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*What Guns, Bombs, and Lives Have Not Purchased: The Frustration of Vietnam**

RAY COLE HILLAM**

The war in Vietnam is not war as we have known it in the past. We Americans like to have our wars simple, and we think they should be for one purpose—victory. But the war in Vietnam defies this description.

There are many different views of the war. Some claim it is a civil war, in which the United States and other powers are meddling. Others argue that it is a war of aggression from the North and, upon request, the United States is supporting the object of that aggression, the Saigon government. Still others see it as an expanding China which the United States and its allies are obligated to resist. There is some merit in all three of these claims. For instance, not every Viet Cong is a Communist; many are nationalists who have joined for reasons other than communism. This has contributed to the notion that the war in South Vietnam is an internal or civil war. However, the Viet Cong, if successful, will create a Communist state either separate from or unified with North Vietnam. Likewise, Hanoi's involvement in South Vietnam, including the recent infiltration of conventional forces, has become obvious to most observers. In fact, now that the war has taken on certain conventional qualities, Hanoi has openly admitted its involvement. Nor can it be doubted that there are certain international complications involving Moscow, Peking, and Washington, though they are not in direct conflict. Thus, the war in Vietnam has its local and international dimensions. It is a war fought at many levels.

*This article is based on the observations of Professor Hillam while he was in Vietnam as a Fulbright-Hays Professor from September 1966 to July 1967. It is a discussion of the nature of the war, as he saw it, and the kind of challenge which confronts the newly elected South Vietnamese government and its allies.

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BYU Studies Quarterly, Vol. 8, Iss. 1 [1968], Art. 6

It is also a war with four quite distinct parts. Some stress the conventional qualities of the war and the need to first resist overt aggression. The Department of Defense statement that "the covert nature of the aggression in Vietnam, which characterized the earlier years of the struggle, has now all but disappeared," implies that the war is now conventional. Others emphasize its political qualities: the need to shore up the Saigon government and broaden its base of support and to make a decision about negotiating with Hanoi, with or without the participation of the National Liberation Front. Still others stress the importance of achieving economic stability and prosperity in order to combat inflation and famine—commonly referred to as "the other war." More significant, say some, is the war against clandestine aggression—the organizational war against the enemy infrastructure.

The Objectives and Strategy of the Enemy

The objectives of the enemy in Vietnam give greater understanding to the nature of this different kind of multi-faceted war and reveal that it has a dimension in depth that traditional wars, whatever their scale, lack. The enemy intends not only to seize power or to exchange one government system for another, but to restructure the entire South Vietnamese society, including the destruction of the prevailing myths that bind this society together. In this sense, the objective is total. To achieve this objective, the enemy has resortd to a war of persuasion, manipulation, and compulsion, as well as violence. Thus, the war takes on political, economic, social and psychological, as well as military significance.

The strategy of the enemy in South Vietnam is based partly on a mixture of aphorisms accumulated over the years from the writings of Chinese and Vietnamese revolutionaries and partly on pragmatic assumptions of how best to come to power in South Vietnam. Recently captured enemy diaries and notebooks clearly indicate the emphasis the enemy places on the writings of Mao Tse-tung and Vo Nguyen Giap, the North Vietnamese theoretician. The continual reference to the military maxims and political aphorisms of these two prominent revolutionaries suggests the importance the enemy places on the ideology of guerrilla communism as a directing and motivating factor.

Hillam: What Guns, Bombs, and Lives Have Not Purchased: The Frustration

In discussing the strategy of the enemy, it is important to refer to the earlier strategies of Mao and Giap. Mao, in his 1938 lectures, *On Protracted War,* speaks of a three-phased protracted strategy: the defensive, stalemate, and offensive phases. Giap, while he generally accepts Mao's three-phased strategy, in his book entitled *Peoples War, Peoples Army,* adds two preliminary phases which provide first for the psychological milieu for the insurgency, and second for the organizational base for launching the protracted war. The next three phases, which tend to be operational rather than preparatory, are similar to Mao's description of the three-phased protracted war.

In an effort to simplify the description of the enemy's strategy, both as it is based on the Mao-Giap formula and the present environment, perhaps it is best to speak in terms of four phases: the organizational, the nonviolent, the violent, and the legitimization phases.

