal of American East-Asian Relations*, vol. 21, no. 1, (2014), 35.

²⁷⁰ Walt Rostow to President Johnson, 27 December 1967, *DDRS*, Document No.: CK3100620764.

²⁷¹ Conrad, “‘Before it’s too Late’”, 44-45.

greater land inequality correlated with greater government control. Mitchell suggested that “the greater power of landlords and relative docility of peasants in the more ‘feudal’ areas accounts for this phenomenon”. According to Callison, the findings of the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) in 1967 as well as those of Sansom had significant impact in turning around the U.S. mission’s attitude.²⁷² The SRI, in a study of land tenure in the southern half of South Vietnam in 1967, discovered that the desire to own land remained the key aspiration of tenant farmers. The majority would happily purchase land over several years and would prefer government assistance in this area more than community improvement or agricultural extension projects.²⁷³

On a visit to Ba Tri in Kien Hoa province on September 20 1968, Thieu announced that following the pacification of an area, the GVN would no longer reinstate absentee landlords but would allow peasants to keep any land they had received from the NLF. In February 1969 the GVN froze land occupancy and rents in newly pacified areas and subsequently extended this to secure areas in April. The idea was to prevent landlords from readjusting land tenure, for example installing relatives, while the government drafted a land reform law. At first the GVN considered a “voluntary purchase” programme, whereby tenants would be given the opportunity to buy the land they farmed at a fair price. But the government soon realised, Minister of Land Reform and Agriculture Cao Van Than noted, farmers would not be willing to pay for land where landlords had long ago stopped collecting rents or where the NLF had told farmers they already owned the land. Instead, the GVN decided to grant land completely free of charge to all tenants, sharecroppers, squatters, and beneficiaries of NLF land redistribution. New owners would receive title to the land and could then contribute to village autonomy and financial self-sufficiency by paying land taxes to

²⁷² Ibid, 756; Callison, *Land to the Tiller*, 75 fn118; Sansom. *The Economics of Insurgency in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam*, 231.

²⁷³ CIA, ‘The Economic Situation in South Vietnam’ (Biweekly), 24 February 1969, 1-A Economic Activity and Planning (1 of 2), Box 62, Vietnam Subject Files, National Security Council Files, Nixon Library.

their village government. The GVN would compensate landlords, made possible by U.S. aid, with a small down payment in cash and the rest in government bonds. The programme, Than said, would “create in insecure areas and among the uncommitted rural people a large class of small landowners who must realize that they become [sic] landowners thanks to the government”.²⁷⁴

One of the main obstacles to land reform, it would turn out, was not the Thieu regime but the National Assembly, where many of the country’s landlords held sway. As the Lower House considered the GVN’s law in late 1969 it became clear, and of considerable concern to U.S. officials, that political elites might jeopardize the bill. Many deputies rejected the very idea of granting permanent title to farmers who had accepted land from the NLF. Others worked to dilute the GVN proposals. In September, the Lower House added the provision that landlords could keep 15 hectares of land, whereas the original GVN proposal was for a zero retention limit. They also wanted the government to compensate landlords on a sliding scale, with 100% cash payments for smaller landlords. Later in the year, the U.S. embassy reported that National Assembly opposition to the regime’s unilaterally declared austerity tax, mentioned in the previous chapter, was a major reason for the assembly’s continued foot dragging on the bill. Some deputies argued that land reform had been thrust upon the regime by the United States. In an ironic twist these assembly members employed something akin to Marxist analysis to defend current, feudal land tenure relations. Land reform was nothing more than an American scheme to change land tenure so that the United States could better economically exploit South Vietnam.²⁷⁵ Of equal concern for the U.S. embassy was the possibility that deputies might complicate land reform by trying to make it more equitable. Some members of the Assembly wished to include provisions which would

²⁷⁴ Cao Van Than, ‘Agrarian Reform in Vietnam’, (Saigon: Council on Foreign Relations, 1969).

²⁷⁵ Callison, *Land-To-The-Tiller in the Mekong Delta*, 88; John Holdridge to Henry Kissinger, ‘Land Reform Prospects’, 21 January 1970, Vietnam Land Reform thru March 1970, Box 75, Vietnam Country Files, National Security File, Nixon Library.

ensure that groups who had supported the government such as soldiers and refugees but who were currently away from their land would not lose out. This would considerably complicate the implementation of the programme as, unlike a reform which simply granted land to current tillers, it would lead to a potentially irreconcilable claims and counter-claims. Minister Than, in acknowledgement of the GVN's weak administrative capabilities, said he wanted a law that was "simple and easy to administer and can be put into immediate effect".²⁷⁶

Into this debate stepped Roy Prosterman, one of the leading U.S. land reform experts of the 20th century. Prosterman was a University of Washington professor and one of the authors of the SRI study. In September 1969 he toured South Vietnam on behalf of the National Committee for a Political Settlement in Vietnam, a group which viewed land reform as a powerful source of leverage for Saigon in the Paris peace talks. He left Vietnam convinced that National Assembly opposition to the law was based upon fears that the GVN could not afford to compensate landlords. Prosterman suggested that the United States underwrite this compensation, and pay part of this through the transfer of agricultural inputs like fertilizer and tools. In what amounted to a capitalist reformulation of the feudalistic landlord-tenant relationship, Prosterman suggested that former landlords could then sell these inputs to their former tenants. The report, and a series of articles in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* painting Prosterman as "the white knight of land reform", generated a good deal of ire within the Nixon administration. One article highlighted that AID officials in Saigon were still not fully committed to a sweeping land reform program and even favoured a different approach "to the free land plan". Administration officials in Washington suspected that such

²⁷⁶ Theodore L. Eliot to Henry Kissinger, 'Increased US Assistance to Land Reform in South Vietnam', 26 November 1969, Vietnam Land Reform thru March 1970, Box 75, Vietnam Country Files, National Security File, Nixon Library; Frank Herbert, 'Viet Land Reform Bill is "Unworkable"', *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 7 September 1969, Vietnam Land Reform thru March 1970, Box 75, Vietnam Country Files, National Security File, Nixon Library.

reports might be true.²⁷⁷ Nonetheless, the State Department and U.S. embassy in Saigon dismissed Prosterman's solution as economically unfeasible and further noted "we should also consider carefully the overall political effect here of our 'taking over'... the GVN's land reform program. This program, a very broad and sweeping one... initially came entirely at President Thieu's initiative, and so far it remains a thoroughly Vietnamese effort despite our supporting assistance".²⁷⁸

The reform that emerged therefore was a negotiated process. It was shaped by U.S. pressure and some U.S. opposition, by Thieu and Than's preferences for a simpler, though less equitable reform, and by National Assembly resistance. In addition, Saigon attempted to shape the meaning of the LTTT. The GVN very explicitly tried to appropriate the Viet Minh's legacy and the NLF's political platform. The MLRA promised that the Land-to-the-Tiller was part of a "social revolution" that would transform the countryside.²⁷⁹ Saigon officials liked to point out that land reform in North Vietnam had been tremendously violent while the NLF had used terror and coercion in the south. Saigon's land reform, on the other hand, was peaceful. GVN officials failed to acknowledge that violence in the countryside preceding Saigon's land redistribution meant few tenants were farming the land and fewer landlords were collecting rent, both of which made the programme feasible. Than also argued that the GVN had something of an edge over the NLF because it was the only authority which could constitutionally and legally grant peasants land. Of course, as far as a peasant was

²⁷⁷ John Holdridge to Henry Kissinger, 'New Angles on Land Reform in SVN', 16 October 1969, Vietnam Land Reform thru March 1970, Box 75, Vietnam Country Files, National Security File, Nixon Library.

²⁷⁸ Theodore L. Eliot to Henry Kissinger, 'Increased US Assistance to Land Reform in South Vietnam', 26 November 1969, Vietnam Land Reform thru March 1970, Box 75, Vietnam Country Files, National Security File, Nixon Library.

²⁷⁹ 'Agricultural Development Activities 70' [Hoạt Động Phát Triển Nông Nghiệp 70], undated, folder 2558, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

concerned, that point only matter if one thought the GVN would eventually win the war.²⁸⁰

As the RVN got ready to carry out the LTTT, Minister Than visited Taiwan, one of the first country's to implement a non-Communist land reform in post-war Asia. In a report that displaced the United States from any involvement in Taiwan's land reform, Than reported that the GMD's reforms were based on Sun Yat Sen's Three Principles of the People. The country had carried out land reform in phases beginning in 1949 and culminating in the Land to the Tiller programme which had paved the way for the transformation and commercialization of agriculture. Than recommended that the GVN send more Vietnamese land reform personnel to Taiwan to study these processes. The following month, Archibald Woodruff, director of the Land Reform Training Institute in Taiwan and S.K. Shen, Taiwan's Director General of Land Reform visited South Vietnam. Woodruff commended the GVN for its "determination to enact a progressive social revolution" in the face of considerable barriers, while Shen promised to promote South Vietnam's land reform abroad to obtain "material and spiritual support from the friendly countries of the free world".²⁸¹

At the level of implementation, the LTTT amounted to a major transfer of authority to the village. The Village Administrative Committees, which included the elected village chief and deputy chief, determined the compensation landlords received for each plot. Village Land Distribution Committees, chaired by the village chiefs, processed applications and issued titles. New landowners were then entered on village tax rolls and after one year's relief would begin paying tax to the village government. The GVN anticipated that these steps would contribute to village self-sufficiency and

²⁸⁰ Than, 'Agrarian Reform in Vietnam'.

²⁸¹ 'Report to the Prime Minister regarding Vietnamese delegation's observation of land reform in Taiwan and Taiwanese delegation's observation of land reform in Vietnam' [Phiếu trình Thủ Tướng Chính Phủ về việc phái đoàn Việt Nam quan sát công cuộc Cải Cách Điền Địa tại Đài Loan và phái đoàn Đài Loan quan sát công cuộc Cải Cách Điền Địa tại Việt Nam], 24 September 1970, folder 27033, Phủ Thủ Tướng, TTLTQGII.

give peasants the impression that local government officials were acting in their best interest.²⁸²

Saigon planners hoped that new owners would invest in their land and increase production. Thieu told farmers that once they became owners they must defend their land against the Communists and “increase production to help the country soon attain self-sufficiency”.²⁸³ However, the economic impact of the programme depended greatly on geography. In the coastal lowlands north of the Delta, where the war continued unabated, higher population pressure and less available land meant that the LTTT only affected five percent of the area, with most farmers remaining on marginal plots.²⁸⁴ Even in some parts of the Delta itself, low-yield floating rice was the norm, and the LTTT’s three hectare retention-limit was far too low for these farmers to engage in commercial agriculture.²⁸⁵ In contrast, studies indicated that where the GVN had redistributed land in some areas of the Delta, farmers had dramatically increased their marketable surplus.²⁸⁶ The LTTT may therefore have formalised a situation in which some farmers had sufficient arable land to engage in commercial agriculture, while others did not.

Long Tri village in the Delta province of Chuong Thien provides an example of how the dynamics of these various programmes- miracle rice, the VSD, and the LTTT- played out on the ground. In early 1970 and again in mid-1971, CORDS evaluators produced detailed reports on the political and socio-economic conditions in Long Tri. Colby declared that the first report was “one of the best evaluations I have ever read”

²⁸² Minh, ‘A Decade of Public Service’, 56-57.

²⁸³ *Five-year rural economic development plan: Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry and Animal Husbandry*, (Saigon: Ministry of Land Reform and Agriculture and Fishery Development, 1971) 14; *Vietnamese Agriculture: A Progress Report*, 34.

²⁸⁴ Willard C. Muller, ‘The Land-to-the-Tiller Program: the Operational Phase; End of Tour Report’, April 1973, *USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse*, Document ID: PN-ABQ-699.

²⁸⁵ For a description of the Delta’s ‘hydraulic environment’ see Biggs, *Quagmire*, 14-19.

²⁸⁶ Charles Stuart Callison, ‘Economic, social, and political effects of land-to-the-tiller program in South Vietnam: a progress report’, June 1973, *USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse*, Document ID: PN-AAA-218.

and recommended that it be forwarded to senior civilian and military officials in both Saigon and Washington.

Long Tri was situated along the Cai Lon River on strip about 15km long and 5km wide. Due to the poor conditions of the roads and bridges, access to the village was largely by sampan along the area's canals and waterways. The standard of living was modest. Farmers grew a single rice crop annually and supplemented this with some sugarcane, fish, ducks and hogs. The village had been solidly behind the Viet Minh during the French War and residents looked back "wistfully" at the years of peace after the Geneva Conference. "There was no government at that time" said the current village chief, "and the people simply went on about their business". Over the course of the next 10 or so years, the GVN subjected the village to "a bewildering array" of pacification projects, from strategic hamlets to the construction of schools and dispensaries. The CORDS evaluators reported, however, that little had been done to organize the people to protect themselves or to solve their community problems. Meanwhile the NLF maintained a strong presence, taxing as much as 90% of the village population.

After the Tet Offensive however, NLF local forces had suffered huge losses and many defections. The revolutionaries could still threaten the village but their presence had considerably diminished. At the same time as many as 3,000 residents had abandoned their homes and fields in two of the outlying hamlets and had moved to more central hamlets, essentially becoming refugees within their own village. Development projects focused on this area of nearly 9,000 residents. Nonetheless, the village was isolated from centres of technical expertise. Only two farmers who were interviewed "had heard of the wonders of IR-5/8, but they did not know where to purchase seed". With no technical assistance, Long Tri's farmers simply threw away broken water pumps and sprayers when they stopped functioning. This lack of technical assistance had plagued the VSD programme too. The villagers had selected 18 hog and fish rearing

projects but all had failed. An undiagnosed disease wiped out most of the pigs and, despite the efforts of the village chief to convince villagers to keep the surviving pigs for breeding, residents slaughtered them or took their pigs and left the project.²⁸⁷

By July 1971, things were looking slightly better in Long Tri though there were some worrying signs. The village was now running many of its own affairs. The local Popular Forces companies had finally been placed under the authority of the GVN village chief as per central government policy and the village was now self-funding 40% of its activities. In secure areas of the village, authorities had begun redistributing over 1,200 hectares of land under the LTTT. Local GVN forces had pushed further into insecure areas, however, and were now “stretched to their limit”. The village authorities could not exploit these areas for economic or political advantage. A few “brave souls” had moved back onto these abandoned fields beside new GVN outposts but most remained too fearful of booby traps and continued fighting. Over 4,500 hectares of this land were eligible for free redistribution under the LTTT but villagers had made requests for just 300 hectares. Villagers were understandably unwilling to risk their lives or pay tax on such insecure fields. Meanwhile, the failure of small income-boosting VSD projects in 1970 had convinced residents to focus on larger, physical construction projects such as classrooms and bridges the following year. Finally, some farmers had managed to get their hands on TN rice seed but heavy losses due to high water had dissuaded others from growing it. The evaluators concluded that the economic situation was “basically good” but “serious economic development has barely begun in Long Tri”.²⁸⁸

If Long Tri was any indication of how agricultural development was playing out in the rest of the country, the results were ambiguous. The village had become more

²⁸⁷ ‘Evaluation of Long Tri Village’, 2 May 1970, Eval. of Long Tri Village, Box 15, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, 1967-1973, RG472, NARA II.

²⁸⁸ ‘Update on Evaluation of Long Tri Village’, 30 July 1971, Update Evaluation of Long Tri Village, Box 75, Command Information Publications, 1967-1972, RG472, NARA II.

autonomous in terms of local defence and financing but self-sufficiency was a long way off. Devolution of authority to the villages was all well and good, but Long Tri's experience with the VSD indicated that community development projects still required assistance from technical experts if they were to succeed. Such technical expertise was in short supply in South Vietnam in the early 1970s. GVN development policies, particularly the LTTT, clearly had some significant impact in parts of the village firmly under GVN control. But Long Tri demonstrates the degree to which development in many areas, despite a considerably improved security situation, continued to be bounded by territorial control and the ability of government officials to reach remote villages, or even parts of villages.

GVN planners attempted to frame the narrative as one in which the government was successfully guiding rural modernization. The authors of the Five Year Rural Economic Development Plan wrote that government efforts in the promotion of miracle rice had reversed agricultural decline and created the potential for agricultural diversification. The authors wrote that "a majority of our rural people are no longer as conservative as before" having "understood and accepted new farming techniques".²⁸⁹ The plan's goals were self-sufficiency in food production in the first phase (1971-1972) and agricultural exports in the second (1973-1975). These exports would raise foreign exchange and encourage investment in light industries that would process agricultural products for global markets.²⁹⁰ The plan's goals highlight the degree to which GVN planners hoped the adoption of TN rice could have a knock on effect, transforming the entire agricultural economy. Not everyone accepted this line of reasoning. The plan came in for criticism in the National Assembly, with one representative and former bureaucrat in the MLRA Vo Long Trieu arguing that the government was massively overstating the speed with which such projects could be completed. The government,

²⁸⁹ *Five-year rural economic development plan*, 6-10.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 29.

Representative Trieu said, was hoping for “a prosperity that could only be had in one’s imagination”.²⁹¹

Saigon’s optimism was not entirely baseless, however. The country had made advances in agricultural production. The GVN estimated that rice output increased by almost fifty per cent from 1968-1969 to 1971-1972.²⁹² Markets were bustling, and consumer goods such as Honda motorbikes flooded the countryside. Even reasonably partial observers were impressed. “Rural prosperity” in the Delta “is a fact of life”, the UK embassy reported in early 1970, “and the IR8 programme is an undoubted success”.²⁹³ Agricultural credit also continued to expand. By the end of 1972, 35 private rural banks were in operation and in 1972 alone total agricultural credit amounted to more than US\$50m. This was a staggering amount of money to infuse into the rural economy and generated changes that historians have largely overlooked.²⁹⁴

Another cause for GVN optimism was the revolution’s considerable rice procurement problems in this period. NLF defectors reported in 1969 that life in the revolutionary zones had become unendurable. In the autumn of 1970, an NLF defector reported that the NLF command around Saigon had ordered cadres to hire themselves out as agricultural labourers to get food and to try to catch fish. By the autumn of 1971 Hanoi was even telling rear service personnel in the Laos panhandle that no food would be delivered from the North in the coming dry season and they would have to aim at self-sufficiency.²⁹⁵ Revolutionary propaganda urged peasants to “quickly harvest and carefully conceal their rice” from the GVN. If Saigon could not steal rice by military

²⁹¹ ‘Statement of Representative Vo Long Trieu about the “The Rice Project” in the “Five Year Rural Economic Development Plan”’, [Bản nhận định của Dân Biểu Võ Long Triều về ‘Dự Án Lúa Gạo’ trong ‘Kế Hoạch 5 Năm Phát Triển Kinh Tế Nông Thôn’], undated, folder 2892, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

²⁹² ‘Report on the Rice Situation’ [Phúc Trình về Hiện Tình Lúa Gạo], 5 September 1973, folder 3035, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

²⁹³ ‘Economic Development’, 17 February 1970 FCO15/1361, UKNA.

²⁹⁴ ‘General Survey of the Economic and Financial Situation in Vietnam’, *Kinh Tế Tập San*, no. 5-6. (1973). The total amount of agricultural credit was VN\$22.3bn which was slightly more than US\$50m if calculated based on the exchange rate at the end of 1972: VN\$435 to US\$1.

²⁹⁵ Lewis Sorley ed., *Vietnam Chronicles: the Abrams Tapes, 1968-1972*, (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2004), 501, 697.

means it would use “its inflation devalued-banknotes... to buy paddy from our peasants”. The United States Senate’s resolution cutting Nixon administration aid to Saigon in late 1971 was bad for farmers because “the clique’s rice-stealing scheme is one measure to relieve its critical situation”. But by late 1971, most of those engaging in commercial agriculture were the middle and rich peasants, beyond the moral suasion of the revolution.²⁹⁶

By the spring of 1973, 1.1 million hectares of land had been distributed to some 800,000 farming families under the provisions of the LTTT. USAID research indicated that the new land owners were more likely to make risky investments, adopt new agricultural techniques and purchase consumer goods.²⁹⁷ As the modernizers had predicted, a stratum of middle and rich peasant farmers in the Delta had seized on a new agricultural technology and turned to commercial agriculture. However, the consequences of rural change were not what the modernizers anticipated. Measuring the political implications of these changes proves very difficult. Undoubtedly, many peasants who had received land through the LTTT appreciated the government’s efforts, while the results of the VSD were more ambiguous. On the other hand, it is easier to measure how agricultural development effected South Vietnamese economic viability. For several reasons, these developments did not redound to the GVN’s economic advantage.

MLRA officials placed their faith in TN rice for its increased production. However, accelerating production proved less problematic than processing, storing and especially marketing surplus grain. Even as production increased and security improved, rice shipments from to Saigon repeatedly failed to meet GVN planners’

²⁹⁶ ‘Don’t Sell Rice to the GVN- Save it for the VC, says Liberation Radio’, 14 November 1971, Folder 10, Box 14, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 05- National Liberation Front, TTU-VVA, Item No.: 2311410015; Elliott notes that by 1971 ‘the base of the revolution had been reduced to small clusters of poor peasants’, Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*, vol. 2, 783.

²⁹⁷ ‘Land Reform- United States Economic Assistance to Viet Nam, 1954-1975: Viet Nam Terminal Report’, 31 December 1975, *USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse*, Document ID: PN-ABH-885.

estimates. Although the security environment had improved considerably in 1970-1971, the Delta's waterways remained insecure, and roads and highways were inadequate to handle increased volumes of grain. In addition, a small number of merchants dominated all aspects of the rice economy. For all of the GVN's pretensions of guidance, control and planning, lack of competition meant that these merchants could control the market and manipulate prices. They could reap handsome profits without delivering more rice to Saigon.²⁹⁸

The GVN, on the other hand, had inaccurate or conflicting data on production, consumption and demography, inhibiting the rationalisation of imports or creation of market incentives for farmers to sell and merchants to deliver to Saigon. Particularly revealing was that the MLRA – responsible for increasing production - and the Ministry of Economy – responsible for scheduling imports - disagreed on rice production levels.²⁹⁹ GVN agricultural officials at the provincial level, frustrated with the lack of ministry coordination, argued that farmers would respond to incentives if marketing prospects were good.³⁰⁰ The GVN tried to assert control by intervening in the rice market, reducing subsidies on imported rice, guaranteeing prices for short periods of time or maintaining security stocks to prevent market disturbances.³⁰¹ Each step was an attempt to encourage farmers to part with their stocks and to prevent merchant speculation. But in such a volatile economy, merchants kept a close eye on government stocks and scheduled rice imports. The CIA reported these merchants were often able to drive up prices despite no absolute shortages of rice.³⁰² The Saigon media did not help the GVN in this respect. The Ministry of Economy found itself having to respond to

²⁹⁸ 'Economic and Engineering Study: Grain Storage and Marketing System, Vietnam', March 1970, 128-133, *USAID Developing Experience Clearinghouse*, Document ID: PN-ADX-694.

²⁹⁹ 'Report on the Rice Situation', 5 September 1973, Folder 3035, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

³⁰⁰ 'National Agricultural Development Planning Conference, October 5-8, 1970', Planning and Programming – Agricultural Production Memo - 1970, Box 15, MACV HQ CORDS, MR4/New File Dev Div, Agr Br, RG472, NARA II.

³⁰¹ 'Communique regarding rice procurement 1969-70 season' [Thông cáo v/v thu mua lúa gạo mùa 1969-1970], folder 2519, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

³⁰² CIA Report, 'The Economic Situation in South Vietnam' (Biweekly), 25 August 1969, Box 62, Vietnam Subject Files, National Security Files, Nixon Library.

newspaper articles which speculated about government stocks and looming shortages by assuring the population that there was enough rice to go around.³⁰³

Robert Nooter, head of USAID in Vietnam in the early 1970s, later recalled that the main difficulty in the agricultural sector in South Vietnam was not transforming peasant psychology but the far more mundane issues of pricing and marketing. Nooter said that “under wartime conditions, the South Vietnamese first instincts were not to handle [rice] on a market economy basis... the government was inclined to go out and collect it at the point of a bayonet. We argued that that was not a good way to run an economy”. Nooter believed that if prices were right, farmers would sell their rice. As Nooter recalled, Minister Ngoc understood and agreed with the U.S. position and things started to turn around.³⁰⁴

Ngoc became the United States’ point man on reforming the agricultural economy. In mid-1970 USAID agreed to additional rice imports to meet looming shortages only if the GVN equalised price between domestic and imported rice in Military Regions I and II. Ngoc supported this move, arguing that subsidies had deflated local rice production, discouraged trade between the Delta and the north, created false demand and encouraged corruption.³⁰⁵ Ngoc pushed through the reform, eliminating subsidies. The Ministry of Economy also attempted to encourage more private trade between the Mekong Delta and rice-deficient provinces in the north of the country. The absence of such trade was a major reason for the continued high volumes of rice imports. In late 1970, Ngoc announced a number of measures to encourage merchants to

³⁰³ ‘Communique- Minister of Economy Pham Kim Ngoc’ [Thông Báo, Tổng Trưởng Kinh Tế Phạm Kim Ngoc], 24 February 1970, folder 2519, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

³⁰⁴ ‘Interview with Robert Nooter’, 6 January 1996, *Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, (available at: <http://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Nooter,%20Robert%20H.toc.pdf>; retrieved 9 February 2014).

³⁰⁵ ‘Strengthening the Rice Market’ [Lãnh mạnh hóa thị trường gạo], 27 June 1970, Folder 2518, PTTDNCH- TTLTQGII.

engage in such trade, including subsidized transport and handling costs and offering to buy back merchants' unsold rice. Such reforms had limited impact however.³⁰⁶

The trouble with turning peasant farmers into “rational economic actors” in this unstable, inflationary economy was that “rationality” encouraged speculative behaviour. An early indication of farmers engaging in such speculative behaviour came in 1969. Despite a bumper crop and increased security farmers decided to hold on to their stocks as prices steadily rose and eventually doubled during the year. As a result, Saigon had to schedule emergency imports.³⁰⁷ In 1970, as rice prices fell and hog prices rose, USAID estimated that farmers diverted large volumes of rice to feed livestock. Rice shipments from the Delta to Saigon again failed to meet GVN expectations in 1970 so to shore up prices and ensure deliveries the GVN had to greatly increase its share of the market.³⁰⁸ USAID hinted at peasant speculation again the following year when it noted that farmers in Long An were “aggressively developing greater on-farm storage facilities” which would allow them to store rice until prices rose. USAID estimated, in early 1971, that there was enough surplus rice in the Delta to meet 97% of national needs. However, government rice procurement that year again fell well below GVN targets.³⁰⁹ In order to become self-sufficient in a meaningful way, and given the negligible private rice trade between the Delta and the north of the country, the GVN had to procure rice from the Delta and ship it to the provinces north of Saigon. When procurement targets went unmet, the GVN had to request further rice imports from the United States. The peasantry, it seems, was responsive to the market. But a combination of factors, including increased security in the Delta, land reform and the financial incentives

³⁰⁶ ‘Communique- Minister of Economy Pham Kim Ngoc’, 25 February 1970, folder 2519, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

³⁰⁷ Pike ed., *Bunker Papers*, vol. 3, 762.

³⁰⁸ William J.C. Logan and William F. Moody, ‘Rice Marketing and Situation Report: Vietnam’, January 1971, *USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse*, Document ID: PN-ABS-393; ‘Strengthening the Rice Market’, folder 2518, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

³⁰⁹ Logan and Moody, ‘Rice Marketing and Situation Report: Vietnam’, *USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse*; ‘Report for the Prime Minister regarding 1972 rice policy’ [Tờ trình Thủ Tướng Chính Phủ về chính sách lúa gạo], folder 2845, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

created by the Green Revolution, did not benefit the state economically. Rather it seems to have increased the economic leverage of wealthier farmers vis-à-vis the state.

In March 1972, the North Vietnamese army and NLF forces launched a military offensive throughout the south, shattering the precarious security situation in the Delta. Although U.S. airpower stalled the offensive by October, Hanoi had inserted a huge number of North Vietnamese troops into South Vietnam and the NLF once again made inroads into the countryside. Ironically, reports indicated that farmers were now urgently trying to sell their rice as soon as it was harvested to avoid taxation by the forces of the revolution. It seemed that the NLF and PAVN had accidentally caused economic incentives which the GVN had struggled to create. But the disruption caused by the offensive had considerably reduced the GVN's ability to get the rice to market.³¹⁰

For the South Vietnamese, while continued rice imports highlighted the ambiguous results of the miracle rice project, there was no doubt as to the success of the LTTT. Having sought to learn about land reform from the rest of the Global South, by late 1972, MLRA officials were comparing the LTTT favourably to land reform in the rest of the region. Following a trip to Japan, the Philippines, and Malaysia, a MLRA official reported that South Vietnam's LTTT was easily the most progressive program.³¹¹ GVN agricultural officials believed that the LTTT was so successful that South Vietnam would have to begin looking to more "advanced friendly countries" for replicable models of land administration and management. In the summer of 1973 Cao Van Than and Bui Huu Tien, Director of Land Reform therefore visited the United States, France and the Shah's Iran to learn about aerial photography, land records management and land taxation. They toured these countries to gather additional

³¹⁰ J.D. Freeman, Rice Advisor- My Tho, 'Narrative for September 1972', Folder 1601-09a Mr Freeman's Reports File 1972, Box 30, MACV HQ CORDS, MR4/New File Dev Div, Agr Br, RG472, NARA II.

