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**AVIATION FOREIGN INTERNAL DEFENSE (AFID)  
IN VIETNAM**

by

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## **Preface**

This idea for this paper began in my ACSC seminar with Dr. Dean. He convinced me that the type of wars the US military is most often involved in have been, and will continue to be, small wars – particularly counterinsurgencies. He emphasized foreign internal defense (FID) as an essential way to help foreign governments fight insurgencies. My goal for this research was to find a historical example of USAF FID, and draw lessons for what are sure to be numerous future USAF FID missions. My efforts to learn from how the USAF executed the FID (“advise and assist”) mission in Vietnam have been personally and professionally enlightening.

Two things have become clear to me from my research. First, that every action undertaken in the name of FID must focus on enabling the host nation government to become a viable institution in the support of its people. Second, the US military will find conducting FID with this purpose will be, at times, uncomfortably outside traditional military methods. Civic action, a subject I only just discovered in this research, is a case in point. It is my hope that I have articulated my new understanding well enough that future USAF FID commanders who may read this work will consider a ‘whole new level’ of FID.

Besides Dr. Dean, several others were helpful in completing this paper. Colonel Hale was outstanding as an advisor. I am surprised at how well she was able to keep me motivated and free from unproductive research directions. The Air Force Historical Research Agency was an invaluable source – the historical records shaped my opinions of USAF involvement. Finally, I could not have accomplished this research without the help of my wife Miriam. She spent many hours reading my materials and editing my drafts, and then countless more as my sounding board – I would not have been able to figure out what I really thought without her counsel.

## **Abstract**

Foreign Internal Defense (FID) “refers to the US activities that support a host nation (HN) internal defense and development (IDAD) strategy designed to protect against subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency, consistent with US National Security objectives and policies.”<sup>1</sup> US FID programs are designed to achieve these goals “by emphasizing the building of viable institutions that respond to the needs of society.”<sup>2</sup> Aviation FID (AFID) is defined herein as any FID activity conducted by USAF personnel, to include humanitarian or civic action efforts.

Given the extent of “subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency” in the world today, it is very likely that the USAF will be engaged in AFID activities in many locations during the coming years. Hard-won lessons from previous AFID mission should be sought out and applied to these anticipated future AFID activities. Vietnam provides such a historical instance of AFID – the US military’s “advise and assist” mission in South Vietnam would be termed FID in today’s vernacular.

The methodology used in researching this paper was to examine the actions the USAF took in Vietnam that could be characterized as “advise and assist”, and then looking for things that went right or wrong. Limited research time necessitated starting from an inherently biased position in making these examinations – the central sources consulted were mainly ‘secondary’ in nature and the oral histories were investigated with an admitted intent to add evidence to the conclusions suggested in the secondary sources.

Three areas of effort illustrate USAF AFID activities in Vietnam. This paper will seek lessons in the examination of USAF provision of training, equipment, and civic action assistance. Of these three activities in Vietnam, the first two, training the VNAF to conduct operations more

effectively and providing technology to the VNAF, corresponded to traditional USAF roles. The third area of activity, USAF provision of civic or humanitarian aid, was a necessary part of the joint pacification effort conducted in Vietnam after 1967 – civic action did not correspond to any contemporary USAF mission area.

A single overarching lesson learned theme is evident from USAF assistance efforts in Vietnam: to be effective in AFID, the USAF must avoid providing assistance in the way the service is most comfortable, but rather must tailor the assistance and the manner of delivery to the needs of the assisted nation. In other words, AFID must be conducted with a focus on HN IDAD. While this finding may appear obvious and therefore uninteresting, it will be seen that, in practice, it will require deliberate action and non-traditional thinking for the USAF to adhere to this principle.

Civic action is a case in point for this required non-traditional thinking. The USAF must find time to conduct civic action even though AFID forces are small and therefore do not have personnel “to spare”, and even though other US forces (such as military construction units) are better equipped to provide services. The purpose of civic action is to develop a servant/soldier military tradition and thus to increase the likelihood of long-term HN government legitimacy. The limited USAF AFID forces must therefore find the time to do civic action even though it is not their traditional role – they cannot teach the HN that public service is beneath “elite” military forces.

A similar argument could be made for each recommendation to tailor AFID efforts. In each case, the core of the argument would be that the USAF must get past its accepted or traditional roles and methods and provide assistance with an eye to what the HN really needs.

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<sup>1</sup> JP3-07.1, *Joint Tactics*, I-1.

<sup>2</sup> JP3-07.1, *Joint Tactics*, I-1.

## **Summary**

During the Vietnam conflict, although the United States Air Force (USAF) is perhaps most remembered for its bombing campaigns over North Vietnam, the USAF also performed a substantial amount of Aviation Foreign Internal Defense (AFID). In fact, US military involvement in the Vietnam conflict began with the “advise and assist” mission – an activity that would be known as FID in today’s vernacular – and, though USAF actions eventually became direct and intense, the advise and assist activities continued for the duration of the conflict. The AFID efforts in Vietnam provide lessons for what types of activities should be included in AFID and what the focus of those efforts should be as they are executed. Perhaps the greatest lesson is found in observing that the AFID efforts that had the most lasting effect on the broader nation-building objectives in Vietnam were not only did not correspond to USAF mission areas of the day, they are also outside today’s doctrinal conception of AFID.

This paper will argue that AFID will be an increasingly important mission area for the USAF and that the insights available from the execution of AFID in Vietnam can inform those future operations, both in scope and conduct. Perhaps the most important insight is that assistance efforts must be carefully tailored to meet the needs of the host nation, and that this tailoring may necessitate activities that are beyond the scope of traditional mission areas.

## **Background**

The National Security Strategy of the United States asserts that “[t]he best way to provide enduring security for the American people” is to “foster a world of well-governed states that can meet the needs of their citizens...”<sup>3</sup> This assertion is true because poorly-governed states provide potential recruiting grounds and safe havens for terrorist groups that target the United



States. The effort to eliminate the terrorism that threatens US security must include an effort to strengthen such poorly-governed nations. As Secretary of State Colin Powell said, “[t]he war on terrorism will be fought with increased support for democracy programs, judicial reform, conflict resolution, poverty alleviation, economic reform, and health and education. All of these together deny the reason for terrorist to exist or to find safe haven within borders.”<sup>4</sup> The US armed forces have an ongoing role to play in our nation’s strategy of combating terrorism by strengthening good governance throughout the world.

Foreign Internal Defense (FID) “refers to the US activities that support a host nation (HN) internal defense and development (IDAD) strategy designed to protect against subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency, consistent with US National Security objectives and policies.”<sup>5</sup> US FID programs are designed to achieve these goals “by emphasizing the building of viable institutions that respond to the needs of society.”<sup>6</sup> This expression of the objectives of FID logically leads to the use of US military forces to enable friendly but weaker nations to provide for the internal security of their countries against extremist or insurgent threats.<sup>7</sup> The equipping and training of legitimate foreign military forces to fight insurgent or lawless elements in their country, for example, is a FID activity. However, it is important to note that FID extends far beyond providing *military* capabilities to a foreign country. The Joint definition of FID also encompasses the construction of infrastructure such as roads, hospitals, or water wells, and the training of local officials in good governance principles.

Given the extent of the FID objectives in Joint doctrine, the logical definition of Aviation FID (AFID) is the subset of FID activities that deal with airpower or use airpower resources (including personnel) to execute FID efforts. Such a definition of AFID would clearly include training an indigenous air force to use airpower in protecting their population from insurgent or

criminal aggression – an AFID mission currently being executed by the USAF in Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, just as Joint FID doctrine extends beyond traditional military functions, AFID could include helping indigenous people to build a school or training local medical personnel. It must be acknowledged here that current USAF doctrine calls FID “separate but complimentary” with humanitarian or civic action efforts.<sup>9</sup> However, for the purposes of this paper, AFID is defined as any FID activity conducted by USAF personnel, to include humanitarian or civic action efforts. In defining AFID in this way, it must be emphasized that AFID is only a portion of a joint military FID effort which is in turn only a portion of a US national effort to support a host nation’s IDAD effort. AFID is distinguished here not because it can stand alone, but because this paper will focus particularly on the contributions the USAF can make to this broad effort.

Understanding that the fight against terrorism will be greatly aided by strengthening partner nations, it stands to reason that the US must carefully and effectively develop our capability to provide assistance through Foreign Internal Defense (FID) to these nations. An essential part of such development is to learn from the experiences of the past, such as those found in the USAF advisory activities during the Vietnam conflict. This paper will focus on identifying some important lessons evident in the FID activities of the USAF in Vietnam and drawing conclusions about how these insights can inform future operations.