In the organizational phase, the professional revolutionary and functional cadre develop a network of clandestine organizations and lay the foundation for a comprehensive infrastructure. It is also during this incipient phase that a strategy is developed for launching organized resistance against the constituted authorities.

In the next phase, which is the initial operational phase and is best characterized by the emphasis placed on nonviolent activities, the cadre is actively engaged in political agitation and indoctrination. He organizes and directs study groups, fronts, and other overt organizations designed to enlist popular support for his clandestine movement. This organizational base, both overt and covert, continues to broaden during this phase and subsequent phases of the protracted strategy.

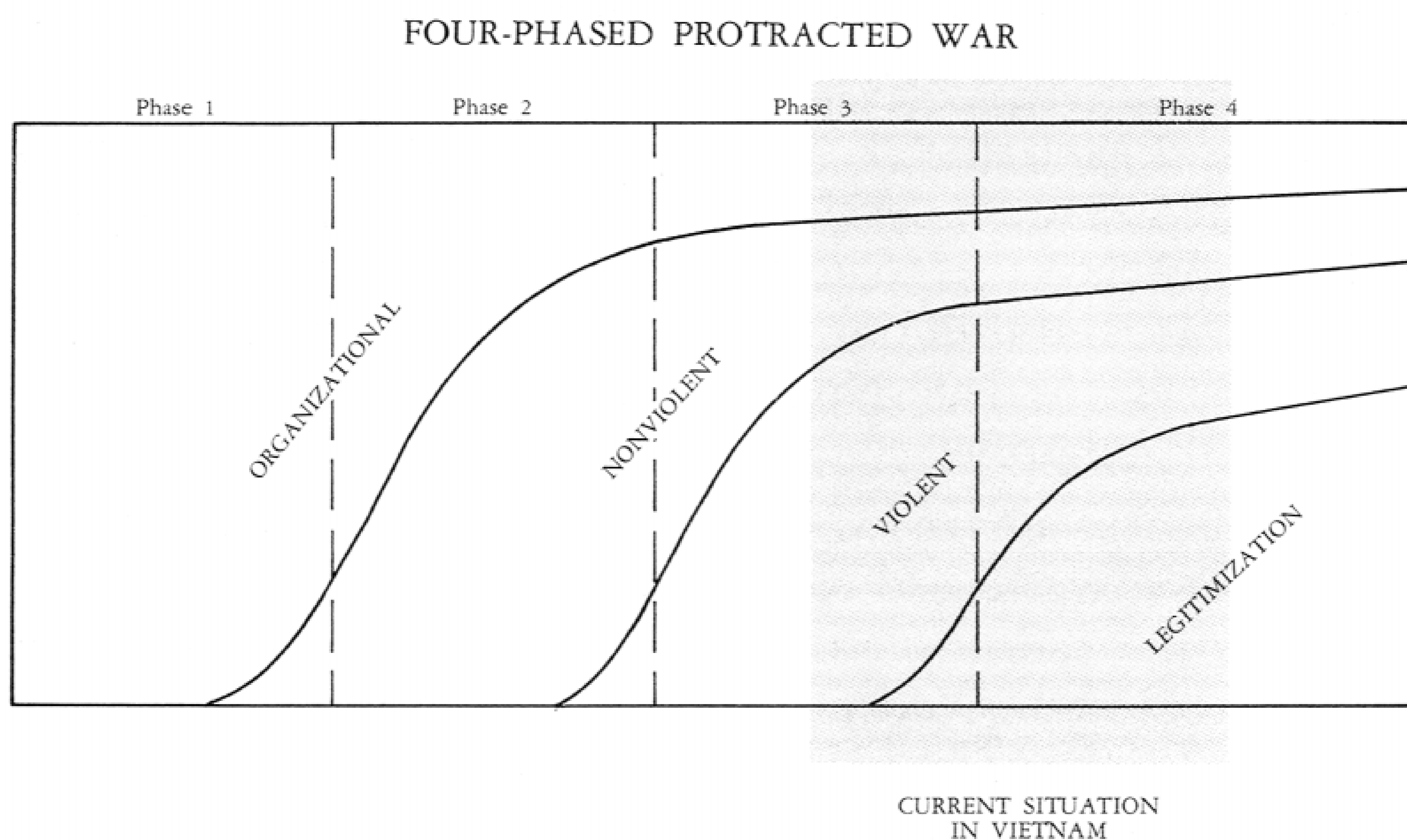
The third phase is characterized by violence. There are assassinations, kidnappings, and guerrilla attacks on outposts, police patrols, or convoys. Initially, the enemy employs defensive tactics of hit, run, and hide. The government is in hot pursuit but eventually becomes overextended, yet tries to hold on. Throughout this phase, the enemy is building and consolidating his position. Continued emphasis is placed on clandestine activity and organizational work. Political agitation and indoctrination, as well as acts of terror, continue.