³¹¹ 'Report on Mr. Nguyen Thanh Qui's observation of land reform in the Philippines, Japan, and Malaysia', [v/v Phúc trình về việc quan sát công cuộc Cải Cách Điền Địa tại Phi Luật Tân, Nhật Bản, Mã Lai Á của Ông Nguyễn Thành Qui], 24 November 1972, folder 27033, Phu Thu Tuong, TTLTQGII.

experience with which to nurture the results of the LTTT.³¹² The tables had turned in other ways too. For the first time, South Vietnam had apparently produced a development success to which other Global South nations might aspire. In a conversation with Kissinger in the summer of 1973 Lee Kuan Yew passed on a Singaporean report on the situation in South Vietnam which described the LTTT as “virtually a model for the region”.³¹³

Conclusion

U.S.-South Vietnamese agriculture projects in the years between the Tet Offensive and the Paris agreements serve as a microcosm of post-war U.S efforts in this field. The post-war social science and development consensus may have been coming apart in the United States just as Nixon took office, but there is no evidence that the U.S. team in Vietnam had received the message. During the Nixon years, U.S. officials continued to pursue the same strategies, helping the GVN complete projects initiated during the Johnson administration, namely the accelerated rice production campaign and land reform. There was no decisive break in the approach to rural development between the two administrations.

Post-war social science indicated that a psychological transformation of the peasant was required if the economies of the postcolonial nations were to ‘take-off’. GVN officials and their U.S. advisers hoped that the introduction of a single technology in the form of a small seed could spark that psychological transformation. This would in turn revolutionize the entire agricultural economy and revamp the peasantry’s relationship with the state for the better. As such GVN and U.S. agricultural advisers set

³¹² ‘Republic of Vietnam Delegation’s Report regarding the visit to the United States, France and Iran to observe land reform and land administration’ [v/v phúc trình của Phái Đoàn VNCH về chuyến công du tại Hoa Kỳ, Pháp và Ba Tư để quan sát về Cải Cách và Quản Trị Điền Địa], 20 August 1973, folder 27053, Phu Thu Tuong, TTLTQGII.

³¹³ ‘Some Notes on President Nguyen Van Thieu’, undated, Memcon-Singapore Aug. 4, 1973 (1), Box 10, National Security Adviser, Saigon Embassy Files Taken by Amb. Graham Martin (copies), 1963-1975 (1976), Ford Library.

about convincing South Vietnamese farmers of the merits of the Green Revolution. It would turn out that transforming peasant psychologies was not required. U.S and GVN officials acted almost as if the commercialization of agriculture was yet to happen in the late 1960s, when in fact peasants had been exposed to market forces since the colonial era. It should have come as no surprise then that tens of thousands of farmers with the means seized on miracle rice regardless of GVN guidance. U.S. and GVN observers pointed to the subsequent growth in prosperity and consumerism as evidence, backed up by social science, that rural society was moving in the right direction. But as long as these farmers could enjoy the fruits of modernization without committing themselves to community development and the functioning of local government then this new wealth was politically meaningless for the GVN. The LTTT and miracle rice project appealed to the “rational” peasants while the VSD appealed to the “moral economy” of the villages. As U.S. observers saw it the first two succeeded and the latter failed because peasants were self-interested actors. This interpretation called into question the GVN’s entire post-Tet strategy which was premised on communal solidarity and the establishment of self-governing, self-sufficient, and self-defending villages.

An examination of agricultural development in Vietnam highlights the need, once again, to place South Vietnam in a regional context. For each of the problems that South Vietnam encountered in rural development, from increased rice production to credit and land reform, South Vietnamese technocrats looked to the Global South for answers. For the GVN these lessons were very real and applicable. In South Vietnam the Green Revolution was not simply a narrative created by the postcolonial state and development professionals to convince domestic and international audiences of the vitality of the regime. Nor was it simply a story of environmental degradation, though that would be one of the legacies of the miracle rice project too. Rather, real and significant social and economic changes occurred in the South Vietnamese countryside

during the final years of the war which would have important consequences after 1975. The farmers who benefitted most from the GVN's rural development policies would prove to be the fiercest opponents of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam's attempts to collectivize agriculture.

Chapter Three

Creating Clean, Modern Citizens: Public Health in South Vietnam

Public health systems give states enormous power to intervene in and regulate their citizens' private lives. While agricultural development projects tend to enter the workplace, public health projects enter the home. Particularly in postcolonial states, public health systems allowed new states to build new men. In the name of extending health care into the countryside in ways that colonial states had never attempted, governments could create the kind of modern citizens that they wanted by determining the way they should cook, eat, clean, dispose of waste, defecate and reproduce. Such projects were as much about staking the state's claim on the population and establishing the writ, sovereignty and legitimacy of the postcolonial state in rural areas, as they were about giving citizens a better standard of life. Thus, it is no surprise that in the years after independence, peasant populations sometimes accepted and sometimes resisted the postcolonial state's health interventions.

This chapter examines the GVN's attempt to build a modern public health infrastructure that would contribute to economic and social development and to the sustainability of the South Vietnamese state following the American decision to begin disengagement from Vietnam. The GVN's health programmes and policy debates centred on the best way to marshal the human resources of the country to serve the military and economic needs of the state. The chapter focuses on two projects in particular: the National Sanitary Hamlet Programme and population planning. The Sanitary Hamlet Programme attempted to build a public health infrastructure in the countryside through a campaign of hygienic reform. The RVN was critically short of

health care professionals and the state dedicated the vast majority of its modest resources to defence. By encouraging modern hygienic practices in the villages, the Ministry of Health (MOH) hoped to produce a self-governing citizenry that would take responsibility for its own health care needs. Accepting the age old American link between health and productivity, the GVN believed this healthy rural population would contribute to South Vietnam's economic take-off. These modern practices would create healthier, more productive citizens with as little impact as possible on the overstretched manpower of the state. But the Sanitary Hamlet Programme was also the manifestation of an elite South Vietnamese vision of an unsanitary peasantry and in this sense bore striking resemblance to late colonial era development. The programme once again highlights GVN elites' ability to both idealize and wish to reform village life.

Alarmed by high population growth, some GVN technocrats and their allies in the Family Happiness Protection Association [Hội Bảo Vệ Hạnh Phúc Gia Đình], a Saigon-based NGO, began to lobby for a population planning programme. While some advocates championed family planning as a women's rights issue, most saw contraception as a means to manage the size and composition of the South Vietnamese population. These political and civilian elites became part of a transnational network of population control advocates which reached the peak of its global influence in the late 1960s and early 1970s. South Vietnamese population planning campaigners endorsed the same approach to the problems of population as influential demographers and international NGOs, namely that top-down efforts to shape the demography of a country could generate economic development. To speed up the economic modernization of the country and to end the RVN's dependency on the United States, population planning advocates believed that South Vietnam needed to increase the productive portion of the population relative to the number of dependents. Taiwan and South Korea once again seemed to provide replicable models.

U.S. officials in Vietnam endorsed these programmes but acknowledged that both were very much South Vietnamese-led efforts. The United States provided construction material and technical assistance for the Sanitary Hamlet Programme, with counterinsurgency advocates seeing links between hygiene and anti-Communist, communal solidarity. In the area of population control, USAID was keen to take a backseat for fear that the United States might be accused of neo-colonial meddling in the reproductive health of Vietnamese women. Instead, USAID facilitated South Vietnamese officials' engagement with the international population control movement and hoped to achieve population planning goals through Vietnamese actors who shared a similar outlook. The United States would prove disappointed with the results of these efforts, highlighting its limited leverage over the Vietnamese political scene.

One of the biggest challenges for postcolonial nations in the early years of independence was providing primary health care including preventive medicine, health education and sanitation, for all citizens. Yet historians have noted that throughout the Global South development institutions and postcolonial states placed less emphasis on basic health care and focused instead on two major efforts: disease eradication- particularly malaria and smallpox- and population planning. But development agencies were not only interested in these high modernist approaches. Historians of development have overlooked a third trend in international health: the construction of toilets as a means to improve the sanitary conditions and health of peasants in the Global South. Each of these global trends played out in South Vietnam from the 1950s to the 1970s.

The major post-war global health regimes had colonial antecedents but in the Cold War they acquired a new logic. U.S. policymakers and social scientists contemplated the links between health and communism but there was no consensus. For some, illness, poverty, hunger led inevitably to political instability and revolution.

Places of ill-health were promising hunting grounds for communist agitators.

Improvements in public health in the postcolonial world, some U.S. policymakers believed, would guard against communist revolution. Outlining the Truman administration's program of technical assistance to the developing world known as Point IV, the State Department wrote in 1949 that "the undernourished Eastern peasant, afflicted with chronic malaria" was "a weak and lethargic worker". "A more vigorous physique", brought about by better health, would make him more productive.³¹⁴

For modernization theorists, however, public health was one of the few areas in which the application of technology, if not very carefully managed, could have a negative effect. Max Millikan and Walt Rostow of the Center for International Studies at MIT, challenged the common belief that hunger caused revolution. Rather, "the energy-stimulating effects of better nutrition... is likely to release the psychological and political pressures for change which may find expression in revolt".³¹⁵ Better nutrition could lead to increased productivity or could be the catalyst for communist revolution.

The decision to focus on disease eradication and population control in the early Cold War was in large part because technologies existed which appeared to deal with these problems. Whereas inter-uterine devices and DDT could eliminate privation in one fell swoop, no single technological fix could assist in the more complicated mission to provide basic health care. As economist John Kenneth Galbraith noted "having vaccine, we identified smallpox".³¹⁶ In addition, health and population experts managed to convince policymakers in the Global North and South that these solutions offered a quicker route to economic growth, that most cherished of postcolonial development goals. Indeed, the only way one could reconcile the conflicting goals of disease control and population growth control – one seeking to keep people alive, the other seeking to

³¹⁴ Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 119.

³¹⁵ Millikan and Rostow, *A Proposal*, 20.

³¹⁶ Erez Manela, 'A pox on your narrative: Writing Disease Control into Cold War History', *Diplomatic History*, vol. 34, no. 2, (2010), 318.

keep people unborn- was to justify both in terms of economic development. Both could be used to engineer an ideally-sized, healthy and productive labour force.

Modern malaria eradication dated back to the late 19th century but health experts disagreed on the best means to deal with the disease until the 1940s. It was only after a number of developments during World War Two, including the invention of DDT and the apparent successes of malaria eradication in select areas of Latin America and southern Europe that health experts settled definitively on the method of vector control, which focused on attacking breeding grounds and fumigating houses in malaria-prone areas. Drawing on these lessons and new technologies, in 1955 the World Health Organization (WHO) launched a global Malaria Eradication Program (MEP) amid concerns that vectors would soon develop resistance to DDT. Throughout the Global South teams of rural health workers travelled around rural areas spraying homes with DDT and identifying and treating cases of malaria.

Scholars argue that the United States threw its weight behind this effort because malaria eradication would help the United States win “hearts and minds” in the Global South, while healthier and therefore more productive postcolonial citizens could resist Communism and provide markets for U.S. goods. Advocates of eradication situated the program within the larger project of postcolonial development. They argued that malaria was responsible for underdevelopment and were more interested in how eradication served economic growth than they were in its public health benefits. But they could never satisfactorily demonstrate any link between eradication and economic development. As the 1960s progressed the program became ever more costly, major donors lost interest, and mosquitos showed growing resistance to DDT. The MEP was a helpful tool for the postcolonial state to project its power into the interior but peasants came to resent rather than appreciate these state interventions in their homes. In addition, an emerging environmental movement, mobilized in part by Rachel Carson’s

best-selling *Silent Spring*, called into question the use of DDT. By 1969, such were the ambiguous results of the MEP that the WHO abandoned attempts to eradicate malaria and returned to the less ambitious goal of control.³¹⁷

Population politics were rooted in Thomas Malthus' late 18th Century tract *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, in which the British cleric argued that uncontrolled population growth would eventually outstrip food and other resources, leading to famine, disease and human misery. By the late 19th Century many Western intellectuals and policymakers feared the rise of hostile "hordes" of non-whites and imagined the white race being swept away by the "yellow peril". These non-white races, it seemed, could subsist on lower levels of resources, threatening the existence of Anglo-Saxons. These fears of scarcity continued to motivate those concerned about overpopulation well into the 20th century.³¹⁸

Interest in population politics came from a huge array of groups, from human and physical scientists to feminists and religious leaders, with equally diverse motivations of racism and eugenics, women's emancipation or religious morality. Prior to the era of decolonization and particularly in the interwar years, there was little consensus on the relative merits of population increase, reduction or redistribution. Population politics in some places, however, would provide important precedents for post-war population planning. In pre-war Puerto Rico, colonial officials sought to limit the productivity of the poor, claiming that overpopulation, and in particular too many

³¹⁷ Randall M. Packard and Paulo Gadehla, 'A Land Filled with Mosquitoes: Fred L. Soper, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Anopheles Gambiae Invasion of Brazil', *Medical Anthropology*, vol. 17, no. 3, 215-238; Randall M. Packard, 'Malaria Dreams: Postwar Visions of Health and Development in the Third World', *Medical Anthropology*, vol. 17, no. 3, (1997), 279-296. Erez Manela demonstrates that the international health community had considerably more success eradicating smallpox in part because the United States and the Soviet Union were willing to cooperate on the program. In addition, and unlike malaria, a vaccine existed, all victims presented symptoms, and vaccination required a much smaller social and environmental intervention than the MEP. By 1977 the programme eradicated smallpox globally. Manela, 'A pox on your narrative', 299- 323.

³¹⁸ Matthew Connelly, 'To Inherit the Earth. Imagining World Population, from the Yellow Peril to the Population Bomb', *Journal of Global History*, vol. 1, no. 3, (2006), 299-319.

working-class people, was the reason for the island's poverty and economic underdevelopment.³¹⁹

It was not until the early Cold War, however, that social scientists began explicitly linking population to political economy and economic development. Having been the domain of biologists and eugenicists prior to World War Two, in the 1940s, overpopulation became the concern of economists, sociologists and especially demographers. Influential demographers first developed demographic transition theory, which argued that birth rates would only decline after economic development, industrialization and urbanization. However, it soon became clear that demographic changes in the Global South were not conforming to this model. Instead, it seemed that changing reproductive behaviour in the postcolonial world might speed up development. One scholar notes that this created the space for policymakers, rather than individuals, to determine population increases. By tying population control to economic development, population experts shook off their association with eugenics and many postcolonial political elites greeted their ideas with enthusiasm.³²⁰

In the 1950s NGOs such as the Population Council and International Planned Parenthood spearheaded population control programmes. The United States' government, on the other hand, was wary of involvement both because of Catholic opposition and Third World accusations of a neo-colonial plot. By the mid-1960s, however, Johnson was convinced of the merits of population control having been presented with questionable analysis which suggested that it offered a better return on the investment of U.S. foreign aid. Even as the Nixon administration downsized

³¹⁹ Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Alison Bashford, 'Nation, Empire, Globe: the Spaces of Population Debate in the Interwar Years', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 49, no. 1, (2007), 170-201.

³²⁰ Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 122- 138; John Sharpless, 'Population Science, Private Foundations and Development Aid: the Transformation of Demographic Knowledge in the United States, 1945-65' in Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard eds., *International Development and the Social Sciences: essays on the history and politics of knowledge*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 176- 200.

USAID, its Office of Population grew between 1969 and 1971. But the United States continued to avoid direct involvement in population control, instead funnelling money through UN agencies and NGOs.³²¹

By the late 1960s, as population control reached its apogee, advocates also became more forceful in their policy prescriptions. Given Third World citizens' ignorance about contraception and the consequences of large families, argued Population Council President Bernard Berelson, voluntary programs were likely to fail. Berelson and other population experts like Davis believed that governments rather than individual couples should determine fertility rates by incentivising contraception and sterilization.³²² Without top-down demographic management, improvements in public health would only accelerate population growth, food would become scarcer and underdeveloped economies would remain stagnant.³²³ Thus public health in the developing world, for both U.S. policymakers and many local elites, became an issue of managing the population for optimum economic advantage. The framing of the population issue in these terms, despite the lack of social science consensus on links between population growth and per capita income, led to coercive programmes in some Asian countries including India, Taiwan and South Korea. Governments gave rural midwives targets for sterilization and intra-uterine device insertions but often there was no follow-up care, leading to pain and bleeding, or ectopic pregnancies and septic abortions.

³²¹ Matthew Connelly, 'LBJ and World Population: Planning the Great Society One Family at a Time', in Mark Attwood Lawrence and Francis J. Gavin, *Beyond the Cold War: Lyndon Johnson and the New Global Challenges of the 1960s*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); 'USIA and Population Matters Abroad', 18 February 1970, Reel 8, frame 0771, Records of the U.S. Information Agency, Part 1: Cold War Era Special Reports, Series B, 1964-1982, *Roosevelt Studies Center*, Middelburg (hereafter *RSC*); Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 281-289.

³²² Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution*, 105-106.

³²³ Thomas Robertson points out that population control reached fever pitch in the late 1960s and early 1970s not only because neo-Malthusians saw birth control as a technique for economic development, but also because of the rise of an environmental movement that began to question the very premise of growth and consumption. Thomas Robertson, *The Malthusian Moment: Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

Like disease eradication and population control, American toilet-building as nation-building dated back to the colonial era and continued into the Cold War. But whereas historians of medicine have examined the centrality of latrine construction to U.S. public health projects in the colonised world, historians of development have largely overlooked the continuation of this health regime in the postcolonial Global South after 1945.

Although colonial medicine initially focused on protecting white enclaves, the development of the germ theory of disease in the late 19th century convinced colonial health officials that colonizers would remain vulnerable unless medical interventions also targeted local populations.³²⁴ From the early 20th century, the more “progressive colonies” such as the United States in the Philippines and the Dutch in the East Indies therefore instituted hygienic reform campaigns. Seeing the apparent filth of the colonized as a cultural deficiency, divorced from social or economic context, colonizers began instructing colonial subjects about good hygienic habits, including the use of sanitary latrines. Colonial officials could point to the civilizing, sanitizing mission to legitimise colonial rule, while protecting the health of local labour would allow colonial powers to better exploit the resources of empire.³²⁵

In addition to the colonial powers, philanthropic organizations took up toilet-construction with aplomb. From the 1900s through the 1920s the Rockefeller Foundation carried out efforts to eradicate hookworm, the “germ of laziness”, in the

³²⁴ David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Mariola Espinosa, ‘A Fever for Empire: U.S. Disease Eradication in Cuba as Colonial Public Health’, in Alfred McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano eds., *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State*, (Madison, WI.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 288-296; Warwick Anderson, ‘Excremental Colonialism: Public Health and the Poetics of Pollution’, *Critical Inquiry*, 21, No. 3 (Spring, 1995), 645-646; Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, 35.

³²⁵ Sunil Amrith, *Decolonizing International Health: India and Southeast Asia, 1930-1965*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 9-11; Arnold, *Colonizing the Body*, 13, 61; Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). Nonetheless, these colonial reforms were extremely limited in scope; colonial powers could be more easily condemned for neglecting the health of their colonial subjects than for imposing biomedical interventions.

American South and Latin America. The goal was to increase economic productivity and the chosen means was treatment and toilet construction.³²⁶ The Rockefeller Foundation was so enthusiastic about the potential for the toilet to improve the health and therefore productivity of colonial labour that it even carried out projects in British colonies.³²⁷

One might get the impression from the historiography of Cold War development that this practice ended in the era of decolonization. But it continued unabated. In the 1940s, U.S. health professionals estimated that hookworm was so prevalent in some parts of Latin America that people only gained nutrition from about 50% of the food they consumed. Between 1942 and 1952 the Institute for Inter-American Affairs and the Latin American nations therefore constructed more than thirty eight thousand outdoor toilets in rural areas of Latin America.³²⁸ The ubiquity of this mode of U.S. intervention was not lost on Che Guevara who, at the launch of the Alliance for Progress in 1961, dismissed U.S development as offering only “the paradise of the latrine”. The United States seemed to believe the latrine was “the fundamental thing” in improving the social conditions of the poor. “It is a bit like... I do not know”, Che mused, “but I would almost classify it as a colonial mentality”. As Che highlighted, little better illustrates the continuity of colonial and postcolonial development than United States’ toilet-building in the Global South during the 20th Century.³²⁹

³²⁶ Warwick Anderson, ‘Going through the Motions: American Public Health and Colonial “Mimicry”’, *American Literary History* 14, no. 4. (2002), 701-703.

³²⁷ Soma Hewa, *Colonialism, Tropical Disease, and Imperial Medicine: Rockefeller Philanthropy in Sri Lanka*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995), 40-85. In Ceylon, the Rockefeller Foundation launched a programme of hookworm treatment, temporary latrine construction and health education on plantations. The idea was to convince plantation owners that toilets were economically efficient and that workers would use them. Only when owners saw the results, were they willing to pay for more permanent structures.

³²⁸ Wilton L. Halverson, ‘Health South of the Border’, Institute of Inter-American Affairs: Building a Better Hemisphere Series, No. 17, January 1953, *USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse*, Document ID: PN-AEC-017, retrieved 25 June 2015; Andre Luiz Vieira de Campos, ‘The Institute of Inter-American Affairs and its Health Policies in Brazil during World War Two’, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 3, (1998), 523-534.

³²⁹ ‘Economics cannot be separated from Politics: Speech at Punta del Este, 8 August 1961’, (available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1961/our-america/our-america.pdf>; retrieved 25 June 2015).

As in other fields of development, South Vietnam turned to global solutions to its public health problems. These three trends of post-war public health – disease eradication, population control, and hygienic reform – each found enthusiastic backers among South Vietnamese political and civilian elites. In the case of malaria eradication and population planning, South Vietnamese pushed these programs at the very time they were reaching their peak globally. While Diem's First Republic endorsed malaria eradication in the 1950s and early 1960s, civilian elites seized on population planning in the late 1960s and 1970s. As in many other areas of the Global South, civilian NGOs spearheaded the campaign for population planning. Hygienic reform and sanitation remained a concern of South Vietnamese political elites throughout the country's history but it was not until the late 1960s that the GVN began to implement a systematic effort in the form of the Sanitary Hamlet Program.

Bringing Health to the Villages

U.S. health assistance to Vietnam began with nursing education programmes during the First Indochina War. Following the partition of Vietnam in 1954, this programme continued in the south, along with technical assistance, overseas training programmes and the provision of medical equipment that South Vietnam could not afford. The WHO also ran a malaria eradication programme. As the conflict escalated in the early 1960s, the U.S. increasingly used health care to serve civic action and counterinsurgency goals. Yet despite the emphasis on nation-building and civic action during the early years of the American War, by 1968 the United States and the GVN had made little progress toward building a public health infrastructure in the countryside.

Medical assistance in the countryside was very basic. Plague, tuberculosis and leprosy were common, and average life expectancy was 35-40. In 1965 there were

approximately 800 doctors in South Vietnam, 500 of whom served in the military and 150 of whom were in private practice. This left 150 doctors working in Ministry of Health hospitals serving a population of 15 million people; a ratio of one doctor to 150,000 people. Many of these doctors were simultaneously engaged in administrative duties. Those in private practice were predominantly based in urban areas, compounding the inequality between the cities and countryside.³³⁰

Given the dearth of health care professionals the GVN attempted to devolve modest health care services down to the village and hamlet level. In 1957 the government established a Rural Health Program which sought to provide villages of more than 10,000 residents with a maternity dispensary staffed by a midwife and a village health worker. Smaller villages were served by only a village health worker, while hamlets of 500-1,000 people had a medical kit looked after by the hamlet health worker. These part-time staff received only one month's medical training, and their health stations were equipped with a medical chest and a training manual on which they relied heavily.³³¹ Very limited numbers of district health nurses, sanitary agents and health educators supervised and assisted the village and hamlet health workers. U.S. advisers placed great emphasis on health education and sanitation but as a report claimed, the GVN was sceptical of the need for these services. It was not until "their value could be demonstrated" that the Ministry of Health agreed to pay the salaries of these personnel beginning in 1961.³³² The NLF frequently targeted the health workers and their supplies and by 1961 the security situation in the countryside meant that health services had shut down in many areas. Five years later, the MOH reported that over 250

³³⁰ Myron Allukian Jnr. and Paul L. Atwood, 'The Vietnam War' in Barry S. Levy and Victor W. Sidel eds. *War and Public Health*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 313- 337.

³³¹ James T. Baird and Willard H. Boynton, 'The Challenge and the Task in Vietnam', *Public Health Reports (1896-1970)* 79, no. 5 (May, 1964), 383-391.

³³² 'Helping to Develop the Health Program of Viet Nam: Annual Report Public Health Division United States Operations Mission Viet Nam', July 1, 1960 - June 30, 1961, No Date, Folder 16, Box 11, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 11 - Monographs, TTU-VVA, Item No.: 2391116005.

health workers had been killed, captured or were missing, while 107 health installations had been destroyed.³³³

In marked contrast with the paltry contribution to basic health services, the GVN showed great interest in the WHO's malaria eradication campaign. By 1961, South Vietnam had contributed \$2m and over 2,500 Vietnamese were working on the programme. This GVN contribution equalled the annual U.S. health program budget in the same period, an enormous outlay given the Saigon's limited resources.³³⁴ Like many postcolonial leaders, Diem showed enthusiasm for health programmes that applied a single technological fix to overcome complex environmental and epidemiological problems. The malaria eradication programme also allowed the state to intervene in the lives of the peasantry on an unprecedented scale and thereby stake a claim on the population. Teams sprayed DDT inside homes once every six months and collected blood samples. The programme continued into the 1970s but with resistance from the peasantry and a lack of territorial security the high modernist ambition of eradication was, by the mid-1960s, scaled back to less ambitious goal of malaria control. The abandonment of eradication in favour of control, however, merely foreshadowed the WHO's abandonment of the global eradication program in 1969.

Given the manpower difficulties of the MOH and inability to maintain health facilities in the countryside, as the United States increased its involvement in South Vietnam it began to play the major role in delivering medical services. The CIA attributed foreign "omnipotence" in the field of public health to a lack of GVN personnel but also to the "different attitudes towards patient care in eastern and western

³³³ Ibid; 'Preliminary Plan, Rural Health Development, 1966' (undated) [USAID translation of Ministry of Health document], Box 1, HLS General FY '66, USAID Mission to Vietnam/Public Health Division, Subject Files of the Assistant Director, 1966-1970, RG286, NARA II.

³³⁴ 'Helping to Develop the Health Program of Viet Nam: Annual Report Public Health Division United States Operations Mission Viet Nam', TTU-VVA.

cultures”.³³⁵ Having contributed in large part to the burden the war placed on the South Vietnamese health system, U.S. officials blamed the South Vietnamese for a lack of consideration. By the time of the U.S. decision to send large numbers of troops to Vietnam in 1965, the United States had been involved in health projects in the south for almost 15 years. Yet the public health infrastructure had improved little. As the war in the countryside escalated, maintaining health facilities became increasingly difficult. Health projects became militarised and politicised as the United States and South Vietnamese struggled for the “hearts and minds” of the peasantry.

Medical treatment was often delivered as an element of civic action programmes, whereby South Vietnamese units and their U.S. counterparts would enter villages and deliver basic services to the people. In 1962, a joint proposal by the U.S. embassy and U.S. military established the Medical Civic Action Programme (MEDCAP) and Dental Civic Action Programme (DENTCAP). The goal was to provide outpatient care in rural areas while simultaneously training South Vietnamese medical technicians. More importantly, the programmes aimed to convince the rural population that the government cared about their well-being.³³⁶ Often provided during “County Fair Operations” or as part of a “cordon and search”, U.S. forces surrounded a village as ARVN troops questioned military-aged villagers. U.S. and Vietnamese medics then immunized villagers against common diseases, treated basic medical problems, extracted teeth and handed out soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste and leaflets on hygiene. The troops barbecued food while military bands and even magicians performed as the crowd looked on, sometimes with “enthusiasm”, sometimes with dismay. One report complained that in some instances the MEDCAPs “amounted to no more than a travelling medicine show”. While the programme might have some

³³⁵ CIA Directorate of Intelligence, ‘Intelligence Report: the Situation in South Vietnam (Weekly)’, 6 February 1967, Central Intelligence Agency, *DDRS*, Document No.: CK3100019630.