In the early 1950s, Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev declared his intention to spread communism through “wars of national liberation.”<sup>10</sup> A reasonable motivation for this approach is that, knowing the US would come to the aid of any country coerced into a communist government, and recognizing the danger of direct action against US forces, Khrushchev instead endorsed wars of subversion and insurgency. The Vietnam conflict was one such war. Despite a

national desire to contain communism, the US did not initially want to be directly engaged in the Vietnam conflict because, like Russia, the US hoped to prevent war between the great powers. It was feared that direct US involvement in Vietnam could escalate the conflict from insurgency to general war with North Vietnam's sponsor nation – Russia or China. As a result of the desire to affect the Vietnamese outcome but not be overtly involved, the US adopted an advise and assist strategy following the model that had recently been applied successfully against the communist insurgency in the Philippines. In today's vernacular, the military aspects of this advise and assist activity would be termed FID. The intent of FID was to provide the Vietnamese forces with the capability to push back the incursions of communist guerrilla and regular forces.

Although US military involvement in Vietnam became large and conventional for many years, FID objectives were also pursued with varying emphasis over the duration of the conflict. This paper will focus on three areas of AFID in Vietnam: USAF provision of training, equipment, and civic action assistance.<sup>11</sup> Of these three activities, the first two, training the VNAF to conduct operations more effectively and providing technology to the VNAF, were clear USAF FID roles. The third area of activity, USAF provision of civic or humanitarian aid, was a necessary part of the joint FID effort – we will call it AFID by our definition because it was conducted by airmen.<sup>12</sup>

### **Training**

The objective of training the Vietnamese was central to the USAF mission in Vietnam.<sup>13</sup> The USAF's official execution of this training mission began in 1961 with the deployment of "Farm Gate", a detachment of special operation pilots. Farm Gate's primary purpose, at least ostensibly, was to train the VNAF in airpower operations. In fact, the Kennedy administration authorized Farm Gate strictly as advisors who were not to conduct any combat operations "at the

present time”.<sup>14</sup> The training mission, however, quickly evolved into a mission of direct combat with training as a secondary objective. In attempts to accomplish both of these objectives, Farm Gate advisors instituted a “training through operations” technique but found it both dangerous and ineffective. As a result, Farm Gate’s training operations were greatly supplemented (and later replaced entirely) by the more traditional pilot training activities that had been ongoing at a low level.<sup>15</sup> In 1963, the Farm Gate code name was dropped and the USAF’s directed focus on training gave way to increasing operational involvement.<sup>16</sup> This paper’s search for AFID lessons will focus on the in-country training conducted by Farm Gate.

Between 1961 and 1963, the limited training activities conducted in Vietnam by the USAF Farm Gate detachment failed to improve the size and quality of the VNAF enough for them to be able to meet the air firepower needs of their country’s ground forces.<sup>17</sup> Several factors limited Farm Gate’s success. First, USAF leadership at the highest levels was not committed to the advisory mission.<sup>18</sup> General Horace M. Wade remarked, “[T]here was quite a bit of foot dragging in the Air Staff among individuals, especially tactical types, for wasting our resources and efforts in this type of warfare because they didn’t believe – and I concurred with them. We didn’t believe this was the way to fight a war....”<sup>19</sup> Second, the specific characteristics that constitute a good teacher were not sought or developed during the recruitment or training of the Farm Gate advisors. Finally, the combat environment in Vietnam made training difficult and dangerous.

Despite Kennedy’s direction that Farm Gate was in Vietnam to train the VNAF, USAF leadership, at the highest levels, consistently communicated that combat was Farm Gate’s mission objective. In 1961, General Curtis E. LeMay, then Chief of Staff of the Air Force, stood up Farm Gate’s parent organization, the 4400<sup>th</sup> Combat Crew Training Squadron.<sup>20</sup> At its

inception LeMay assigned the 4400<sup>th</sup> the mission “to conduct combat operations...under extremely austere operating conditions anywhere in the world...to support United States policy.”<sup>21</sup> It was from within this background and culture that the Farm Gate detachment was formed. Reflecting on the purpose of Farm Gate in Vietnam, LeMay admitted that the training mission was a “cover” for the unit’s real mission, and that they were sent “over there to fight right from the start.”<sup>22</sup> In December 1961, only a few months after Farm Gate’s arrival in Vietnam, Major General Moorman, the vice commander in chief of PACAF reiterated Farm Gate’s mission as a “covert operation” that used the “training function as a cover... [for] actions against the Viet Cong.”<sup>23</sup> He went on to outline five specific objectives that Farm Gate was working to achieve, none of which included the training of VNAF personnel.<sup>24</sup> Brigadier General Rollen H. Anthis, who had direct operational control over Farm Gate aircrews, described the mission in this way. “The original idea was the operation of our USAF Farmgate [sic] in Viet Nam was to be covert rather than an overt. This meant working behind the enemy lines, going into small unprepared fields in the black of night without lights, picking up informers... or delivering special teams to spy on or harass the VC.”<sup>25</sup> It is a logical conclusion that one reason the training mission was not effective was because among many USAF leaders it was not even acknowledged. Not surprisingly, records show that of the 3638 sorties flown in the first 11 months of 1962, only 308 were training sorties, a remarkably low 8% for a unit whose official primary mission was to conduct training.<sup>26</sup>

As a result of this assertion that Farm Gate advisors would in reality be in covert combat operations, the pilots were selected for their ability to accomplish a very different mission than the one they ended up conducting. They were recruited – and each volunteered – under the auspices of flying and fighting for the United States in places and doing things that their country

might not choose to acknowledge.<sup>27</sup> Not surprisingly, the expectation of cloak and dagger operations was not satisfied by training foreign pilots in outdated aircraft.<sup>28</sup> In the words of the Detachment's first commander, "upon their arrival in Vietnam, Farm Gate pilots were not happy to discover that training the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) was their primary mission."<sup>29</sup> After several months in country, Farm Gate was given the go ahead to fly combat missions. The eagerness of personnel to get on to their 'real' mission is evident in the unit's response: "The message came about two o'clock in the afternoon. At three o'clock the Farmgate (sic) boys were on their way to the target."<sup>30</sup>

The misrepresentation of the circumstances the Farm Gate pilots would face came with consequences. The pilots' expectations and resultant priorities must certainly have had an adverse affect on the way they approached their training responsibilities, but more significantly, pilots who are ideally qualified for a covert combat mission are not necessarily those best suited for an advisory mission.

In his USAF oral history interview, General Landsdale emphasized the point that identifying the right advisor – having applicable skills and the ability to work very closely with foreign leaders – is critical for success. "[I]f you could find the precise right places to put people...and then handpick some Americans to go in and stay as long as necessary...we could affect a tremendous economy of effort in helping the type of insurgency that Vietnam was."<sup>31</sup> Being an effective advisor requires a certain skill set that not everyone has. Farm Gate pilots were not selected for such abilities.<sup>32</sup> One can only speculate as to the extent of the training challenges that fell to Farm Gate because they selected their participants based on willingness to execute covert operations, not on ability to advise foreign forces to execute their own operations.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to the challenges resulting from the priorities of USAF leaders and pilots, the effort to simultaneously execute training and combat had negative impacts on both missions. One pilot noted, “it was kind of difficult for us in a combat environment to try to train Vietnamese because you’d get shot at occasionally on takeoff and landing. You had to always go somewhere in formation in case somebody got shot down.”<sup>34</sup> The danger to personnel led to the added operational expense of providing multiple combat ready airplanes for each training mission. “[B]ecause it’s a combat theater, you have to send out another airplane to chase [a student pilot], to watch him in case he got shot down (sic).... This is pretty expensive to tie up a combat capable airplane [and] a combat ready pilot chasing a VNAF student.”<sup>35</sup>

A VNAF training program as President Kennedy envisioned it could have been of great benefit to the Vietnamese. However, because of personnel failures and the difficult environment, the training mission was poorly executed and became a hindrance rather than a benefit to the VNAF. The USAF’s operational intervention, passed off as training, “not only failed to increase capability within the VNAF, but also promoted a dependency relationship that kept the VNAF on the sidelines as second stringers.”<sup>36</sup> The Vietnamese needed to truly own their fight if they were to be effective at it because winning would require flexibility and sacrifice on their part. To the extent the USAF stepped up and took ownership of combat operations, the VNAF became less able to own the fight themselves. Ironically, the competence and bravery with which the Farm Gate pilots executed the mission *they believed they were given* actually contributed to the *ineffectiveness* of the VNAF by relegating them to a follower role in their own war.<sup>37</sup>

The USAF should have trained and advised the VNAF to better enable them to execute their mission in Vietnam.<sup>38</sup> The greatest failure of the USAF relative to its training mission is that it did not see the validity of the training effort and instead acted on an apparent belief that

the conflict could be solved if only the USAF could bring its military prowess to bear on the problem. Instead, the USAF should have listened to the President and contemporary experts who knew the importance of training, the manner in which it should be provided, and the personnel skills needed to deliver training effectively in cultures very different from the United States’.