BYU Studies Quarterly, Vol. 8, Iss. 1 [1968], Art. 6

The final phase is one primarily of force rather than issues. The guerrilla units become mobile conventional military units which initiate frontal assaults and attack fortified positions. The war becomes conventional and much of the ideological emphasis is replaced by the long-hoped-for military victory. It is during this phase that the movement hopes to achieve legitimacy and general acceptance, locally and abroad.

In the enemy's protracted strategy, the transition from one phase to the other is not precise and can be reversed, and one phase is not necessarily a prerequisite for another. The chart below illustrates the fluid nature of the enemy's phased strategy of protracted war. Note that each stage, while evolving into an advanced stage, continues its existence up to the end of the conflict.

FOUR-PHASED PROTRACTED WAR



The war in Vietnam is presently in the third and fourth phases. In fact, there are expressions of all four phases in different areas of South Vietnam. In the Mekong Delta, except for An Giang Province, the enemy is in phase three. In the northern provinces of South Vietnam, he is in phase four. In An Giang and Tuyen Duc provinces, he has never extended much beyond the second phase. In late 1964, the enemy was passing into the fourth phase, but because of the direct and escalated commitment of United States troops, the enemy has had to revert back to earlier phases in some areas.

Hillam: What Guns, Bombs, and Lives Have Not Purchased: The Frustration

The Present Situation

Certain military, economic, and political gains have been made since the spring of 1965. There have been military successes against Viet Cong battalion-size forces in such areas as the "iron triangle," and against North Vietnamese units in the Central Highlands. If current estimates are to be accepted, the enemy is gradually declining in strength. These estimates indicate that while he has been recently losing around 15,000 men per month, infiltration from the North has declined to about 7,000 per month and recruitment in the South has declined to approximately 5,000 per month. Thus, the allied military involvement has put substantial pressure on the enemy and has made it more difficult for him to pursue his strategy.

There is some evidence of an improved economic situation. The runaway inflation of a year ago has been curbed and some of the developmental programs have achieved a measure of success in such areas as education, public works, and agriculture. These, hopefully, will improve the productivity and the living standard of the average Vietnamese.

There is also some evidence of political progress. It is estimated that the number of people under government control has increased by six percent during the past year. Nearly 450 hamlets were allegedly brought under the control of the Saigon government in 1966, and the current pacification program (Revolutionary Development) seeks to extend government control over an additional 1,100 hamlets, containing a population of 1.3 million during 1967. Just a year ago, the Thieu-Ky regime was barely able to survive Buddhist riots; yet since that time a constituent assembly has drafted a constitution which was promulgated recently, and free elections have been held, despite extreme Viet Cong terror and opposition.

However, there are also factors which counterbalance these gains. Although some estimates indicate that the enemy may now be beginning to decline in manpower, other estimates show that over the past two years he has been able to increase by nearly 65,000 men. Nearly 220,000 of the enemy have been killed, yet the allies are confronted with the largest enemy force they have ever faced—297,000 men. Furthermore, the enemy has progressed from fighting with captured rifles and limited supplies, to using automatic weapons, heavy mortars, artillery,

BYU Studies Quarterly, Vol. 8, Iss. 1 [1968], Art. 6

and rockets, which have been brought into the South. All these improvements in the enemy position have been made despite intensified pacification efforts and extensive military pressure. More than a million troops have been able to secure only a fraction of a country slightly larger than Utah.