³³⁶ Robert J. Wilensky, *Military Medicine to Win Hearts and Minds: Aid to Civilians in the Vietnam War*, (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2004), 53-61.

advantage in convincing locals that “Western magic is more powerful than local magic”, the observer complained, it “represents an inexcusable prostitution of medical facilities”.³³⁷ American claims that the programme would deliver better health care aside, the true aim was to win the loyalty of the rural population by establishing a benevolent government presence in the countryside. As one U.S. military report stated: “the primary benefit from MEDCAP is psychological rather than medical”.³³⁸

Nevertheless, the results were not always as desired. The sight of ARVN troops and their foreign counterparts delivering medical treatment while gathering intelligence and interrogating villagers did not give the impression of an entirely benevolent Saigon regime. It was clear that the programme was at least in part intended to blunt opposition to military operations. The militarization of medicine and its use as a political weapon was not lost on the villagers but “Free World Forces” were at a loss as to why Vietnamese villagers did not show more appreciation for their efforts. Australian MEDCAP teams based near Vung Tau wondered why nearby villagers maintained “an air of indifference” after civic action operations in which they had pulled the villagers’ rotten teeth, treated their endemic TB, killed their mosquitoes and provided them with “some good Australian tucker”.³³⁹

MEDCAPs and DENTCAPs continued until U.S. forces withdrew in 1972. In a post-war assessment, ARVN Generals Nguyen Duy Hinh and Tran Dinh Tho suggested that MEDCAPs “resulted in better health care for those areas where indigenous doctors were a rarity”.³⁴⁰ This was no doubt the case but the programmes made little contribution to the creation of a modern, sustainable public health infrastructure in

³³⁷ ‘Summary of Certain Observations and Conclusions, Visit of Dr. David McK. Roich, Director, Division of Neuropsychiatry Walter Reed Army Institute of Research’, 21 March- 9 April 1964, Reel 1, Box 1, History Backup Files (II), Papers of William C. Westmoreland, part I, History, Statements, and Clippings File, RSC.

³³⁸ ‘Memo (MACV-IVC-4) - Medical Civic Action Program (MEDCAP) - re: summary of program’, 11 October 1967, Folder 04, Box 01, John Proe Collection, TTU-VVA, Item No.: 9860104003.

³³⁹ Alister Brass, *Bleeding Earth: a Doctor Looks at Vietnam*, (Melbourne: Heineman, 1968), 107.

³⁴⁰ Tran Dinh Tho and Nguyen Duy Hinh, ‘The South Vietnamese Society’ in Lewis Sorley ed. *The Vietnam War: an assessment by South Vietnam’s Generals*, (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2010).

South Vietnam. Most critically, the programmes failed to deliver adequate follow up care in the villages because there were not enough medical teams to go around and rural insecurity sometimes prevented return visits. Fearing that drugs would fall into the hands of the NLF, the teams sometimes limited the quantity of medicine prescribed to ill villagers to a 2-3 day supply.³⁴¹ Acceptance of medical care did not indicate support for the government. MEDCAP teams reported that they had to stop handing out commodities such as candy and clothes because “opportunists” were flocking to MEDCAPS with inexplicable “coughs and headaches”.³⁴² Nor were the programmes a novel way to secure the peasantry’s loyalty; intelligence gathered at one MEDCAP indicated that North Vietnamese Army medics had conducted their own medical civic action programmes in the area before South Vietnamese and American troops. The civilians in the area were “generally very healthy”.³⁴³

Medical civic action programmes delivered health care to remote rural villagers who had previously had little or no access to medical attention. However, the programmes had little lasting impact. They were delivered in piecemeal fashion and with psychological goals in mind. Furthermore, MEDCAPs and DENTCAPs did little to modernize the rural peasantry’s practices and social relations. It was not until after the Tet Offensive that the South Vietnamese government attempted ambitious social engineering projects to condition the peasantry to behave in more healthful, modern ways.

³⁴¹ ‘MEDCAPs- Medication’, 18 March 1970, Folder 16060- 7A Nursing Correspondence- Outgoing, Folder 1, 1970, MACV, HQ CORDS/Military Region 3, Public Health Division, Box 7, General Records 1969-1970, RG472, NARA II; ‘Interview with Charles Julienne’, 5 August 2004, Charles Julienne Collection, TTU-VVA, Item No.: OH0374.

³⁴² ‘ARMY 1970, 3RD -187th Inf Randolph Glen’, 7 March 1970, Folder 01, Bud Harton Collection, TTU-VVA, Item No.: 168300010557.

³⁴³ ‘Combat Operations After Action Report’, 18 July 1970, Folder 33, Box 01, Ron Leonard Collection, TTU-VVA, Item No.: 13680133001.

Filthy Camps and Sanitary Hamlets

With Vietnamization, the GVN's financial and manpower resources were thinly stretched. Even prior to the Tet Offensive the Ministry of Health had requested closer coordination between the civilian and military health services but during the offensive itself, at a time when civilian health services were overwhelmed, military physicians attached to civilian facilities were called back to their units.³⁴⁴ As the GVN prepared for General Mobilization in response to the Tet Offensive, the MOH called for a flexible policy and expressed concern that medical personnel would be drafted. The military, the MOH noted, had nearly its full required number of physicians, pharmacists and dentists while the civilian branch had less than 40% of its required staff. The MOH warned that General Mobilization, if strictly applied, would lead to paralysis in some areas of civilian health. Unsurprisingly, General Mobilization in June, which called up all males aged 16- 50 for military or paramilitary service, aggravated the already dire shortage of health professionals. In an illustrative case, Da Lat general hospital was forced to cancel all surgeries when the army drafted its only anaesthetist.³⁴⁵ The Joint Utilization Program, whereby civilian and military medical personnel shared facilities beginning in late 1969, alleviated the problem somewhat, but shortages of civilian health professionals remained critical until the fall of Saigon.

The military's drain on national resources was such that by 1970 the MOH's operations accounted for just 2.9% of the national budget. Minister Tran Minh Tung told Prime Minister Khiem that in most countries this figure was 6-12%. To compensate for this shortfall, the ministry sought assistance from "free world" countries other than the United States and in 1970 raised US\$21m, more than its projected budget for 1971. However, these countries were mostly willing to assist with hospital construction and

³⁴⁴ Minister for Health to Lt. General Minister of Defence [Tổng Trưởng Y Tế to Trung Tướng, Tổng Trưởng Quốc Phòng], 1 March 1968, folder 3397, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

³⁴⁵ 'Ministry of Health's Viewpoint Concerning the General Mobilization Order', 18 April 1968, Health and Sanitation FY '68, Box 2, USAID Mission to Vietnam/Public Health Division, Subject Files of the Assistant Director, 1966-1970, RG286, NARA II; Pike, *The Bunker Papers*, vol. 2, 393-394.

training programmes and there was little left for rural health projects.³⁴⁶ In light of this dire resource shortage, many post-Tet development projects sought to encourage village self-sufficiency. In the area of public health, the Sanitary Hamlet Programme aimed to provide the peasantry with the means to manage its own health care needs.

Poor sanitation was responsible for many common illnesses in Vietnam. The Walter Reed Army Institute of Research reported that hookworm was “almost universal” and dysentery and acute enteric diseases were very common, “reflecting the sanitary conditions and hygienic habits of the population”. The use of night soil, previously rare, was becoming more common due to the financial pressures of the war. “Excreta disposal facilities” were inadequate and, as another report claimed, “people won’t use them anyway”.³⁴⁷ These problems were even worse in refugee camps. After-care and sanitation were almost non-existent. In many camps, refugees received little or no food, had no access to water, no toilets, inadequate shelter and no medical facilities.³⁴⁸

Filth was everywhere for the American soldier serving in Vietnam. “They’re very ignorant. They shit and wipe their ass with their finger. They smell. The villages stink. Stink!” complained one.³⁴⁹ The sight of Vietnamese squatting in fields was particularly upsetting for young U.S. troops. For these soldiers the perceived filth of the

³⁴⁶ ‘Summary of Foreign Aid Situation for Health in 1970’ [v/v tổng kết tình hình ngoại viện về y tế trong năm 1970], 11 December 1970, folder 27150, Phủ Thủ Tướng, TTLTQGII.

³⁴⁷ ‘Health Data Publications, No. 5 (Revised), January 1966 - The Republic of Viet-Nam (South Viet-Nam) - Department of Health Data, Division of Preventive Medicine’, January 1966, Folder 19, Box 01, Robert M. Hall Collection, TTU-VVA, Item No.: 16090119001; Dr. John M. Levinson and Dr. Thomas S. Durant, “Testimony on Civilian Casualty, Social Welfare, and Refugee Problems in South Vietnam before the Senate Subcommittee To Investigate Problems Connected with Refugees and Escapees of the Senate Committee of the Judiciary”, Congress Session, 91:1, (24 June 1969), 46, *ProQuest Congressional*, Hearing ID: HRG-1969-SJS-0052.

³⁴⁸ Dr. John M. Levinson and Dr. Thomas S. Durant, ‘Testimony on Civilian Casualties, Social Welfare, and Refugee Problems in South Vietnam before the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Problems Connected with Refugees and Escapees of the Senate Committee of the Judiciary’, Congress Session, 91:1, (24 June 1969), 42- 81, *ProQuest Congressional*, Hearing ID: HRG-1969-SJS-0052; Refugee and Civilian War Casualty Problems in Vietnam- Prepared for Subcommittee to Investigate Problems Connected with Refugees and Escapees of the Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate by the General Accounting Office, 14 December 1970, Folder 08, Box 31, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 03 - Refugees and Civilian Casualties; Brass, *Bleeding Earth*, 123.

³⁴⁹ Christian G. Appy, *Working Class War: American Combat Soldiers in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 129-130.

villagers somehow devalued the American cause in Vietnam. “We were fools to be ready to die for a people who defecated in public” one claimed.³⁵⁰ It was not only the grunts who believed that Vietnamese were filthy. Larry Flanagan, a USAID officer, said “they have no idea of why a clean market is any better than a dirty market; it’s just a market and leaving trash around has been a way of life for who knows how long”. For Flanagan, filth was a Vietnamese tradition. The GVN, composed of the urbane French and U.S.-educated elite, also equated squalor with custom and hygiene with progress. The Ministry of Health attributed the peasantry’s difficulty overcoming their “unsanitary habits” to “their ancient traditions and obscure superstitions” which “have not yet been cleared from their minds”.³⁵¹ Encouraging rural Vietnamese to defecate in the correct place and dispose of their rubbish in an acceptable fashion thus became part of the mission to force them from tradition to modernity.

In this sense, U.S. and elite South Vietnamese perceptions of the peasantry mirrored that of the late colonial discourse of the “unsanitary other”. Japanese public health regimes in Korea, Taiwan and mainland China as well as U.S. projects in the Philippines aimed at reforming colonial or “underdeveloped” subjects. Often these programmes in the colonial periphery were extensions of those that targeted the urban poor in the colonial metropole. In the early part of the 20th century, the United States in the Philippines and Japan in Korea and Taiwan used the image of the unsanitary native to justify the continuation of colonial rule. U.S. colonial officers argued that Filipinos were not in control of their bodily functions and their lack of hygienic knowledge endangered their children.³⁵² If these people could not govern their personal hygiene,

³⁵⁰ Loren Baritz, *Backfire: a history of how American Culture led us into Vietnam*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 25.

³⁵¹ ‘Guidebook for Setting Up Sanitary Hamlet’, 17 December 1970, File 1606-07A Sanitation- 1971 (Part 1 of 2), Box 43, MACV, HQ CORDS, MR4/Public Health Div, General Records, 1966- 1972, RG 472, NARA II.

³⁵² Bonnie McElhinny, “‘Kissing a Baby Is Not at All Good for Him’: Infant Mortality, Medicine, and Colonial Modernity in the U.S.-Occupied Philippines”, *American Anthropologist*, vol. 107, no. 2 (2005), 183–194; Anderson, ‘Excremental Colonialism’, 640-669; Todd A. Hamilton, ‘Sanitizing Empire:

colonial officials reasoned, they very well could not govern themselves. The difference with earlier visions of imperial medicine was that colonial officials now saw these subjects as capable of change. But only through a process of reform, including hygienic reform, could they become ready for independence. The GVN's Sanitary Hamlet Programme, in adopting a similarly paternalistic attitude to the peasantry, points to the way in which some postcolonial regimes treated their rural citizens like colonial subjects, viewing them with something approaching disgust.

The GVN's National Sanitary Hamlet Programme began with two pilot hamlets in Phu Yen and Tay Ninh provinces in 1965 but did not become a nationwide campaign until 1969. The GVN chose model hamlets in select areas, while existing hamlets could elect to voluntarily replicate these efforts and turn their hamlets into sanitary ones through the Village Self-Development program. The goal of the program was to ensure "cleanliness everywhere" and protect the people's health. Mobile health teams visited the target group, screening them for TB, dysentery, parasites and skin conditions and treated suspected cases. The peasants received immunizations against plague, cholera, smallpox and typhoid. When the teams detected malaria they carried out "a radical one day treatment of all the populace" and in instances of infestation, the teams conducted thorough delousing. There was also an emphasis on maternal and child health care. The target group was then subjected to two week's intensive health education employing loudspeakers, radios, leaflets and demonstrations. Within the hamlets themselves the residents, under the supervision of GVN cadres and American advisers, constructed

Japanese Articulations of Korean Otherness and the Construction of Early Colonial Seoul, 1905-1919', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 61, no. 3 (August, 2005), 639-675; Wu Chia-Ling, 'Have Someone Cut the Umbilical Cord: Women's Birthing Networks, Knowledge, and Skills in Colonial Taiwan', in *Health and Hygiene in Chinese East Asia: Policies and Publics in the Long Twentieth Century*, eds. Angela Ki Che Leung and Charlotte Furth, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 160-180.

sealed wells and toilets, washable concrete marketplaces and compost bins with concrete floors.³⁵³

The refugee population became one of the principal targets of the programme. As noted in the previous chapter, these refugees had been driven into camps by an often deliberate U.S. and South Vietnamese military strategy. During the early years of the U.S. intervention, there seemed in the mind of the U.S. and South Vietnamese military planner and policymaker no contradiction between population displacement and health care. As a captive, dependent population and despite the general lack of sanitation in the camps, refugees presented an ideal target for disease eradication. Mobile health teams visited the camps and administered vaccinations, rising from 4.1 million nationwide vaccinations in 1964 to 27.8 million in 1968.³⁵⁴

However, as Warwick Anderson notes, immunization programs do not give states the same regulatory power over citizens' bodies as campaigns of hygienic reform. A state can immunize people but they would not become modern citizens until they began to follow modern hygiene and sanitation practices.³⁵⁵ With improved security in the countryside following the offensives of 1968, the government encouraged urban-dwelling peasants to return to the countryside and used hygiene and sanitation projects to regulate behaviour in the new communities. As USAID director John Hannah implied, refugees were not a part of a national political community. The goal of the Return to Village programme, Hannah said, was "to move these war victims out of the status of refugees and back into the status of normal citizenship".³⁵⁶ The rehabilitation

³⁵³ 'GVN Refugee Resettlement Plan', August 1971, Folder 07, Box 16, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 06 - Democratic Republic of Vietnam, TTU-VVA, Item No: 2321607004; 'Preliminary Plan, Rural Health Development, 1966' (undated) [USAID translation of Ministry of Health document], Box 1, HLS General FY '66, USAID Mission to Vietnam/Public Health Division, Subject Files of the Assistant Director, 1966-1970, RG286, NARA II.

³⁵⁴ E.A. Vastyan, 'Civilian War Casualties and Medical Care in South Vietnam', *Annals of Internal Medicine* 74, no. 4 (1971), 611–624.

³⁵⁵ Warwick Anderson, 'Immunization and Hygiene in the Colonial Philippines', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 62, no. 1 (January, 2007), 1–20.

³⁵⁶ John Hannah, (Administrator, Agency For International Development), 'Testimony on Civilian Casualty, Social Welfare and Refugee Problems in South Vietnam, part 1, before the Senate

of the refugee and war victim population, it seems, not only included efforts to bring them back into the community of productive workers and loyal government supporters, but also included more sanitary habits. In 1971, the government therefore decided to establish sanitary hamlets at all Return-to-Village and resettlement sites. The GVN combined refugee resettlement with the Sanitary Hamlet programme to shape the kind of rural citizens it wanted. By encouraging both deurbanization and hygienic reform, the GVN was expressing its vision of rural modernity which tied hygiene and sanitation to anti-Communist identity.

The GVN was taking captive refugees living in unsanitary, overcrowded camps, immunizing them and educating them about preventing illness and sending them back to clean villages. The idea was that they would return to their villages, healthier, happier, more productive and more dedicated to the national, anti-Communist cause. The refugees, one assumes, must have wondered why, if sanitation was so important, were the camps and reception centres so filthy. Even in the case of the non-refugee population the programme was, for a government that had previously done little in the medical sphere to reach them, an ambitious intervention in the lives of the people, with the state often reaching right inside peasant's homes.

Long Qui hamlet, Long Thanh district in Tay Ninh was one of the earliest sanitary hamlets. Government cadres explained the need for better sanitation to the villagers and then solicited contributions of labour and money. They directed the villagers in the drainage of the area to prevent malaria, the construction of 262 water-sealed latrines, and wells with cement walls.³⁵⁷ The cadres then instructed the villagers in "a concentrated cleaning effort in homes, kitchens, pigsties, etc". Upon completion, U.S. observers reported, "many health hazards had been removed". The programme was

Subcommittee to Investigate Problems Connected with Refugees and Escapees, Senate Committee on the Judiciary', Congress Session 91:1, (24-25 June 1969), 10, *ProQuest Congressional*, Hearing ID: HRG-1969-SJS-0052.

³⁵⁷ 'UN Bulletin: Self-Reliance', 1 July 1971, Folder 06, Box 18, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 02 - Military Operations, TTU-VVA, Item No.: 2131806129.

not simply about medical benefits, however. Aside from these, the programme had also “led to more attractive hamlet and a sense of community spirit”.³⁵⁸ The programme would make residents healthier but also, by making the villages more aesthetically pleasing, the sanitary hamlets appealed to the modern sensibilities of U.S. advisers and middle-class, urban Vietnamese officials. The mass mobilization of villagers for the public good forged stronger community links. Hygiene would therefore serve the goals of counterinsurgency. The Sanitary Hamlet programme reflected the larger development and nation-building goals of the Second Republic: modern practices and community solidarity. In this sense, it demonstrates how the seemingly oppositional goals of modernization and community development could co-exist.

The gap between design and practice was the primary shortcoming of the sanitary hamlets. In 1971 the MOH ordered each provincial health service to select three model hamlets which would act as beacons of hygiene for surrounding hamlets to replicate through the VSD programme. Each province received VN\$100,000 (US\$850) for each of the three hamlets.³⁵⁹ Cadres would then mobilize the local population in the construction of sanitary facilities, which GVN health officials estimated would take 30-45 days.³⁶⁰ In practice, the government and U.S. advisers poured resources into some model hamlets that others could not hope to receive, while construction projects often took several months to complete. The hamlet of Ong Huong near Bien Hoa provides an illustrative example.

The GVN chose Ong Huong as a model because of its size, population of over 2,000 people and proximity to water sources. The 1971 Community Defence and Local

³⁵⁸ ‘Recommendation for the Award of the Meritorious Unit Commendation’, 18 May 1971, 2nd Civil Affairs Company (1 of 2), 1971 Meritorious Unit Commendations, Vietnam Service Awards, RG472, available at: <http://www.fold3.com/image/#269639814>, accessed 10 June 2012.

³⁵⁹ ‘Finance for use in the establishment of Sanitary Hamlets’ [v/v cấp kinh phí để xử dụng vào việc thiết lập các Ấp Vệ Sinh], 13 February 1971, folder 2098, Bộ Y Tế (Ministry of Health), TTLTQGII.

³⁶⁰ ‘GVN Refugee Resettlement Plan’, August 1971, TTU-VVA; Kontum Health Service, ‘Plan to set up Sanitary Hamlets, 1971’ [Ty Y Tế Kontum, ‘Kế Hoạch Lập Ấp Vệ Sinh, 1971’], 5 February 1971, folder 2098, Bộ Y Tế, TTLTQGII.

Development Plan gave the MOH the responsibility for guiding young people to participate in sanitation operations and the United States provided transport for 100 students who assisted Ong Huong's residents "in a beautification effort". U.S. advisers then helped construct 100 garbage pits, 20 animal pens and 113 water-sealed latrines at a total of 1,500 man hours. They built a dam, which twice washed out before a permanent structure was built and a slow-sand filter to treat raw water into potable water. The latter was a "major undertaking" which required well over 2,000 man hours and the assistance of the local Popular Forces platoon. Local carpenters and labourers, with U.S. advisory assistance, took 5 months to build water tower with a 5,000 gallon tank mounted on top. The water was treated with calcium hypochlorite and the villagers installed two diesel pumps. Water-borne communicable diseases "will virtually be eliminated from Ong Huong", reported the U.S. unit responsible for the project, and a potable water supply "has encouraged the local populace to continue good sanitation habits".³⁶¹

The hamlet served as a showcase; public health officials visited Ong Huong to see the latrines, wells and slow sand filter.³⁶² The idea was that surrounding hamlets would be inspired to replicate Ong Huong and under the Village Self-Development Programme, residents could vote to implement projects to sanitize their own hamlets. But the total cost of the Ong Huong project was VN\$350,000 plus the donation of VN\$250,000 worth of surplus American supplies and well over 3,500 man hours. The Engineering Branch of CORDS in Military Region IV estimated that a slow sand filter

³⁶¹ 'MACV/CORDS Advisory Team 98 Accomplishments', 13 May 1972, Civil Operations and Rural Development Support, Military Region 3 And Its Assigned Units, 1970-1972, Meritorious Unit Commendations, Vietnam Service Awards, RG472, available at: <http://www.fold3.com/image/#268892424>, accessed June 10th 2012; 'Community Defense and Local Development Plan', 1 January 1971, Folder 065, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, TTU-VVA, Item No: 120165050.

³⁶² 'Report for Week Ending November 7- 13, 1971', 16 November 1971, MACV, HQ CORDS, MR4/Public Health Div, Box 36, Folder 1601-03 PH General 1971, General Records 1966- 1972, RG472, NARA II.

could cost up to VN\$700,000 including material and labour.³⁶³ Surrounding hamlets, inspired by beautified Ong Huong, would therefore be hard pressed to match this effort. Under the VSD programme the GVN contributed VN\$1,000,000 to every village which had held elections. But these funds, in principle, had to be shared among 5 or 6 hamlets.

Following the establishment of the sanitary hamlets, rural health teams made periodic visits to conduct health education “on a lower level of intensity” than during the initial week-long saturation.³⁶⁴ Such education sought to transform a traditional, rural culture into a modern one in the shortest possible time, allowing the state to retreat from health care responsibilities. The goal was to produce a self-governing citizenry that, once educated, would have minimal health care needs, would be productive members of the community and would therefore place less of a burden on precious GVN resources. As the 1972-1975 Four Year Economic Plan stated, the goal of health education was “a self-reliant public health system... in which each and every person can enjoy a healthy physical life”.³⁶⁵ For the Ministry of Health, health education had the power to transform rural society. The sanitary hamlet programme was not just a model for better health in the countryside but the first step toward rural modernization in all areas. The programme provided a model for other GVN ministries in the same way that the sanitary hamlets provided a model for unsanitary hamlets. As the model hamlets proliferated, all hamlets would become sanitized. The next step would be an Agricultural Hamlet in which farming methods would be modernized followed by Education Hamlets aimed at “expanding culture”.³⁶⁶

³⁶³ ‘Engineer Cost Estimate’, 30 April 1971, File 1606-07A Sanitation- 1971 (Part 1 of 2), Box 43, MACV, HQ CORDS, MR4/ Public Health Div, General Records, 1966- 1972, RG472, NARA II.

³⁶⁴ Isaiah A. Jackson Jnr., ‘Health Advisory Services (formerly Public Health Services)’, USAID Mission to Vietnam, 31 October 1975, *USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse*, Document ID: PD-AAF-587-F1, accessed 10 June 2012; ‘GVN Refugee Resettlement Plan’, August 1971, TTU-VVA.

³⁶⁵ *Four Year National Economic Development Plan, 1972- 1975*, 226.

³⁶⁶ ‘Guidebook for Setting Up Sanitary Hamlet’, 17 December 1970, File 1606-07A Sanitation- 1971 (Part 1 of 2), Box 43, MACV, HQ CORDS, MR4/Public Health Div, General Records, 1966- 1972, RG 472, NARA II.

Throughout the war, the Vietnamese and their American counterparts developed a series of surveys to measure the impact of these programmes on the political identities of the population. But as one CIA report stated “this is almost impossible”.³⁶⁷ On the other hand, U.S. personnel discovered a way to measure the more quantifiable benefits of the Sanitary Hamlet Programme. The primary indicator of whether sanitation had improved in the newly upgraded hamlets was to measure the level of intestinal parasites in the local population before and after sanitary improvements had been made. In Military Region III the Parasitology Department of the U.S. 9th Medical Laboratory provided diagnostic services for parasitic diseases, collecting water and faecal samples and taking them back to the lab where they determined the levels of parasitic infection in the newly sanitized villagers.³⁶⁸ Rather than being a programme that “reaches into the heart of the hamlets” as Deputy Commander for CORDS in II Corps James Megellas said, it was in fact a programme that reached into the bowels of the hamlet.³⁶⁹

Almost 60 years earlier, during a cholera outbreak in the Philippines, American scientist E.L. Munson had conceded that American faeces collection amounted to “an invasion of the accepted rights of the home and of the individual on a scale perhaps unprecedented for any community”. The Philippines became a military laboratory and U.S. policies attempted to render the Philippines more laboratory like- clean, sterilized, hygienic.³⁷⁰ Similarly, these were the goals of the sanitary hamlet programme. But if modern sanitation meant the rather humiliating process of foreigners coming into your home and inspecting the contents of your new toilet, one can imagine that at least some peasants were not terribly enthused about the programme. For others it must have

³⁶⁷ ‘The Pacification Effort in Vietnam’, 18 January 1969, Reel 7, frame 0547, CIA Research Reports: Viet Nam and Southeast Asia, 1946-1976, RSC.

³⁶⁸ ‘Tasks Performed’, 19 August 1971, 9th Medical Laboratory, 1970-1971, Meritorious Unit Commendations, Vietnam Service Awards, RG472, NARA II, available at: <http://www.fold3.com/image/#269629473>, accessed 10 June 2012.

³⁶⁹ ‘End of Tour Report – DEPCORDS II CTZ – Mr. James Megellas’, 19 May 1970, End of Tour/J. Megellas, Box 22, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, 1967-1973, RG472, NARA II.

³⁷⁰ Anderson, ‘Excremental Colonialism’, 646.

seemed quite a sudden role reversal. Many refugees and other villagers had gained employment as “shit-burners” in U.S. military bases, a job which was exactly as it sounds.³⁷¹ Some newly sanitized villagers simply expressed amusement, “every three days or so,” one said, “there is a group of Americans who come to see the toilets”.³⁷²

By providing the peasantry with better living conditions, modernization projects such as the sanitary hamlet programme aimed to abolish a traditional hygienic culture and force the peasantry to modernize. As a corollary, the peasantry, seeing visible improvements in their standard of living could be more easily co-opted into the GVN’s support base. But as the experience in one sanitary hamlet showed, it was not so easy to transform a rural culture. Peasants did not respond as the government hoped, sometimes for quite practical reasons. The toilets, a peasant mused, were “good at night but in the day time” when they were working “the people still prefer the rice fields or the river banks”.³⁷³ Some sanitary hamlets did not even get this far. In Ninh Thuan province on the central coast, the provincial health services had to abandon attempts to establish a sanitary hamlet at Dac Nhon in Buu Son district because “the people did not respond” to the cadres’ guidance.³⁷⁴ If the residents of one of the three hamlets that the provincial services had selected as a potential model site did not embrace the programme, it did not bode well for those hamlets which were supposed to voluntarily adopt MOH guidelines.

The model sanitary hamlets cost a great deal more than the GVN was capable of contributing to elsewhere. With the expectation that neighbouring hamlets would replicate these construction efforts, the MOH was holding those peasants to standards of hygiene with which they were previously unfamiliar and that their economic status did

³⁷¹ James Trullinger, *The Vietnam at War: an account of conflict in Vietnam* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 136.