### **Appropriate Technology**

Providing aircraft for the VNAF was a primary element of the AFID mission in Vietnam. Regrettably, over the course of the Vietnam conflict, the leadership of the USAF and the VNAF together sought to introduce jet aircraft to Vietnam even though less advanced aircraft were better suited to the VNAF’s mission.<sup>39</sup> This misguided aim had immediate and lasting detrimental effects on the ability of the VNAF to conduct their operations. Because several authors have addressed the subject of aircraft suitability for low-intensity conflict, only a summary of their conclusions will be presented here.<sup>40</sup> The possible VNAF motivations for pursuing aircraft which were less than ideally-suited to their missions, and the role the USAF played in influencing the VNAF’s jet aspirations, will be more thoroughly explored. This section will conclude with observations on how – and why – the USAF could have encouraged the VNAF to seek aircraft appropriate to their needs.

Over the years of US involvement, numerous aircraft types of varying capability were provided to the VNAF – the most significant ones are listed here. In 1956, the VNAF received F8 Bearcat fighters, and in 1958 armed T-28 aircraft were added. Both of these early airplanes were provided through French advisers that were then operating in Vietnam. A series of increasingly advanced aircraft were subsequently introduced when the US’ assistance became overt. The A-1 was introduced in 1960, the B-26 (as part of Farm Gate only) also in 1960, and the C-47 in 1961. The VNAF operated these prop-driven aircraft for several years before



increasing US interest in Vietnam prompted another round of airpower modernization. The B-57 bomber was provided to Vietnam in 1965, and was the VNAF's first jet-powered aircraft. Two more jets followed: the F-5 fighter (operational with the VNAF in 1967), and the A-37 (operational in 1969).<sup>41</sup> By late 1970, the VNAF had four jet fighter squadrons and only three A-1 squadrons – each averaging 20 aircraft.<sup>42</sup> The last major aircraft type introduced to Vietnam during this era was the C-119, a prop-driven transport.<sup>43</sup> Some of these aircraft proved to be more effective in Vietnam than others. In general, the slower prop-driven aircraft were more suitable, and the introduction of more advanced jets was a hindrance to effective operations.<sup>44</sup>

Jet aircraft were detrimental to the VNAF for a number of reasons. First, the expense of purchasing, operating, and maintaining jet aircraft was beyond the means of South Vietnam without US assistance. In addition to the expense, the complexity of jets put a strain on the ability of the VNAF to maintain those aircraft. The recruiting and training of capable personnel for specialized maintenance was a continuing challenge for the VNAF.<sup>45</sup> For South Vietnam, advanced aircraft also posed problems of infrastructure that taxed the resources of the state. Most notably, jets required longer and better-surfaced runways that were much more difficult to build and maintain than the relatively unimproved runways that prop aircraft can use.

The disadvantages of jets to the VNAF may have been acceptable if mission effectiveness using such platforms was substantially improved over prop aircraft. In fact, a thorough analysis shows that, for the missions the VNAF was executing, prop aircraft were considerably more effective than their jet counterparts.<sup>46</sup> More than 80% of VNAF sorties flown were dedicated to close air support, troop and convoy air cover, or interdiction missions.<sup>47</sup> The low-tech, propeller-driven A-1 was ideally suited for these missions for several reasons.<sup>48</sup> Heavy ground cover in Vietnam necessitated aircraft capable of low and slow operations in order to

effectively spot and attack ground targets. Prop aircraft could operate from the short, austere airfields with limited ground support that were primarily available in Vietnam.<sup>49</sup> Slow attack aircraft, such as the A-1H, provided a more stable bomb and gun delivery platform and carried a significantly heavier ordinance load than the VNAF's jet-powered A-37 strike aircraft.<sup>50</sup> Finally, low-tech reciprocating engines provided reasonable survivability against the small arms fire encountered in Vietnam when flying low and slow.

Many airmen engaged in the fighting in South Vietnam recognized the superiority of prop aircraft for their missions. The operations of one VNAF unit, equipped with both prop-driven A-1s and jet powered A-37s, provide an example of this recognition. Despite the fact that the unit's A-1s were so old and worn that they were all limited to 3gs, the unit flew the A-1s rather than the A-37s.<sup>51</sup> Though evidence pointed to the conclusion that prop aircraft were better for their mission, the South Vietnamese pursued the acquisition of jets for the VNAF. As early as 1959, South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem made a strong attempt to acquire jets for the VNAF. Central to President Diem's request was the fact that the US had recently supplied jets to nearby Thailand and the Philippines – not a claim that jets would be more effective than prop aircraft for the VNAF.<sup>52</sup>

Aside from the obvious human expectation that greater technology will lead to greater chances of military success, there are at least two reasons why the VNAF and the USAF sought to introduce advanced aircraft into South Vietnam. Vietnam was motivated by nationalism in their desire for an advanced air force, and the US had a desire for the VNAF to be capable of independent operations.<sup>53</sup> These legitimate motivations caused both nations to overlook the advantages of less advanced and better-suited aircraft for the VNAF.

The VNAF's desire for advanced aircraft was motivated by nationalism as well as a desire for the advantages of modern warfare.<sup>54</sup> Advanced military capabilities and the weapons that deliver them are a status symbol. The United States and Russia, superpower states of the day, were the prime examples of this principle. It was clear for any country that the stronger they were militarily, the more respect they would get on the world stage. Hence, advanced weapons were an international and domestic signal that the nation deserves respect from its regional neighbors and is a reasonable object of loyalty from its citizenry.

The desire for Vietnamese military independence was a reasonable motivation for acquiring advanced aircraft – a desire that was openly professed more by the US than by Vietnam.<sup>55</sup> However, with the benefit of hindsight, military independence was a tempting but unattainable goal given the circumstances Vietnam faced. The Vietnam conflict was surrogate warfare between greater powers, and the true test of independence would have been the ability of South Vietnamese forces, including the VNAF, to stand against the North Vietnamese Army armed and sustained by a US peer competitor.<sup>56</sup> No independent VNAF could have stood against that capability for long – the resources of the US were required to resist the resources of the PRC.<sup>57</sup>

The vision of independence was a good one, but it should have been altered to encourage independent VNAF operations in the COIN and close air support mission areas. General Harry Aderholt, who commanded the First Air Commando Wing in 1964, understood this truth.

Either because the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advanced Echelon in Saigon didn't understand or didn't give a damn, the Farm Gate boys started flying close air support for the Vietnamese army.... That should have been a job for the [VNAF] and it's A-1s, not the Americans.... We never should have had our regular Air Force and Army units over there. It should have been dealt with as an insurgency, and it should have been the Vietnamese's fight and not ours.<sup>58</sup>

Rather than equipping and training the VNAF to execute the COIN, anti-guerrilla warfare, and close air support missions they should have owned, the USAF inserted itself into those missions and set the VNAF's vision on an independent, USAF-like capability. The USAF should have provided its assistance with the goal of enabling the VNAF to take ownership of the insurgent fight.<sup>59</sup>

The USAF should have tailored its advice and assistance to the operational requirements and constraints in Vietnam. As it applies to the current discussion, the USAF should have pushed suitable aircraft, and should not have told the Vietnamese, overtly or by induced service culture, that they needed USAF-like capabilities to be a legitimate air force. Rather, the USAF should have proclaimed that the VNAF, with a local COIN-capable air force, was fully legitimate and exactly the air force their country needed. One of the USAF's failings in Vietnam was that they let (or encouraged) the VNAF to take on our culture of what made an air force great.<sup>60</sup> This induced culture doomed the VNAF to not concentrating on the mission that was most important for them to succeed in executing on their own.

### **Military Civic Action**

Military civic action is any action undertaken by the military – especially the indigenous military rather than the US military – to represent the government in providing for the basic security and welfare of the people.<sup>61</sup> In the words of Major General Edward G. Lansdale, viewed by many as an icon of US counter-insurgency warfare, military civic action is “almost any action which makes the soldier a brother of the people, as well as their protector.”<sup>62</sup> Success in this effort strengthens the internal stability of the host nation.<sup>63</sup> With this understanding of military civic action in mind, it is clear that military civic action, while not a traditional military

activity, is an instrument of internal defense, and, as applied or encouraged by the USAF in foreign countries, is an essential aspect of AFID.

