

CIVIL AFFAIRS IN VIETNAM

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Description

The U.S. military experience in Vietnam is an excellent example of the successful integration of civilian and military efforts at counterinsurgency through nation building. Never before the war in Vietnam had the American military been forced to so drastically re-evaluate its fundamental war fighting strategy. Vietnam was essentially two separate wars: the fight against the National Liberation Forces (NLF) in the north was representative of a more conventional approach; while dealing with the smaller Viet Cong (VC) insurgency in the south required the development of modern counterinsurgency strategy.

While the VC insurgency had existed in South Vietnam since the late 1950s, the communist forces favored the use of conventional warfare from 1965 to 1968. Throughout the war, the Communists launched three major conventional operations: the 1968 Tet Offensive, the 1972 Easter Offensive and the final push on Saigon in 1975.¹ Following the loss of an estimated 50,000 of their forces in the Tet Offensive, the Communist Politburo in Hanoi adopted Resolution 9 acknowledging that conventional warfare would not be enough to force America out of Vietnam. The resolution called for a greater emphasis to be placed on guerrilla style tactics and to avoid engaging in large battles.²

In the early days of American involvement in the war, General Westmoreland, Commander of the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), prioritized stopping the NLF from gaining any more ground in South Vietnam and chose to rely on civilian agencies to win the allegiance of the South Vietnamese in order to negate the VC threat. However, prior to 1967, U.S. stability operations were entirely uncoordinated with different civilian agencies all running separate operations. While they were theoretically coordinating with the military through the U.S. embassy, this was not the reality. For the military, battlefield realities forced pacification strategies to take a backseat to war fighting operations.³

In the spring of 1966, an independent study of the pacification programs in Vietnam commissioned by President Johnson concluded that there was little indication of any coordination between civilian agencies. Johnson then turned to interim National Security Advisor, Robert Komer, to unify the civilian and military pacification efforts in Vietnam. Komer's first attempt to create a unified command structure came in November

¹ Dale Andrade and Lieutenant Colonel James Willbanks, "CORDS/Phoenix: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam for the Future," *Military Review* 86, no. 2 (2006): 77.

² *Ibid.*, 79.

³ *Ibid.*, 78.

of 1966 when, with the support of Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, he formed the Office of Civil Operations (OCO). President Johnson gave the OCO 90-120 days to improve pacification efforts or be absorbed by MACV. OCO was however, doomed from the outset because of the military's lack of coordination with it, which denied OCO direct access to the military's immense resources. Komer also found himself unable to hire an adequate number of civilian advisers to fill the ranks of the OCO in the limited time he was allotted.

In March of 1967, President Johnson officially disbanded the OCO and announced that Komer would be elevated to the rank of Ambassador and become the sole manager of pacification programs in Vietnam, a position Komer had long been advocating. On May 9, 1967, Johnson signed National Security Action Memorandum 362 assigning MACV responsibility for pacification in Vietnam. Ambassador Komer was then assigned to MACV to serve under General Westmoreland as his Deputy in charge of Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS).⁴ With direct access to the President and the full backing of the Secretary of Defense, Robert Komer overnight became one of the most powerful men in both the United States and Vietnam.

Key Actors

- **Blue:**
 - U.S. Military
 - Central Intelligence Agency
 - U.S. Agency for International Development
 - Office of Civil Operations
 - Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support Program
 - United States Information Services
 - U.S. State Department
 - U.S. Department of Agriculture

- **Green:**
 - South Vietnam
 - South Korea
 - Australia
 - New Zealand
 - Philippines
 - Thailand

- **Brown:**
 - USAID was by far the largest provider of aid to the Vietnamese people spending an average of \$222 million per year from 1955-1960⁵

⁴ Dale Andrade and Lieutenant Colonel James Willbanks, "CORDS/Phoenix: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam for the Future," 82.

⁵ Robert Stewart, "CORDS and the Vietnam Experience," in *Project on National Security Reform: Historical Case Studies*, ed James Jay Carafano and Richard Wertz, (2007): 3.