The cost of the war has been high indeed. Currently, the United States is pouring more than two billion dollars a month into the war effort and is losing nearly twice the number of men per week compared with a year ago; the number of U.S. dead now exceeds 13,000. The costs to South Vietnam have also been staggering. In addition to the destruction from the war, the South Vietnamese armed forces have lost more than 50,000 men since 1961. The United States has committed more than half a million men to Vietnam, and the South Vietnamese government expects to increase its 650,000-man army by an additional 100,000. Yet, the enemy has been able to effectively respond to past increases and presumably is capable of meeting new ones.

Despite signs of economic and political progress in South Vietnam, this progress could be abruptly reversed. Without United States support, almost certainly the newly elected government would rapidly collapse.

In view of these conditions, the present situation is one of stalemate. "Stalemate" is an unacceptable term among officials in Washington and the higher echelons in Vietnam, but it is commonly used by Americans serving in Vietnam to describe the current situation.

Why is it that the enemy can successfully stalemate the superior military power of the allies? What is it that would lead a senior American general to say, "I have destroyed the X Division three times. I have chased main force units all over the country and the impact was zilch."

The Infrastructure

The strength of the enemy position in South Vietnam lies in his organization—the infrastructure. The term infrastructure is appropriate since it implies an arrangement of constituent parts beneath the surface. Indeed, the infrastructure is a sophisticated network of parallel, horizontal, and vertical intermediate structures designed to enmesh populations and retain commitments. It is this complex organization which has been

Hillam: What Guns, Bombs, and Lives Have Not Purchased: The Frustration

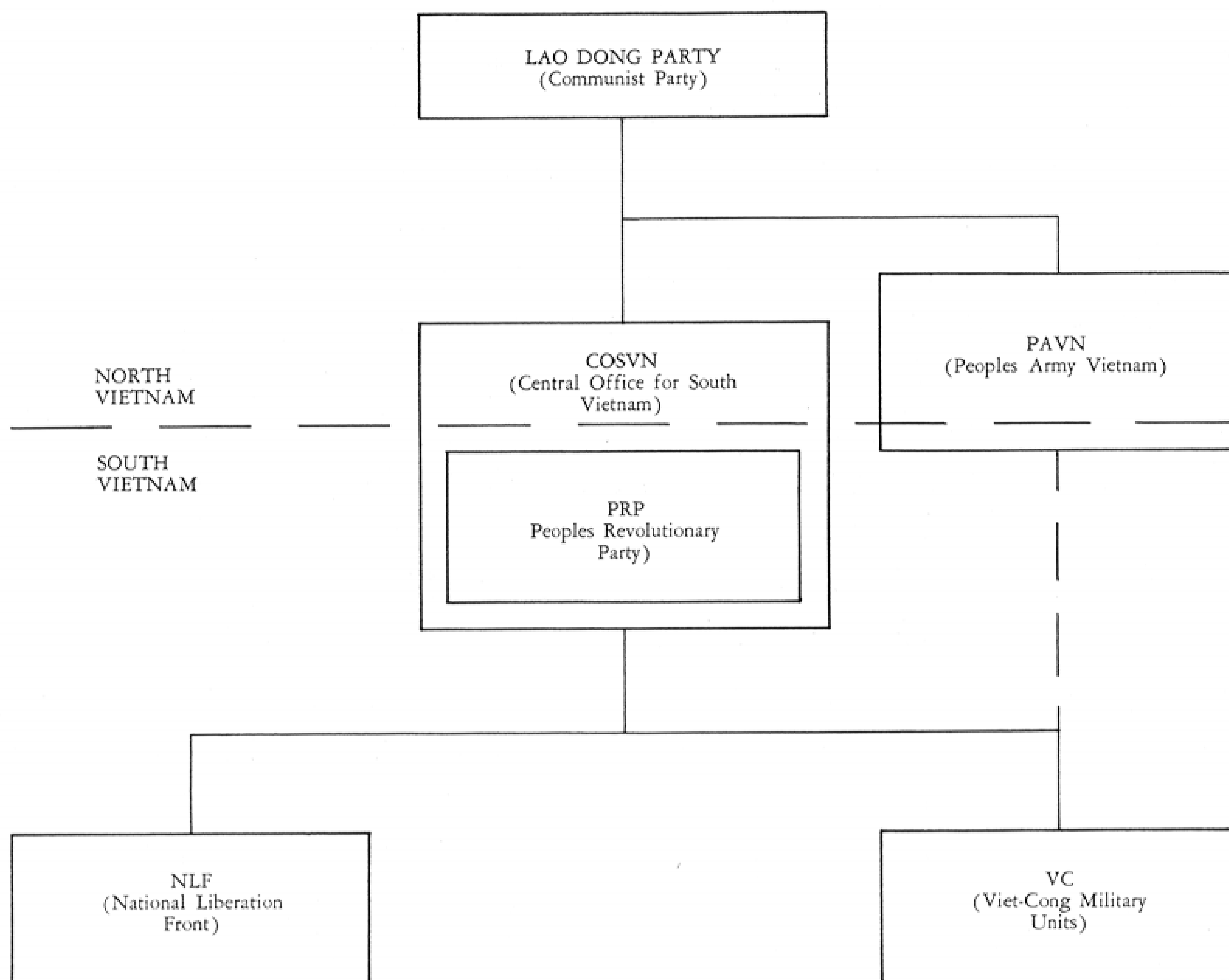
used to mobilize and manipulate the rural population and to prevent the Saigon government from governing.