Recall that AFID, by this paper's definition, is merely FID conducted by the USAF, and that FID is one aspect of the United States' support to a host nation's IDAD efforts. The stated goal of all US involvement is to "free and protect a nation from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency by *emphasizing the building of viable institutions that respond to the needs of society* [emphasis added]."<sup>64</sup> Military civic action is the way in which the US military can most directly contribute to that end goal of building government institutions that respond to the people's needs.<sup>65</sup>

Neither the USAF nor the VNAF placed enough emphasis on civic action: the USAF because they did not initially see the relevance to their mission, and the VNAF because they had no concept of public service until US forces began to exemplify this principle. While some in Vietnam did not understand why the USAF should have any responsibility for civic action, the USAF received substantial operational benefits from these projects in addition to the most obvious positive outcome of the VNAF learning to do civic action through the example of US forces.

An argument against indigenous military forces providing civic action – one presumably felt by the South Vietnamese – is that military resources in weak or developing countries are too scarce to apply them to a mission that should fall to other government organizations. The reason the military was so critical in providing the civic action function for the Vietnamese government was that the military was the government's only sizeable resource that could possibly be applied to nation-building efforts.<sup>66</sup> This condition is also true today for most weak or security-challenged states. The militaries of the weakest and poorest countries are the government

institutions most likely to get funding – using those forces for development as well as security can enable the government to provide critical services for their people at little added cost to the indigenous government.<sup>67</sup> These service and security missions are complementary because substantial government service erodes the power base of insurgents and thus reduces the internal security threats faced by police or military forces.<sup>68</sup> The ultimate results of the diverse civic action efforts in South Vietnam will be seen to validate the supposition that internal security can be substantially improved through civic action.

Civic action-like efforts in Vietnam through the early 1960s were not civic action at all, but were rather the product of individual charitable actions – and thus were marginally successful. The charitable and energetic airmen observed the poor conditions of the Vietnamese and responded with many unofficial service projects that ranged from providing medical services and training to building schools for the Vietnamese.<sup>69</sup> These generous efforts surely had a positive impact on the conditions of the Vietnamese, but did little to encourage indigenous government responsiveness. After years of inconsistent and unofficial charitable action, the realization was made that significant mission benefit could be had by expanding these efforts and modifying them to encourage Vietnamese leadership. In 1966, the USAF established the civic action program and in 1967 Military Assistance Command – Vietnam (MAC-V) established CORDS as a single coordinating organization for pacification, which included civic action efforts.<sup>70</sup> The USAF civic action program expanded and refined its efforts over the years based on lessons learned in providing non-warfighting AFID assistance to the Vietnamese.

Two important observations for USAF civic action are immediately apparent in the civic action projects undertaken in Vietnam. The first observation is that the scope of civic action programs appropriate for the Air Force includes – but does not stop with – the application of

airpower. The second observation is that ownership of civic action projects by the Vietnamese was critical to their success. The following three examples of effective civic action programs illustrate these observations.

Some of the USAF civic action programs involved the classic use of airpower to provide services to the people. In the fall of 1966, a severe flood struck the delta region of Vietnam. Vietnamese and Air Force units at a nearby air base offered airlift capability to deliver supplies as well as their services in preparing the relief. The Vietnamese government gave these units responsibility for around 3000 homeless families in a particularly isolated area of the river delta. The VNAF and USAF personnel worked together to assemble and package seventy tons of supplies into family-sized bundles which included foodstuffs, tents, tools, and clothing. In the space of a few hours, Vietnamese transport aircraft lifted the supplies into the affected area, where the provincial Vietnamese armed forces provided security for the landing zone and subsequent convoy transport to the needy people. Other groups could have provided this service to the Vietnamese people. The US forces were certainly capable. What makes this humanitarian relief event a good example of civic action is that the Vietnamese executed it with some US assistance. Consistent with the real purposes of civic action, the Vietnamese people received relief from government representatives and in the process the VNAF airmen had a significant positive experience with being servant/soldiers. This successful relief effort was primarily executed by the VNAF, with the guidance and encouragement of the USAF.<sup>71</sup> This classic use of airpower for military civic action was more the exception than the rule for efforts the USAF was involved with, though other civic action projects also capitalized on the particular skills of USAF personnel.

Medical Civic Action, the provision of medical services to the people, was another effective civic action program undertaken by trained USAF personnel. In 1967, the USAF attempted to establish a medical civic action program around Pleiku Air Base.<sup>72</sup> The civilian population surrounding Pleiku was not Vietnamese, but were Jarai Montagnards. The Jarai were friendly, proud, hard working, and fiercely independent. These characteristics made them pleasant to work with but very reluctant to accept US assistance. In fact, the Jarai viewed such charitable efforts as an attempt to turn them into a dependent and shiftless people. Because of this independence and suspicion, initial medical civic action programs were unsuccessful with the Jarai. After some lengthy work, one USAF doctor came to appreciate the characteristics of the people and identified a way to provide medical help to the Jarai.<sup>73</sup> This USAF doctor invited the native doctors to receive training in western medical techniques which they could then provide to their people. The three-month training program had outstanding results. The native doctors delivered basic sanitation and medical services to the people, who readily received the information from their own doctors. The native doctors came to trust the expertise of USAF medical personnel, and turned to them for help with any particularly complicated or serious cases. The role of the USAF became exactly what it should have been, one of provide training and advice rather than doing for the native people what they could do for themselves.<sup>74</sup> The lessons of Pleiku were recognized and applied in other USAF civic action programs, many of which had almost nothing to do with airpower or military-specific skills.<sup>75</sup>

One particularly successful example of construction and education civic action occurred around Bien Hoa Air Base. Many refugees from more disrupted areas of Vietnam settled around Bien Hoa, bringing with them large numbers of young children. A local Vietnamese instructor developed a plan to educate these children and hired a group of local teachers to perform that



work. However, this group ran out of resources before they were able to construct a school. Military personnel from Bien Hoa heard about the effort and delivered a large number of discarded wooden bomb fin crates to the village. The local Vietnamese constructed a school using the wood delivered to them. Because lumber was a scarce and valuable commodity, they were able to sell a portion of the wood to buy nails and other construction supplies necessary to complete their project. The school, a symbol of valuable government-provided service, would normally have been the target of Vietcong arsonists, but the ownership of the local population, secured by virtue of their own labors, made the building immune. The school building project, the actual labor for which was provided solely by the Vietnamese, was only the beginning of the civic action at the Bien Hoa school.<sup>76</sup>

The Bien Hoa civic action office instituted a scholarship program to educate refugee children who could not otherwise attend school. Private contributions from Bien Hoa personnel and stateside donors provided the funds to educate 515 children.<sup>77</sup> Attendance and performance standards were required of the scholarship recipients and the donors from the base personally delivered the money to the students each month. By these means the students learned to take advantage of the opportunities given them and were regularly exposed to people – representing their government – who provided them with their assistance. Except for the collection and management of the funds themselves, the Vietnamese completely handled the scholarship program at Bien Hoa: identifying candidates, setting eligibility requirements and performance standards, and monitoring the progress of the assisted students. According to one school principal and General William W. Momyer, the 7<sup>th</sup> AF Commander, the lasting effect of the scholarship program was to teach the meaning of citizenship to children who otherwise would become potential recruits for the Vietcong.<sup>78</sup>

Perhaps the most significant civic action lesson, of many, was the criticality of heavy Vietnamese participation in the projects undertaken.<sup>79, 80</sup> Any level of US volunteer participation had to be scrutinized.<sup>81</sup> The zeal of charitable and energetic Americans often put the Vietnamese in the shadows when they did choose to work alongside them – an outcome that was a humiliation to the Vietnamese and decreased their ownership of the project involved.<sup>82</sup> Conversely, as with the Bien Hoa school, civic action programs on which the Vietnamese took a substantial lead became their own to protect.<sup>83</sup> The Vietnamese people responded vigorously to efforts to entrust them with the responsibility for civic action projects, and, by 1971, after only three years of USAF focus on Vietnamese self-help and low US presence, the South Vietnamese people were providing 96% of the labor for all USAF-supported civic action projects.<sup>84</sup> Vietnamese ownership was also important at the provincial and national levels. The best self-help projects brought the Vietnamese people into contact with their government. These projects began with needs identified by the local government officials and paid for in part with funds supplied through the Vietnamese provincial government. The end result in such cases was the Vietnamese people learned to look to their government for assistance – they recognized their government as a power for good in their country.<sup>85</sup>

USAF civic action programs empowered and legitimized the Vietnamese government in the eyes of their people because it emphasized the leadership and contribution of indigenous forces and people. The USAF's role was to do the minimum work required to start the civic action programs and push the indigenous people out front in the work that was accomplished and the credit that was given.<sup>86</sup> Several distinct factors inhibited the effort to legitimize the Vietnamese government by teaching the military to adopt a servant/soldier culture.