- **Red:**
 - Viet Cong (Southern Insurgency)
 - National Liberation Forces (North Vietnamese)

Objectives & End States

Small groups of U.S. Army civil affairs personnel had been deploying to South Vietnam since 1960 on temporary duty assignments to help Special Operations forces better train and communicate with the South Vietnamese military. However, the first formal regular duty deployment of CA units did not take place until the winter of 1965. The first CA unit to be sent to Vietnam was the 41st CA Company, which was comprised of 16 six-man refugee teams. These teams were highly specialized and each consisted of an O-3 team leader, a medical doctor, a construction officer, a counter-intelligence officer as well as several CA generalists.⁶ Each CA Company sent to Vietnam consisted of approximately 60 officers and 100 enlisted men. Around 80 percent of every company was comprised of CA generalists and were typically operating at 15-20 percent under strength.⁷

Civil Affairs Missions in Vietnam had three primary objectives:

- Eliminate the Viet Cong Insurgency in South Vietnam
- End the VC's ability to recruit in Southern Vietnam
- Recruit indigenous tribes to take up arms against the VC and the NLF

When CA personnel first started to be deployed to Vietnam they were originally tasked to provide support to the III Marine Amphibious Force and 1st Infantry Battalion. This early mission took on two important forms. The first of which was to provide relocation assistance to the hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese civilians displaced by the fighting. Their second mission was to provide civil support to Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG), which were established to win the loyalty of the aboriginal tribes living in Vietnam's Central Highlands.⁸ CA personnel were ordered to improve the lives of these indigenous peoples through the building of schools and the teaching of modern agricultural techniques in the hopes that the local tribes would take up arms against the NLF and the VC out of loyalty to the U.S. Military. This mission is discussed in greater detail further on in the paper.

While civilian assistance programs like CIDG were the primary mission of CA units for the first two years of their regular deployments to Vietnam, the overall concentration of CA missions became focused on CORDS following its creation in 1967. While CORDS was the primary military civil affairs mission in Vietnam following 1967,

⁶ Stanley Sandler, *Glad to See Them Come and Sorry to See Them Go: A History of U.S. Army Tactical Civil Affairs/Military Government, 1775-1991*, U.S. Army Special Operations Command History and Archives Division, 1993, 357.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 355.

it is important to note that not all of the military personnel working under CORDS were trained civil affairs soldiers. However, since all civil affairs programs in Vietnam were consolidated by Robert Komer under CORDS in 1967, the term should be considered synonymous with civil affairs for the remainder of the paper.

Overview of the CORDS Program

In order for CORDS to be effective, Robert Komer knew that he had to successfully integrate civilian and military personnel into a single functioning organization. Komer acknowledged in an early memo to President Johnson that the civilian agencies operating in Vietnam were nothing short of a “mess.” According to his assessment they were simply incapable of operating at the “high tempo that the war required.”⁹ Komer’s goal was to completely remove the VC’s influence from South Vietnam and to do this he would need to instill the civilian agencies with a military efficiency. In order to accomplish this objective, Komer was permitted for the first time ever to place military personnel under the direct command of civilians. Invariably, when civilians were assigned to key positions within the CORDS program they would always be assigned a military deputy and vice versa. This merger not only paired civilians and military personnel with comparable skills, but also helped dissolve much of the home agency loyalty that had prevented civilians from effectively working together under the OCO.¹⁰

CORDS was divided into four major staff elements:¹¹

Research and Analysis Division: Established quantitative and qualitative measurements to evaluate the effectiveness of pacification projects. Data from the Hamlet Evaluation System was used to develop metrics to determine the general level of security in each of South Vietnam’s hamlets.

Reports and Evaluation Division: Analyzed the accuracy of reports from the field by conducting independent studies of all aspects of the pacification program.

Plans and Programs Division: Worked with the South Vietnamese Ministry for Revolutionary Development to coordinate the pacification plans of CORDS and the South Vietnamese Government. Komer hoped to have the Vietnamese take on as much responsibility as possible.

