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A People's Army For South Vietnam: A Vietnamese Solution

Brian M. Jenkins

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10. ABSTRACT

A lack of men, money, and any firm guarantee that the U.S. Congress will continue, for very long, to provide funds to support South Vietnam's defense establishment at current levels makes it imperative for South Vietnam to reduce the economic and social burden of its defense, while maintaining adequate security. A program is suggested by which much of the Vietnamese defense burden could be shifted to a people's army composed of local militiamen and members of the People's Self-Defense Force, allowing reductions in the regular armed forces. Initially, this program would concentrate on expanding and increasing the effectiveness of the People's Self-Defense Force and territorial forces. The burden would be gradually transferred. By 1975 the potential savings would amount to $750 million a year. Equally important, 300,000 to 400,000 soldiers would have been released from full-time active duty.

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PREFACE

As American forces are withdrawn from South Vietnam, attention is turning to what sort of military organization the South Vietnamese will create for themselves. The present military establishment, a replica of the American army, is clearly beyond the country's means, and the South Vietnamese know it. While they may continue to ask for large amounts of military equipment, they are at the same time planning for the day when they must defend their country with less external support. Increasingly, they talk of a *people's army* as a possible answer to the threat of protracted war.

This Report, which is part of a continuing program of research undertaken by The Rand Corporation for the Advanced Research Projects Agency, Office of the Secretary of Defense, examines the concept of a *people's army*, suggests the steps by which such a concept could be implemented, and estimates the costs that would be incurred and potential savings that would result from implementation.*

The author, a staff member in Rand's Social Science Department, conducted the research for this Report while in South Vietnam during the first four months of 1971. In addition, he has drawn on his prior experience in Vietnam as a Captain in the United States Army Special Forces (1966-1967) and as a civilian member of the Long Range Planning Task Group at MACV headquarters in Saigon (1968-1969).

This study has been the subject of numerous briefings by the author to representatives of the NSC, JCS, Joint Staff, OSD/ISA, OSD/SA, OSD/DDR&E, and the Army Staff in Washington, D.C., and at CINCPAC and USARPAC headquarters in Honolulu.

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*Nine months have now passed since this Report was written and its conclusions briefed to government officials. In the intervening period the North Vietnamese have launched a major conventional invasion, their drive has been halted, and the South Vietnamese have mounted their first counteroffensive. South Vietnam's foremost defense problem at the present time obviously is not the threat of protracted war. It is unlikely, however, that should the North Vietnamese forces be driven back, Hanoi and the Viet Cong will totally abandon their efforts to take over South

Vietnam. South Vietnam still will face a variety of threats to its security, ranging from renewed conventional attack to low level protracted war. The basic problem of defending the country with less external support will remain, perhaps become more acute.

SUMMARY

The Vietnamization program has been successful in enabling the United States to withdraw its combat forces, but it will not end the war. South Vietnam will face alone a tenacious enemy that is determined to go on fighting. There is no evidence that North Vietnam has abandoned its objective of total victory. It is unlikely to withdraw the troops it has deployed in Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam, and South Vietnam does not have the military capability to destroy them entirely or to drive them back home. Within its borders, South Vietnam confronts the Viet Cong, who survive though weakened by South Vietnam's pacification campaigns. They are still feared; in some areas they are still popular; and in the past they have demonstrated great resiliency. Facing these threats, South Vietnam must be able to sustain its defenses in a war that, with occasional interruptions of peace, could continue indefinitely.

To carry on after American withdrawal, the United States has created in South Vietnam a large, conventionally structured army. South Vietnam cannot support this army for very long. It has neither the men nor the money. Almost half of the country's able-bodied men are already soldiers. The number that desert or are killed each year exceeds the number of young men reaching the draft age, and with the South Vietnamese army taking on a greater share of the fighting, neither desertions nor casualties are likely to decline.

As it is now, not only does the United States pay all the costs of fighting the war, it also helps pay the salaries of South Vietnam's soldiers and subsidizes the country's economy. No guarantee can be given that the U.S. Congress will continue to vote the $3 billion a year necessary to sustain the war effort, a figure that does not include the cost of American forces, any residual advisory group that may remain in Vietnam, or the air interdiction campaign in Laos. Even with continued American assistance, South Vietnam faces serious economic problems that could produce popular unrest, political agitation, and government instability, which would ultimately be reflected in weakness on the battlefield. South Vietnam could be in danger of collapsing under

the weight of its own military establishment. This may become a greater threat to the country than that of being conquered militarily.

Designed originally to meet the threat of a Korea-style invasion from the north, South Vietnam's army is far too dependent on lavish artillery and air support, which are expensive and destructive. Its style of fighting and the often bad behavior of its soldiers toward the populace tend to alienate the very people it is supposed to defend. Fighting as it does now, this army will exhaust the country in the protracted war that the opponent seems to have decided on.