Traditional Vietnamese culture presented a challenging environment for developing effective national government, in large part because “the Vietnamese were family-oriented, not community oriented.”<sup>87</sup> The behavior of the national army, as the central government’s most visible representative to the people, is indicative of the challenges. The South Vietnamese army had no tradition of service to the people, and was in fact often antagonistic to the population. For example, General Lansdale observed in 1953 that the indigenous South Vietnamese military were often more brutal than the Vietcong - the South Vietnamese soldiers viewed the people as an opportunity for pillaging.<sup>88</sup> This condition of the military is important because it illustrates how far the US advisors had to go in bringing a tradition of service to the Vietnamese armed forces.

The process of the Vietnamese military learning to be soldier-servants, under the tutelage of US forces, was slowed because the armed forces personnel were reluctant to give up the relative prestige and sophistication of their weapons and military methods. In exchange, the US military taught them to assist the most poor and disdained members of their society with the simple tools of public service.<sup>89</sup> Despite significant cultural challenges, the eventual inculcation of public service principles through the military civic action program was a great improvement to the Vietnamese military as a government organization. A testament to the growing Vietnamese government ownership of civic action is that after 1968, the Vietnamese military began to take on civic action responsibilities as their own.<sup>90</sup> This military involvement demonstrates the commitment of the Vietnamese government and the beginnings of a soldier-servant tradition that could serve as a safeguard for a strong, cohesive, and democratic society.<sup>91</sup>

The most notable operational benefit of civic action was that it had the short term effect of improving base security by increasing the flow of information from the people.<sup>92</sup> The USAF

successfully used civic action efforts to win over the residents of hamlets near air bases – with the intent of denying the Viet Cong the ability to conduct close range mortar attacks. During the first half of 1966, the Viet Cong shelled Binh Thuy AB an average of once a month from nearby positions. Following a dedicated civic action program which included construction, medical services, and food distribution, the base security environment improved dramatically. In October 1966, when the VNAF moved into a perimeter hamlet to stage a mortar attack, several residents reported the attack plans to base security police with the result that the mortars and ammunition were captured and the attack was prevented. Of note, VNAF participation was good in all of the projects undertaken around Binh Thuy.<sup>93</sup> Another instance of operationally significant intelligence resulting from civic action was observed in the hamlet Dong Tam 6. Residents responded to a school building civic action program “by turning over the hamlet vice chief, an active Viet Cong, to government authorities.”<sup>94</sup> Short term intelligence benefits such as these were visible during the Vietnam conflict to the extent that civic action was used, and these results should have influenced USAF commanders to embrace the program more than they did.

Vietnamese pacification (eliminate the insurgency) programs, of which civic action was an important part, proved to be very successful in Vietnam.<sup>95</sup> This claim of broad success has evidence in the reported security of the Vietnamese population over the years when civic action programs were emphasized. By the end of 1972, the US government estimated that security had been provided for between 80% and 93% of the population of South Vietnam, up from about 42% in 1965, the year before the civic action program was formalized.<sup>96</sup> Some expert American and British observers have gone so far as to express the opinion that by the end of 1972 the communists had effectively lost the battle in Vietnam, and their only chance for victory was to mount a conventional invasion.<sup>97</sup> It is interesting to speculate as to whether the security gains

eventually realized through pacification could have been achieved much sooner if the US had concentrated their early aid to Vietnam in that area as opposed to direct military intervention.<sup>98</sup>

Two facts brought out in this discussion, that civic action is a powerful and perhaps required tool for FID, and that the Vietnamese military was in no way naturally disposed to executing civic action, lead to an important conclusion. The USAF's role in teaching civic action to their VNAF counterparts was a critical part of their overall mission. To effectively improve the long-term stability of Vietnam, the USAF's mission should have extended beyond the proper-use-of-airpower instruction normally associated with a USAF "advise and assist" or AFID mission.

### **Lessons Learned**

Two assumptions guide the selection of lessons learned from Vietnam that will be enumerated here; both are subjects of debate, but certainly have some validity. First, the overall pacification efforts in Vietnam – of which the USAF civic action program, under CORDS, was the USAF's primary contribution – effectively won the communist insurgency aspect of the Vietnam conflict prior to North Vietnam's conventional invasion.<sup>99</sup> Second, the US military, perhaps especially the USAF, had the capability to turn back the North Vietnamese conventional invasion.<sup>100</sup> Given these two assumptions, which essentially speak to the effectiveness of various strategic and tactical approaches in Vietnam, several lessons learned become evident. Each of these lessons learned relates to the theme of helping the advised country to build their own capacity to provide their own internal security and services in a way that is suited to and sustainable by that country.

The first lesson learned is that effectively filling the supporting role of trainer or advisor to a developing country requires individual skills and characteristics that are not commonplace.

General Lansdale, who had global successful experience with counterinsurgency, believed that individual skills were so important that one “right guy” could advise a president or a foreign minister or a corps commander in “doing the right thing [and] they would start winning the war.”<sup>101</sup> Lansdale’s claim was that such effective individuals could succeed in circumstances similar to Vietnam’s where large-scale intervention had failed.<sup>102</sup> The medical civic action work in Vietnam with the Jarai natives has been discussed. In this example, a single dedicated individual succeeded where many had failed to achieve results. Also discussed was the fact that some civic action officers and some base commanders in Vietnam were enthusiastic toward non-military, nation building type activities, and some were not, despite ostensibly similar backgrounds and relevant training. The realization was made in Vietnam that special skills were required for effectiveness – “men willing to learn the language, eat native foods, work with the people at their own pace, and above all, treat each individual with respect.”<sup>103</sup> Such abilities won’t be identified by any personnel system.<sup>104</sup>

To be successful, the scope of AFID must be expanded to recognize that the effort involves building a military and not just developing military *capability*. AFID is undertaken at the request of a host nation – to assist in their indigenous IDAD efforts. The host nation’s military can become, with US assistance, servant/soldiers, representatives of the national government to the people. Civic action, assisting indigenous military forces to provide services to the people, is not a unique USAF contribution to FID. However, providing a servant/soldier role model for indigenous airmen *is* a FID contribution only regular (not SOF or other special unit) USAF forces can provide. To not fulfill such an exemplary role is to communicate to indigenous forces that serving the nation’s people is beneath some elite group of the military – in this case, the air force.

Civic action, as an example of expanded AFID scope, was one of the most effective areas of effort the USAF undertook in Vietnam. However, civic action was well outside the area of aviation training and advising and was rejected by some as “apart from the real war.”<sup>105</sup> Direct operations impact from civic action was somewhat limited, with an increase in HUMINT resulting in increased air base security being the most clear product.<sup>106</sup> Other positive and important effects were improved quality of life for the Vietnamese people, pacification (the elimination of US-hostile feelings among the Vietnamese), which meant reduced recruitment for the insurgent Vietcong, and education of the Vietnamese including increased understanding of good government and citizenship.<sup>107</sup> Perhaps the most positive effect was that the indigenous military learned to serve the people rather than be a separate, privileged, powerful, above-the-law force. As a corollary, the Vietnamese people became more inclined to respect and value their military and the central government it represented. The positive impact of USAF civic action is an argument for the expansion of the scope of AFID operations to include military civic action – both as an execution effort and as a focus for training indigenous forces.

AFID in Vietnam showed the criticality of tailoring assistance in such a way as to maintain foreign nation ownership of the problem and its solution. It is critical that indigenous military forces own their fight and are able to take the lead in its prosecution. This requires that the USAF limit the scope of its military assistance. US involvement must be deliberately restrained, not only in the area of operations, but in the area of civic action, where the initial response to this paper’s argument might be to ‘do more of that’. Great success can be had when indigenous leaders are put out in front in civic action efforts and must supply the effort, leadership, and supplies. For example, when funding programs enabled local Vietnamese leadership was put “in a position of being able to plan, direct, and fund their own civic projects

without even consulting American advisors”, those leaders worked with more zeal than ever before observed.<sup>108</sup> Before such forward thinking about Vietnamese involvement prevailed, charitable and energetic USAF personnel undertook many civic action-type efforts independently. Even after civic action was institutionalized by the Air Force, personnel who volunteered to help waded in with a charitably-motivated get-it-done attitude that had the effect of reducing the Vietnamese to an observation role, which they were happy to take (with the notable exception of the Jarai, an ethnically separate people which have been discussed). The bottom line was that too-heavy US involvement eliminated the idea of Vietnamese ownership and eliminated the benefits of having the indigenous military become a force for good representing their government. The Vietnamese needed to own both the military operations and the civic action missions and to take pride in the accomplishment of both.