Management Support Division: Assisted a variety of civil agencies by managing contracts, telecommunications, training, hiring and general administrative work.

⁹ Frank Jones, “Blowtorch: Robert Komer and the Making of Vietnam Pacification Policy,” *Parameters* 35, no. 3 (2005): 108.

¹⁰ Robert Stewart, “CORDS and the Vietnam Experience,” 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

In the course of the first six months, Komer nearly doubled the CORDS staff from 4,980 to 8,327 and by 1968 CORDS advisors were working in all 44 provinces of South Vietnam.¹² CORDS did not suffer from the same civilian personnel shortages that had contributed to the failure of the OCO as Komer was permitted to hire third country nationals and Vietnamese to make up for the deficit.¹³ The heads of the civilian agencies in Washington were reluctant to surrender control over their personnel and programs in Vietnam, however, Komer had the full support of the President and it was not long before he had earned himself the nickname “Blowtorch Bob.”¹⁴

Operational Strategies/Key Missions and Tasks

Komer chose to consolidate all of the former military and civilian pacification projects into six distinct CORDS programs. Every project undertaken had to be accompanied by a metric for measuring success in order to justify its continued existence. All projects that were deemed viable were then folded into the following six programs:¹⁵

1. **New Life Development:** Provided economic aid to villages.
2. **Chieu Hoi:** Program encouraged VC to defect.
3. **Revolutionary Development Cadre:** Encouraged good governance programs at the local level.
4. **Refugee Support:** Helped refugees relocate.
5. **PSYOP:** Provided support for the Chieu Hoi program as well as other anti VC campaigns.
6. **Public Safety:** Focused on increasing the size and capabilities of the National Police Force.

A central component of counterinsurgency strategy has always held that without security there can be no stability. In 1967, the Public Safety Division of CORDS started “Project Takeoff” to grow and train South Vietnam’s police force. By the end of 1968, CORDS had successfully increased the size of the police force from 66,000 to 79,080. The National Police were also expanded into 67 operational companies consisting of a total of 11,960 policemen. Beyond expanding the number of police officers and U.S. advisers, “Project Takeoff” also allocated funds for the building of an expansive prison system and the printing of national ID cards designed to help identify outside insurgents attempting to blend in amongst villagers.¹⁶ While these increased security measures did ultimately have a powerful effect on the insurgency, police corruption and abuse continued to be an intrinsic problem especially when it came to the Phoenix program.¹⁷

¹² Dale Andrade and Lieutenant Colonel James Willbanks, “CORDS/Phoenix,” 83.

¹³ Robert Stewart, “CORDS and the Vietnam Experience,” 7.

¹⁴ Ambassador Lodge once compared Robert Komer’s demands for progress as having the same effect as someone taking a blowtorch to the seat of your pants.

¹⁵ Robert Stewart, “CORDS and the Vietnam Experience,” 7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*,” 8.

¹⁷ Orrin Schwab, *A Clash of Cultures: Civil Military Relations during the Vietnam War*, (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2006), 111.

The Phoenix Program

The Phoenix program (Vietnamese: Pho Hoang) was a military intelligence program developed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and executed by the South Vietnamese National Police. The program focused on the destruction of the political infrastructure of the Viet Cong through a process known as “neutralization,” which involved infiltrating, killing or capturing members of the VC. While the South Vietnamese government was technically responsible for Phoenix, the Vietnamese police and militias who executed its mission were trained and controlled by CORDS advisers. However, by 1969 the CIA station chief in Vietnam, William Colby, had assumed administrative control of the program. William Colby would later go on to become Director of the CIA.¹⁸

The VC’s numbers in South Vietnam were believed to have reached between 70,000 and 100,000 by 1967. Virtually every village in the South was assigned a small cadre of communist insurgents to infiltrate the town and assure the loyalty of its residents through ever-present surveillance and the threat of retribution. In addition to fear and propaganda, the local VC also provided villagers with basic medical services and education in an attempt to win their hearts and minds. In order to combat the growing insurgent threat, the Phoenix program emphasized four major aspects in its attempt to dismantle the VC network¹⁹:

1. Create district intelligence gathering and interrogation centers.
2. Generate a series of dossiers on suspected VC.
3. Institute rules under which VC could be tried and imprisoned.
4. Have the local militias and police function as the main implementers of the Phoenix strategy so as to de-emphasize the U.S. military’s role and free up resources for more conventional military operations.²⁰

By 1970, there were 704 U.S. Phoenix advisers in Vietnam. American advisors hoped to maintain a constant presence in the Vietnamese countryside mirroring the insurgent’s strategy of embedding themselves amongst the local population.²¹ Statistics show that between 1968 and 1972, the Phoenix program was responsible for neutralizing 81,740 VC of whom 26,369 were killed. This high death toll seemed to indicate to the American public that much of Phoenix’s success could be attributed to death squads. While assassination and torture were certainly carried out, it is believed that the vast majority of these abuses occurred at the local level outside the purview of U.S personnel. Furthermore, of the 26,369 VC killed, 87% died as a result of conventional military

¹⁸ Dale Andrade and Lieutenant Colonel James Willbanks, “CORDS/Phoenix,” 90.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

²⁰ The police were never very effective. They accepted bribes from the VC to release prisoners and made numerous false arrests in order to meet ill conceived “neutralization quotas.”

²¹ Dale Andrade and Lieutenant Colonel James Willbanks, “CORDS/Phoenix,” 86.

operations and were never taken into custody.²² So while Phoenix may not have been as effective as the statistics originally indicated, it was also not as bloody as many believed it to be.

A great deal of effort was made by the designers of the Phoenix program to legitimize it in the eyes of the locals. CIA analysts believed that it was imperative that the indigenous population not view the American instituted trial system as either arbitrary or unjust. Convictions were thus reliant upon three separate sources of evidence in order to incarcerate a suspect for a maximum of six years. Freed prisoners were highly likely to rejoin their VC comrades, however, they were released anyway in an effort to preserve the legitimacy of the American legal system and win the trust of the indigenous population.²³

Even more successful than Phoenix was the Chieu Hoi or “Open Arms” program, which offered amnesty to defecting members of the VC. Similar to many of the jihadists the U.S. military finds itself battling today, many of the VC were not die hard believers in their cause, but were instead coerced into fighting through intimidation or personal gain. It was thus not a particularly daunting task to convince many of them to lay down their arms. Overall, the “Open Arms” program cost approximately \$150 per deserter, and was responsible for the defection of over 200,000 VC by 1972. After a short period, defectors were retrained in a craft or given a small piece of land to farm and resettled elsewhere in South Vietnam along with their families. Frequently, defectors would also volunteer to work with the South Vietnamese Armed Propaganda teams broadcasting messages to their former compatriots encouraging them to change sides.²⁴ A team consisting of less than 40 American advisers supervised the entire Amnesty program, which made it the most cost effective pacification program run during the Vietnam War.²⁵

The Need for Greater Cultural Understanding

The training and equipping of the indigenous population of Vietnam was a vital part of the CORDS strategy. Through their study of the Malay-Polynesian tribes of the Central Highlands of Vietnam, anthropologists from American University under contract to the U.S. military developed ways in which the indigenous populations of Vietnam could be convinced to mobilize against the VC and the NLF.²⁶ Armed with these strategies and a greater cultural understanding, trained members of the U.S. military were able to convince villagers to gather intelligence on insurgent groups and take on the responsibility of neutralizing them themselves. This allowed the U.S. military to focus on fighting the more conventional National Liberation Forces (NLF).

The U.S. Army’s 4th Infantry Division’s civic action program in Pleiku Province in 1967 is a quintessential example of how improved cultural understanding can turn a

²² *Ibid.*, 88.

²³ Dale Andrade and Lieutenant Colonel James Willbanks, “CORDS/Phoenix,” 88.