The question may be properly raised as to how the infrastructure was able to gain this stronghold. The roots are in its predecessor, the Viet Minh movement, through which Ho Chi Minh obtained power in the North. The Viet Minh was a nationalistic movement of Vietnamese against the French colonialists. Ho, through political and organizational genius, was able to seize control of the movement so that it became a Communist front organization. Not long after the Geneva agreements of 1954, the enemy began to strengthen and extend the clandestine apparatus left in the South by Ho Chi Minh.

Conditions in South Vietnam were conducive for waging a clandestine war against the Ngo Dinh Diem regime. An administrative vacuum existed throughout much of South Vietnam partly because Diem was never able to extend effective control over the entire nation and partly because officials in those areas under nominal control of the Diem government preferred to govern in the traditional mandarin manner—"let the peasants come to you, do not go to them."

The vacuum was filled by the remnants of the Viet Minh infrastructure who restructured the existing apparatus, recruited and trained additional cadre, and broadened their popular base. Thus, the infrastructure began to evolve, not wholly as an indigenous clandestine revolutionary movement, but one which was partially transplanted. The chart indicates the line organization of the infrastructure. Direction of the infrastructure is provided by the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) with headquarters in North Vietnam. This is a hard-core Communist organization with lines running into South Vietnam, particularly to the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) which is composed of Communist cadre, most of whom are South Vietnamese, and which is the intermediary between the leadership in the North and the movement in the South. The PRP provides the leadership for the National Liberation Front (NLF) which, like its predecessor, the Viet Minh, is a Communist front organization. The purpose of the NLF is to serve as a fathering point for all opposition to the Saigon government, and it includes both Communists and non-Communists. The Viet Cong armed units are the military forces subordinate to the PRP.

CHAIN OF COMMAND OF INFRASTRUCTURE
(Simplified)



The infrastructure has three levels. At the top are the dedicated North and South Vietnamese Communists who provide direction for the movement. In the middle are the cadre who are perhaps more motivated by career and professional incentive than revolutionary fervor. Whatever their motivation, they are the backbone of the movement and provide the necessary link between the leadership and the masses. The lower level consists of the peasants who belong to mass organizations; who provide men, provisions, and cover for the military effort; and who are loyal to whichever government is currently in control. The rank and file are often motivated to support the movement through grievances against the government, promises of a better future, or intimidation and terror.

Despite the organizational genius of the enemy, there are some problems within the infrastructure. First, the system favors the poor peasant over the middle-class educated person and offers him special advantages; yet the latter has a tendency to rise to positions of leadership. Often, this results in the unique situation of the middle-class leader resenting the peasant

because of his special advantages and the peasant resenting the leader because of his higher position. Against the background of class struggle, which the ideology of the enemy encourages, this conflict is sharpened. Second, the rank and file often object to an imposed system of government, whether it be Communist or non-Communist. Earlier, the infrastructure had offered them benevolent government, lower taxes, and reform; but recent military demand has made this impractical, and the rank and file often become disgruntled at unfulfilled promises and a never-ending war. The leaders and cadre of the infrastructure have frequently resorted to terror to achieve their goals, and this has further weakened their appeal. Third, like the Saigon government, the security forces and military units within the infrastructure are not always able to provide adequate security. There is an increased tendency for the rank and file to blame the infrastructure for not protecting them when their village or hamlet is subjected to increasing pressure from Saigon.