Equipment selected for supply during AFID must be carefully tailored to the needs of the assisted nation. Identifying and providing appropriate equipment involves acknowledging and analyzing the particular needs and capabilities of foreign air force rather than providing the equipment the USAF would use. The Vietnam conflict had both insurgent and conventional components that varied in intensity over the years. Until the last few years when North Vietnam brought significant anti-aircraft capability into the South, slow aircraft suited to the COIN fight were put to effective use in Vietnam. At some levels of their organizations, both the USAF and the VNAF admitted that “slow aircraft like [the] A-1H, with a lot of ordinance” were best suited for counterinsurgency operations.<sup>109</sup> In spite of this recognition by some, increasingly advanced aircraft were introduced for several reasons that have been discussed. The lesson is that the USAF should carefully limit the equipment provided during AFID, tailoring it to the current (and



sustainable future) mission of the indigenous forces. In most cases, this equipment will be lower-technology aircraft tailored for the internal defense mission.

A point of caution for future AFID missions is that the VNAF adopted the service culture of the USAF, in many cases to their detriment.<sup>110</sup> This problem was not unique to the USAF. The induced culture was positive to the extent that Vietnamese forces were exposed to the servant-soldier culture of the US military through civic action type projects. Unfortunately, the primary interaction of the Vietnamese military with US forces had to do with modern warfighting, and this culture was detrimental to their ability to effectively fight the counterinsurgency war of which it was most important they take ownership. For example, the aspect of USAF culture that places great emphasis and focus on the most advanced technology available, was not beneficial to the VNAF. It rubbed off on the VNAF as an organization that their air force was only capable or mature or legitimate to the degree it looked like the USAF. The promise of advanced weapons often outstrips the realized effectiveness of the weapon, particularly in asymmetric warfare. In Vietnam the pursuit of advanced aircraft resulted in too much focus on high technology over lower tech, dirtier, slower, more effective air power. With this induced service culture the VNAF focus shifted away from the COIN and civic action mission areas that could have most improved the Vietnamese internal security problems.

The AFID experience in Vietnam suggests that the idea of creating an independent air force should be approached with caution and must be tailored to the circumstances of the assisted nation. The goal of an independent, capable, VNAF was understandable from the perspective of both the US and South Vietnam. 'Independent', in this case, means able to prosecute the war successfully on their own. On the part of the US government, Vietnamization, or returning the responsibility for combat operations to the South Vietnamese, was national policy during the

Nixon administration.<sup>111</sup> The US wanted to get out of Vietnam and to have the VNAF capable to stand on their own in helping to prevent the incursion of communist forces. Simple nationalism and the pride of military forces in being able to defend their country explain the Vietnamese desire to have an independent VNAF. Acting on a desire to create an independent air force, the USAF pushed the VNAF physically (by way of the aircraft provided) and mentally (by way of the training provided and the service culture and focus induced) toward looking and acting like the USAF. The notion of independence like the USAF enjoyed was detrimental to the VNAF. However, the idea of independence in general was good if it had been tailored. An alternate approach would have been to enable the VNAF to independently and effectively conduct their COIN fight, and roll the USAF role back to deep interdiction and air superiority.<sup>112</sup> This would have let the Vietnamese own their fight and would have limited USAF involvement. A necessary parallel effort would have been the USAF recognition of the COIN role as a *legitimate and complete* role for a national air force – a sharp contrast to the induced legitimacy message the USAF actually passed to the VNAF; that they had to become like the Americans.

A final idea is suggested by these lessons learned and the introductory assumption that large-scale US military intervention could have turned back the final North Vietnamese conventional invasion of the South. The USAF should have focused their AFID on enabling the VNAF to independently and effectively conduct their COIN fight, and should have limited direct USAF combat to deep interdiction and air superiority. This approach would have effectively thrown a “conventional umbrella” over South Vietnam and would have enabled the VNAF to focus on prevailing in their internal security battle with the communist insurgents. This was a battle the Vietnamese could and did win largely on their own. The US would also have benefited from the umbrella arrangement by limiting US involvement to an area of great strength for US

forces and by significantly reducing the funding required of the US to Vietnam. The lesson from Vietnam that should be applied to future AFID is that some assistance should be held back for the benefit of the aided country. Assistance should be tailored to allow countries to concentrate on the lower-level conflicts and interests that will have a much more significant impact on the basic security of their respective nations.

### **Conclusion**

The AFID lessons from Vietnam that are evident in this research may be accurately summarized by this statement: to be effective in AFID, the USAF must avoid providing assistance in the way the service is most comfortable, but rather must tailor the assistance and the manner of delivery to the needs of the assisted nation. To summarize, the specific Vietnam AFID lessons that establish the theme just presented are:

- 1) Advising personnel must possess skills and characteristics adapted to training
- 2) AFID must include state-building efforts such as civic action, not just airpower training
- 3) AFID must be tailored to maintain indigenous ownership of the problem and its solution
- 4) AFID-supplied equipment must be tailored to the situation of the assisted nation
- 5) AFID forces must deliberately counter aspects of USAF culture that would be detrimental to the assisted nation's air forces
- 6) Efforts toward an independent air force should be approached with caution and must be tailored to the circumstances of the assisted nation
- 7) A US 'conventional umbrella' would allow nations to concentrate on their internal security problems that they are best able to address

The Vietnam lessons learned cumulatively focus on nation building and developing military forces tailored to internal security and trained to perform nation building activities. In other words, to be most effective, AFID must be conducted with a focus on HN IDAD.

For example, the case for USAF civic action serves as a concise argument for performing AFID with a clear vision of the ultimate purpose to support host nation (HN) IDAD efforts: 1) HN security and stability are increased when viable government institutions respond to the needs

of their society. 2) The HN military is a (sometimes the only) government organization with resources available to provide services to the people. 3) US military forces conducting FID can use civic action to begin to instill a servant/soldier tradition in the HN military. IDAD efforts are strengthened. Resistance to performing civic action using regular USAF forces comes in the argument that AFID forces are small and therefore do not have personnel “to spare”, or in the assertion that other US forces (such as military construction units) are better equipped to provide services. While there is truth in these arguments, it must be remembered that the purpose of civic action is *not* merely to provide services – this is a valuable side benefit. The purpose of civic action is to develop a servant/soldier military tradition and thus to increase the likelihood of long-term HN government legitimacy. The limited USAF AFID forces must find the time to do civic action even though it is not their traditional role – they cannot teach the HN that public service is beneath “elite” military forces. A similar argument could be made for each recommendation to tailor AFID efforts. In each case, the core of the argument would be to get past accepted or traditional roles or means and provide assistance with an eye to what the HN really needs.

As in Vietnam, enabling the indigenous government to focus on the internal security problem can result in victory over the insurgency. As with Vietnam, this victory will likely lead to conventional conflict that will likely be beyond the military capabilities of the indigenous country if the US helps build forces tailored to COIN. The answer to that difficulty is a conventional umbrella.

During the Vietnam conflict, the USAF simultaneously provided both airpower-oriented AFID and less traditional civic action AFID. This was particularly true after the codification of the civic action program. A similar situation will (or should) exist for future AFID endeavors –

the USAF will have the mission of assisting some developing air force in the effective application of airpower in their country. The backdrop to these future assistance missions will be the desire to stabilize weak states by strengthening the central governments' ability to provide security and services to their citizens, thus eliminating the legitimate grievances of the people (ref legitimate grievances). The civic action aspects of AFID will help address that backdrop of increasing stability. Studying the actions and effectiveness of the USAF can provide insight into how AFID should best be conducted in the future.