²⁴ Robert Stewart, “CORDS and the Vietnam Experience,” 9.

²⁵ Orrin Schwab, *A Clash of Cultures*, 113.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

neutral or hostile group into a military asset. In what came to be known as the “Good Neighbor Program” members of the 4th Infantry embedded themselves with the Montagnard people of Vietnam’s Central Highlands. Not being ethnic Vietnamese, the Montagnard did not originally take a side in the civil war. However, the commander of the 4th Infantry Division, Major General William Peers, hoped that by improving the Montagnards quality of life, he could convince them to not only provide his men with security but also deny the North Vietnamese “concealment and support.”²⁷

The Ethnic Vietnamese saw themselves as superior to the Montagnard people and thus were unwilling to do anything to aid in their development. MG Peers assigned 21 of his men to live with the Montagnard in 3 or 4 different hamlets, providing them with basic medical care and assisting in minor development projects. Using French as a common language, soldiers from the 4th Infantry Division worked with the Montagnard to establish a school to train teachers and taught local farmers modern agricultural practices.²⁸ By making the effort to communicate with them in a common language as well as protecting them from the abuses of the ethnic Vietnamese, these soldiers were able win the loyalty of the Montagnard who eventually agreed to take up arms following the Tet offensive. In the end, the 4th Infantry Division abandoned their development projects in Pleiku Province when they were ordered to a different area of operations. However, the mission showed the potential for the military to form long term partnerships with indigenous people that result in mutually beneficial security arrangements.²⁹

Quality of Life Improvements

Land Reform

Land reform was one of the first issues addressed by CORDS following the consolidation of development projects in South Vietnam. Intelligence analysts had long reported that much of the support for the VC came from disgruntled tenant farmers who saw the communist ideal of mutual ownership as superior to their complete lack of ownership under the government of South Vietnam. In order to cut off this pipeline of potential VC recruits, CORDS petitioned the government of South Vietnam to pass a law forbidding any single farmer from owning more than thirty-seven acres of land. The remaining land was then parceled out in three-acre shares to every family in South Vietnam. While the new land policy was nothing short of institutional socialism, it was effective at winning peasant support for the South Vietnamese government and put a major dent in VC recruiting efforts.³⁰

Economic Development

²⁷ Faris Kirkland, “Cultural Dynamics of Civic Action in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, 1967-1968,” *Armed Forces & Society* 26, no. 4 (2000): 550.

²⁸ Faris Kirkland, “Cultural Dynamics of Civic Action in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, 1967-1968,” 552.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 557

³⁰ Orrin Schwab, *A Clash of Cultures*, 118.

Even before the creation of CORDS the United States had already provided more than \$1.3 billion in economic assistance to South Vietnam for agricultural education, land reform administration, rural and urban water projects, telecommunications, highway and bridge construction, fisheries, power plants, public health and general education.³¹ Following the Tet Offensive in 1968, CORDS also provided humanitarian relief to over 750,000 refugees. More than 500,000 of these individuals were ultimately resettled and were supplied with over 33,000 tons of food and 66,000 tons of construction materials to help rebuild their lives. The South Vietnamese government was similarly encouraged to donate \$3.8 million directly to those most affected by the rise in violence.³² By 1972, the South Vietnamese economy was prospering but not booming as were many others in Asia, however, they had managed to attain a completely self-sufficient food supply.³³

Healthcare Reform

A study commissioned by Walter Reed Army Hospital in 1963 discussed the abysmal state of Vietnam's healthcare system. In addition to the thousands suffering from wounds and other war related afflictions, the people of Vietnam were exposed to terrible conditions on a daily basis. The study found that only one third of the country had access to potable water. Malnutrition was pervasive throughout Vietnam, which contributed to the alarmingly high infant mortality rate of one in four. Diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, dysentery and even small pox were found to be common afflictions amongst the population of Vietnam.³⁴ In 1953 there were only 10 dentists, 8 pharmacists and 130 physicians in all of Vietnam. However, after extensive American investment 225 new physicians, 64 new dentists and 250 new pharmacists graduated in 1972 from schools in South Vietnam. By the time the United States withdrew its forces in 1975, the South Vietnamese Ministry of Health employed over 650 full time doctors.³⁵