The infrastructure has a great advantage over the government since its organization, as designed, thoroughly penetrates every level of society and has been in operation for a number of years; nevertheless, sometimes it is difficult to compete with efficient government administration. These weaknesses contribute to the feasibility of limiting the power of the infrastructure.

Defeating the Infrastructure

How can the infrastructure be rendered ineffective? The most meaningful strategy is to dry up its resources. This requires more effectively restricting the infiltration of supplies and manpower from North Vietnam and more important, reducing the local sources of supplies, manpower, and popular support.

The current strategy of interdiction is clearly insufficient. In recent months, infiltration has been so great that the enemy has been able to escalate its military effort, particularly in I Corps (the northern provinces of South Vietnam) from the third to the fourth phase. Bombing the access routes from North Vietnam has been of limited value. Enemy infiltration has been made more difficult by military operations into the demilitarized zone and along the Laotian and Cambodian bor-

BYU Studies Quarterly, Vol. 8, Iss. 1 [1968], Art. 6

der, but it has not been reduced. In fact, it has increased because of the requirements of the enemy in the South.

The apparent futility of the present strategy of interdiction is reflected in the recent statement of the South Vietnamese Defense Minister, General Cao Van Vien, who said that bombing in North Vietnam would not in itself stop infiltration. The problems, he said, are the infiltration routes and base areas the enemy has in Laos and Cambodia and that so long as these problems cannot be resolved, infiltration will not cease. He believes the war will last another twenty to thirty years unless infiltration of men and supplies through Laos is halted.

Since present military measures have not effectively curbed the enemy's infiltration into the South, some argue negotiations with Hanoi is the only other alternative. Negotiations, while they might be desirable, are no guarantee against infiltration. The attitude of Hanoi is to continue the effort in the South, and the Central Office for South Vietnam has been instructed not to deviate from the orginal goals, even in the event of negotiations with the Americans.

The strategy of interdiction has been of limited value. Negotiations are not only presently unlikely, but it is doubtful whether infiltration would stop even if the belligerents found themselves at the conference table. Some alternative methods must be considered. Perhaps the construction of a fortified belt or barrier south of the demilitarized zone should be more seriously considered. This might later be followed by building a system of strategically situated barriers down the Laotian and Cambodian borders or erecting a fortified barrier across Laos to the Mekong River. These barriers, if properly maintained and enforced, could more successfully restrict the huge flow of supplies and manpower and possibly dry up the infrastructure's external source of support.[1]

More significant than infiltration from the North is the availability of support to the enemy in the South. The locally recruited hamlet and village cadre who provide the necessary link between the hard-core leadership and the masses are the backbone of the enemy infrastructure. It is through these

[1]After this article was in galley proof, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara announced that the strategy called for here would be implemented; however, the extent and strength of the barrier system he has in mind is not known at this time.

Hillam: What Guns, Bombs, and Lives Have Not Purchased: The Frustration

middle-range cadre, who in many cases have their own political base, that the enemy is able to secure recruits and supplies to carry on the war.

How can the recruitment of young men in the hamlets and the collection of food and other supplies be curbed if not eliminated? How can the enemy's resources within South Vietnam be dried up? The answer is pacification. There have been pacification efforts in the past, but they have failed.

The first pacification attempts in Vietnam were made by the French some fifteen years ago. But the French were up against impossible odds. Not only was the population firmly on the side of the enemy, but the armed forces of the enemy outnumbered the French. The first attempt at pacification under Ngo Dinh Diem was started in 1957. Known as Operation Sunrise, the effort called for the destruction of the enemy's administrative structure and the inclusion of the countryside under government control. The villages marked for pacification were mismanaged and ill-defended. Many government officials and pacification workers were assassinated or kidnapped, and the program eventually terminated, leaving the areas more firmly in the hands of the enemy.