## Notes

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- <sup>3</sup> Office of the President of the United States, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 1.
- <sup>4</sup> Joint Publication (JP) 3-07.1, *Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Foreign Internal Defense (FID)*, V-1.
- <sup>5</sup> JP3-07.1, *Joint Tactics*, I-1.
- <sup>6</sup> JP3-07.1, *Joint Tactics*, I-1.
- <sup>7</sup> Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2-3, *Irregular Warfare*, Forward.
- <sup>8</sup> Givhan, interview.
- <sup>9</sup> AFDD 2-3, *Irregular Warfare*, 3.
- <sup>10</sup> Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, 237.
- <sup>11</sup> The provision of aviation training and equipment occurred over the course of US involvement. The USAF was also involved in military civic action from 1966 until the departure of forces. In the context of Vietnam, the USAF's civic action activities were part of the broader CORDS-led self-help program, an ancillary effort to pacification.
- <sup>12</sup> The civic action and pacification ideas were turned into action in 1966 with the institution of the USAF civic action program and in 1967 with the CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support) program. CORDS provided a single coordinating organization for civilian- and military-led pacification in Vietnam, and included Vietnamese self-defense, self-help, and self-governance programs. See Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing*, 142. As evidenced by the *Pentagon Papers*, the US Department of Defense's highly classified introspection on Vietnam that was leaked to the press.
- <sup>13</sup> MAC-V, *History of the U.S. Air Force Advisory Group*, 2-3.
- <sup>14</sup> Westermann, "Relegated to the backseat", 129.
- <sup>15</sup> Westermann, "Relegated to the backseat", 131. Aviation training remained an objective over the course of the conflict. After 1963, in-country training activities continued at a low level and hundreds of VNAF pilots received pilot training in the US.
- <sup>16</sup> Mikesh, *Flying Dragons*, 48.
- <sup>17</sup> Westermann, "Relegated to the backseat", 142 and 146. The USAF's failure to concentrate on the training mission limited the VNAF's ability to conduct the necessary operations and led to the requirement for USAF forces to fill that gap. Farm Gate may have been the first egregious instance of USAF activity that diminished VNAF ownership of their war – it would have been difficult to reverse the USAF's operational leadership role after the involvement of Farm Gate aircrew in direct action rather than training and advising.
- <sup>18</sup> There were several USAF general officers who clearly understood the supporting role the USAF should have taken. MGen Edward Lansdale is the most notable example. See Currey. USAF BGen Heine Aderholt complained that USAF higher-ups either didn't understand or didn't care that they were doing it wrong, because "the Farm Gate boys started flying close air support for the Vietnamese army...{t}hat should have been a job for the VNAF and it's a-1s, not the Americans." See Westermann page 135.
- <sup>19</sup> USAF Oral History Interview (hereafter OHI), General Horace M. Wade, 357.
- <sup>20</sup> Westermann, "Relegated to the backseat", 128.
- <sup>21</sup> Westermann, "Relegated to the backseat", 128.
- <sup>22</sup> Westermann, "Relegated to the backseat", 128-129.
- <sup>23</sup> Westermann, "Relegated to the backseat", 130.
- <sup>24</sup> Westermann, "Relegated to the backseat", 130-131. The Kennedy administration continued to emphasize counter-insurgency warfare throughout its existence. Moorman's objectives for Farm Gate were clearly disconnected from the administration's expressions on the detachment's purpose. I could not find any evidence that Kennedy or his administration was aware of how blatantly the USAF disregarded the President's direction – in this case, "for training only".
- <sup>25</sup> USAF OHI Major General Rollen H. Anthis, 5.
- <sup>26</sup> Westermann, "Relegated to the backseat", 141.
- <sup>27</sup> Gleason, *Air Commando Chronicles*, 2. Robert L. Gleason, an LtCol in the USAF at the time of his interview, was later assigned as the Operations Officer for the initial Farm Gate detachment. He describes his interview in the opening pages of his book. The initial questions were innocuous, like "would you be willing to serve for prolonged periods under austere conditions? Separated from your family?" Then more "ominous" questions that culminated with this: "Would you be willing to fly and fight on behalf of the U.S. government, and agree to do so knowing that your government might choose to deny that you were a member of the U.S. military, or even associated with this nation, and thus might not be able to provide you with the protection normally given to a U.S. citizen?" LtCol

Gleason later learned that “more than 3000 other officers and higher-ranking airmen” received similar interviews, and about 350 were selected for assignment to the initial cadre.

<sup>28</sup> Westermann, “Relegated to the backseat”, 128.

<sup>29</sup> Westermann, “Relegated to the backseat”, 129.

<sup>30</sup> USAF OHI Major General Rollen H. Anthis, 8.

<sup>31</sup> USAF OHI Major General Edward G. Lansdale, 20. Here Lansdale describes the type of advisor needed. A similar description may be found in Currey, *Edward Lansdale*, 280 and 281. See the following note.

<sup>32</sup> Currey, *Edward Lansdale*, 280-281. Here Currey summarizes from Lansdale's writings the lessons he has learned about how to conduct an effective nation building operation. All of them are instructive. Among them is a description of the type of advisor needed to have the great impact he sees as possible. Citizens assigned as such advisors, he says, must be aware of and believe in “their own heritage: freedom, justice, peace, the worth of the individual, the basic rights of mankind.” “Cynics, Lansdale believed, could be used elsewhere on other duties, but never in responsible positions overseas where they represent the United States.” The traits Lansdale goes on to list are extraordinary: Advisors must be “responsive and responsible,” “adhere to a high code of conduct,” “act with unfailing courtesy,” “have integrity and imagination,” “retain a sense of humility,” “have empathy for others,” “able to accord friendship to those with whom they will work,” “more interested in serving than being served,” “imbued with thoroughgoing honesty and self-reliance,” “respect fairness,” “willing to sacrifice in order to serve their own country and others,” and finally, “tough enough to retain hope and confidence in the midst of travail.” No wonder that Lansdale's opinion was that no assignment system could identify such people, all that could be done was to choose a likely candidate, put him in place, and watch them closely. See Lansdale OHI page 20.

<sup>33</sup> Gleason, *Air Commando Chronicles*, 2. Gleason points out that criteria for the selection interview were “flying time, effectiveness ratings, type of previous experience, etc”, and that the interview described in the above endnote was the final step in the screening process. The interview ensured that all candidates were volunteers prepared to assume the great risk of “engag[ing] in dangerous operations *fighting* for a friendly foreign government at the request of the USAF.” Emphasis added.

<sup>34</sup> USAF OHI Major Albert D. Motley, Jr., 9.

<sup>35</sup> USAF OHI Major LtCol William H. Gutches, 15.

<sup>36</sup> Westermann, “Relegated to the backseat”, 142.

<sup>37</sup> This strategic failure in spite of tactical success was articulated well in the broken English of a contemporary VNAF general. “[W]e have to say that we really enjoy the presence of the U.S. Air Force's units up there. Because they help us handle the air job—our mission. But on another hand by their mere presence up there, we lost a lot of chances to have a better Vietnamese Air Force.” See USAF OHI Major General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, 44-45.

<sup>38</sup> By the focus on the USAF's training weaknesses, it should not be inferred that the VNAF was a failure as a force. In fact the VNAF was fairly effective and had many skilled pilots with a vast amount of combat experience. See Westermann pages 143 and 144. The point is that by failing to focus on training the USAF induced some fundamental weaknesses in the VNAF. American-led operations for the sake of results garnered “motivation and leadership” credit for Farm Gate and began a lasting expectation for low numbers of VNAF sorties and professional competence far below that of the USAF. See Westermann page 146. Once the supporting/supported relationship was set, the USAF would not get a second chance at training – the advisory role diminished seriously in 1964-65 with President Johnson's conventional emphasis, and when FID again became the focus in 1967, the VNAF role was firmly entrenched.

<sup>39</sup> As will be discussed later in the paper, President Diem aggressively requested jets as early as 1959, and in 1966, Secretary McNamara approved the conversion of six A-1 squadrons to F-5 and A-37 aircraft. See Mikesch page 78.

<sup>40</sup> Abernathy, “Weapons of Choice”, 24-34. Davis, “Back to the Basics”, 15-19. Carr, “Fastmover FID”, 90-93.

<sup>41</sup> Mikesch, “*Flying Dragons*”, 78, 79, and 105. These jet fighter introductions were part of the plan, approved by McNamara in 1966, to convert six A-1 squadrons to two F-5 plus four A-37 fighter squadrons. By 1974, the VNAF had ten A-37 squadrons, five F-5 squadrons, and only three A-1 squadrons. See Mikesch page 118.

<sup>42</sup> Mikesch, “*Flying Dragons*”, 109.

<sup>43</sup> Mikesch, “*Flying Dragons*”, 26, 30, 32, 39, 58, 70, 77, 81, 90.

<sup>44</sup> Abernathy, “Weapons of Choice”, 24-34.

<sup>45</sup> Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, 250.

<sup>46</sup> Abernathy, “Weapons of Choice”, 24-34.

<sup>47</sup> Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, 251.

<sup>48</sup> Abernathy, “Weapons of Choice”, 25.

<sup>49</sup> Westermann, “Relegated to the backseat”, 128.