Realizing that their nation cannot alone afford its present military establishment or depend for long on American military assistance, a number of South Vietnamese are considering a different concept of military organization, one better suited to South Vietnam's needs and capabilities than what it has now. They envisage a vast *people's army* composed of lightly armed soldiers responsible for the defense of their own localities. In time, this inexpensive militia would be able to assume much of South Vietnam's defense burden and thus allow reductions in the size of the regular armed forces. It is a kind of army South Vietnam can afford, one that is derived from durable Vietnamese traditions of national defense.

South Vietnam already has an incipient people's army in the People's Self-Defense Force, Popular Forces, and Regional Forces, which together comprise over four million part-time and full-time local soldiers. A three-phase program is suggested to show how these three organizations could be combined, made more effective, and transformed into a people's army.

In the first phase, which would begin immediately, the Regional and Popular Forces and People's Self-Defense Force would be placed under a single command and renamed officially the People's Army. At the same time, the fighting capabilities of the People's Self-Defense Force would be improved by reinforcing PSDF units with a small cadre of veterans drawn from the regular forces, by giving them more and better training, and by furnishing more small arms and some crew-served weapons. The first phase would also include measures to prepare for the eventual demobilization of the regular army, such as the creation

of a territorial reserve force to be attached to existing Regional and Popular Forces units, and the establishment of military-agricultural colonies, or *don dien*, on abandoned land in strategic areas, a concept similar to the Israeli *kibbutzim* but deeply rooted in Vietnam's history.

In the second phase, as the people's army became capable of assuming a larger portion of the defense burden, probably sometime in 1973, the army could begin a limited demobilization, starting with soldiers who could be readily absorbed into the economy. Those who remained should be given vocational training part-time to reduce the danger of urban unemployment and unrest that might otherwise follow the release of thousands of soldiers, the great majority unskilled in any civilian occupation, from the service. At the same time, South Vietnam could create an urban auxiliary militia composed of part-time soldiers who could take over some of the routine tasks now performed by full-time regular soldiers, allowing further demobilization.

The people's army would reach maturity in the third phase, possibly around 1975, allowing substantial reductions in the size of the regular army. Fully formed, the people's army would include a sizeable People's Self-Defense Force encadred by veterans of the regular army. It would be assisted by a single territorial force of 300,000-400,000 full-time but still local soldiers. Backing this would be a much smaller regular army.

The naturally greater vulnerability of a people's army to large, conventional enemy offensives would be compensated for by other strengths. Should the enemy plan an offensive like that of Tet 1968, that is, widespread attacks on population centers, first it would have to mass troops and pre-position supplies. The people's army's continuous presence in all populated areas would allow it to forestall such a buildup. Against the alternative possibility of an enemy offensive against a single military region, the mobile, highly professional regular army could gradually redeploy to the most vulnerable areas of the country as the people's army freed it from territorial defense.

As the people's army grew stronger and the regular army were gradually reduced to 300,000 men, a goal mentioned by President Thieu, then approximately $640 million could be saved annually. That saving

would not be enough to make South Vietnam independent of U.S. military assistance. (The United States would save most of the money.) But South Vietnam would save men. Demobilization would allow the return of thousands of men to productive roles in the South Vietnamese economy, thus decreasing the country's dependence on American economic assistance.

Indications are that the South Vietnamese are moving toward creating a people's army. Given the alternatives, they have no choice but to try to develop a cheaper way to defend their country. Opposition is likely to come from the regular army, particularly senior commanders, who may regard the people's army as a direct threat to their military commands as well as to the political power they exercise as commanders of large military formations.

The American role should be positive but low-key. We cannot create a people's army for the South Vietnamese as we have created their regular army. We should, however, increase their sense of urgency. Frank discussions indicating that U.S. military assistance will decline sharply would encourage the South Vietnamese to develop a low-cost defense force. More positively, the United States should materially support their efforts in this direction.

Not only is the concept vital to the survival of South Vietnam, but the development of a people's army there might reveal principles of defense organization that could be applied in other nations in Southeast Asia. There is a need in the region as a whole for the creation of low-cost but effective defense forces that are not an overwhelming burden upon local societies and economies and are not totally dependent on American support.

Appendix A looks ahead and attaches actual numbers and costs to some of the ideas described, if implemented, and estimates the potential savings that would result as the people's army assumed a growing share of the defense burden, thus allowing gradual reductions in the present armed forces.