Then came the ill-fated Strategic Hamlet program, patterned after the British pacification strategy in post-war Malaya. This program was designed to achieve population and resource control in selected areas by confining the rural population to fortified hamlets. The image of the government was to be built up in these fortified hamlets by intensive propaganda and improved social services. While the concept had merit, impossible goals were set for the program. By the end of one year, it was claimed that approximately half of the estimated 12,537 hamlets, with a population of 8.2 million people, had been pacified through the program. During the next year, 1963, most of the remaining half were to have been pacified. However, the program floundered because it was rushed, overextended, and haphazardly carried out. Furthermore, the Diem government was overthrown by the end of the year.

By January 1964, the mistakes of the past were reviewed and the revised Strategic Hamlet program became known as the New Life Hamlet program in which most of the emphasis was placed on rural construction with local militia providing

BYU Studies Quarterly, Vol. 8, Iss. 1 [1968], Art. 6

security. Since the February 1966 Honolulu Conference, the New Hamlet program has become part of a more comprehensive concept called Revolutionary Development (RD).

The concept of RD is defined as an integrated military and civil process to restore, consolidate, and expand government control so that "nation-building" can succeed. It consists of coordinated military and civil actions to free the people from enemy control; restore public security; initiate political, social, and economic development; extend effective government authority; and win the support of the people, even many within the enemy's infrastructure. It is designed to be a comprehensive, balanced, and integrated approach to provide security and to transform South Vietnam into a free, viable, and enduring society. It is a recognition of the fact that neither the military war nor the "other war" by itself is adequate. In concept, it ties together all sides of the struggle: military, political, economic, and social. As a result, the marginal man (middle cadre) of the infrastructure becomes the most significant target.

In theory, RD is a sound concept. In practice, it has not been moving as well as it might. According to one source, only 168 of 12,537 rural hamlets are under total government control and fewer than 2,000 are under partial control. The enemy, on the other hand, controls nearly 4,000 hamlets.

The heart of the problem is providing security. Many hamlets have been under enemy control as long as twenty years. Clearing the area of main-force enemy units, rooting out the infrastructure, and transforming the political loyalties of the people cannot be achieved overnight. Past crash programs have not been realistic. For instance, it was recently announced that the Khan Van hamlet, just miles from Saigon, had been "pacified" again—for the *fifth* time.

Unfortunately, the pacification programs have always been under constant pressure from Saigon and Washington to show results. This pressure often corrupts the reporting process, resulting in overplayed success stories and false optimism.

The program, from the beginning, has been plagued by the lack of expertise in leadership and the recruitment of incompetent RD workers. Many of the RD teams which are sent into the hamlets to live with the people for six months or

Hillam: What Guns, Bombs, and Lives Have Not Purchased: The Frustration

longer for purposes of pacification have been more of a drain on the economy and manpower pool than an asset to pacification. Some have deserted in mass. Others, however, have been effective where adequate security has been maintained.

The slow and disappointing beginning of the RD program does not mean there is a need for a new program. Rather, the present RD program needs to be perfected, specifically, by being more adaptable to the requirements of each hamlet, and to the nation as a whole. Moreover, since RD is basic to national policy, both the Vietnamese effort and that of their American advisers must be integrated. RD should be a rallying point for every military and civil effort in South Vietnam. Unfortunately, this is not the present situation as the maze of separate and independent programs which give only lip service to RD still continues.

Conclusions

The war in Vietnam is frustrating to most Americans who have served there because of its complexity, protraction, and current stalemate. Frustration also stems from the failure of not knowing what to do next. Withdrawal is virtually impossible, even if desirable. Continued military escalation will have little impact on the infrastructure unless it leads to the kind of massive destruction most Americans consider unthinkable.

The newly elected government and its allies must focus more on the challenge of drying up the enemy infrastructure. The current military stalemate is perhaps meaningful if the positive trends toward constitutional government and economic progress can continue; however, these trends are not assured unless the power of the infrastructure is substantially reduced. Unfortunately, guns, bombs, and lives have purchased little—the infrastructure remains virtually unscathed.

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