<sup>50</sup> The F-5 was also envisioned for this goal, though when the first F-5A/B squadron became operational in 1967, the USAF discovered that its air-to-ground capability was well below expectations. For this reason, the second planned squadron was not introduced for seven more years. Vietnamese General Loan indicates that the F-5 was envisioned as a quick reaction air-to-ground airplane – not effective in that role, but quick to get there while the slower A-1s arrived. See Loan Interview page 20.

<sup>51</sup> Mikesch, *“Flying Dragons”*, 117.

<sup>52</sup> Mikesch, *“Flying Dragons”*, 36.

<sup>53</sup> Particularly during the Nixon administration, when Vietnamization, or “returning” the responsibility for combat to the Vietnamese, was the national policy.

<sup>54</sup> Givhan, interview.

<sup>55</sup> “Vietnamization”, or the turning over of the war effort to South Vietnam, was a main theme of the Nixon administration. This effort included efforts to give the Vietnamese “arms, equipment, and training.” See Sorley page 128. According to the Ambassador, Ellsworth Bunker, the measure of success in Vietnam was to be the degree to which the US can get the Vietnamese to take over the war effort themselves. See Sorley page xiii and 95. The Vietnamese, presumably, wanted to fight and win their own war. In 1971, the US ambassador to Vietnam remarked that President Diem recognized the dangers of asking for US military combat assistance because a struggle won with foreign troops would not be in the interests of his country. See Westermann page 147.

<sup>56</sup> Historians will argue about whether it was the PRC, the USSR, or both that was militarily backing the North Vietnamese. In any case, the point here is valid: the north was backed up by a US peer competitor.

<sup>57</sup> Sorley, *A Better War*, 373.

<sup>58</sup> Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, 247.

<sup>59</sup> This is true particularly after the 1964-1965 expansion, when USAF presence was significant. Prior to this time, the need for conventional airpower was relatively small because the communists had not turned to large-scale conventional offensive operations. By Robert Komer’s estimation, prior to the 1964 communist escalation to quasi-conventional war, a dedicated COIN effort had a good chance for success. The USAF would have done well focus on enabling the VNAF to focus on this aspect of the war.

<sup>60</sup> This problem, called “mirror imaging” by several authors, was not unique to the USAF in Vietnam. Corum and Johnson provide an especially compelling argument for the ways in which the VNAF was impacted as the USAF imparted their service culture to them. See *Airpower in Small Wars* pages 241, 252, 254, 264, 270, and 272-274.

<sup>61</sup> Christiansen, “The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: Civic Action”, 36-37.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 37. Lansdale also said, “When not serving as a protector while fighting insurgent bands, the host army must be brothers to the people. Advisors must emphasize the importance of correct and appropriate military behavior toward civilians and the value of civic action programs. Choose projects wisely to provide both short- and long-term value. Work hard at them. A soldier with a shovel, hammer, or trowel, an officer teaching elementary studies, a medical team laboring to provide health care – all on behalf of their own people – are mighty bulwarks against the enemy.” Currey, *Edward Lansdale*, 281.

<sup>63</sup> Simply, insurgent forces seek to discredit the government by eliminating any security except that which they provide and to limit any positive interaction of the government with the people. Insurgencies thrive where there is “domestic unrest caused in part by government unresponsiveness to popular needs.” See Christiansen page 4. The internal stability of a country, particularly when insurgent forces are operating, hinges on the ability of the legitimate government to capture and hold the loyalty of the people by providing them with security and services.

<sup>64</sup> JP3-07.1, *Joint Tactics*, I-1.

<sup>65</sup> The JCS, in early 1962, issued a definition of civic action that captured this intent. Civic action is [t]he use of preponderantly indigenous military forces on projects useful to the local population at all levels in such fields as education, training, public works, agriculture, transportation, communications, health, sanitation, and others contributing to economic and social development, which would also serve to improve the standing of the military forces with the population. U.S. forces may at times advise or engage in military civic actions in overseas areas. See Christiansen page 38.

It is ironic that the sound understanding of civic action that is suggested in this definition did not translate into an operational focus in the early years of the Vietnam conflict.

<sup>66</sup> Christiansen, “Civic Action”, 36. Christiansen’s work is the product of more than a decade of careful research and includes detailed citations of primary sources. As a result, Christiansen’s paper legitimately forms the only source used in this section. Her complete work is recommended to the interested reader.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 4.



<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>70</sup> Christiansen, "Civic Action", 115, and Komer, *Bureaucracy*, 111.

<sup>71</sup> Christiansen, "Civic Action", 132.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 271. The author provides a table of services provided by the "USAF Medical Civic Action Program" for the years 1967 through 1971.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 144. The author notes explicitly that other USAF civic action teams learned and reapplied the lessons of these successful civic action programs. It is not clear from the author's work whether the lessons flowed to other branches of the overall CORDS program.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 138-139.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>80</sup> Many other lessons were learned as the USAF improved their civic action programs. These include:

Program funding (Christiansen, "Civic Action", 117),

NGO coordination (Ibid., 118),

The need for a civic action training program for all USAF personnel (Ibid., 120),

Best source for civic action program ideas (Ibid., 124),

The importance of planned vs spontaneous civic action (Ibid., 124),

The benefit of scheduling civic action airlift and making it available to other services (Ibid., 125),

Vietnamese 'adoption' of hamlets (Ibid., 128), and

The need for local leader coordination (Ibid., 130).

<sup>81</sup> Christiansen, "Civic Action", 245.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 12 and 89.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 88-89.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 264. See author's endnote number 82.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 131-132.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>95</sup> Sorley, *A Better War*, 64-65. CORDS, started in 1967, led this overall pacification effort.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>98</sup> Komer offers the opinion that placing primary emphasis on the unconventional COIN fight was repeatedly advocated but was not attempted in any scale until the implementation of the CORDS program in 1967-1971. Even then, COIN was not given primacy, but was executed as a relatively tiny adjunct to the conventional military effort. See Komer page x-xi. CORDS recognized the criticality of civic action as a supporting program to such a COIN (pacification) effort.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>100</sup> Generally speaking this is true. At any time, the US military (not necessarily those forces stationed in Vietnam) had the capability to turn back North Vietnam's conventional invasion. At some point during the US drawdown, the US military no longer had sufficient forces in Vietnam to accomplish this. The assumption here is that if the US had the national will to commit or maintain the necessary forces, the US military could have defeated the NVA offensive.

<sup>101</sup> USAF OHI Major General Edward G. Lansdale, 32.

<sup>102</sup> Lansdale had himself been such an "effective individual" in assisting the Phillipine government to defeat the communist Huk insurgency. See Currey chapters 4-6. The US government subsequently assigned Lansdale to attempt to perform a similar function in South Vietnam. Lansdale was less effective in Vietnam even though he did

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succeed in becoming a close advisor of President Diem. The most likely reason for Lansdale's lack of success is that President Diem persisted in following the advice of his authoritarian brother Nhu. See Currey chapters 7-8.

<sup>103</sup> Christiansen, "Civic Action", 144.

<sup>104</sup> USAF OHI Major General Edward G. Lansdale, 21.

<sup>105</sup> Christiansen, "Civic Action", 256.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>109</sup> USAF OHI Major General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, 27.

<sup>110</sup> See *Airpower in Small Wars* pages 241, 252, 254, 264, 270, and 272-274.

<sup>111</sup> Endnote repeated here: "Vietnamization", or the turning over of the war effort to South Vietnam, was a main theme of the Nixon administration. This effort included efforts to give the Vietnamese "arms, equipment, and training." See Sorley page 128. According to the Ambassador, Ellsworth Bunker, the measure of success in Vietnam was to be the degree to which the US can get the Vietnamese to take over the war effort themselves. See Sorley page xiii and 95. The Vietnamese, presumably, wanted to fight and win their own war. In 1971, the US ambassador to Vietnam remarked that President Diem recognized the dangers of asking for US military combat assistance because a struggle won with foreign troops would not be in the interests of his country. See Westermann page 147.

<sup>112</sup> Some might argue that this is exactly what the US did during the Linebacker bombing campaigns. True, but several considerations negate any benefit this arrangement might have provided in focusing the VNAF on the COIN fight. By that late point in the war, the US had put the VNAF in a supporting role through years of direct action in South Vietnam, and had induced the USAF culture that legitimacy comes from fast jets and the missions that require them. A positive effect might have been had if the US had made and followed such a 'roles' policy in 1961 when the USAF first became officially involved. Such a policy in 1969 – IF, as is doubtful, that was a consideration for either Linebacker – was meaningless after the long history of interaction between the USAF and VNAF.

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