Building of Democratic Institutions

By 1970, the VC insurgency had largely been defeated making it possible to hold elections in over 10,000 hamlets and 2,000 villages throughout South Vietnam. Voter participation surpassed that of the United States with between 80% and 90% of the population casting their ballots. Records show that in 1971 over 7 million people registered to vote and chose from 1,295 candidates running for seats in the national legislature. However, while the Vietnamese turned out in waves for what would be a short-lived experiment with democracy, U.S. public opinion continued to view the government of South Vietnam as dictatorial and corrupt. By 1971, Americans had lost patience with all policies designed to turn the tide in Vietnam regardless of their actual effectiveness.³⁶

³¹ *Ibid.*, 117-118.

³² Robert Stewart, "CORDS and the Vietnam Experience," 13.

³³ Orrin Schwab, *A Clash of Cultures*, 118.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

³⁶ Robert Stewart, "CORDS and the Vietnam Experience," 16.

Order of Battle

U.S. troop strength in Vietnam had been slowly building over the course of 16 years of armed conflict hitting its peak in 1968 when a total of 553,000 American troops were stationed in country. General William Westmoreland served as commander of Military Assistance Command, Vietnam during the key years of the U.S. military buildup in Vietnam and is famously remembered for his assessment that the United States “won every battle until it lost the war.”

The only country that contributed more soldiers to fighting the communists in Vietnam than the United States was the government of South Vietnam, which supplied over 650,000 troops and suffered even higher casualty rates than the U.S. military. The government of South Korea sent an additional 300,000 soldiers, in addition to the nearly 50,000 from Australia and a combined 10,450 troops from New Zealand, Thailand and the Philippines. Some countries such as Australia and South Korea provided highly trained special operations forces capable of conducting offensive missions while others like the Philippines proved more adept at civil support missions.

The U.S. civil affairs mission in Vietnam was the most extensive civil action program ever undertaken by the U.S. military surpassing the enormous CA operations carried out in Italy during World War II.³⁷ CA personnel from both the active and reserve component took part in CA missions in all 44 provinces of South Vietnam. As noted, the majority of CA personnel engaged in CORDS related projects following the consolidation of civic actions programs in Vietnam in 1967.³⁸ However, in addition to members of the 41st CA Company who conducted refugee assistance missions, soldiers from the 29th CA Company carried out extensive construction projects building schools, latrines, brick factories, etc. throughout much of South Vietnam.³⁹ As is true today, the vast majority of civil affairs personnel operating abroad in the 1960s were Reservists.

Ends-Means Relationships/Final Thoughts

CORDS and the CA operations that came before it were ultimately successful counterinsurgency programs. Unfortunately, it was only one part of an overall failed strategy for winning the war in Vietnam. By the early 1970's, the VC insurgency in the South had been largely defeated as a result of the CORDS, Phoenix and “Open Arms” programs. These pacification efforts were so successful that by 1970, 93% of the population of South Vietnam reported living in “relatively secure” villages.⁴⁰ In the Kien Hoa province of the Mekong Delta, the birthplace of the National Liberation Front, the

³⁷ Stanley Sandler, *Glad to See Them Come and Sorry to See Them Go: A History of U.S. Army Tactical Civil Affairs/Military Government, 1775-1991*, 358.

³⁸ In addition to the 29th and 42nd CA Companies, the 51st, 52nd, 53rd, 54th, 97th and 2nd Civil Affairs Companies also played a significant CA role in Vietnam.

³⁹ Stanley Sandler, *Glad to See Them Come and Sorry to See Them Go: A History of U.S. Army Tactical Civil Affairs/Military Government, 1775-1991*, 358.