³⁷² Gloria Emerson, ‘Vietnam Hamlet a Sanitary Model’, *New York Times*, October 12 1970.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Province Health Services Chief, Ninh Thuan to Director of Personnel and Finance Directorate, Ministry of Health, ‘Request for funds for establishing Sanitary Hamlets in 1971’, [Ty trưởng ty y tế tỉnh Ninh Thuận kính gửi Ông Giám Đốc Nha Nhân Viên và Tài Chánh Bộ Y Tế, ‘v/v Xin ủy ngân lập ấp vệ sinh năm 1971], 10 March 1971, folder 2098, Bộ Y Tế, TTLTQGII.

not allow them to maintain. Even within the model sanitary hamlets there were problems. The government expected the peasantry in the hamlets to maintain certain levels of hygiene and sanitation but rather than encouraging self-sufficiency, the government had built complex sanitation works that the peasantry could not maintain without government assistance. One USAID report complained that maintenance of the facilities in the sanitary hamlets was “less than satisfactory”.³⁷⁵ The government constructed new health facilities in the countryside to serve the sanitary hamlets but manpower and resources for maintenance, health education and medical treatment remained critically deficient as the central government was increasingly preoccupied with military matters. For example, three newly constructed rural maternities in Tay Ninh province remained unstaffed for over 6 months despite repeated appeals from the region’s Director of Health Truong Van Chuong. The MOH finally told Chuong that midwives were available but no funds were allocated for their salary.³⁷⁶

By the end of 1971, there were 141 sanitary hamlets throughout the country and the MOH planned one hamlet and one fully sanitized village in each of the country’s 257 districts by the end of 1973.³⁷⁷ By the end of 1974 the total had risen to 275 hamlets, many of which had more than 1,000 residents each. Some American advisers were sceptical as to whether the GVN could sustain the effort. In Congressional testimony in April 1972 Robert Nooter of USAID said preventive health care was “new to them. I hesitate to say they are ready to take over that whole field” but the Sanitary Hamlet Programme was at least indicative of the GVN’s attempt to focus on long-range

³⁷⁵ John Kennedy, ‘Public Health Services’, USAID Mission to Vietnam, 6 December 1973, *USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse*, Document ID: PD-AAF-587-D1, accessed 10 June 2012.

³⁷⁶ ‘CORDS Military Region III Overview for March 1972’, 12 April 1972, Folder 02, Box 01, Glenn Helm Collection, TTU-VVA, Item No.: 1070102003.

³⁷⁷ ‘Ministry of Health’s Four-Year Program of Activities (1972-1975)’ [Chương trình hoạt động 4 năm (1972-1975) của Bộ Y Tế], folder 3754, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII; Kennedy, ‘Public Health Services’, *USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse*.

planning.³⁷⁸ However, in the final analysis, USAID ruled the sanitary hamlets a “crash program” which served no long-term value. The peasantry was apparently interested in the programme, according to USAID, and keen to dedicate time to completing projects but given the dearth of sanitary agents and health education officers, “the people soon reverted to their old habits”.³⁷⁹

The Sanitary Hamlet Programme, by teaching the peasantry about hygiene and sanitation, attempted to shift health care from curative to preventive medicine. Preventive medicine would place less strain on the MOH’s limited resources. The sanitary hamlets also aimed to forge community solidarity in the service of counterinsurgency. But the project required a rapid transformation of habits and held poor peasants to standards of hygiene that were difficult for them to maintain. The programme received unanimous support from both GVN and U.S. officials who believed that improving rural sanitation was an unquestionably benevolent goal. Criticism focused not on the concept of the programme, but its execution. Another programme to modernize South Vietnam’s public health practices, population planning, did not benefit from such unanimity of support.

Quality, Not Quantity: Population Planning in South Vietnam

The Sanitary Hamlet Programme fit neatly with the GVN’s desire to deliver health into the home. The GVN’s population planning project had similar ambitions and also occurred against the backdrop of debates about overcrowded cities, repopulating the countryside and changing national culture. Rather than treating the issue as one of women’s rights, population planning was, for most, an attempt to engineer an ideally

³⁷⁸ Robert H. Nooter, ‘Testimony on Vietnam- Supporting Assistance, Foreign Assistance and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1973, Part 2, before the House Subcommittee on Foreign Operations and Related Agencies Appropriations, House Committee on Appropriations’, Congress Session 92:2 (19 April 1972), 404, *ProQuest Congressional*, Hearing ID: HRG-1972-HAP-0058.

³⁷⁹ Jackson, ‘Health Advisory Services (Formerly Public Health Services)’, *USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse*.

sized, economically productive population. In the late 1960s, a 1920 French law banning abortion and contraception and a 1933 decree which extended that law to Indochina remained on the statute books in South Vietnam. Modernizing technocrats fought to have this law repealed and for the establishment of a nationwide network of family planning clinics. Opposition to population planning came from a broad array of interests. Debates centred on whether South Vietnam needed more people to serve the country militarily and economically or whether the country's population should be held down to improve per capita income and produce quality rather than a large quantity of economic actors. In the ongoing struggle with the NLF and North Vietnamese forces for control of populated territory, some officials believed that any limitations on the population, although it would be a long time before they took effect, would be unwise. Other opponents viewed population control as an imperial enterprise that the Global North was imposing on the Global South, while others still expressed fears that the availability of birth control would lead to increased sexual promiscuity and an erosion of the large, traditional Vietnamese family.

While international non-government organizations were often “the first and most persistent advocates” of population planning in the Global South, in South Vietnam it was a domestic NGO which took up the challenge.³⁸⁰ Beginning in 1962 a group of private citizens sought to promote family planning knowledge but they received little support from the government and international agencies. Four years later, participants at a maternal and child health seminar raised concerns about the increasing number of illegal abortions endangering the lives of women and called on the government to establish a position on family planning. That year, a number of these doctors and private

³⁸⁰ Matthew Connelly, ‘Seeing Beyond the State: the population control movement and the problem of sovereignty’, *Past and Present* 193, (November 2006), 201.

citizens founded the Family Happiness Protection Association (FHPA) to promote family planning.³⁸¹

In response to these developments the Ministry of Health established a Committee for Research in Family Planning to examine the crisis, explore public opinion, and collect demographic information. The committee discovered the number of illegal abortions was high and only 15% of South Vietnamese women interviewed knew about any methods of family planning. Committee chair and Director of the Cabinet in the MOH Truong Minh Cac began to lobby the National Assembly to have the 1920 law repealed; an event that Cac and other officials repeatedly promised was just around the corner.³⁸² In the meantime, the GVN adopted a permissive attitude to birth control and implemented a limited programme even while the anti-family planning laws continued. In 1969 the government opened eight clinics in densely populated areas and contraceptives were only available to women with more than five children. By 1971 the government deemed the pilot project successful enough for it to be extended to 30 clinics, with one planned for each of the 44 provincial hospitals by 1972 and one in each of the 257 districts by 1974. The criteria for eligibility were also lowered to women with one living child “plus husband’s consent and a marriage or cohabitation certificate”.³⁸³

The FHPA essentially became a front for the government and there was a good deal of overlap between officials in the MOH interested population control and the leadership of the association. Tu Uyen, previously a member of the MOH’s family planning research committee became Chairman of the FHPA and was later succeeded by Tran Nguon Phieu, formerly GVN Minister for Social Welfare. The 1920 law limited

³⁸¹ ‘Family Planning’, Pham Thi Hao, Chairperson of the Health and Social Committee, [‘Kế Hoạch Hóa Gia Đình’, Pham Thị Hào, Chủ Tịch Ủy Ban Y Tế Xã Hội], undated, folder 31169, Phủ Thủ Tướng, TTLTQGII.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Truong Minh Cac, Tu Uyen and Vo Liet Nu, “Vietnam (South),” *Studies in Family Planning* 3, no. 7, East Asia Review 1971 (July 1972), 157.

the activities the GVN could conduct in the realm of family planning so the association became a vehicle through which the GVN could operate, including doing much of the publicity work. The FHPA trained government health officials in family planning “motivation” techniques, delivered guest lectures to students of social studies, demography and statistics, and made presentations to the National Assembly. Uyen and the MOH’s Truong Minh Cac co-authored articles on South Vietnam’s population planning for the Population Council’s *Studies in Family Planning* journal.³⁸⁴ The association also produced a newsletter for those interested in family planning, one issue of which featured on its cover an urbane and happy-looking young couple with one son and one daughter. The newsletters included reports on the activities of the association and bar charts indicating the increasing numbers of Vietnamese practicing family planning.³⁸⁵

For GVN and FHPA officials a large part of the appeal of family planning was that it drew South Vietnam into an international network, conferring legitimacy on the regime. For development agencies, it appeared an uncontroversial issue. Whereas other development projects or assistance to South Vietnam with any hint of war support risked raising the ire of the non-aligned countries or charges of aiding a neo-colonial puppet regime, family planning appeared to raise none of these concerns. Under the old French law the GVN could only pay the wages of MOH family planning staff; US and international agencies including the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), Pathfinder Fund, the Population Council and Oxfam paid for commodities and training, while IPPF also funnelled money to the FHPA. The Population Council, USAID and regional governments also sponsored MOH officials to go to population seminars and on observation tours of population programmes in Singapore, Thailand,

³⁸⁴ Cac, Uyen and Nu, “Vietnam (South),” 157.

³⁸⁵ ‘Internal Newsletter: the Family Happiness Protection Association, Number 7’ [Bản Tin Nội Bộ: Hội Bảo Vệ Hạnh Phúc Gia Đình, số 7], folder 585, Bộ Y Tế, TTLTQGII.

Korea and Taiwan, joining an international network of demographers and population experts.³⁸⁶ International development institutions such as the World Health Organization or countries such as the UK which ordinarily made little contribution to South Vietnamese development were happy to help. In 1972 WHO secured \$50,000 in UNDP funding for “a maternity-centred family planning welfare project” in South Vietnam.³⁸⁷ These were minor contributions in monetary terms but for South Vietnamese officials they amounted to endorsements. Similarly, for the Family Happiness Protection Association, becoming the official IPPF representative in South Vietnam was celebrated a major achievement.³⁸⁸

As the GVN’s point man on population, Cac was on the receiving end of the international population control movement’s information pipeline, receiving “overpopulation” literature and tracts from a host of population planning advocates. An official at the U.S. Embassy sent Cac a copy of Paul Ehrlich’s *The Population Bomb*, the infamous polemic which warned that within years global population would outstrip food supply resulting in famine and war. The U.S. official included a cover note which observed “the population of Vietnam will double in 23 years... a sobering thought” as it would mean the need for twice as many houses, classrooms and teachers.³⁸⁹ Cac also received and circulated a copy of the ‘Declaration on Food and Population’, in which some the 20th century’s most prominent development thinkers and practitioners like Nobel Prize-winning biologist Norman Borlaug, former IRRI Director Robert Chandler

³⁸⁶ ‘Report for Week Ending February 14 through 21, 1970’, 25 February 1970, Folder 1601-3 PH General 1970 (part 2 of 2), Box 25, MACV, HQ CORDS, MR4/Public Health Div, General Records, 1966-1972, RG472, NARA II; ‘Report for Week ending April 18 through 25, 1970’, 29 April 1970, ADPH to Director, Folder 1601-3 PH General 1970 (part 1 of 2), Box 25, MACV, HQ CORDS, MR4/Public Health Div, General Records, 1966-1972, RG472, NARA II.

³⁸⁷ Rafael M. Salas, UNDP to Dr. O. Jannone, UNDP (Saigon), 19 December 1972, folder 581, Bộ Y Tế, TTLTQGII; Cac, Uyen and Nu, ‘Vietnam (South)’, 157-160.

³⁸⁸ ‘Internal Newsletter: the Family Happiness Protection Association, Number 7’, folder 585, Bộ Y Tế, TTLTQGII.

³⁸⁹ Associate Director of Local Development, U.S. Embassy to Trung Minh Các, 20 July 1972, folder 581, Bộ Y Tế, TTLTQGII.

and economist Gunnar Myrdal called on the world community to adopt a common strategy to meet food shortages in light of rapid global population growth.³⁹⁰

Given the need to repeal the 1920 law, one of the key tasks was to convince National Assembly members of the merits of family planning. In 1969 an amendment was introduced in the Lower House which proposed deleting the anti-contraception components of the 1920 law. However, the motion was tabled pending further study. USAID's chief population adviser in Vietnam wrote to the Population Council's representative in Taiwan saying "we are firmly convinced that the observational tours of Taiwan and Korean programs under Population Council in 1968 were largely responsible for the support that the amendment did receive". USAID officials therefore continued to pursue this angle, making presentations to the Senate Health Committee and sending health committee members on further study tours of the region's population programmes.³⁹¹ But U.S. officials noted many obstacles that had to be overcome to push through population planning in Vietnam. For many Vietnamese, the large family was both a tradition and a guarantee of financial and social security in old age. Another challenge was the perception among Vietnamese that the United States and the West was forcing population control on the developing nations. Finally, Catholic opposition would prove a major barrier to change. Catholics represented just 10% of the population but included much of the urban elite. They wielded hugely disproportionate political influence in South Vietnam and accounted for as much as 50% of the National

³⁹⁰ 'Report to the Minister of Health regarding the Declaration on Food and Population' [Tờ trình Ông Tổng Trưởng Y Tế v/v Bản Tuyên Ngôn về Thực Phẩm và Dân Số], 19 April 1974, folder 581, Bo Y Te, TTLTQGII.

³⁹¹ 'Report for Week ending April 18 through 25, 1970', 29 April 1970, ADPH to Director; 'Monthly report May 1970', 5 June 1970, Gerald Patrick PH/PH/Pop to Dr James Lynch PH Acting; 'Report for Week ending June 7 through June 13', 17 June 1970; 'Report for Week Ending October 11- 17, 1970', October 21 1970, ADPH to Director; Folder 1601-3 PH General 1970 (part 1 of 2), Box 25, MACV, HQ CORDS, MR4/Public Health Div, General Records, 1966-1972, RG472, NARA II.

Assembly membership. Much of the suspicion of family planning came from these legislators.³⁹²

While the National Assembly prevaricated, advocates of family planning debated the role of women in the programme and the economic implications of family planning. A “Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices” (KAP) survey of 9,000 urban and rural women conducted by the MOH in 1969-1970 showed overwhelming approval for family planning. Only 25% previously knew of contraceptive methods and most women wanted smaller families. However, advocates of family planning were disappointed to find out that these women did not want much smaller families. The survey discovered the median actual number of children was 5.8 but the median ideal number of children was a still very high 4.3.³⁹³

For some advocates, the task was to increase women’s knowledge of and access to contraception. Phung Ngoc Duy, a member of FHPA, complained that “women are virtually neglected” at South Vietnam’s family planning seminars. She argued that without women’s participation in the debate any family planning program could not succeed. Duy believed that government cadres should explain family planning to women in an informal manner at seminars in heavily-populated working class areas, soliciting their ideas and clearing up their concerns. These women could then spread the message of family planning in their neighbourhoods.³⁹⁴

But the results of the KAP survey indicated that even under circumstances in which Vietnamese women could have their ideal number of children, population would continue to grow at a high rate. Vietnam’s Neo-Malthusians were dismissive of these women’s apparently irrational desires. Of women’s preference for more than four children, Luu Van Hinh, Chief of the Planning Bureau in the National Health Education

³⁹² ‘The Population Program of Vietnam’, 4 August 1971, folder 1606-01 Family Planning 1971, Box 42, MACV, HQ CORDS, MR4/Public Health Div, General Records, 1966-1972, RG472, NARA II.

³⁹³ Cac, Uyen and Nu, ‘Vietnam (South)’, 157-160.

³⁹⁴ Phùng Ngọc Duy, ‘The role of women in the population and family planning program’ [Vai trò người phụ nữ trong chương trình dân số, kế hoạch hóa gia đình], undated, folder 585, Bộ Y Tế, TTLTQGII.

Service said “we can see at once that this ideal number is a figment of the imagination based on psychological judgement rather than reasoning from reality”. The Malthusian reality, Hinh argued, was that there were currently 16.5 hectares of land per person in South Vietnam and within 25 years this would be 0.5 hectares if something was not done about population growth. Hinh called for a family planning program based on socio-economic indicators. If it cost 5,000 piasters a month to feed a mouth, he reasoned, a family with a monthly income of 30,000 should have no more than four children. Notably, Hinh and Duy, despite their very different approaches, shared the belief that the poor should be the primary target of family planning interventions³⁹⁵

While some wished to increase women’s access to contraception, the overwhelming justification for birth control centred on economic development and only a programme that established targets, rather than one which respected individual choice, could hope to influence the economy. As with other public health projects, population planning was an attempt to marshal the human resources of the country toward military and economic goals. Ministry of Health officials believed that a population control program would be “a decisive factor in the success of national development planning”.³⁹⁶ The goal was to manipulate the size and composition of the population to contribute to South Vietnam’s take-off and ensure the survival of the state after the U.S. withdrawal. The GVN’s Four Year National Economic Plan stated that “to increase workers’ productivity, programs on public health and family planning will be vigorously prosecuted”.³⁹⁷ The Inter-ministerial National Population Council, founded in April 1973, stated that “the major factors in the development of a country include its social and cultural patterns, the natural resources available, the levels of investment

³⁹⁵ ‘Some Health Education Aspects of Family Planning in Vietnam’, folder 581, Bộ Y Tế, TTLTQGII.

³⁹⁶ ‘Report to the Minister regarding the Family Planning Project’, [Tờ trình Ông Bộ Trưởng về dự án kế hoạch gia đình], 15 November 1971, folder 27150, Phủ Thủ Tướng, TTLTQGII.

³⁹⁷ *Four Year National Economic Development Plan, 1972- 1975*, 96.

achieved and the quality, rather than quantity, of the population”.³⁹⁸ Mrs. Nguyen Van Bong, Deputy Chairperson of the FPHA, referring perhaps more to the well-connected wives of the South Vietnamese military than to the rural peasantry, said that the women who ran big business in Saigon were evidence of female empowerment. “We don’t need women’s lib here”, she said, “We are already emancipated”. Bong said that reducing population growth would increase the standard of living and reduce inflation. It was “a matter of survival”.³⁹⁹ Demographic transition theory had supposed that development would precede declines in birth rates in the Global South. By the 1970s, the MOH and the FPHA, like the international population control movement, had inverted this theory, believing that lower population growth would generate a corresponding increase in Gross National Product per capita.

A major deficiency in the development of an effective population planning programme and undermining any economic logic for one was the absence of accurate demographic information. The MOH based its information on a 1967 census of Saigon, a 1969-70 census of 14 cities, and a 1971 census of select rural areas in 15 provinces. Analysing this information, the MOH’s Committee on Statistics believed that South Vietnam’s population was growing by approximately 3.4% per annum, high by Southeast Asian standards and enough to ensure that the population would double within 25 years. The National Institute of Statistics believed growth was 2.6%.⁴⁰⁰ This was a considerable discrepancy and would have a meaningful impact on population growth. In Saigon, the only city where hospitals kept a reasonably good record of births

³⁹⁸ ‘Population Aspects in the Republic of Vietnam, 1973’, Sub-Committee on Statistics, Family Health Committee, National Population Council, (National Population Council: Saigon, 1973), 15.

³⁹⁹ Della Denman, ‘Women of Vietnam: some grew stronger in the face of the war’, *New York Times*, February 28, 1973.

⁴⁰⁰ Professor Nguyen Duy Xuan, ‘Relationship Between Population and Socio-Economic Development in Vietnam’ in *Seminar on Population*, (Saigon: National Population Council, 1974), 25.

and deaths, the growth rate was estimated to be over 4%. Nonetheless, these rough estimates became the basis for population and economic development projections.⁴⁰¹

The irony of developing a population planning programme in a country where there was no accurate statistics on population size or growth and where the territory of the government changed daily was apparently lost on GVN, U.S. and international planners. Indeed, MOH officials expressed frustration at the National Assembly Health Committees' reluctance to repeal the 1933 decree, but this was at least in part due to the absence of reliable demographic data.⁴⁰²

It was not only the rate of growth that concerned population planning advocates, however. The demographic composition of the country also posed problems. South Vietnam's dependency burden, which measured the number of economically productive people supporting dependents, was one of the highest in the world. The National Population Council argued that "a major drawback to economic development is too many children and retired people". The GVN needed to address the population imbalance if it was to break its dependence on the United States. Seeking to reassure GVN leaders concerned more about security than economic development, the Population Council stated that no matter how quickly birth rates fell the number of men aged 20-34 would quadruple between 1971 and 2001. "The number of young men available for military service will continue to increase rapidly... as most of these potential future soldiers have already been born".⁴⁰³

The Population Council warned that the GVN must enact a vigorous family planning programme or risk economic stagnation. The council pointed to the example of Taiwan which had successfully reduced its population growth from 3% to 2% between 1963 and 1973. The GVN should set similar goals of reducing growth to between 2-

⁴⁰¹ 'Population Aspects in the Republic of Vietnam, 1973', 44.

⁴⁰² 'Monthly report: May 1970', 5 June 1970, Gerald Patrick to Dr James Lynch, Folder 1601-3, PH General 1970 (part 1 of 2), Box 25, MACV, HQ CORDS, MR4/Public Health Div, General Records, 1966-1972, RG472, NARA II.

⁴⁰³ 'Population Aspects in the Republic of Vietnam, 1973', 21-23.

2.4% by 1980. If the government failed to meet this target, the increase in the cost of education and health care would prove overwhelming and there would not be enough cultivatable land to support the population.⁴⁰⁴

By the time of the Paris Agreements, there were 86 family planning centres throughout the country but the 1920 law remained on the statute books. Although a family planning law went before the National Assembly in early 1973, members appeared to be dragging their feet. Birth control had proved a controversial issue. Tu Uyen, the FHPA chair, told members of the baseless criticism of the association by “extreme” and “prejudicial” groups, as well as criticism of its activities in some newspapers.⁴⁰⁵ The debate over the merits of population planning would grow even more discordant in the months to come.

Conclusion

Ruth Rogaski, in an essay on Japanese public health projects in early 20th century Manchuria, stated that historians of public health “have faced two analytic paths: either (modern biomedicine) brings the desirable benefits of health and modernity... or it is a mode of social control, a coercive force, which, in creating modernity, limits the range of possible expressions of humanity”. There is no reason, Rogaski suggests, why it cannot be both.⁴⁰⁶ Access to birth control and improved rural sanitation are unquestionably positive development goals. But both are modes of social control and regulation and are therefore likely to meet resistance from the targets of public health interventions.

The GVN attempted to meet the health care needs of the peasantry in spite of the limited money and manpower that it could commit to this area. By mobilizing peasants

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid, 61- 63.

⁴⁰⁵ ‘Chairman’s Report, 1972-1974 Term of Office’ [Bản tường trình của Hội Trưởng, Nhiệm Kỳ 1972-1974], Family Happiness Protection Association Newsletter number 7, Folder 585, Bộ Y Tế, TTLTQGII.

⁴⁰⁶ Ruth Rogaski, ‘Vampires in Plagueland: the Multiple Meanings of Weisheng in Manchuria’ in Angela Ki Che Leung and Charlotte Furth eds. *Health and Hygiene in Chinese East Asia: Policies and Publics in the Long Twentieth Century*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 156.

in an effort to build toilets and beautify hamlets, the government expected to win the political loyalty of the peasantry while health education would modernize the peasantry to become responsible for its own health care. In this sense, the programme was both a modernization and community development project.

All the while, the GVN failed to deal with a problem that some planners saw as a far greater barrier to achieving self-sufficiency: the high proportion of economically dependent people in the population. The sanitary hamlet programme was unlikely to raise objections from within the government bureaucracy. Better sanitation could appeal to all GVN planners. They reasoned that all peasants would appreciate the fruits of sanitary engineering. On the other hand, a population planning programme threatened the vision that some political elites had for modern South Vietnam. For some politicians and bureaucrats there was no contradiction between modernizing the peasantry and maintaining the traditionally large Vietnamese family.

Neither of these programmes reached large numbers of the population. Yet, with the exception of the malaria eradication campaign in the late 1950s, no GVN health programme reached large numbers in the villages. Building a public health network that extended throughout the country was a huge task for any postcolonial nation, let alone for the RVN at a time when it faced an existential military threat. The GVN's public health programmes highlight the difficulty of conducting "biomedical" policies in areas of territorial dispute and ongoing war. Aside from the political opposition, it would only have been possible to initiate a population planning programme in a time of peace when the government could reach and register everyone within its sovereign territory. Similarly, the pressures of the war considerably complicated the government's efforts to mobilize manpower for anything other than war-making, undermining any attempt to extend health care into the countryside. Although the idea was to create a self-sufficient

population, the projects left behind a complicated sanitation infrastructure which the villagers could not maintain without continued technical assistance from government.

GVN public health projects in the post-Tet era are more significant for what they hoped to achieve and what that tells us about the GVN's vision of development and modernity, than for their concrete results. In the Sanitary Hamlet and population planning projects it is possible identify three goals in keeping with the GVN's larger development vision including the desire for modern practices among South Vietnamese citizens- in this case in hygiene and reproduction-, the attempt to construct a sense of community in the villages, and the desire for economic growth.

Such was the global momentum behind population planning in the late 1960s and 1970s that no postcolonial state in the non-Communist world, regardless of how appropriate or not a population programme might be, could avoid getting caught up in this frenzy. Not only did engagement with the transnational population network confer legitimacy on the GVN, but when South Vietnamese officials looked around the region they could see that their role model states were adopting these policies with even greater determination. Although the South Vietnamese project was never anything like as coercive as Taiwan and Korea's, some South Vietnamese officials and private citizens believed that to be a developmental state in the early 1970s was to have a population planning programme that would place the power to determine birth rates in the hands of the state.

The preference for sanitation is more difficult to explain in the 1970s without looking at the longer sweep of colonial and postcolonial medicine. U.S. officials envisioned a link between hygiene and military and social control that dated back to the colonial Philippines. The sanitary hamlet programme highlights the ways in which postcolonial elites' adopted colonial ways of thinking about the peasantry and disdain for rural ways of being. As will be seen in the next chapter, urban areas in South

Vietnam were hardly bastions of hygienic modernity. Hygiene was one of the most obvious ways in which the elite could distinguish itself from the masses and one of the most immediate ways in which postcolonial leaders could remake their peasant societies. The attempt to radically transform a rural culture that, while seemingly unsanitary, was acceptable to the villagers, is symptomatic of urban technocrats deciding from afar what rural peasantry wants and needs. Sanitation was a central component of community development projects in the Global South in the 1950s and 1960s. Yet the Sanitary Hamlet Programme demonstrates the ways in which the postcolonial state could employ the principles of community development, not for the sake of local interests and grassroots mobilization, but in the name of state-designed modernization projects.

Chapter Four

“The City Will Always Win”: Urban Development in South Vietnam

For most people the idea of the American War in Vietnam conjures up images of steamy jungles, verdant rice paddies, and booby-trapped villages. In many accounts of the war, whether academic histories or Hollywood movies, cities are conspicuous by their absence. But in many ways the war shaped urban life, including standards of living, social relations, and settlement patterns. If the GVN and the NLF had to win the ‘hearts and minds’ of South Vietnam’s villagers, the war was equally a struggle for the loyalty of the urban population. After all, Hanoi’s military strategy from the early 1960s was to launch a “General Offensive, General Uprising”, the final stage of which would see the urban population take up arms against the GVN. The Tet Offensive demonstrated that the Communists could penetrate deep into South Vietnam’s cities. As for the general uprising however, the results for Hanoi were disappointing. The urban population had not come out to support the revolution en masse. Still, for Saigon the lessons were clear. Future offensives might prove more successful. The regime therefore hoped to take advantage of the shock that Tet had delivered to city dwellers and hoped that correct political organization and development might even draw the people of the cities to the government’s side.

Looking at urban development in South Vietnam in the years after the Tet Offensive three themes emerge. Firstly, development policies and programmes shifted with the changing course of the war. Secondly, the GVN and its American advisors attempted both bottom-up and top-down development strategies. And finally, those

strategies once again demonstrate that both Vietnamese and U.S. officials drew inspiration from transnational development networks and global development trends.

Between 1968 and 1973 the GVN and U.S. urban development strategy reflected a changing war and shifting political and military goals. In the months immediately after Tet, the GVN focused on bottom-up urban counter-insurgency and community development programmes in a bid to create a sense of anti-Communist community in the towns and cities. These projects appeared to yield mixed results. With the Communist threat to the urban centres seemingly on the wane and under U.S. pressure to better prepare for post-war economic development, urban development shifted to top-down projects such as land use planning and more comprehensive urban and regional plans.

Both bottom-up, community development projects and high modernist attempts to render the city more legible mirrored global trends. In the late 1960s these ideas were new and highly experimental. Decades of social science research, from the interwar years to the 1960s, indicated that urbanization was synonymous with modernization and development. As such, in the early years of decolonization, social scientists and development practitioners failed to elaborate a strategy for urban development in the postcolonial world.

It was only during the United States' urban crisis in the late 1960s that development institutions began to explore these problems in any depth. In the United States the solution was Community Action, empowering local communities to make decisions about their own neighbourhoods. In Vietnam, in a process similar to Community Action, Vietnamese development cadres with experience gained in South Vietnam's villages entered urban slums, assessed the "felt needs" of the residents and helped the people carry out development projects. The goal was to forge closer links between urban neighbourhoods and the government. Dissatisfied with the results of

these community-based schemes, U.S. officials in Vietnam began to search for new strategies. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, as international development agencies switched their focus to Third World cities they concluded that the solution to the Third World's urban problems was a more holistic approach and the integration of urban development and national planning. During the end of the American War, U.S. officials thus pushed these new solutions despite their questionable applicability to South Vietnam.