⁴⁰ Dale Andrade and Lieutenant Colonel James Willbanks, “CORDS/Phoenix,” 85.

number of suspected VC insurgents operating in the area went from an estimated 12,000 insurgents in 1967 to less than 2,000 in 1971.⁴¹

While the insurgency was mostly defeated by 1970, public opinion in the United States had already concluded that the war as a whole was lost and would no longer tolerate the continued loss of American lives. Despite massive improvements made to South Vietnam's military, police, and economic infrastructure, the South Vietnamese government was not up to the task of defeating the communists. The presence of the U.S. military proved to be the only thing keeping South Vietnam from being overrun. It is worth noting that the army that eventually toppled the South Vietnamese government in 1975 was a conventional force made up of North Vietnamese troops and not South Vietnamese insurgents. The U.S. pacification program had succeeded in ending the VC's ability to recruit and infiltrate. However, the North Vietnamese could always reconstitute forces killed or captured by the U.S. military by sending fresh troops down the Ho Chi Minh Trail.⁴²

CORDS would never have been as successful as it was had it not been for Robert Komer's relentless pursuit of efficiency. Komer had the full backing of both President Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, without which his plan of placing military personnel under the command of civilians and vice versa never would have survived. Komer's direct access to the President also quickly won him the respect of General Westmoreland and made him an effective liaison to the South Vietnamese government.⁴³ Komer's elevated position within the military command structure combined with his authority over all civilian pacification programs meant that he was finally able to merge civilian expertise with the unmatched logistical capabilities of the U.S. military.

The greatest success of the CORDS program was that it not only established effective interagency coordination, but also succeeded in convincing the military to incorporate development projects into its overall security strategy. After creating a unified command structure incorporating all U.S. personnel operating in Vietnam, General Westmoreland was able to delegate responsibility for countering the VC insurgency to Komer and his several thousand civilian and military advisors, while utilizing the bulk of his military forces to fight a more conventional war against the North Vietnamese.

Recommendations

1. A secure operating environment is a prerequisite for any successful pacification effort.
2. Unity of effort is vital for mission success. All civilian agencies and military advisors need to have a single manager.

⁴¹ Ross Coffey, "Revisiting CORDS: The Need for Unity of Effort to Secure Victory in Iraq," *Military Review* 86, no. 2 (2006): 94.

⁴² Dale Andrade and Lieutenant Colonel James Willbanks, "CORDS/Phoenix," 78.

⁴³ Frank Jones, "Blowtorch: Robert Komer," 112.

3. Insurgencies can only survive if they can maintain a presence within the local population. Thus intelligence is vital in order to identify those forces quickly for neutralization.
4. Need to improve the quality of life for the local population in order to win their loyalty. Groups should be given access to opportunities that the enemy cannot or will not provide.
5. Need to establish a clear legal framework for pacification programs. Detention programs that are viewed as arbitrary and unjust will be more useful to the enemy as propaganda than to the military as a form of deterrence.
6. The U.S. military will never be able to create government structures capable of winning popular support if the indigenous government is inherently defective and corrupt. Institution building is a time consuming effort that can often exhaust the patience of the American public, however, it remains a fundamental part of long-term success.

Order of Battle

Divisions	Capabilities	Forces Serving
United States Military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. Army • U.S. Marines • U.S. Air Force • U.S. Navy • 41st CA Company • 29th CA Company • 51st CA Company • 52nd CA Company • 53rd CA Company • 54th CA Company • 97th CA Company • 2nd CA Company 	553,000
Army of the Republic of Vietnam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 Army Divisions 	650,000
South Korean Military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combat Battalions 	300,000
Australian Military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 Infantry Battalions • 1 Field Artillery Regiment • 1 Armored Squadron • 1 Special Air Service Squadron • 1 Signals Squadron 	49,968
New Zealand, Thailand, Philippines Militaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philippine Medical Corps and civil affairs assistance group • 2 New Zealand Infantry Brigades • 1 New Zealand Artillery Battery • 1 New Zealand Special Air Service Squadron • Thai “Queens Cobra” Battalion 	10, 450