This chapter makes new contributions to the historiography on international development and the American War in Vietnam. Firstly, the chapter traces the genealogy of ideas about urban development from American social scientists and development practitioners to the cities of the Global South from the interwar years to the 1970s. Secondly, it demonstrates that, beyond the Tet Offensive, South Vietnam's cities were just as important sites in the American War as were the villages. Indeed, in the years after 1968 many projects in Saigon and other cities mirrored efforts in the countryside, not only in development but also in pacification within the city and its surroundings. U.S. and South Vietnamese officials believed that proper political, social and economic organization in the cities could regulate urban dwellers political identities in favour of the regime and lay the groundwork for economic development.

American Social Science, Development Practice and Third World

Urbanization

In a 1969 talk at an Asia Society Southeast Asian Development Group seminar, urban geographer Terry McGee argued that development institutions had failed to predict the problems of Third World urbanization. McGee highlighted three developmental faiths so deeply embedded in the Western social sciences that those who grappled with issues of postcolonial development viewed urbanization as an end in

itself. Those faiths included the notion that urbanization was a solvent on “traditional” values and an inducer of social change; that urbanization was a precursor to demographic transition; and that urbanization was a function of industrialization and economic growth.⁴⁰⁷

These faiths could be traced back to the interwar years. In the 1920s and 1930s Chicago School Sociologists focused their research on European immigrants’ and rural southern migrants’ encounters with American cities. With migration, as with war or revolution, Robert Park argued, the “cake of custom” was broken down. It was in the migrant or immigrant’s mind that “the process of civilisation is visibly going on”. The growth of the metropolitan cities, Park believed, had “loosened local bonds, destroyed the cultures of folk” and replaced “the sacred order of tribal custom” with “the rational organization which we call civilization”. Park’s University of Chicago colleague Louis Wirth argued that the size, density, and particularly the heterogeneity of cities had changed human relations and made urbanites more modern. The diversification and specialization that resulted from population density could offer “heightened mobility of the individual” but also instability. Balance was restored in the city, Park and Wirth believed, when traditional forms of social solidarity were replaced by new forms of association, competition and social control. Cities then operated as beacons of modernity. As the “center of economic, political and cultural life” the city “has drawn the more remote parts of the world into its orbit”.⁴⁰⁸

The second developmental faith McGee highlighted was demographic transition theory. This theory held that levels of urbanization and technology shaped demography. The first phase was marked by both high birth and death rates as rural people placed a

⁴⁰⁷ T.G. McGee, ‘The Urbanization Process: Western Theory and Southeast Asian Experience’, 24 March 1969, *USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse*, Document ID: PN-ABI-058, accessed 23 February 2015.

⁴⁰⁸ Robert E. Park, ‘Human Migration and the Marginal Man’, *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 38, no. 6, (May 1928), 881-893; Louis Wirth, ‘Urbanism as a Way of Life’, *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 44, No. 1, (July 1938), 1-24.

high value on children for their labour and as social security in old age. In the intermediate period mortality rates would decline and birth rates would temporarily remain high as access to life-saving technology increased. With further urbanization in the final phase, the “value of children” changed with and birth rates declined, leading to demographic stability.⁴⁰⁹

McGee’s final developmental faith emerged from the work of economists like W. Arthur Lewis and Paul N. Rosenstein-Rodan who saw the primary role of development as shifting underutilized labour out of the rural sector and into industry.⁴¹⁰ Most economists accepted, Rosenstein-Rodan argued, that if this surplus population were removed from agricultural areas agricultural output would actually increase, providing finance for industrial development. These economists believed foreign aid should concentrate on capital investments that would draw peasants out of the countryside. Urbanization would lead to the specialization of economic functions, the concentration of resources and thus greater economic efficiency.⁴¹¹

In their approach to the issue of urbanization in the Global South, post-war modernization theorists built on these ideas but took them even further.⁴¹² Along with technological advancement, literacy, political participation, rising incomes, and mass

⁴⁰⁹ Sharpless, ‘Population Science, Private Foundations, and Development Aid’, 176-200

⁴¹⁰ W. Arthur Lewis, ‘Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labour’, *The Manchester School*, vol. 22, no. 2, 139-191.

⁴¹¹ Cullather, *The Hungry World*, 146-148; Colin Clark, ‘The Economic Functions of a City in Relation to its Size’, *Econometrica*, vol. 13, no. 2, (1945), 97-113. When he gave his talk in 1969 the theories McGee outlined were already under fire. In the 1960s the international population control movement focused on changing the reproductive behaviour of postcolonial peoples largely because demographic transition had evidently not occurred in the Global South. By the mid-1960s Arthur Lewis had grown pessimistic about the possibilities of unrestrained population growth and unlimited supplies of labour generating higher growth in the Third World. W. Arthur Lewis, ‘Unemployment in Developing Countries’, *The World Today*, vol. 23, no. 1, (1967), 13-22.

⁴¹² The Chicago school sociologists had believed that ‘civilization’, poorly as they defined that term, was the result of the clashes of cultures and peoples. Although folk cultures were transformed, even destroyed in this process, Park and Wirth believed they still played a role in the formation of a new culture. Robert Redfield, an influential anthropologist and Park’s son-in-law, believed that folk cultures could survive modernization and that indigenous elite could use them as a source of stability, weaving them into a ‘Great Tradition’. This made Redfield’s work distinct from modernization theory and it would become foundational to post-war community development projects. Immerwahr, *Thinking Small*, 57-61; Nicole Sackley, ‘Cosmopolitanism and the Uses of Tradition: Robert Redfield and Alternative Visions of Modernization during the Cold War’, *Modern Intellectual History*, vol. 9, no. 3, (2012), 565-595.

consumption, not a single modernization theorist would fail to include ‘urban’ in their definitions of modernity. Like Marxism-Leninism, modernization theory held urbanization and industrialization as the keys to economic development, albeit for very different ends. The general consensus among modernization theorists was that urbanization served as both a conduit for and a projector of modernity. People who encountered cities were transformed by their experiences, while the effects of the cities were felt far beyond the city’s boundaries. For modernization theorists, cities served as the fulcrum of modernization.

Few wrote as much about the importance of urbanization to the modernization process as Daniel Lerner in *The Passing of Traditional Society*. Lerner believed that the successive phases of modernization were urbanization, literacy, mass media consumption and political participation. The vehicle to achieve this was the “mobile personality” and the key personality trait was “empathy”. Lerner believed that traditional village societies were non-participatory and had no sense of belonging to a bigger, national community. The most empathetic of rural people, however, would be first ones drawn to the city, where higher levels of media consumption would create a sense of national community. “The city will always win”, argued Lerner, and the villages could not resist the invasion of its influence.⁴¹³ For Lucian Pye, modernization amounted to the diffusion of a “world culture”. Pye defined this culture as having “the essence of much of the culture of the West, its place of origin”. Cities served as the “vital links” in the diffusion of this culture, attracting people who were willing to change their status, accept new roles and learn new skills. As such cities served as the strongest point of attack on the “old order”.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹³ Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society*, 50-75; Jacobs, *Imagining the Middle East*, 167-170.

⁴¹⁴ Lucian Pye, *Politics, Personality, and Nation Building: Burma’s Search for National Identity*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), xi, 81. Despite their confidence in the impact of urbanization as a process, Lerner and Pye saw evidence that things were going wrong. Pye, looking at the Burmese capital of Rangoon, acknowledged that increases in the density of the urban population had not by itself brought about ‘other developments associated with urban life’. Refugees, fleeing rural violence, remained more or

Given this social scientific consensus that urbanization was a positive force for modernization, it is perhaps little surprise that global development institutions thought little about urban problems in the Global South in the 1950s and 1960s. Looking at early American efforts in the realm of urban development it is clear that it was not only social scientists but also development practitioners who internalized these faiths. U.S. development practitioners in the early Cold War tended to conceive of development as increasing the urban proportion of a country's population. Urbanization was the end goal.⁴¹⁵ If that was the case, the process hardly required guidance. Reflecting the United States' preoccupation with rural development, spending on urban technical assistance amounted to a measly 1.5% of total technical assistance doled out between 1949 and 1970.⁴¹⁶

This is of course not to say that the development agencies were unaware of problems. Rural migrants had flocked to the cities of the Global South far in advance of the industrialization that might have provided them with jobs. Slums and squatter settlements had sprung up on the peripheries of every city. Already by the late 1950s, the cities of the Global South were suffering from massive housing shortages, inadequate sanitation, unemployment and enormous pressure on social services. In South Vietnam this situation was aggravated by the influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees from the countryside. In response to such challenges USAID, the World Bank, the World Health Organization and other agencies had offered capital assistance for

less together in village communities, a situation the state encouraged by combining traditional forms of social control such as local headmen with a modern policing apparatus. Lerner was troubled by what he saw in Egypt, where high levels of media consumption had not led to the diffusion of Western values. To compensate for his development failures, Nasser sought legitimacy by turning Cairo's Voice of the Arabs into a vehicle for the spread of anti-colonialism and Arab nationalism. But for both Lerner and Pye these problems resulted from the failure of Third World governance rather than any fundamental problem caused by Third World urbanization.

⁴¹⁵ Harold Mager, 'Requirements for an Effective Urban Program in Under Developed Areas', U.S. Technical Cooperation Administration, June 1953, *USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse*, Document ID: PN-ABI-256.

⁴¹⁶ Stephen W. Cooley, 'AID Technical Assistance for Urban Development: A Study of Agency Experience, 1949-1970', June 1971, *USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse*, Document ID: PN-AAN-712.

housing, power, roads and potable water supply projects in many Third World cities. In 1964 the GVN and USAID hired Constantinos Doxiadis, principal architect of Islamabad and consultant to dozens of Global South countries, to author a long-term development plan for Saigon. But, as will be seen, the plan remained on the shelf. By the late 1960s as the major development agencies began to explore these issues in greater detail, they reported that none of these previous efforts amounted to a comprehensive approach to the social and economic problems of urban development. Their efforts in urban areas, the agencies acknowledged, had been uncoordinated, sectoral and ad-hoc in nature.⁴¹⁷

The major reason for the more sustained interest in urban development issues in the late 1960s was the United States' own urban crisis. If Western experience provided a compelling narrative for Third World urbanization, that narrative began to lose plausibility in the wake of the riots in Watts and Detroit. Certainly, the United States had experienced very obvious urban problems going much further back. From the 1940s onwards American cities were marked by industrial relocation, infrastructural decline, white suburbanization, and the inward migration of poor minorities.⁴¹⁸ Forced to address these obvious problems in American modernity, modernization theorists pointed to the urban renewal projects of the 1940s and 1950s to demonstrate that the United States was overcoming these difficulties.⁴¹⁹ But the efforts of reform-minded mayors in those decades, focusing on downtown redevelopment and slum clearances, rarely provided jobs for urban minorities nor did they address structural inequalities. By the early 1960s these failures could no longer be denied as Johnson launched his "War on Poverty". The cornerstone of this effort and the proposed solution to the urban crisis

⁴¹⁷ Frederick C. Terzo, 'Urbanization in Developing Countries: the Response of International Assistance, An International Urbanization Survey Report to the Ford Foundation', *Educational Resources Information Center*, ERIC No.: ED079464; 'AID Technical Assistance for Urban Development: A Study of Agency Experience, 1949-1970'.

⁴¹⁸ Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 3-14.

⁴¹⁹ Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future*, 210-212.

was the Community Action Program which aimed to put decision-making power in the hands of the urban poor. Under the terms of the program community action agencies would only receive funding if they could demonstrate “maximum feasible participation” of the poor. But liberal politicians recoiled when Community Action placed power in the hands of “radical” groups who organized rent strikes and voter registration drives and seemed to feed the social unrest in American cities in the 1960s.⁴²⁰

The United States’ urban crisis was one of the principal causes of the breakdown of the post-war social science consensus and few attacked modernization theory as fiercely as Samuel Huntington. On the one hand, Huntington saw urbanization as a force for counter-revolution. Writing in 1968, Huntington argued that “in an absent-minded way” the United States military in Vietnam “may have stumbled upon the answer” to wars of national liberation in the Third World. The degree to which U.S. military policy was depopulating the countryside and driving peasants into urban areas was quickly moving South Vietnam beyond the point at which it was susceptible to rural guerrilla insurgency. Nonetheless, Huntington warned, if the NLF could assert its control over the newly urbanized population “as easily as they were able to assert their control over the rural population” then whole urbanization process would have been nothing but a “Trojan horse” for the revolution. In this regard, there were worrying lessons from the United States’ urban experience. As in the United States, where the children of the Great Migration had revolted in the mid-1960s, Huntington claimed it would be the second generation of urban slum dwellers who would prove most revolutionary in the Global South.⁴²¹

⁴²⁰ Immerwahr, *Thinking Small*, 132-163; Alice O’Connor, ‘Community Action, Urban Reform, and the Fight against Poverty: The Ford Foundation’s Gray Areas Program’, *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 22, no. 5, (1996), 586-588.

⁴²¹ Samuel P. Huntington, ‘The Bases of Accommodation’, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 46, no. 4 (1968), 650-652. Huntington restated these ideas in his influential text of the same year: Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 299-301.

The United States' urban crisis compelled development professionals to pay greater attention to urban problems in the Global South. Though ironically, in their search for solutions they simply restated the basic tenets of forty years of American social science. The proceedings of the Honolulu conference on urban development in May 1967 demonstrate the degree to which development practitioners' search for solutions was constrained by social science thinking and also expose the basic differences of opinion between U.S. development thinkers and Third World governments.

Third World leaders had long viewed rapid urbanization as detrimental to the social, political and economic fabric of their nations. In response to the "urban horrors" of overcrowding, unemployment, squatter settlements, and disease, the instinct of the Asian countries had been to deurbanize. Policies focused on decelerating urban growth in major cities by building new and satellite towns. Some countries had also attempted to increase rural incomes through agricultural credit, land reform and resettlement programmes to stem the flow of migrants to the cities. In what amounted to a disavowal of modernization theory, these Third World officials believed cities destroyed tradition, were aesthetically displeasing and politically unstable.⁴²²

At first, many delegates at the conference restated these older strategies. Then, a U.S. observer reported, a "new debate" emerged. Delegates began to acknowledge that the pull of the megalopolis was too strong and that little was known about the advantages of building secondary urban centres. The debate then switched from an emphasis on urban problems and the prevention of urban growth to identifying the positive role of urbanization in the national development process. What followed might have been lifted from the pages of Robert Park and Colin Clark. The advantages of the

⁴²² Milton Kaplan, 'Pacific Conference on Urban Growth: the New Urban Debate, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1-12 May 1967 – A Conference Report', February 1968, *USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse*, Document ID: PN-AAE-765.

city, the conference report concluded, were economies of scale, juxtaposition and specialization of function. Industrialization led to the concentrated accumulation of both capital and labour which led in turn to further urbanization. The city produced goods and skills for the rural areas and was “the theatre of change, the theatre for modernization in every aspect of life” setting norms for future national development. Delegates now accepted that urbanization, when properly organized, could stimulate national growth. In this sense rural migrants were to be encouraged, squatters tolerated, and land use plans must consider overall economic development.⁴²³ This was anything but a new debate. Rather it was the triumph of American perceptions of urbanization over the “anti-urban bias” of Third World anti-communists. But if Asian countries’ plans for deurbanization were unrealistic, this supposedly new and dynamic thinking was also conceptually bankrupt as a means for solving Third World urban problems because the solutions required manpower and resources which the Asian countries did not have.

At the end of the 1960s and in the early 1970s, the major development agencies and lending institutions created or strengthened their staffs responsible for urban development. These agencies had come to view the cities of the Global South as seething hotbeds of discontent. The prospect that what had happened in Watts and Detroit might occur in Third World cities filled U.S. policymakers with dread. “Frustrations that fester among the urban poor”, World Bank President Robert McNamara argued in a 1970 speech, “are readily exploited by political extremists. If cities do not begin to deal constructively with poverty, poverty may well begin to deal more destructively with cities”.⁴²⁴ The problem was that these agencies could find no obvious solution to the crisis of the Third World’s cities. As a result of efforts to deal

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Yue-man Yeung and Francois Belisle, ‘Third World Urban Development: Agency Responses with Particular Reference to the IDRC’ in Robert Drakakis-Smith ed., *Urbanisation in the Developing World*, (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 107.

with its own urban crisis, one USAID official noted, the United States had plenty of “the code words” of urban development such as “decentralization”, “citizen participation” and “advocacy planning” but it had none of the answers.⁴²⁵

As they shifted their attention from rural to urban affairs, USAID, the Ford Foundation and the World Bank engaged in in-depth and coordinated reviews of how to respond to Third World urbanization. As will be seen, the outcome of these studies was remarkably similar to the ideas put forth at the Honolulu Conference. Urbanization, if properly managed, was a force that Third World governments could and should harness for economic development. These shifts in thinking about urban development as well as the tensions between Third World and U.S. approaches to urbanization would play out in South Vietnam during the final years of the American war.

At first it might appear, that in the midst of a violent war, South Vietnam faced a very different, much graver set of urban problems than those of other Third World countries. Yet South Vietnam faced very similar challenges including rapid urbanization, slums and squatter settlements, a scarcity of housing and opportunities for sustainable employment, and inadequate resources to deal with these issues. In the years after the Tet Offensive, GVN and American officials would employ bottom-up counter-insurgency and community development strategies like those of the Community Action Program, as well as the top-down strategies that the development agencies would endorse in the early 1970s. Differences of opinion would shape the urban debate between American officials in Vietnam and the GVN. On the other hand, the GVN would seek to deurbanize major urban centres by offering migrants inducements to return to the countryside and proposing new and satellite towns. While American officials supported some of these ideas in so far as they advanced pacification and

⁴²⁵ Cooley, ‘AID Technical Assistance for Urban Development’.

political stability, they also sought to encourage more comprehensive urban planning so as to encourage post-war economic growth.

War, Urbanization and Society in South Vietnam

Historians have paid scant attention to the urban dimensions of the Vietnam Wars but some recent scholarship has shown that when looking at these conflicts it is disingenuous to separate the rural from the urban. Recently, Christopher Goscha has shown that during the French War, Hanoi, Saigon and other urban centres served as sources of manufactured goods, labour, specialists, and medicines to the “isolated and unindustrialized guerrilla economy”. The Viet Minh cultivated a complex set of social relations to connect these “underground cities” to the countryside. Networks of itinerant female street vendors and children guided revolutionaries in and out of the city, and served as transporters of documents, money, and weapons. But the cities also served as battlefields. Viet Minh operatives in particular targeted the European quarter in Saigon, in response to which the French set up block houses and checkpoints. Surveillance, security checks, searches and curfews became the norm. Only with the onset of Chinese and Soviet aid did the war shift to conventional military operations in the countryside.⁴²⁶ David Hunt has demonstrated that in the wake of the French War and the early years of the American War, Vietnamese peasants had frequent encounters with towns and cities, for work, education, and even for leisure. Peasant identities in the 1950s and 1960s, Hunt shows, were highly fluid and could not be charted along a simple rural-urban continuum or tradition-modernity axis.⁴²⁷ Still we know much less about the urban dimensions of the American War and even less about the nexus of war, counter-insurgency and urban development.

⁴²⁶ Christopher Goscha, ‘Colonial Hanoi and Saigon at War: Social Dynamics of the Viet Minh’s “Underground City”, 1945-54’, *War in History*, vol. 20, no. 2, (2013), 223-250.

⁴²⁷ David Hunt, *Vietnam’s Southern Revolution: from Peasant Insurrection to Total War*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008).

War and politics shaped urban life and urban spaces in South Vietnam. These spaces were fraught with political symbolism for city dwellers. Large swathes of Saigon were occupied by ARVN military installations, while city streets bore the names of Vietnamese intellectuals and politicians murdered by the Viet Minh. The ARVN monument in Lam Son Square was somewhat more ambiguous. Although intended to “symbolize the aggressive spirit of the Vietnamese army”, political scientist Allan Goodman observed that the statue appeared to depict two soldiers aggressively attacking the National Assembly building across the square. For Goodman the monument stood as a sad analogy for South Vietnam’s civilian politics, impotent in the face of military power. Lower House deputies proved sensitive enough to this interpretation that some requested the statue be replaced with one of Le Loi, the 15th century emperor and national hero.⁴²⁸ Others claimed the configuration of the statue, with one soldier in front of another, appeared to depict an American advisor pushing his ARVN charge into battle. Or perhaps it showed the ARVN soldier cowering behind his American adviser.⁴²⁹

Standing in the centre of Saigon, in Chien Si (Soldier) circle, was the International Aid Memorial. Based on Saigon architect Nguyen Ky’s national contest-winning design and dedicated on 22 June 1969, International Aid Day in Vietnam, the monument featured a huge pillar rising out of an octagonal pool. At the top of the pillar was a blossoming lotus, “the Asian symbol of purity”. A giant plinth mounted on a copper tortoise’s back, reminiscent of the stelaes in Hanoi’s ancient Temple of Literature, listed the forty-six nations that had contributed to South Vietnam’s reconstruction “in our hour of challenge”. Thieu allegedly approved its construction after a conversation with his fortune teller. The clairvoyant told Thieu that a dragon

⁴²⁸ Goodman, *Politics in War*, 1, fn 1 p. 260.

⁴²⁹ Richard Pyle and Horst Faas, *Lost Over Laos: a True Story of Tragedy, Mystery, and Friendship*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 2003), 78.

rested under Saigon with its head under the Presidential Palace and its tail in Chien Si Square. The lotus tower was to pin down the dragon's tail, while the water would keep it cool. This way the dragon's tail would no longer cause turbulence in Saigon politics.⁴³⁰ The monument was an attempt to demonstrate South Vietnam's international support and hence legitimacy, while downplaying the dominant role of the United States. But while it might have offered "a pleasant place to read, rest or stroll", it no doubt also gave Saigoneses the opportunity to contemplate their country's massive dependence on foreign aid.⁴³¹

Rapid urbanization in war-time South Vietnam did even more to shape urban spaces. It was the result of both push and pull. Hundreds of thousands of peasants were driven off the land as a result of the horrific violence and destruction in the countryside. Others were attracted to Saigon and other urban centres by employment opportunities serving the allied military and civilian presence. Between 1960 and 1967 Saigon had grown by 25% while its suburban areas of Bien Hoa and Gia Dinh had grown by 70% and more than 200% respectively. The effect of urbanization was equally as badly felt in smaller towns. For geological reasons Saigon remained a low rise city and its outward growth was constrained on several sides by swamps to the south and west, military installations to the north and ARVN generals' speculative land purchases along the north-east corridor to Bien Hoa. By the late 1960s, almost 18% of the country's population lived in the capital and Saigon had among the highest population density in the world, approaching 90,000 people per square mile in some areas.⁴³²

⁴³⁰ Stephen B. Young, 'The Orthodox Chinese Confucian Social Paradigm versus Vietnamese Individualism' in Walter H. Slote and George A. DeVos eds., *Confucianism and the Family: a Study of Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 150.

⁴³¹ 'Economic and Social Assistance to Vietnam, 1970, Republic of Vietnam: Ministry of Foreign Affairs', FCO 15/1487, UKNA; 'Republic of Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Economic and Social Assistance to Vietnam July 1, 1964 - December 31, 1969', undated, Folder 15, Box 12, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 11 - Monographs, TTU-VVA, Item number: 2391215002.

⁴³² Michael Seltz, 'Saigon 1969: Urbanization and Response, A Personal Memoir', *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, vol. 36, no. 5, (1970), 310-313.

By the late 1960s, Saigon was a city of striking contrasts. Don Oberdorfer captured the contrasts well when he described Saigon as “the seat of government, the center of commerce and luxury... the haven of foreigners on the broad tree-lined boulevards and the dwelling place of poverty-stricken squatters in the back alleys and slum districts”.⁴³³ William Duiker, then an employee in the U.S. embassy, noted the contrast between a well-to-do middle classes in the city centre and a sea of “poor workers, beggars and refugees flooding into the refugee camps in the suburbs”.⁴³⁴ Lavish U.S. aid and the spending power of Americans in Vietnam also shaped urban life. In PX Alley, a two-block area with hundreds of stalls, wealthy Saigonese could buy consumer goods pilfered from U.S. military post exchanges. The Commodity Import Program allowed middle-class Saigonese to purchase motorbikes, refrigerators, and other modern conveniences. Meanwhile, huge areas of the city containing squatter communities and slums of tens of thousands of people went completely untouched by government services. Here there were no schools, no paved roads, no sewerage, and no garbage collection. Many families lived in shacks and other makeshift shelters built from disused ponchos, parachutes and empty beer cans. The sidewalks served as toilets and sites of cottage industries and petty services.⁴³⁵

The GVN attempted to make sense of these illegible urban areas. One U.S. urban planner working in Vietnam claimed that during the Diem era, such was the emphasis on security, that the regime had compiled maps with detailed information on buildings, alleyways and demographics. Michael Seltz said that following the 1963 coup, “the charts and maps were destroyed”, though he did not say by whom or why. In any case the unregulated, breakneck growth of Saigon in the intervening years made old

⁴³³ Don Oberdorfer, *Tet!*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1984), 134.

⁴³⁴ *Four-year national economic development plan, 1972-1975*, 40-41; Andrew Rotter, ‘The Role of Economic Culture in Victory and Defeat in Vietnam’, in *Why the North Won the Vietnam War*, ed. Marc Jason Gilbert, (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 203.

⁴³⁵ Seltz, ‘Saigon 1969: Urbanization and Response’, 310-313.

data redundant and far outpaced the government's ability to gather up-to-date information on demographics, employment, taxation, and land use.

Between Diem's overthrow in 1963 and the Tet Offensive, the Ministry of Public Works (MPW) initiated land use plans and programs of easement and construction for 52 cities and other urban areas. Forty-two were forwarded for local approval but due to inaction or rapidly changing conditions just 10 were completed and mostly for smaller urban agglomerations.⁴³⁶ The MPW frequently found itself having to redraft urban projects due to "excessive" and unexpected urbanization.⁴³⁷ As a result, urban planning had been piecemeal and illegal settlements sprung up quicker than GVN planners could respond.

Saigon tended to function best where it was not in the hands of the city government. In the absence of a working public transport system and in spite of the opposition of the local government, "a vast, informal, private mass transit network" of 4,000 three-wheeled Lambretta taxis had sprung up in Saigon, providing an estimated 360,000 one-way trips per day. In District 5, otherwise known as Cho Lon and historically home to Saigon's ethnic Chinese population, housing, roads, and canals were in much better condition thanks to the efforts of numerous Chinese associations.⁴³⁸

Part of the problem was the low status the GVN assigned to urban planning. The MPW was also responsible for the construction and maintenance of highways, roads, canals, and airports. It is perhaps not surprising that in a wartime environment in which guaranteeing communications and supply was an issue of national security, that the MPW placed more emphasis on these areas. The ministry tended to justify this focus by

⁴³⁶ 'Urban Planning in Vietnam', June 1968, Office of Urban Reconstruction and Development, ADLD/USAID/Vietnam, Urban Planning in VN/Phase I, Box 27, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, 1967-1973, RG472, NARA II.

⁴³⁷ 'Directorate General of Construction and Urban Planning's Urban Development Program' [Chương trình phát triển đô thị (của Tổng Nha Kiến Thiết và Thiết Kế Đô Thị)], 11 August 1967, folder 696, Bộ Công Chánh [Ministry of Public Works], TTLTQGII.

⁴³⁸ 'The Lambro System: Mass Transportation in Saigon', 17 March 1969, Lambro Traffic/Saigon, Box 9, Civil Operations and Rural Development Support, Plans, Policy and Programs Directorate, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, RG472, NARA II.

suggesting that such work would lay the ground for post-war economic development. This was in spite of the fact that operations prioritised military goals such as roads for heavy equipment, rather than secondary farm to market roads. Urban problems were also exacerbated by the failure of the GVN to understand the permanence of the changes that were occurring. The 1964-65 Doxiadis' report recommended, among other things, a long-term, 35 year housing construction programme for the Saigon area. Officials in the Ministry of Public Works, however, believed that it was not possible in 1965 to estimate Saigon's future growth or national role. The GVN had not decided whether Saigon would continue as capital, or whether it would become a tourist, port or industrial town. The directorate also contested Doxiadis' projection of 4% population growth in Saigon. When peace returned, the director wrote, the population of Saigon might decrease and some people would return to the villages to farm or would be attracted to other, industrial regions.⁴³⁹

By 1967 however, it had become clear to planners in the MPW that many of these refugees did not intend to return to the countryside. Even where security had been restored, planners now noted, only a small number of people wished to return to their villages because the majority had become familiar with urban life.⁴⁴⁰ Interviewers discovered that 48% of rural-urban migrants cited better security as the reason why they preferred urban life but 62% of non-native urban dwellers said they planned to stay once the war ended, and only 15% planned to return to villages once peace was restored. Thus many may have moved to the cities for security but they planned to stay for economic opportunities.

⁴³⁹ 'Long-term program to build affordable housing in Saigon-Gia Dinh' [Chương trình dài hạn xây cất nhà rẻ tiền tại Saigon-Gia Dinh], 8 April 1965, folder 7863, Bộ Công Chánh và Giao Thông [Ministry of Public Works and Traffic], TTLTQGIII. For the best account of Doxiadis' work, with particular emphasis on his work in Islamabad, see Markus Daechsel, *Islamabad and the Politics of International Development in Pakistan*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). For the similarities in Doxiadis' thinking with that of the modernization theorists see Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future*, 203-204.

⁴⁴⁰ 'Four Year Housing Program, 1968-71' [Chương trình gia cư 4 năm, 1968-71], 2 August 1967, folder 696, Bộ Công Chánh, TTLTQGII.

To build a sense of community in the cities, government officials saw the need to impose both physical and moral order. By 1967 squatter settlements were “choked to bursting point” and planners were particularly reviled by the “disorder” of the swampy, “sinuous alleyways”.⁴⁴¹ Thieu’s concerns lay more in the behavioural realm.

Immediately upon assuming the presidency he expressed an interest in addressing what he perceived as South Vietnam’s urban problems. But rather than highlighting the plight of South Vietnam’s urban poor, in his inaugural address on 31 October 1967, Thieu outlined his vision for a more regimented, moral urban society. He called upon the people of the cities to make greater sacrifices. “A strong rear force must be organised to protect cities” and to relieve the burden on the rural population. Thieu spoke of a “shocking contrast between the rural and urban areas” and the need for sacrifice on a more equal basis. Thieu also demanded “national order and discipline”.⁴⁴²

Under the national policy launched in November 1967, the GVN placed the rebuilding of South Vietnam’s cities on par with rural reconstruction, social improvement, and industrial development.⁴⁴³ To deal with the housing crisis, a Directorate General of Housing was established at the end of 1967 and launched a four-year housing construction programme.⁴⁴⁴ At a MPW seminar on the development of Saigon and its surroundings in January 1968, attendees recommended the establishment of a government agency to deal with Saigon’s development problems. Delegates also called for expanded social infrastructure, affordable housing, the installation of utilities and widening of roads to boost economic development.⁴⁴⁵ Such ambitious plans existed

⁴⁴¹ ‘General Directorate of Urban Construction and Design’s Urban Development Program’

⁴⁴² ‘Address to the Nation by the President of the Republic of Vietnam at the Presidential Inauguration Ceremony October 31, 1967’, 31 October 1967, Folder 14, Box 09, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 02 – Military Operations, TTU-VVA, Item No.: 2130914132.

⁴⁴³ Pike, *The Bunker Papers*, vol. 1, 237.

⁴⁴⁴ ‘Reconstruction and building’, [Tái thiết và xây dựng], Bộ Công Chánh và Giao Thông Vận Tải [Ministry of Public Works and Transport], 1 February 1969, folder 110, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

⁴⁴⁵ ‘Seminar on the renewal of the capital and surroundings, Tuesday 9th to Saturday 13th January 1968’, [Hội thảo chỉnh trang đô thành và vùng phụ cận, từ thứ ba 9/01/68 đến thứ bảy 13/1/1968], 13 January 1968, folder 2254, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

solely on paper, however, and would soon be placed on hold because the Tet Offensive presented the government with a much greater and immediate set of problems.

Although the war clearly shaped Saigon economically, physically and socially, the city had remained largely spared from violence prior to the Tet Offensive. Nonetheless, the enemy threat to the capital had always been very real. In the mid-1960s, the NLF maintained a presence in over a hundred hamlets in suburban Gia Dinh province, many of which “were really part of the city”. Indeed in 1964-65 the United States had compelled the GVN to launch Hop Tac [Cooperation], an attempt to pacify the provinces around Saigon, which failed to achieve its goals.⁴⁴⁶ In the following years, the NLF continued to use the suburban areas surrounding Saigon as sources of food and supplies and as staging posts for attacks on and infiltration of the capital.⁴⁴⁷

Party leaders in Hanoi were well aware of the revolution’s strengths and the Saigon regime’s weaknesses in urban areas. At its 9th Plenum in November 1963, the party formally adopted its strategy of “General Offensive, General Uprising” the ultimate goal of which was to spark a popular insurrection in South Vietnam’s cities. But during the following years, debates raged in Hanoi about the relative merits of protracted guerrilla warfare versus urban-based, conventional war. In time it would become clearer that urban crises had the potential to bring down the Saigon regime. The Buddhist and student anti-government “Struggle Movement” in the cities in the north of South Vietnam in the spring and summer of 1966 crippled Danang and Hue for months. For Le Duan the I Corps uprisings served as “proof that cities were still crucial to the war in the South and advocated the need to strengthen proletarian leadership over the revolution”. Many in Hanoi were sceptical about chances of an urban-based effort.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁶ ‘Re-Emphasis on Pacification: 1965-67’, *Pentagon Papers*, Gravel Edition, vol. 2, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 515-623.

⁴⁴⁷ ‘Security of Saigon’, 29 December 1969, PSG Studies 1969/Book II, Folder II, Box 8, Civil Operations and Rural Development Support, Plans, Policy and Programs Directorate, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, RG472, NARA II.

⁴⁴⁸ Nguyen, ‘The War Politburo’, 31.

But purges in 1967 targeted the subordinates of those opposed to a general uprising and by July Le Duan and Van Tien Dung had settled on a means for implementing the “General Offensive, General Uprising”: main forces would drag U.S. units away from urban centres while large-scale attacks on the cities would inspire political insurrection.⁴⁴⁹

On January 30th and 31st 1968, People’s Army of Vietnam and PLAF units launched coordinated attacks on major urban centres and American and ARVN military and government installations in South Vietnam. Within days, the revolutionary forces had attacked many of South Vietnam’s urban areas, fighting their way into Quang Tri, Danang and Hue in I Corps, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon, Kontum, and Ban Me Thuot in II Corps, Saigon in III Corps, and My Tho, Can Tho and Ben Tre in IV Corps. There would be further waves of attacks and renewed offensives in May and August 1968 but in most areas American and ARVN units drove out communist forces within a few days of the initial offensive. In Saigon the fighting lasted for a week, while in Hue communist forces held out for a month.

In preparation for the Tet Offensive, the NLF had been able to use its base areas around Saigon to smuggle guns and personnel into the city with ease.⁴⁵⁰ In the early morning hours of January 31, thousands of guerrillas emerged from hiding in Saigon and brought government and military installations under small arms and mortar fire. NLF guerrillas attacked the U.S. embassy, the heart of American power in Vietnam. Thousands more troops attacked the capital from outside in the following days. Days of house-to-house fighting followed. In response, and as they would again during “mini-Tet” in May, ARVN and American forces evacuated some parts of the cities and employed overwhelming force, including aerial bombing and napalm, to dislodge

⁴⁴⁹ Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War*, 101.

⁴⁵⁰ Oberdorfer, *Tet!*, 6-7

communist forces and attacked them as they retreated. The damage done to South Vietnam's urban areas was immense.⁴⁵¹

In May and again in August the NLF continued its attacks and suffered massive casualties.⁴⁵² The south and south-western fringes of Saigon, particularly Districts 6 and 8, were badly damaged. In total, more than 105,000 homes were destroyed or damaged nationwide, with 39,000 in Saigon-Gia Dinh alone.⁴⁵³ Electricity and water supplies were disrupted and sanitation services came to a standstill. For a state that had previously failed to adequately house its urban population and to deal with its other urban problems, repairing the damage presented an overwhelming task.

Sensing that an adequate response to the crisis would afford the GVN a psychological victory, Ambassador Bunker advised Thieu to set up a joint U.S.-GVN Central Recovery Committee to deal with dislocation and destruction in urban areas. The Committee established refugee centres for evacuees in Saigon and other cities, ordered the distribution of rice, and laid out plans for urban reconstruction. Thousands of rural development cadres were moved into Saigon to help with the clean-up, alongside youth and student organizations. The United States and the GVN also focused on reopening key roads. The offensive disrupted supply to the cities, generating price rises which the MPW believed undermined the people's confidence in the government.⁴⁵⁴ With continued assaults and rocket attacks on Saigon throughout the first eight months of 1968 however, the magnitude of the task was enormous. South Vietnam's already enormous urban problems were thus compounded by the 1968

⁴⁵¹ Ibid, 116; James J. Wirtz, *The Tet Offensive: Intelligence Failure in War*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 224-229; Long, 'The Tet Offensive and its Aftermath', 105-107.

⁴⁵² Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*, vol. 2, 1092; Long, 'The Tet Offensive and its Aftermath', 105-107.

⁴⁵³ 'Reconstruction and building', 1 February 1969, Bộ Công Chánh và Giao Thông Vận Tải, folder 110, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

⁴⁵⁴ Telegram from the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State, 2 February 1968, document no. 45, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. VI, Vietnam, January- August 1968; Pike ed., *The Bunker Papers*, vol. 2, 318-321, 336-337; 'Ministry of Public Works and Transport's Activities and Achievements in 1968 and Program of Activities in 1969', [Hoạt Động và Thành Quả Trong Năm 1968 cùng Chương Trình Hoạt Động Trong Năm 1969 của Bộ Công Chánh và Giao Thông Vận Tải], 3 December 1968, Folder 1, Bộ Công Chánh và Giao Thông Vận Tải, TTLTQGII.

offensives and under such conditions, the immediate GVN and U.S. effort focused on relief rather than development.

Breaking down the Anarchy, Isolation and Selfishness of Urban Life: Creating Community in urban South Vietnam

GVN leaders saw the psychological impact of the Tet Offensive as an opportunity to organize and arm the population. During the offensive, the urban population had not risen up as leaders in Hanoi had hoped. Although initially shaken by the government's inability to protect the cities from attack, Tet challenged urban dwellers political identities like never before and even if people did not become committed followers of the GVN, they were often horrified by the actions of the NLF and PAVN. Many even passed on intelligence about NLF units operating in their neighbourhoods.⁴⁵⁵ Almost immediately in the wake of the Tet Offensive, the GVN therefore reinvigorated its effort to organize urban and rural citizens into civil defence groups. Such neighbourhood groups would stand guard, raise alarms, and "eradicate... hostile elements".⁴⁵⁶ In the years after Tet, Saigon and other urban centres would become as militarized as the country's villages.

The regime first began by training civil servants and following the General Mobilization Law in June 1968 all males aged 16-17 and 39-50 had to enrol in the People's Self-Defence Forces. At the U.S. embassy's suggestion, in August 1968, the GVN launched "self-defence month" and the ARVN released more than 50,000 weapons to arm civilian self-defence units in rural hamlets and cities. Urban citizens'

⁴⁵⁵ Wirtz, *The Tet Offensive*, 224.

⁴⁵⁶ 'Address to the Nation of Prime Minister Nguyen Van Loc on the Communists' Tet Offensive', 15 February 1968, *The Cabinet of Prime Minister Nguyen Van Loc: Activities in the Past Six Months*, (Nov. 9, 1967- May 9, 1968), (Saigon: Prime Minister's Press Office, 1968), 82. Certain South Vietnamese leaders, Loc among them, privately expressed concern about arming civilians. Many of these officials feared a repeat of the well-organized, private armies of the religious-political sects in the Mekong Delta in the 1940s and 1950s. Martin Loicano shows that Thieu and Ky were crucial in overriding this opposition and pushing through the establishment of the PSDF. Martin Loicano, 'The Role of Weapons in the Second Indochina War: Republic of Vietnam Perspectives and Perceptions', *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2013), 69-70.

militias nicely complemented Thieu's desire for a more regimented urban society. At a ceremony launching the campaign in Saigon Thieu claimed that "the foundation of democracy and freedom must be organization, and a people which cannot organize themselves effectively are not a nation".⁴⁵⁷

The PSDF was less important as a military force than as a mechanism for regulating urban dwellers' behaviour and political identities. Militarily the PSDF proved quite unremarkable and rarely engaged with the enemy. By the end of 1969 the Danang PSDF could claim to have killed or captured eight suspected NLF members, while the Saigon forces had not killed or captured any. This was hardly because the NLF was no longer operating in the cities. Despite its hardships after the Tet Offensive, revolutionary forces could still plant bombs and collect supplies in urban areas. The real power to deal with urban insurgency lay with the national police which ran the Phoenix programme in the cities and claimed to have apprehended 1,000 suspects in 1969. The goal of the PSDF then, was not military, but political and psychological. It committed its members to the defence of the regime and drove home the notion that the nation was on a full war footing to which everyone had to contribute. Members attended lectures in current affairs and served as an important source of available labour to contribute to community development projects. In the event of future electoral competition with the Communists, the GVN also hoped that service in the PSDF would provide its members with a clearer political identity. Participation in the PSDF would turn members into "enlightened voters" whose "ballot will be cast for the Nationalist camp".⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁷ Pike ed., *The Bunker Papers*, vol. 2, 531-534.

⁴⁵⁸ 'Organized Citizens Protect Danang', *Viet Nam: Yesterday and Today*, vol. 3, no. 10, October 1969 (London: Embassy of Vietnam); 'Saigon CSD Forces Living up to Expectations', 14 June 1972, *Vietnam Weekly Bulletin*, no. 21, (Wellington, NZ: Embassy of the Republic of Vietnam); 'Target Saigon: an Analysis of Enemy Activities against Saigon in 1970', 15 January 1971, Box 75, CORDS, Reports and Analysis Directorate, Analysis Division, Command Information Publications, 1967-1972, RG472, NARA II; 'Implementation of the 1969 Special P&D Plan', Republic of Vietnam, Prime Minister's Office, Central Pacification and Development Council, 9 August 1969, Box 70, NSC Files, Vietnam Subject Files, Nixon Library.

The results in the psychological realm were, however, ambiguous. Interviews of Saigon residents indicated that many more people were listed on PSDF rolls than actively participated. Some members avoided duty by paying about VN\$100 (US\$0.80) per month and this money was then pooled to pay those who stood guard and patrolled at night. Interviewees believed that, as the GVN had established the PSDF, it was the government's rather than people's responsibility to maintain the force and that, aside from some initial GVN enthusiasm, the people had received little information about the functions and purpose of the PSDF. Furthermore, while some saw the value of the PSDF as an auxiliary police force, most believed that in the event of contact with the enemy PSDF would fire their weapons in warning before making a "hasty retreat".⁴⁵⁹

Militarizing the urban population would not by itself ensure political loyalty. The GVN also needed to deliver the fruits of modernity to deprived urban and suburban areas. While emphasis on physical infrastructure and utilities was an important pillar of the GVN's pacification and urban development policy, top-down planning would do little to create a sense of community. This could only be achieved by involving the population in development projects. Both the GVN and U.S. officials felt that the sense of community was particularly absent in urban areas. In its 1970 Pacification and Development Plan noted that the GVN "must develop the community spirit of our urban population" and "try to break down the anarchy, isolation and selfishness of present urban life". This goal would be achieved through the decentralization of decision-making and "the development of a stronger community spirit".⁴⁶⁰ The Saigon Civil Assistance Group, the CORDS body responsible for development of the capital, noted that an effort had to be made to "to widen the horizons of local Saigonese beyond family considerations by recognition of the long-term benefits of wider community

⁴⁵⁹ 'Attitudes of the People of Saigon towards PSDF', 16 December 1969, Box 8, Spec. Evals/Social Reconstruction, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, 1967-1973, RG472, NARA II.

⁴⁶⁰ 'Plan for Pacification and Development, 1970', Republic of Vietnam Central Pacification and Development Council, *USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse*, Document ID: PC-AAC-231, accessed 16 March 2015.

activity”.⁴⁶¹ The key to such an effort, CORDS’ Director of Plans, Policies and Programs Clayton McManaway believed, was development. Not a few large projects chosen by city and provincial administrators and with little popular mobilization, but many “small community development projects benefiting as many people as possible in the immediate neighbourhood” and involving “as much physical participation” of residents as possible.⁴⁶²

In this regard there were precursor programs on which the GVN and CORDS could draw. In the absence of a concerted urban effort by the GVN in the mid-1960s, student and youth organizations sought to fill the gap. The leaders of the movement were young men who had been called into government service by Diem’s successor General Duong Van ‘Big’ Minh. Through their association with various government ministries these young men like Vo Long Trieu, Doan Thanh Liem, and Do Ngoc Yen, some of whom would later become deputies in the Lower House of the National Assembly, began planning rural-based development projects with the goal of teaching the peasants the benefits of self-help and community action. This “Summer Youth Programme”, a kind of South Vietnamese Peace Corps, sent students into the countryside to build schools, infirmaries, and refugee shelters. When rural insecurity prevented further work in these areas, the youth leaders decided to focus on one urban area as a “proving ground for the revolutionary approach” they hoped to apply nationwide. In July 1965, they approached Premier Nguyen Cao Ky with a proposal to launch a pilot programme in District 8 on the edge of Saigon. The district was a depressed area, cut off from Saigon proper by a series of canals. D8 had been overwhelmed by an influx of refugees, growing from an estimated 50,000 residents in 1963 to perhaps 150,000 or 300,000 by 1965. These were mainly unskilled labourers

⁴⁶¹ ‘Saigon Civil Assistance Group, CORDS: Saigon Area Action Program’, 25 April 1970, Update Briefings/For Mr. Jacobson, Box 14, CORDS Historical Working Files, 1967-1973, RG472, NARA II.

⁴⁶² Clayton McManaway to Major General Hon, ‘Village Self Development in Saigon, the Autonomous Cities and other Urban Areas’, undated, folder 131, Hội Đồng An Ninh và Phát Triển [Security and Development Council], TTLTQGII.

living in makeshift shelters in “squalid conditions and suffering from “an inadequate diet”. Residents had few educational opportunities or social services and were “beset with overwhelming health and sanitation problems”. Bubonic plague and cholera were common and one observer estimated two-thirds of the population was afflicted with TB. The district experienced high crime, an effective NLF infrastructure, and an ineffective local government. Community bonds had broken down and parents were alienated from their urbane, street-savvy children.⁴⁶³

Youth leaders believed that in the absence of the bonds that ordinarily held together village communities, they would have to create new ones among “diverse and uprooted people”. With financial support and material assistance from the GVN and USAID, trained youths moved into the neighbourhood to live with local families and met with locals to work out “what project the residents felt was most urgently needed”. The inhabitants would elect their own “hamlet development council” and work would begin. The New Life Development Project, as it came to be known, built a school and child care centre and helped establish two agricultural cooperatives which allowed poor local residents to supplement their incomes. The youth workers even convinced a company dredging a nearby river to pump silt onto the land adjoining the district to create more space for housing construction. The project was considered such a success that Ky came to dedicate the site of the first 50 houses and Vice President Humphrey came to inspect the district in 1966.⁴⁶⁴ This self-help housing project spread to districts 6 and 7 and by early 1968, the movement had built 1,000 houses.

Tet highlighted the somewhat Sisyphean nature of urban development in Saigon. During the offensive the good work of the New Life Movement was completely undone. Charles Sweet had been involved with the New Life Movement project in

⁴⁶³ Edward C. Britton, ‘Vietnamese Youth and Social Revolution’, *Vietnam Perspectives*, vol. 2, no. 2, (Nov. 1966), 19-21; Goodman, *Politics in War*, 167-172.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

District 8 as an International Voluntary Services worker and by 1968 as a U.S. embassy official. During “mini-Tet” in May 1968 he arrived at the New Life Construction Project headquarters in D8 where he said he was “met with frigid silence” by men with whom he had worked for the previous four years and with whom he was on close terms. Referring to the use of bombing and napalm in the D6 and 8, Doan Thanh Liem said “when you use these tactics, I know we are losing the war”. Lien estimated that in D8 alone 200 civilians had been killed, 1,000 wounded, and 4,000 homes destroyed. Liem then insisted that Sweet drive around the district with “bao chi” (press) on his scout car to protect him, not from the VC, but from angry residents who correctly blamed U.S. planes for the destruction.⁴⁶⁵ Following the May offensive the New Life Movement, with GVN and U.S. financial support, once again mobilized 3,000 households in districts 6, 7 and 8 to plan and rebuild their homes. The programme was then extended on a city-wide basis.⁴⁶⁶

The direct links between the New Life Development Project and the Urban Self-Development Program (USD) are not entirely clear. William Colby, in Congressional testimony in March 1970, acknowledged that the USD built “in large part on a successful community development program” in District 8 which aimed to “ameliorate some of the worst conditions” in the city and to improve communication between local groups and the local government. Colby claimed that ensuring the minimum essential services in an area where the GVN had often been absent eliminated conditions on which the NLF thrived.⁴⁶⁷

Rather than acknowledging any debt to the youth group’s community development projects in D8, the GVN claimed to be drawing on the Village Self-

⁴⁶⁵ Lansdale to Bunker, 12 May 1968, *DDRS*, Item Number: CK3100101904.

⁴⁶⁶ ‘Saigon Civil Assistance Group: Self-Help Housing’, 25 April 1970, CIC Fact Book #1, Box 18, *CORDS Historical Working Group Files 1967-1973*, RG472, NARA II.

⁴⁶⁷ ‘Statement for the Record on the Development Aspects of Pacification and Development’, 1 March 1970, Folder 07, Box 15, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 02 – Military Operations, TTU-VVA, Item Number: 2131507025.

Development (VSD) Program, discussed in previous chapters. In 1970 the GVN extended the VSD concept into urban areas. Given that rural development was the main point of reference for the urban development program, the project was put in the hands of the Ministry for Rural Development (MORD). Launching the programme in April 1970 Minister Tran Thanh Phong wrote that the Village Self-Development (VSD) Program had familiarised peasants with democracy, allowed them to voice their aspirations and act in a spirit of self-sufficiency. In urban areas, Phong said, the program aimed to mobilize local organizations to “implement projects that bring practical usefulness to many people... in the spirit of self-sufficiency and voluntarism. The program also promotes spirit of community cooperation between people and between the people and the government”. Much like the VSD, local people would decide projects based on discussions “carried out in the spirit of democracy” and would then be encouraged to donate money, materials and labour. First, local notables would elect a development committee after which the committee would organize a meeting with representatives of local people’s organizations with more than 50 members, such as neighbourhood associations or youth groups, to consider projects. Based on these discussions, the committee would then post a list of potential projects on local bulletin board for all to see and, at a congress organised by the committee at least three weeks thereafter, people could decide on projects based on a majority vote. The program explicitly stated that in towns of over 50,000 people no project costing more than VN\$200,000 (US\$1,695) would be approved because the idea was to carry out small, short-term projects with usefulness to the people in the neighbourhood. The idea here was that more projects would mean more popular mobilization with impact on participants’ immediate surroundings.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁸ ‘Urban Self-Development Program’ [Chương trình tự túc phát triển khu vực thị tứ], 28 April 1970, Folder 131, Hội Đồng An Ninh và Phát Triển, TTLTQGII.

The program was certainly less democratic than Phong suggested and was open to abuse. The local development committee was, after all, elected by local chiefs and if the neighbourhood did not have a suitable place at which all people could gather to vote on projects, the regulations stated that the development committee could hold a meeting only with the representatives of local organizations, local PSDF representatives, and development cadres. If local committees could capture these organizations they could select projects as they pleased. Nonetheless, if the system worked, it amounted to a major step towards decentralization of urban decision-making and was a clear statement of the regime's preference for community-based development solutions and popular mobilization.

In Saigon this work would be facilitated by community development workers, of which the city planned to recruit and train 180 by the middle of 1970. The CD worker would be "a specialist in his role as human engineer" and would work with the people "in order to motivate them to change their attitudes and to create the desire in them to change and improve their lives through community effort". The CD workers would help citizens form local development councils, help plan, implement, and monitor development projects, and organize training and information programs.⁴⁶⁹ The MORD began recruitment by soliciting applications from rural development cadre who lived in Saigon. The first 70 of these black pyjama-clad cadres would be working in Saigon's districts by July 1970.⁴⁷⁰

In this sense, the urban self-development program in South Vietnam's cities mirrored a similar process in the United States just a few years earlier. As Daniel Immerwahr has highlighted community development programs began in the United States with Department of Agriculture and War Relocation Authority projects in the

⁴⁶⁹ 'Saigon Action Program- Sub-program: Strengthen Local Government', Saigon Community Development Service and Saigon Training Center, Col. Do Kien Nhieu, Mayor of Saigon, undated, folder 131, Hội Đồng An Ninh và Phát Triển, TTLTQGII.

⁴⁷⁰ 'Saigon Civil Assistance Group, CORDS: Community Development Fact Sheet', 25 April 1970, CIC Fact Book #1, Box 18, CORDS Historical Working Group Files 1967-1973, RG472, NARA II.

New Deal and World War Two eras before being exported to the villages of the Global South. The knowledge gleaned from this experience in the 1950s and 1960s was then applied to America's deprived inner-city neighbourhoods during the War on Poverty.⁴⁷¹ In South Vietnam, the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) reassigned cadres with experience in South Vietnam's villages to implement similar strategies in urban areas.

The similarities between community development in Saigon and community action in Detroit were not entirely lost on William Colby. In September 1970, Colby sent an excerpt of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding* to his assistant chief of staff. Moynihan had been one of the architects of the War on Poverty but his 1969 book was a trenchant critique of the Community Action Program (CAP). The excerpt related to a poll conducted in Boston which Moynihan argued revealed that white, middle class residents' concerns were less to do with the problems identified by the War on Poverty's authors and more to do with the power the CAP had put in the hands of the poor and minorities. Although he acknowledged that a very different set of problems existed in South Vietnam, Colby seized on the idea of polling which he felt "might be appropriate to discover the major concerns of the urban dwellers". Colby suggested formulating questionnaires to determine how urban residents feel and through which channels they would like their demands to be met.⁴⁷²

Although Colby was endorsing Moynihan's argument that community developers needed a better handle on urban residents' real concerns, he was also endorsing the re-exportation of a failed strategy and citing one of that strategy's biggest critics for guidance. One wonders whether Colby had read the rest of Moynihan's book.

Moynihan's central complaint was that community action had radicalised American

⁴⁷¹ Immerwahr, *Thinking Small*, passim.

⁴⁷² William Colby to Assistant Chief of Staff, 20 September 1970, Box 22, CORDS Historical Group Working Files, 1967-1973, RG472, NARA II; Daniel P. Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding: Community Action in the War on Poverty*, (New York: Free Press, 1969), 162-164.

inner-cities. Would it be a good idea to attempt the same in South Vietnam's urban slums?

Beginning on July 1st 1970, rural development cadre were assigned to each of Saigon's eleven districts, each divided into wards [phường] and sub-wards [khóm]. After two months, inspectors from the Ministry of Rural Development visited the districts to examine the cadres' work. Inspectors reported that cadres had had success helping sub-wards organize development committees, mobilizing local people to select projects, and helping local leaders complete paperwork and secure government funds. They then guided locals in construction work. Inspectors reported that people in the poorer wards lived in crowded, swampy alleys full of stagnant water. Therefore, most projects focused on paving alleyways and laying drainage pipes and thus were well received by locals.⁴⁷³ In some sub-wards locals eagerly donated money and/or labour, often with 20-30 families participating in carrying out a project and people's donations sometimes matching GVN funding.

However, there were obvious problems. Experienced rural cadres were reportedly initially disoriented by the different requirements of their new urban surroundings. In some instances the people did not trust cadres, having been made unfulfilled promises by the government before. Furthermore, in working class sub-wards people were too busy working to attend meetings or volunteer their labour, while in others people were too poor to make monetary contributions. Often only 30-50 people attended meetings in sub-wards of 2-4,000 people, while monetary contributions amounted to 5-25% of the GVN contribution rather the 50% the government hoped for. In addition, cadres sometimes could not meet the felt needs of the population. In Districts 2 and 4, people requested schools for their children but in these crowded neighbourhoods there was no public land available, not to mention few qualified

⁴⁷³ In urban Pacification Attitude Analysis surveys in 1971 and 1972, 13% of urban residents identified 'flooding in slums' as an issue of major concern. Thayer, *War Without Fronts*, 179-187.

teachers. More problematically, it was clear that in some sub-wards, the local chief selected projects himself and then went to the neighbourhood to mobilize the people to carry it out. While there were certainly some flaws in conception, it appears that the greatest single problem facing the urban development program was the shortage of cadres. Reports indicated that people living in the immediate vicinity of the projects were often happy with the results. Others, however, were indifferent because they didn't understand the cadres' role. Cadres had to focus on paperwork and project implementation and had no time for promoting the basic principles of the programme among the people.⁴⁷⁴ But before this could be remedied, American development officials began pushing for a new approach.

The GVN's 1971 Community Development and Local Defense Plan noted that building a spirit of community participation "is one of the most necessary elements in construction and development" and required local authorities to create opportunities for people to regularly meet, discuss and implement projects of public interest.⁴⁷⁵ But the program came in for increasing criticism from CORDS officials, many of whom felt that adopting the VSD concept wholesale and applying it to Vietnam's urban centres had proved inappropriate. Dennis Rondinelli of CORDS Community Development Directorate (CDD) argued the conditions that made VSD successful in the countryside simply did not exist in urban areas. Unlike peasant farmers, who could work on

⁴⁷⁴ 'Regarding the inspection of Urban Development cadre in District 1' [về kiểm tra cán bộ Phát Triển Thị Tứ thuộc Quận 1], 1 September 1970; 'Report on the results of the inspection of Rural Development Cadres' activities in urban areas of District 2 (Saigon)' [v/v tường trình thành quả công tác kiểm tra CB/PTNT hoạt động tại khu vực Thị tứ thuộc Quận Nhì (Saigon)], 31 August 1970; 'Report on inspection of Urban Development Cadres in District 3, Saigon' [Phúc trình công tác kiểm tra CB/PT Thị Tứ hoạt động tại Quận 3 Saigon], 31 August 1970; 'Report on the inspection of cadres' activities in urban areas of District 4, Saigon' [Phúc trình công tác kiểm tra cán bộ hoạt động trong khu vực Thị tứ tại Quận 4 Đô thành Saigon], 29 August 1970; 'Inspection of Urban Development Cadre (District 6 Saigon)' [v/v kiểm tra Cán bộ Phát Triển Thị Tứ (quận 6 Đô thành Saigon)], 31 August 1970; 'Inspection of Urban Development Cadre in District 7' [v/v kiểm tra Tổ CB/PTTT thuộc Quận 7], 1 September 1970; 'Visit to Rural Development Cadre Unit working on 22 activities in 3 Wards: Hung Phu, Rach Ong and Chanh Hung in District 8' [Thăm viếng Cán bộ PTNT Toán công tác 22 hoạt động tại 3 Phường: Hung Phú, Rạch Ông và Chánh Hưng thuộc Quận 8 Đô Thành], 31 August 1970; folder 131, Hội Đồng An Ninh và Phát Triển, TTLTQGII.

⁴⁷⁵ 'Community Defense and Local Development Plan', TTU-VVA, Item No.: 1201065050.

development projects in between short bouts of intensive agricultural labour, urban dwellers in poor districts had to work long hours and “rarely have the time or inclination to participate” in self-help projects. Where communities did build their own streets or drainage systems it let local government off the hook and only added to the disorderliness of city planning.⁴⁷⁶ Another member of the CDD complained that the urban committees that had been set up were not attended by the people and merely served as a “rubber stamp” for projects that the Province Chief or committee members had already decided upon. There was little popular participation and sometimes contractors were used instead. In practice there was widespread misuse of funds and deviation from the self-help concept.⁴⁷⁷

This critique coincided with a larger shift against small-scale urban development. To CORDS observers, it seemed that the USD had not strengthened local institutions, had not increased local self-sufficiency and autonomy, and had failed to attack the infrastructure development problems of the city. A reinvigorated Urban Development Program would allocate more capital toward infrastructural development. CORDS now stressed that these projects should be larger in scale and had to conform to overall city plans or, where no such plan yet existed, with overall planning goals. By requiring that projects conform to an overall plan, CORDS hoped to use USD funds as a stimulus for more planning by the city governments, while a matching funds formula would “almost force” cities to improve the tax collection. The desired outcome of the new approach was the strengthening of urban administration, a better statistical base, and infrastructure development and urban improvement plans reflecting future

⁴⁷⁶ Capt. D.A. Rondinelli, CORDS/CDD/MDD/VSD, ‘Comments on Proposed Urban Development Study’, January 1971, Urban Self-Develop/Mr. Sweet, Box 34, CORDS Historical Working Group Files 1967-1973, RG472, NARA II.

⁴⁷⁷ Bruce M. Hamilton to Director Plans, Policy and Programs, ‘Major Urban Problem Areas’, August 1971, Box 34, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, 1967-1973, RG472, NARA II; Richard J. Evans to William C. Black, ‘Comments Requested on the 1972-75 Urban Development Annex’, 3 January 1972, Urban Development, Box 73, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, 1967-73, RG472, NARA II.

economic and social needs.⁴⁷⁸ GVN officials endorsed these ideas in a meeting at the Ministry of Public Works in April 1972. Mayors and other city representatives recommended that, in light of the lessons of 1969-71, fewer and larger urban projects be carried out. Lt. Gen. Cao Hao Hon, deputy chief of the CPDC, also said that in view of South Vietnam's increasing urban problems the GVN must begin projecting future urban population growth and planning the infrastructure, industry, utilities and services to meet it.⁴⁷⁹

This new approach was in direct contrast to the initial goals of the urban self-development program which sought to mobilize as many people as possible through small projects. While the revised program did not lose its rhetorical emphasis on the democracy and communitarianism of development, the new approach meant that a community's felt needs were no longer relevant if they did not conform to a larger plan. Unlike the earlier projects with impact on the immediate surroundings of those involved, projects now focused on road and bridge building, power, and dispensaries.⁴⁸⁰ This was the step away from bottom-up, decentralized and community-based development projects towards a top-down, centralized approach which would come to dominate urban development in the final year or so of the American advisory effort. It represented a move away from an emphasis on counter-insurgency and forging a sense of national community to an emphasis of future economic development. The GVN and its American advisors now turned away from practical, community-based schemes to top-down projects such as land use forecasting models and comprehensive urban development plans.

⁴⁷⁸ 'Introduction to the Urban Self-Development Concept', CORDS/Municipal Development Directorate, Urban Self-Develop/Mr. Sweet, Box 34, CORDS Historical Working Group Files 1967-1973, RG472, NARA II.

⁴⁷⁹ '1972 Urban Development Meeting', 4 April 1972, Background Docu/Urban Self-Development Fund, Box 60, CORDS Historical Working Group Files 1967-1973, RG472, NARA II.

⁴⁸⁰ 'Status of Implementation of 1972 CD&LD Plan', 10 April 1972, Urban Development, Box 73, CORDS Historical Working Group Files 1967-1973, RG472, NARA II.

The Poverty of Ideas: Urban Planning for Economic Development

In January 1970, Clayton McManaway, CORDS' Director of Plans, Policies and Programs, passed a report on urban planning in Vietnam to CORDS' Assistant Chief of Staff George Jacobsen. McManaway noted that past GVN efforts in urban planning had focused too narrowly on land use and street plans and programs of easement and construction, most of which went unenforced. Both USAID and the GVN, McManaway noted, acknowledged the need for more comprehensive planning which would integrate the economic and social development of South Vietnam's urban areas into broader national planning, taking account of political and military considerations. Such an approach would cover "all elements of the 'ekistics' of an urban area".⁴⁸¹

McManaway's choice of terms was illuminating. Developed by the Greek architect and urban planner Constantinos Doxiadis, ekistics was a high modernist "science of human settlement". Doxiadis had an unbounded belief in the potential omniscience of planning but only if the planner adopted a comprehensive social scientific approach to "the totality of human settlement". By combining anthropology, systems theory, ecology, architecture, and more, ekistics aimed at nothing short of forecasting the future of humanity's relationship with the earth. This would restore order and turn the "inhuman city" into an *entopia*, "a real place for humans to live in harmony with themselves and nature".⁴⁸²

American officials in Vietnam knew Doxiadis for his 1964-65 study of Saigon. In citing ekistics it is quite possible that McManaway did not realise the scale of ambition that such an approach would entail in Vietnam. Yet, in the years after 1968 and especially after American officials grew disenchanted with the USD programme, the South Vietnamese and American effort in urban development moved toward

⁴⁸¹ 'Urban Planning', 13 January 1970, Urban Planning in VN/Phase 1, Box 27, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, 1967-73, RG472, NARA II.

⁴⁸² Daechsel, *Islamabad and the Politics of International Development in Pakistan*, 31-67.

comprehensive city planning as the solution to Vietnam's urban crisis. This was in spite of both American and Vietnamese officials' acknowledgement of the very limited resources and technical expertise available in the country as well as skepticism about the value of such an effort. In addition, there were disagreements between the South Vietnamese and the United States on how to proceed. The GVN preferred a strategy of satellite towns and deurbanizing the primate city of Saigon. American officials doubted the feasibility or political desirability of this approach. Instead, they believed that urbanization was an irreversible trend in Vietnam and it could be best dealt with through comprehensive urban planning. Both Vietnamese and American ideas and debates reflected shifting notions about Third World urban planning within social science and global development networks in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

As McManaway noted, the GVN's Ministry of Public Works did have a reasonably clear vision for urban development, if extremely meagre means to carry it out. Prior to Tet, the GVN's approach to urban planning had been piecemeal. As noted above, MPW's urban plans rarely kept pace with urbanization or socioeconomic and physical change in the cities. After the Tet Offensive, the GVN strengthened the MPW organization responsible for urban planning, the Directorate General of Reconstruction and Urban Planning. In October 1968 the MPW laid out guiding principles for urban development which aimed to "correct local differences", reduce class disparities and develop the entire country rather than a few select urban areas. The Director General of Reconstruction and Urban Planning Nguyen Xuan Duc suggested that, given Vietnam's inadequate resources, "in order for a city to function normally" the population should be under 200,000 or it would give rise to housing shortages, inadequate sanitation and congestion, with unknown consequences. Urban plans would guide the expansion of cities but in some cases the government would limit further expansion to avoid social problems created by excessive growth. In particular, plans would guide the growth and

activities of towns in economically advantageous areas and stress the special character of towns whether in industry, services or tourism.⁴⁸³ To encourage regional and national economic growth, the MPW divided towns and cities based on their function as cultural, commercial or agricultural towns and began researching plans for building and easement, reconstruction of slum areas, and the extension of utilities.⁴⁸⁴

Bui Huu Tuan, a long-term senior civil servant in the MPW, first as Inspector General and later as Director of the Cabinet, had attended the 1967 Pacific Urban Development Seminar. In pursuit of more balanced urban growth, in October 1969 Tuan sent a memo to the MPW's subordinate agencies with which many Global South delegates to the Honolulu conference would have heartily approved. Tuan noted that experience had shown that building housing on urban fringes did not bring desired results because it left residents far from economic opportunities in areas with few transport links. Given Saigon's excessive growth, chronic housing shortages and scarcity of land the MPW would instead establish a series of satellite towns around the capital. In cooperation with the private sector, the government would build houses and link the satellite towns to Saigon by an inter-city electric tram system. To attract people to the satellite towns the MPW would install utilities like water and electricity, construct markets, schools, and hospitals. Tuan suggested that these efforts would be prioritized in satellite towns rather than Saigon's fringes.⁴⁸⁵

There were obvious obstacles to such plans. The MPW acknowledged the need for more specialists, better data, higher private savings and investment, and better

⁴⁸³ 'Ministry of Public Works and Transport's Guiding Principles for Long-Term Program and Post-War Plan, 1969-71' [Nguyên tắc chỉ đạo về Chương Trình Dài Hạn và Kế Hoạch Hậu Chiến 1969-71 của Bộ Công Chánh và Giao Thông Vận Tải], 16 October 1968, folder 59, Bộ Công Chánh và Giao Thông Vận Tải, TTLTQGII; 'Urban Planning in Vietnam: Phase II, February 1970', Urban Planning in Vietnam 1970, Box 1050, CORDS General Records 1967-1973, RG472, NARA II.

⁴⁸⁴ 'Report on the Three Year Post-War Plan (1969-1971) in the field of Construction and Urban Planning' [Phúc trình về kế hoạch tam niên hậu chiến (1969-1971) trong lĩnh vực kiến thiết và thiết kế đô thị], December 1968, folder 127, Bộ Công Chánh và Giao Thông Vận Tải, TTLTQGII.

⁴⁸⁵ 'Ministry of Public Works' Operations Program during 1970-71: Report on Special Modes of Action' [Chương trình hoạt động của Bộ Công Chánh trong 2 năm 1970-1971: Tờ trình về những Phương thức hành động đặc biệt], 28 October 1969, folder 10, Bộ Công Chánh, TTLTQGII.

coordination between responsible agencies.⁴⁸⁶ The October 1969 austerity tax hugely compounded these problems, as it led to a 32% increase in the cost of MPW operations and a 50% increase in investment costs, forcing the MPW to reduce its housing construction operations for the forthcoming year.⁴⁸⁷ As such, these plans rarely left the drawing board. In addition, urban plans sometimes clashed with military and political goals. Following the rural pacification campaigns of late 1968 and early 1969, the GVN turned its attention to pacification in urban areas. The Central Pacification and Development Council noted that, as government forces pushed the NLF out of rural areas, the enemy would attempt to form new base areas in the suburban belts. These areas were “a richer source of men and material” and were home to “poorly educated labourers, all too gullible, and an easy prey to guile”. The NLF could take advantage of people in areas with poor roads, poor sanitation and shortages of water, electricity, and schools, inciting them to “cause confusion in the cities and make trouble for the local government”. To meet this plot, the CPDC noted, the GVN must “implement an effective urban development plan”.⁴⁸⁸ As with all other ministries in South Vietnam, the work of the MPW and its autonomous organizations was linked to pacification and development. Documents highlight that even the Saigon Water Department was required to send information to the CPDC about lengths of pipe laid, water clocks installed etc. The government believed its technological edge over the NLF had the potential to subdue an otherwise restive urban population. Delivering potable water to Saigon’s suburban fringes and working class neighbourhoods thus became part of the

⁴⁸⁶ ‘Seminar for Public Works Development’ [Hội thảo công chánh chuẩn bị phát triển], 18-22 March 1969, folder 128, Bộ Công Chánh và Giao Thông Vận Tải, TTLTQGII.

⁴⁸⁷ ‘Report on Implementing the Ministry of Public Works’ 1970-71 Program’ [Tờ trình về việc thực hiện chương trình 2 năm 1970-71 của Bộ Công Chánh], 15 December 1969, folder 10, Bộ Công Chánh, TTLTQGII.

⁴⁸⁸ ‘Implementation of the 1969 Special P&D Plan’, 9 August 1969, Nixon Library.

pacification enterprise.⁴⁸⁹ As such, these areas received priority over the installation of infrastructure in Tuan's proposed satellite towns.

Despite the obstacles operating against the MPW, American observers described 1969 as "banner year" for urban planning in Vietnam. In comparison with the 10 city plans that the government had completed between 1959 and 1968, it had completed 5 and initiated 14 in 1969. This was in part due to administrative changes in 1968 and 1969 which had given urban planning a greater status within the MPW. Nonetheless, the directorate was still understaffed. Depleted by the draft and more lucrative private sector wages, the Urban Planning service had only 37 of a desired 73 staff members and few trained urban planners.⁴⁹⁰ Challenging as it was for an under-staffed and under-resourced organization to keep pace with South Vietnam's rapidly changing urban conditions, U.S. advisers wished to see an even more comprehensive effort and one that better complemented pacification plans.

Two years later the MPW was still determined that some cities should be allowed to expand, while others contracted, in accordance with economic potential. This would also avoid the issue of resettling migrants in some rural areas where the GVN felt too many people were engaged in agriculture, instead taking advantage of manpower concentrated in cities. This was notably the case in the north of the country where high population densities meant that peasants merely eked out a living. The MPW had also begun researching the establishment of an alternative capital as a means of limiting Saigon's growth. The MPW identified Di An, located about 20km from the capital between the Saigon and Dong Nai Rivers in Binh Duong province, as the most suitable area. The ministry proposed calling the town "New Saigon" [Tân Sài Gòn] and

⁴⁸⁹ 'Pacification and Development Program, 1970, Saigon Water Department' [Chương trình bình định phát triển, 1970, Saigon thủy cục], 24 September 1970, folder 29, Bộ Công Chánh, TTLTQGII. 'Saigon Water Department's Pacification and Development Plan 1971, Water Supply (Saigon-Gia Dinh)' [Kế hoạch bình định phát triển 1971, cấp thủy (Saigon-Gia Dinh) của Saigon Thủy Cục], undated, folder 29, Bộ Công Chánh, TTLTQGII.

⁴⁹⁰ 'Urban Planning in Vietnam: Phase II, February 1970'.

assigning it administrative and diplomatic responsibilities. New Saigon would be connected to old Saigon which would maintain its commercial and port role, as well as to the Bien Hoa industrial zone and to Thu Duc university area.⁴⁹¹

By late 1971 however, American officials were quite sure that a strategy limiting Saigon and Danang's growth in favour of counter-magnets, desirable as that might be, was impracticable and amounted to "paddling upstream against natural social forces". One senior CORDS officer even wondered whether GVN political instincts, regardless of MPW plans to the contrary, might be to encourage the growth of Saigon ahead of regional growth and argued that as far as the growth of Saigon ensured political stability the United States should support it. The solution, CORDS decided, was to help those cities like Saigon and Danang to plan "for systematic expansion of their infrastructure in anticipation of greater future demands". "Comprehensive city plans" seemed like "a practicable and realizable objective" for achieving this, suggested CORDS Assistant Chief of Staff James Herbert, despite acknowledging that there was a dearth of CORDS staff who could assist with such an effort.⁴⁹² In light of the apparently diminished threat to South Vietnam's cities in late 1971 and early 1972, these U.S. officials believed that the advisory effort should focus, not on counter-insurgency and community development, but on long-term economic development and they evidently believed that there was time to train Vietnamese to take over these roles.

The combination of disappointment with the Urban Self-Development Program noted above and this desire for comprehensive city planning fed into the 1972-75 Community Defence and Local Development Plan. The plan continued to place

⁴⁹¹ 'Ministry of Public Works: Results of Activities, 1968-1970', April 1971, folder 61, Bộ Công Chánh, TTLTQGII; 'Ministry of Public Works: Program of Activities 1971' [Bộ Công Chánh, Chương trình hoạt động 1971], July 1970, folder 61, Bộ Công Chánh, TTLTQGII; 'Overview of the Ministry of Public Works' Operations Policy and Modes of Action' [Đại cương về đường lối hoạt động và phương thức hành động của Bộ Công Chánh], 5 February 1971, folder 13, Bộ Công Chánh, TTLTQGII.

⁴⁹² 'Advisory Assistance on Urban Affairs', 15 November 1971, Background Docu/Urban Self-Devel Fund, Box 60, CORDS Historical Working Group Files 1967-73, RG472, NARA II; 'Policy Guidance and Tasking for Additional Planning by MDD', 16 November 1971, Background Docu/Urban Self-Devel Fund, Box 60, CORDS Historical Working Group Files 1967-73, RG472, NARA II.

rhetorical emphasis on community and participation but now the plan called for cities to establish a comprehensive urban development plan of which the urban self-development program was just one aspect. Cities were required to gather and analyse data relating to a host of factors in their localities such as land use, demography, social services and economics. City governments would then use this information to create plans outlining present and future development needs for the next 5 years, a construction program, and land use regulations. Such plans should offer “realistic solutions” to issues like sanitation, slum clearance, housing, industrial development, and illegal land uses. To support this effort, the GVN planned to establish a city and regional planning curriculum in Vietnamese universities in which promising urban development cadres would receive training. These trained cadres would then be assigned to local urban governments.⁴⁹³

There were plenty of critics of this new approach on the American side. Thomas Thorsen, a USAID official in Vietnam, argued that experience had shown that the many heavy studies “bowing our bookshelves” from the Doxiadis to the Lilienthal report had paid little attention to “the paucity of resources”, while “the ‘new and better’ pencil lines” ignored the reality of impossible to resolve conflicts of area, economic status, family, location and heritage. Comprehensive city planning could make “little headway in the face of these conflicts”. While Thorsen’s critique was valid, his solution once again demonstrated the poverty of ideas for grappling with Vietnam’s urban problems. Thorsen argued that the United States and GVN had to overcome the void between the “ubiquitous villages and parasitic large cities” through the development of small market towns geared toward investment in agricultural technology and processing. These towns would stall further rural-urban migration by acting “as so many dams holding up the

⁴⁹³ ‘Four Year Local Self-Defense and Community Development Plan (1972-1975), Annex IV: Special Programs, Appendix A: Urban Development’, Background Docu./Urban Self-Devel Fund, Box 60, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, 1967-1973, RG472, NARA II.

flood of people into Saigon and other large cities”.⁴⁹⁴ Such was the scepticism of the new approach, that AID Vietnam initially refused to fund the new CORDS proposal noting that it was “overly ambitious” given the GVN’s institutional capacity and “meagrely resourced” given the complexity of the problems.⁴⁹⁵ At a meeting in Washington in late April, senior USAID officials overruled and agreed to fund the programme primarily as a vehicle “to improve the administrative and planning capabilities of selected urban areas to solve identified urban problems”.⁴⁹⁶

Cities would follow a process similar to that which had begun in Saigon in 1969. Between August 1969 and April 1972 Frank Pavich, a USAID urban planner attached to the MPW, led a team of 21 Vietnamese land surveyors in carrying out a detailed land use survey of Saigon Metropolitan Area. The exercise resulted in a series of minutely detailed maps with colour coding indicating land use and numerical coding indicating subcategories. Casting an eye over the maps, one could see that an orange area with code 3096 was where one might find the local astrologer, code 3073 the funeral attire shop.⁴⁹⁷ In early 1972 the MPW sent instructors around the country to train urban cadre in land use survey techniques in other cities. As well as land use surveys, cities were required to offer population projections to the year 2000, while Pavich worked on a model for predicting land use requirements for the next 30 years.⁴⁹⁸ Such efforts culminated in a series of design plans which would determine the city’s future development.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁴ ‘Urban Development in Vietnam: A Modest Proposal’, 8 March 1972, Background Docu/Urban Self-Devel Fund, Box 60, CORDS Historical Working Group Files 1967-1973, RG472, NARA II.

⁴⁹⁵ ‘AAC Funding for the Urban Development Program’, 14 April 1972, Background Docu/Urban Self-Devel Fund, Box 60, CORDS Historical Working Group Files 1967-1973, RG472, NARA II.

⁴⁹⁶ ‘Memorandum for the Record: Urban Self-Development Funds’, 25 April 1972, Urban Development, Box 73, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, 1967-73, RG472, NARA II.

⁴⁹⁷ Frank R. Pavich, ‘Saigon Metropolitan Area Land Use Survey (Study)’, 15 May 1972, *USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse*, Document ID: PN-ABH-403.

⁴⁹⁸ ‘Status of the 1972-1975 CD&LD Plan’, 10 April 1972, Urban Development, Box 73, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, 1967-73, RG472, NARA II.

⁴⁹⁹ ‘Directorate General of Construction and Urban Planning’s Can Tho Plan, 1969-1973’ [Đồ án thiết kế thị xã Cần Thơ của Nha Tổng Giám đốc kiến thiết và thiết kế Đô thị năm 1969-1973], folder 1875, Hội Đồng An Ninh và Phát Triển, TTLTQGII.

Better urban data might have provided comforting evidence for those charged with solving Vietnam's urban problems that they had some kind of handle on the issue. But American and Vietnamese urban development goals for Vietnam's cities were becoming more, not less, ambitious as the United States wound down its commitment. To understand why, in the twilight of the American war in Vietnam, American officials opted for such a long-range approach, one has to look to global trends in urban development in the early 1970s.

Conclusion

In the early 1970s the major development agencies commenced investigations of Third World urbanization. The 1972 USAID report, based on discussions with social scientists and visits to 16 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin American highlights the degree to which U.S. officials in South Vietnam were not implementing a set of policies geared toward the specific problems of South Vietnam's cities. Instead, they held a set of assumptions about the urbanization process and a belief in the efficacy of certain solutions that U.S. development experts held about Third World urban development more generally.

The report concluded that cities offered favourable economies of scale and acted as "a vehicle for the rapid diffusion of knowledge, social standards, and new lifestyles", echoing the shibboleths of American social scientists dating back to the 1920s. Despite acknowledging little social science on which to draw, the "severe lack of exportable models", and little knowledge of the urbanization process, the review concluded that cities played a positive role in development. The report condemned Third World urban master planning for focusing too much on the physical, ignoring the economic, social, and political aspects of urban development, as well as failing to conceive the relationship of the city to its hinterland and other cities. Due to their anti-urban bias

Third World leaders had attempted to “keep them down on the farm” or to divert growth to satellite and new towns. The authors were sceptical of such ad hoc approaches. Instead, regional development, alternative growth poles and the integration of urban development into national planning were all to be encouraged. Representatives from all the countries contacted in the course of the review expressed concern about shortages of skilled manpower, resources and data so the authors quixotically recommended that external technical assistance focus training, information, and research. This would, in turn, help overcome problems of planning and administrative capacity, as well as guiding the development of policy, legislation and institutions. South Vietnam, one of the countries visited, came in for particular praise for its emerging system of management and institutional support for urban affairs.⁵⁰⁰

The solutions that U.S. urbanists offered in South Vietnam in the early 1970s simply reflected new ways of thinking about Third World urban development on a global scale but if these were difficult to implement in most postcolonial nations the obstacles to such an approach in South Vietnam were immense. By late 1972, however, South Vietnam’s urban areas faced more critical and immediate problems. The American withdrawal had precipitated a perilous drop in employment opportunities in the cities. In the months after the Paris Agreements the GVN’s efforts in urban areas focused on remedying the country’s economic and urban unemployment crisis through labour-intensive public works schemes. The urban development plans of 1971 and 1972 would prove of very little assistance in this endeavour.

U.S. efforts in Vietnam may well be one of the last times USAID placed such an emphasis on urban planning during the Cold War. Although USAID formalised the 1972 report in a guidance statement the following year, in 1973 the U.S. Congress

⁵⁰⁰ ‘Focus on Urban Development: Perceptions, Problems, Approaches, and Needs. A Potential Role for US Foreign Assistance’, 1972, *USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse*, Document ID: PN-AAC-475.

passed the “new directions” legislation which instructed the agency to focus less on economic growth and more on the basic needs of the world’s poor. Eric Chetwyn, one of the authors of the 1972 report noted that in the early 1970s AID’s leaders had felt that urban development would be “the leading initiative... around the corner” but had later chosen to interpret the new directions legislation as relating to the rural, rather than urban poor. Although AID and Ford helped sound the alarm about urban development in the early 1970s, it was the World Bank which took up the challenge and its lending to urban development projects rose considerably throughout the decade.⁵⁰¹ Perhaps more tellingly, Chetwyn noted that “the Agency felt somewhat overwhelmed by the urban problem. The problems of the cities were so severe, it seemed that resources needed to overcome them were so great, that we were really afraid we might be [sic] a Pandora’s Box, a bottomless pit”.⁵⁰²

⁵⁰¹ Yeung and Belisle, ‘Third World Urban Development: Agency Responses with Particular Reference to the IDRC’, 108-110.

⁵⁰² ‘Interview with Eric Chetwyn’, *Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, 7 May 1999, (available at: http://adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Chetwyn-Eric.toc_.pdf; accessed 29 April 2014).

Conclusion

In the years between the Tet Offensive in 1968 and the 1972 Spring Offensive the Thieu regime decentralized governance and development in an attempt to gain legitimacy in the eyes of a war weary and uncommitted population. Rather than relying on a political party to mobilize support, Thieu believed that the bureaucracy and military establishment as well as those who had benefitted from development projects would be his key source of support in 1971 elections and in contest against the Communists. As the situation became more desperate after Hanoi's invasion and the signing of the Paris Peace Agreements in January 1973, the regime attempted to once again centralize governance and development. Thieu abandoned his earlier effort to create mobilized, depoliticized villages and turned instead to organising a secretive political party. The RVN would also receive considerably less economic aid in 1973 and 1974 than anticipated, the planners' reaction to which was to turn the economy inwards and concentrate more economic power in the hands of the state. As far as Thieu was concerned, there could be no talk of elections until the North Vietnamese army withdrew its troops from the South. In light of these changes, the logic for development was less about gaining legitimacy in the eyes the people, and more a simple matter of survival.

In reversing the GVN's pacification gains since late 1968, Hanoi's 1972 offensive raised the possibility that Communist agents and sympathizers might emerge and take control of hamlet and village councils, a dangerous proposition given the possibility of a post-ceasefire election. In July 1972, in response to the offensive, Thieu requested and gained emergency powers for 6 months from the National Assembly. The following month the GVN issued a decree which cancelled local elections and authorized province chiefs to appoint most village and hamlet officials, backtracking on

the trend toward decentralization since 1968 and significantly reducing the legitimacy of local government. As Thieu's powers were coming to an end in late December, he issued a decree setting new and, given the limited geographical base of most political parties, impossibly high standards for parties to stand in national and even local elections. At the same time Thieu moved to create his own political party, the Dan Chu (Democracy) Party. By the time the deadline for filing applications passed only Thieu's party qualified. To avoid allegations that Thieu was creating a one party state, the GVN granted temporary operating permission to two blocs. Thieu claimed that he was trying to consolidate South Vietnam's non-Communist parties for the post-ceasefire competition with the Communists. But the move was equally aimed at enfeebling the neutralists who would occupy the space between the GVN and the Communists on the National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord, the body charged with implementing the ceasefire and overseeing elections. Both the attempt to gain greater control at the village level and eliminating the "Third Force" as a political entity would continue until the fall of Saigon.⁵⁰³

Careerist civil servants and military officers joined the Dan Chu, allowing Thieu to use the GVN machinery to get out the vote. Nguyen Van Ngai, one of the principal party organizers, was appointed Minister for Rural Development in March 1973 and used RD cadres to spread the party's message. Village elections were now reinstated and by early July 1973 Dan Chu candidates had won 90% of seats in almost one thousand village elections, while opposition parties could rarely field a candidate. Further laws regulating the October elections to the Senate, the only constitutional body still capable of challenging Thieu, led most of the non-Communist opposition to boycott it. The election gave Thieu and Dan Chu a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly, enough to pass constitutional amendments, including the addition of a third

⁵⁰³ Fallaci, *Interview with History*, 67-68; Brooks Richards to Sir Alec Douglas-Home, 'The Partial Senate Election in South Vietnam, 1973', 11 September 1973, FCO 15/1809, UKNA.

presidential term. The opposition newspaper *Dien Tin* noted that the only outlet for the non-Communist opposition now was to “turn to extra-parliamentary activities”.

Administration supporters used development as the primary public explanation for Thieu’s amendment to the constitution. The party’s eponymous news daily *Dan Chu* editorialized that Thieu had not yet had enough time to implement “his large-scale and long-term plans and projects”.⁵⁰⁴

The language of decentralization and democracy continued but the reality betrayed Thieu’s fear of Communist and Third Force infiltration of the villages and his desire to concentrate more power in Saigon. He spoke of an “administrative revolution” which would send urban-based civil servants into the countryside. But the U.S. embassy noted that power was moving away from the villages and back into the hands of the central government. The 1974 Community Security and Local Development plan continued to speak of the importance of village autonomy in the field development. In practice, however, Saigon maintained control by assigning RD cadres to assist in the design and implementation of development plans. In addition, rather than allowing popularly-elected village chiefs to control the territorial forces and PSDF, junior ARVN officers were despatched to the villages to command these forces. While the elected village chiefs had hardly been immune to pressure from above, many of these officials showed a considerable degree of independence from their district and province superiors and often acted in what they perceived to be the interests of their communities. Indeed, some had proven too independent and others, it turned out, had

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid; S.I. Soutar to P.H.D. Wetton, ‘Saigon Weekly Summary: 29 August – 4 September’, 4 September 1973, FCO 15/1809, UKNA; ‘Senator Ngai’s Appointment as Minister of Rural Development; Change in Ministry of Land Reform’, Telegram 05406, 2 April 1973, 1973SAIGON05406, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives Access to Archival Databases (accessed 2 November 2014); ‘Reactions of Political Leaders to Constitutional Amendments’, Telegram 00925, 21 January 1974, 1974SAIGON00925, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives Access to Archival Databases (accessed 2 November 2014).

been members of the old line nationalist political parties like the Dai Viet and the VNQDD.⁵⁰⁵

Against this backdrop of growing centralization and continued fighting in the countryside after the Paris agreements, the GVN hoped to implement a programme of reconstruction and development. However, it found itself battling against several factors largely beyond its control. Hanoi's 1972 invasion had compounded the South's refugee crisis, damaged towns and industries, and compelled Saigon to spend more on defence and refugee resettlement. The impact of the U.S. withdrawal began to be felt most severely in the towns and cities. As a result, the government faced a growing budget deficit, unemployment and a decline foreign exchange reserves, raising the prospect of grave inflation in 1973. As such there was little public money for reconstruction. At a meeting with Nixon at San Clemente in April 1973, the President assured Thieu that he would work to get South Vietnam as much economic assistance as possible but also recommended that Saigon look to the World Bank for support.⁵⁰⁶

The GVN launched an Eight Year plan in May 1973 which would focus on recovery followed by a second phase of public and private investment in agriculture and, indicating the degree of optimism in Saigon in early 1973, in tourism. At the same time however, Thieu went to every length to publicly condemn Hanoi's violations of the Paris Agreement. This caused considerable frustration for some technocrats, one of whom argued that it would complicate the effort to mobilize international support

⁵⁰⁵ 'Embassy Saigon's Mission Weekly, February 28- March 9', 1974SAIGON02968, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives Access to Archival Databases (accessed 2 November 2014); 'Untitled [n.d.]', Local Administration, Box 63, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, 1967-1973, RG472, NARA II.

⁵⁰⁶ 'General Survey of the Economic and Financial Situation in Vietnam', *Kinh Tế Tập San*, No. 5-6, 1973; Memorandum for the President's Files by the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), 3 April 1973, document no. 39, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, vol. X, Vietnam, January 1973- July 1975.

because it might “create the impression that reconstruction and development are simply still impossible in Vietnam”.⁵⁰⁷

Such concerns were not assuaged by the continuing violence in rural areas and the escalating battle between Saigon and the Communists for control of the country’s rice crop. Following a sharp rise in rice prices in early July, a group of senior officials including Thieu’s assistant Hoang Duc Nha, Minister Le Tuan Anh, and a number of senior military and security officials moved against the liberalizers Ngoc and Trung to assert stronger control over the economy. They wished to institute price controls and rationing, restrictions on foreign investment, and an economic blockade of enemy territory. These men were supported by South Vietnamese intelligence reports the following month which indicated that Hanoi was moving large quantities of money into South Vietnam to buy food for its troops and to destabilize the southern economy. The GVN’s Economic and Social Council noted that the price of food for a family now exceeded the salary of an average civil servant. The “only solution”, the Council noted, “is government intervention, guidance, and support to implement the procurement, storage, and processing system”. By the end of the year, the liberalizers Ngoc and Trung had been ousted, the GVN had launched its blockade and put control of the rice market in the hands of the National Food Administration.⁵⁰⁸

The RVN’s economic problems were compounded in 1973 by less than anticipated private investment and international assistance, as well as the global rise in prices and the “oil shock”. Inflation reached its highest levels since 1966 and foreign

⁵⁰⁷ ‘Embassy Saigon’s Mission Weekly, May 16-22, 1973’, Telegram 08796, May 22, 1973, 1973SAIGON08976, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives, (accessed 2 November 2014); Nguyen Huu Hanh to Pham Kim Ngoc, 15 June 1973, folder 3015, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII.

⁵⁰⁸ Embassy Saigon to Department of State, Telegram 12661, July 13, 1973, 1973SAIGON12661, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed October 31, 2014); ‘Report on the Rice Situation’ [Tờ trình về tình hình lúa gạo], 5 September 1973, folder 3035, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII; ‘Rice Problems and Rice and Food Distribution Policy in the North’ [Vấn đề lúa gạo và chính sách phân phối gạo và lương thực tại Miền Bắc], 21 August 1973, Folder 3038, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII; ‘Government Changes’, 29 October 1973, FCO 15/1809, UKNA.

exchange reserves dropped dramatically. In 1974 only 7% of national budget could be dedicated to development. In light of this crisis situation, self-sufficiency and the mobilization of manpower, rather than public investment, were essential.

The deteriorating economic situation compounded the unemployment crisis in South Vietnam's cities which started to suffer particularly badly from the U.S. withdrawal in 1972. The greater Da Nang area had been especially dependent on employment generated by the U.S. presence and by late 1972 U.S. officials described the economic situation there as "acute, urgent and potentially explosive".⁵⁰⁹ In light of this crisis, CORDS' recommendations for more comprehensive urban planning in 1971 and 1972 turned out to be particularly misguided and even redundant. Instead the GVN's focus shifted to immediate efforts to relieve the situation. In March 1973 the Agency for the Development of the Da Nang Area began a labour-intensive public works program and within a few months 4,000 unemployed, unskilled migrants and refugees had been put to work building sidewalks, whitewashing buildings, paving alleys, and cleaning up drainage ditches and beaches.⁵¹⁰ Saigon City Hall launched a city beautification program for six months beginning in October 1973, followed by the establishment of the Agency for the Development of the Saigon Area which soon hired 7,000 workers. The GVN planned to continue the program into 1975 hoping to employ 40,000 workers nationwide by April 1975.⁵¹¹

These public works scheme were crash programs with limited budgets and could only offer temporary relief. They could not resolve the cities' chronic unemployment problems. Between 1973 and 1975 the Ministry of Public Works therefore pushed its "population policy" [sách lược dân cư]. The ministry noted that Communists could

⁵⁰⁹ 'An Approach to Alleviating Current Problems in the Danang Area', undated, Box 34, Danang/Metro, CORDS Historical Working Group Files, 1967-73, RG472.

⁵¹⁰ David K. Shipler, 'Da Nang Beautifies because it Must', 9 August 1973, *New York Times*.

⁵¹¹ 'Embassy Saigon's Mission Weekly Sept 26-Oct 2, 1974', Telegram 12775, 2 October 1974, 1974SAIGON127775, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed 6 April 2015).

easily exploit urban unemployment and poverty in the cities, while statistics suggested a link between poverty and insecurity in a number of densely populated rural areas. The ministry proposed that, as part of the Land Clearing and Hamlet Building Program, the government move people from these insecure areas to other zones of unexploited land. Under the Land Development and Hamlet Building programme thousands of demobilized soldiers, disabled veterans, refugees and urban peasants were resettled on virgin or abandoned lands for the economic development and security of the country.⁵¹²

Demography, food production, and security were intimately linked in the eyes of many policymakers. Questions about how and where to resettle surplus, unemployed or refugee populations, how to boost agricultural output, and whether to curb population growth or depend on manpower for economic growth and security were central to post-Paris policy debates. These issues came to the fore at a Seminar on Population, hosted in Saigon in February 1974 and attended by GVN officials, academics, and representatives of Vietnamese and international NGOs. Although population planning would not have national security implications for 15-20 years, the idea of reducing population growth played on the anxieties of many planners. Several GVN public health officials voiced opposition to population control. Some felt that the RVN needed men in the military and tilling the land. One speaker condemned population control as “a sham issue”, imposed on developing countries by “foreign nations” while members of the Catholic clergy, drawing on Pope Paul VI’s writings, called instead for “self-mastery”.⁵¹³

By the end of 1974, there were 138 clinics in operation, with 75 at the district level, far short of the Ministry of Health’s goal of one per 257 districts but a

⁵¹² ‘Summary of the Employment and Urban Development Study’ [Phúc trình tóm lược nghiên cứu nhân dụng và phát triển đô thị], January 1975, Phủ Thủ Tướng, TTLTQG-II; William E. Colby, (Deputy to the Commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command) “Testimony on War-Related Civilian Problems in Indochina, Part 1: Vietnam, Hearings before the Senate Subcommittee on Refugees and Escapees, Committee on Judiciary,” *Congressional Record*, 92:1 (April 21, 1971), 31, *ProQuest Congressional*, Hearing ID: HRG-1971-SJS-0052.

⁵¹³ *Seminar on Population*, (Saigon: National Population Council, 1974).

considerable increase in four years nonetheless. The government adopted a permissive attitude to family planning in the acknowledgement that there was a population problem but the failure to repeal the bill was due to strong opposition from political elites. In 1974, the Ministry of Health official most closely associated population planning, Truong Minh Cac, noted that the number of new “acceptors”, just 26,000, was far below the target set by the National Population Council. Much like the Family Happiness Protection Association, Cac attributed this to “adverse propaganda”.⁵¹⁴

Economically, the GVN was in crisis management mode. To deal with its growing balance of payments problems, in 1974 the GVN repeatedly devalued the piaster until it was worth about a quarter of its 1970 value. The government constantly adjusted the price of domestic and imported rice, expanded agricultural credit and continued to subsidise fertilizer. Each step sought to boost production and encourage the flow of rice to the urban centres but they placed a massive strain on the already overburdened state coffers. Meanwhile the rural sector, including rice production, continued to grow, and agricultural exports rose to \$75m in 1974. The fact that unemployment rates were now as high in the countryside as they were in the cities further suggests that this growth primarily benefitted only one segment of rural society.⁵¹⁵

With rising world prices, the real value of U.S. economic assistance declined, making the effort to mobilize third party and multilateral assistance all the more urgent. But disagreement among potential donor countries about the nature of assistance to Indochina, as well as uncertainty about U.S. Congressional commitment to international development and the impact of the energy crisis, combined to delay action. Meanwhile,

⁵¹⁴ Truong Minh Cac and Nguyen Tuan Phuong, ‘Vietnam (South)’, *Studies in Family Planning*, vol. 6, no. 8, Family Planning Programs: World Review 1974, (August 1975), 244.

⁵¹⁵ ‘Economic and Financial Stabilization Measures Undertaken in July 1974’, *Kinh Tế Tập San*, no. 7, 1974; ‘CERP 0003- Second Quarter, 1974 Economic Review’, Telegram 0957, 19 July 1974, 1974SAIGON0957, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed 2 November 2014).

the IMF moved from modest approval of the GVN's economic programmes between 1970 and 1973 to disapproval for its dirigiste policies in 1974. In early 1975 an IMF delegation reported that GVN policies did not inspire enough confidence to qualify for an IMF loan.⁵¹⁶

As the economy spiralled and unemployment grew, Thieu's urban base began to come apart at the seams. Throughout 1974 the GVN faced growing protest from ARVN veterans, urban-based labour unions and anti-corruption movements led by - his once most reliable constituency- Catholic priests and their followers. In a two-hour address in October, Thieu defended himself against charges of corruption and dictatorship. He pointed to his development programs, particularly hamlet rebuilding and urban improvement schemes, as the key pillars of his plan for economic recovery and jobs creation.⁵¹⁷

With Hanoi's forces closing in, policymakers in Washington and Saigon continued to hope for economic take-offs, including Taiwanese-inspired Export-Processing Zones and oil strikes in the South China Sea. In February 1975, U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin told President Gerald Ford "on the economic side, we could see the kind of advance Taiwan and Korea had". By the following month, however, the U.S. embassy warned that the RVN's economic prospects were bleak and if economic assistance was not forthcoming, it would threaten the survival of the regime.⁵¹⁸ Ultimately, the RVN collapsed from the top-down. It was Thieu's order to withdraw from the Central Highlands, and particularly the disastrous way in which this was executed, which sealed Saigon's immediate fate. But even had the RVN survived Hanoi's final onslaught, the combination of U.S. domestic politics, the volatile global

⁵¹⁶ 'Internal World Bank Memo', 14 March 1974, OD35/316, UKNA; 'Aide Memoire: Report of IMF delegation, February 19-27, 1975', Saigon, 27 February 1975, folder 3266, PTTDNCH-TTLTQGII;

⁵¹⁷ 'Highlights of President Thieu's Address to Nation', Telegram 12724, 1 October 1974, 1974SAIGON12724, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed 6 April 2015).

⁵¹⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, 15 February 1975, President Ford Memcons (3), Box 16, NSC East Asian and Pacific Affairs Staff: Files, (1969), 1973-1976, Gerald R. Ford Library.

economy and opposition to Thieu's growing authoritarian rule indicate that the RVN would have fared increasingly badly as the 1970s progressed.

The period between 1968 and 1973 is a nebulous one in the literature on the United States and international development. U.S. liberalism had entered a period of crisis, the post-war modernization consensus had imploded and the Bretton Woods system came apart, yet alternative paradigms such as "basic needs" and neoliberalism had yet to stake a firm claim in the minds of development professionals and postcolonial leaders. The absence of a dominant paradigm accounts for the diverse approaches to development adopted by various groups operating in South Vietnam during this period. The United States and the GVN pursued land reform, community development, market-oriented and export-led growth, and top-down modernization to address a variety of social, political and economic problems. While Americans and Vietnamese debated the relative suitability of these approaches, they saw little contradiction in implementing them simultaneously. Ultimately, each approach aimed to strengthen the regime economically and politically.

The fact that U.S. officials were beginning to question the very premise of U.S. development efforts in the postcolonial world in the late 1960s and 1970s, and in large part as a result of the experience in Vietnam, led to divergences of opinion about the best strategies to pursue. Some development practitioners and U.S. policymakers continued to see the need for state planning and particularly for the state's role in rural social engineering. On the other hand, some had clearly started to question the pre-eminent role of the postcolonial state in economic development and saw instead the need for market-driven solutions. Elsewhere the collapse of the development consensus had an uneven impact. Even as development professionals turned their attention to

Third World urbanization they struggled to develop new modes of thinking and instead fell back on the old watchwords of the social sciences. There were no obvious solutions.

U.S. officials' uncertainty as to the benefits of various development approaches created space for Vietnamese actors to shape the trajectory of these projects. In searching for solutions to its political, economic and social problems, the GVN drew on U.S. theories of modernization, community development and land reform but U.S. models did not dominate. For every problem encountered, whether land tenure relations, economic planning, or population control, the GVN tried to learn how other anti-Communist states had grappled with and resolved these issues. Looking to other regional anti-Communist states allowed South Vietnamese technocrats to assert their independence vis a vis their U.S. counterparts but it also allowed them to implement a programme of authoritarian governance and development. The GVN's U.S. or Western-trained technocrats such as Pham Kim Ngoc, Ha Xuan Trung, Cao Van Than, and Tran Quang Minh, admired Taiwanese, South Korean, and Singaporean forms of political and economic organization far more than those put forth in the social science texts they read as graduate students. As a result, South-South exchanges were as important as U.S.-South Vietnamese encounters in determining development's arc.

Examining these projects in South Vietnam in the late 1960s and 1970s, it is possible to begin speaking of a distinctly East Asian model of anti-Communist governance and development in which the United States facilitated exchange and offered advice but often did not play the dominant role. With their higher levels of growth, Taiwan and South Korea provided the key models for replication. It was not only Thieu's South Vietnam, but also Suharto's Indonesia and Ferdinand Marcos' Philippines that turned to these model states for inspiration. In the late 1960s and early 1970s Indonesia and the Philippines, along with South Vietnam, attempted to duplicate Taiwan and South Korea's export-led growth model, each even setting up their first

Export-Processing Zones on the Taiwanese and Korean pattern. But the major appeal of this model, more Taiwanese than Korean, was the ways in which it allowed the state to use development to co-opt the support of a depoliticised peasantry. Encouraging peasants to express their aspirations through development projects served as an alternative to political activity that might threaten the power of the regime. Despite the difference among them, there were striking similarities in how these East Asian states tried to achieve this objective. By the early 1970s, each state had a strong central executive or one-party regime and a weak civil society, and employed some combination of counter-insurgency, transmigration and resettlement schemes, village-level mobilization, Green Revolution technologies, land reform, and population control.⁵¹⁹

The GVN's strategy during the final years of the war synthesized these East Asian anti-Communist developmental ideas. Yet scholars continue to understand South Vietnam entirely in terms of its bilateral relationship with the United States. By situating South Vietnam within the wider frame of decolonization and international development, it is possible to treat the GVN as a postcolonial regime instead of a mere appendage of American empire. There was no South Vietnamese exceptionalism as is implied in much of the literature. Rather, South Vietnam was a failed version of these more successful, authoritarian East Asian states.

The GVN development plans in the years after the Tet Offensive therefore suggest that historians of development might further examine the transnational flow of ideas about economic development among actors in the Global South during the Cold War. Development was not simply something that the Global North imposed on the Global South. Rather, it is clear that actors in the Global South looked to and learned

⁵¹⁹ Samuel Popkin, 'Politics and the Village', *Asian Survey*, vo. 10, no. 8, (1970), 668; Immerwahr, *Thinking Small*, 122; Simpson, 'Indonesia's "Accelerated Modernization" and the Global Discourse of Development', 467-486.

from one another's development experiences. Nonetheless, South Vietnamese planners did not slavishly follow a Taiwanese or Korean development model, in part because they disputed what that model meant. Instead they appropriated elements of other East Asian models and adapted them to Vietnamese conditions or deployed those models in bureaucratic struggles.

An examination of the contestations over development in the Second Republic brings into question the flat caricature of the RVN's leaders presented in many accounts of the war and restores the pluralism of South Vietnamese politics. Americanist historians all too often reduce the South Vietnamese regime to a small cabal consisting of Thieu and his close advisers, interested only in military affairs and the negotiations in Paris. This dissertation, however, suggests the following. Firstly, historians must acknowledge that Thieu viewed development as crucial to the successful outcome of the war. But secondly, and more importantly, historians must widen the cast of characters they examine. Development policy was designed and implemented by ministers and bureaucrats who are completely absent from accounts of the war.

Authoritarian governance appealed to many of these technocrats because it appeared to offer the quickest route to economic growth. It seemed to require none of the compromises and contestations of political pluralism that might jeopardize development plans. Thieu and his technocrats had no time for those who did not share their vision of South Vietnam's future, whether Buddhist and student protestors, National Assembly members, or peasants.

In practice, however, authoritarian rule proved less easy to implement. The Thieu regime was weaker than its leaders and technocrats would have liked, in large part because it had to be mindful of its American constituency, particularly the U.S. Congress. Development was contested both within the executive branch, and between the executive branch and the weak though still very vocal National Assembly, the

relatively free press, and some civil society groups like the FHPA. Projects including economic policy, land reform, and population planning, were each challenged, watered down, revised or completely undermined by opposition politicians. The picture that emerges from these contestations over development is that of a postcolonial society ruled by anti-Communist regime which for all its terrible flaws, including political repression, corruption and the violence it delivered on its people, battled over ideas about modernity that would enable it to build a postcolonial nation in opposition to its Communist competitors.

Between 1968 and 1973, the South Vietnamese state attempted to use the limited resources at its disposal to create a sense of anti-Communist identity in the country's villages and urban slums. GVN leaders encouraged grassroots democracy and participation at the village level but only in so far as it served their larger goals of social engineering. The ultimate goal was self-governing, self-developing, and self-sufficient communities able to resist the Communists. The Village and Urban Self-Development Programmes, agricultural modernization, land reform and the PSDF all highlight the degree to which GVN leaders believed that properly organized village society and urban neighbourhoods could become a source of anti-Communist solidarity, stability and economic growth. This was not a benevolent goal but an attractive strategy for a regime that needed the support of its people, was critically dependent on foreign aid and short of resources. In this sense, even supposedly democratic and participatory community development projects were part of a larger attempt to shape political identities and draw people into a positive relationship with the state. Nonetheless, a real redistribution of power and wealth occurred in these years in the form of village elections, the Village and Urban Self-Development programmes, and land reform. Although these programmes were never as radical as the NLF's policies in its earlier years, by the early 1970s the GVN was able to offer far greater material incentives to the peasantry than

the forces of the revolution. While it is impossible to measure degrees of support for the GVN and NLF at this time, it is very likely that the government enjoyed far wider support than historians have suggested.

Yet the state could never balance these incentives with its use of coercion. The GVN delivered enormous violence on its people, whether in the form of military operations, forced recruitment into citizens' militias, or cultural violence in the form of modernization projects which erased long-standing rural practices. The state used violence to achieve its goals not because it was strong but because it was weak in imposing its authority and creating the identity it desired in peasant farmers and urban dwellers. GVN leaders were not alone, as far as postcolonial states went, in thinking that violence could clear the way for development and that the outcome would justify the means.

The inability to balance incentives and coercion was just one of the reasons for GVN failure, however. Resources for development were always critically deficient because the state diverted the vast majority of both its manpower and material wealth to national defence. As such the pursuit of self-sufficiency was an attractive but elusive goal. The examples of the Sanitary Hamlet Programme and Village Self-Development projects demonstrate that GVN programmes often created structures in the countryside that peasants and village governments could not maintain without continued assistance.

But perhaps the biggest reason for the failure of the GVN strategy and therefore the failure of the South Vietnamese state was that it did not prepare Saigon for the new challenges it would face between 1973 and 1975. Firstly, U.S. and GVN officials were uncertain as to the meaning and goals of development in South Vietnam after the Tet Offensive. There was significant disagreement among various U.S. and South Vietnamese constituencies as to whether goals were best served by long-term development or short-term stabilization. The result was often a compromise between the

two. Ultimately, U.S. officials and GVN leaders did not help prepare South Vietnam for economic self-sufficiency during the period of Vietnamization because they did not anticipate how quickly they needed to achieve this goal. Both GVN and U.S. officials expected that South Vietnam would continue to receive large infusions of U.S. and international aid for several years to come. Based on this assumption, substantial progress was made toward eventual self-sufficiency prior to the Spring Offensive and the Paris Agreements. However, the economic impact of the offensive and continued high defence expenditures after 1973, combined with global economic shocks and a drop in U.S. aid, placed the South Vietnamese economy in dire straits. In this sense, the death spiral of South Vietnam began in 1972, not in 1968 as historians often suggest.

Secondly, between 1968 and 1972, the GVN worked toward goals which were fundamentally undermined by those negotiating the peace agreement. The GVN strategy after the Tet Offensive was geared toward a future electoral competition with the NLF. Elections would only occur once North Vietnamese troops had withdrawn from the South. By allowing North Vietnamese troops to remain in the South and by offering the “Third Force” a significant role in the political process after 1973, the Paris Agreements contained provisions which destroyed the logic for pacification and development of the four previous years.

Historians have long argued that South Vietnam served as a development laboratory for the Kennedy and Johnson administrations in the 1960s. However, scholars have overlooked the significance of U.S development projects in South Vietnam in the Nixon era. The programmes that U.S. development officials advocated during this latter period reflected both continuity and change with regard to post-war development theory and practice. Development in South Vietnam in these years saw both the culmination of post-war projects like land reform and the Green Revolution, and the emergence of new modes of thinking such as flexible exchange rates and a new

focus on urban development. It saw the climax of U.S. efforts to use development as a tool to fight wars of national liberation but also prefigured shifts in international development in the 1970s.

Although Nixon was eager to withdraw U.S. troops from Vietnam and focused primarily on high diplomacy and conventional military force, the administration continued to view development as crucial to the persistence of a stable regime in Saigon. In the early 1970s South Vietnam still experienced the largest American presence of any country in the Global South. It should therefore come as no surprise that South Vietnam remained a laboratory for American developmental ideas until the United States withdrew. In fact, many U.S. officials in both Vietnam and Washington believed that the projects and reforms conducted during the final years of the war were actually more development-oriented than those which had focused primarily on stabilization during the Johnson era. In this sense, historians' focus on the Kennedy and Johnson administrations' development policies to the neglect of the Nixon administration presents us with an inaccurate picture of U.S. development efforts during the Cold War.

Yet scant attention has been paid to the ways in which these projects in Vietnam after the 1968 Tet Offensive foreshadowed shifting U.S and international development priorities in the 1970s. Debates between U.S. and South Vietnamese officials as well as within the South Vietnamese and U.S. governments preceded broader, global transformations in thinking about economic development that would occur in the social sciences, in international development institutions, and in the Global South later in the 1970s. Issues debated in Vietnam included the role of the state versus the private sector, the participation of multilateral and non-government organisations, structural adjustment programs, the merits of population planning, and a growing focus on urban development.

For Nixon, one of the lessons of Vietnam was that direct U.S. involvement in Third World development had implicated the United States too heavily in the domestic politics of foreign nations. But Nixon did not completely reject the need for postcolonial development. Although he and Kissinger believed that the United States was no longer responsible for providing the intellectual blueprints for postcolonial development, they believed in the alternative solutions of private investment, export-led growth, and multilateral and third party aid. In this sense, South Vietnam became a test case for the Nixon administration's approach to development on a global scale. While the United States could hardly hope to avoid involvement in the domestic political scene in South Vietnam in the late 1960s and 1970s, the emphasis on private investment, export-led growth, and the mobilization of international aid each sought to help the United States disengage economically from Vietnam. This might leave behind a viable economy just as Vietnamization might leave behind a viable military. Whereas these development strategies aimed at promoting disengagement from Vietnam, elsewhere in the Global South they would help the United States avoid direct involvement and compensate for growing Congressional disillusionment on foreign aid.

In the 1970s as U.S. economic assistance to the Global South declined, many U.S. client states looked beyond the United States for both the intellectual and material support for their development projects. South Vietnam was one of the earliest of many nations which sought to harness the supposed lessons and emulate the achievements of Taiwan and South Korea. The shift from endogenous growth models to export-led growth and foreign investment that occurred in South Vietnam would become one of the principal development strategies in the anti-Communist Global South, particularly in Southeast Asia and Latin America later in the 1970s. This transformation considerably undermined Third World solidarity in the call for a New International Economic Order which was based on import-substitution and other forms of economic sovereignty.

The legacies of U.S. and GVN development continue to resound in Vietnam. As Hanoi's leaders attempted to collectivize agriculture in the south in the late 1970s, they found IRRI rice varieties both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, miracle rice's more labour intensive requirements allowed the state to use these varieties to force wealthier farmers to share their fields with the land poor. However, the Mekong Delta proved the most difficult region to collectivize largely as a result of the socio-economic changes that occurred there during the American War. This was a major factor in Hanoi's turn to more market-oriented solutions to the country's agricultural crisis in the mid-1980s. Today farmers in the Mekong Delta grow dozens of IRRI rice varieties and Vietnam is now one of the third largest rice exporters in the world, though at significant cost to the nation's environment. The legacies of urban development are evident in Saigon too. In 1996 Vietnam opened its first export-processing zone in Saigon's Tan Thuan Dong, on the same site that the GVN- with Taiwanese assistance- began to construct an export-processing zone in 1974. Thu Thiem district, which Constantinos Doxiadis identified as a promising area for housing development in the mid-1960s, is now touted as Saigon's next "new urban area". The influence of other East Asian nations in the economic development of Vietnam also continues. In the late 1980s, as the Vietnamese Communist Party was searching for solutions to its economic crisis, its leaders looked to Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore as useful models of one party rule and state-led growth. Today these three countries are among the top five biggest sources of foreign direct investment in Vietnam.

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