Appendix B looks back and describes some Vietnamese solutions to the historic problem of sustained mobilization. Despite their ultimate failure against the French challenge in the nineteenth century, Vietnam's precolonial institutions for nine centuries preserved the

country's independence against numerically and technologically superior enemies. To fight the long wars that were a regular feature of their history, the Vietnamese developed techniques that enabled them to reduce the strain of sustained mobilization while maintaining their defense. These included special recruiting procedures; measures for supporting the families of soldiers; various schemes of rotational active duty; an economic role for the army; and the deployment of military-agricultural colonies (*don dien*) to clear new terrain and to defend the frontiers.

Don dien are the subject of Appendix C. This traditional institution has great relevance to South Vietnam's current problems, as it offers a means by which the country could shift some of its military manpower to agricultural production without complete demobilization. The *don dien* could serve several purposes at once: reclaim land that has been abandoned as a result of the war; resettle demobilized veterans; and assist in the defense of strategic areas of the country.

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Co cua lay cua che tham.
Khong co cua lay tham che cua.

The rich man uses his property to protect his life.
The poor man uses his life to protect his property.

-- Vietnamese proverb

I. INTRODUCTION

A high-ranking American officer was recently heard to say, "We have given the South Vietnamese the best-equipped army in the world and provided them with the best training in the world. If they can't figure out how to win the war with it, that's their problem." However true the statement may be, it misses the point that the United States may be *unwilling* to support this army, and the South Vietnamese by themselves are *incapable* of supporting it.

Amid the recurrent crises of this interminable war looms a crisis that is no less so because it will be chronic rather than acute: how are the South Vietnamese going to defend themselves when American forces leave, if they cannot support their present army and if the United States refuses to?

This Report describes a kind of military organization that promises to meet this crisis. Its basis is a lightly armed, vast militia of *local* soldiers, which can be called a *people's army*. As following discussion will show, a people's army could eventually assume a major portion of South Vietnam's defense burden and thus allow partial demobilization of the current overly mechanized and costly regular army. Relatively inexpensive, the people's army is an army that the South Vietnamese can afford. It is an army that they can accept: the very concept of a people's army derives from durable Vietnamese traditions of national defense.

Changes in organization and tactics that would be required in the creation of a people's army will undoubtedly be resisted by the Americans and South Vietnamese who have a vested interest in the current military organization and mode of fighting. However, the crisis is so serious and the potential benefits from a people's army are so great that objections of infeasibility will probably be overcome. Already, there is evidence that top Vietnamese officials favor a people's army.

How the South Vietnamese will manage their defense after American withdrawal is, of course, uncertain. The author believes that they will move toward establishing a people's army while continuing to demand of the United States a high level of military assistance that many

realize will not be granted. Given the alternatives, the South Vietnamese have no choice but to try to develop a cheaper way to defend their country, and to do so before reductions in foreign aid immobilize the army they have now, and before the society collapses while trying to support and man it.

A people's army is no panacea. It will not solve all of South Vietnam's problems. Problems of political leadership, motivation, and cohesiveness, not dealt with here, will remain, no matter how the armed forces are organized and equipped. The author does believe, however, that a people's army offers a means of reducing the burden of sustained mobilization and increasing South Vietnam's chances of survival in the difficult years ahead.

II. THE PROSPECT AND BURDEN OF A LONG WAR

In all likelihood, the withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam will not end the war. Nor will our efforts to build up a large South Vietnamese army to replace our own forces guarantee the survival of South Vietnam. We have provided the South Vietnamese with a replica of the American army; it is a formidable military machine, but, for economic and social reasons, South Vietnam *cannot* support it for very long, and the United States may not be *willing* to support it for the likely duration of the war. Despite its strength on the battlefield, South Vietnam could fall. In fact, the danger that the country will collapse under the weight of its own military establishment may equal or even exceed the danger that it will be conquered militarily. There is also the danger that South Vietnam's army will be arbitrarily reduced to meet budgetary requirements without sufficient forethought as to the consequences for the country's defenses and for its society if thousands of soldiers, the great majority of whom are unskilled in any civilian occupation, were suddenly demobilized.

As faith in conventional military methods and in the inexhaustibility of American resources diminishes while the prospect of continued war remains, many Vietnamese have begun to think about a different kind of an army to defend their country, one that is cheaper and less burdensome on the people, and might be more effective than the present cumbersome, conventionally structured, and overly Americanized army. They foresee South Vietnam's future defense force as a vast militia of armed peasants and part-time soldiers backed by a much smaller conventional army. This is hardly a new idea. In fact, it is probably close to the way the Vietnamese would have organized their own defenses if they had not been so imbued with French training and American military advice.

Coming from a wealthy country and accustomed to comparatively short wars fought overseas, Americans have had little experience with the problems that confront a small, poor country fighting a protracted war on its own territory. Long wars have been a regular feature of Vietnamese history. In often having faced that problem, the Vietnamese developed a number of techniques that enabled them to reduce the strain of sustained mobilization (see Appendix B). We as advisors might do

well to encourage the Vietnamese in their effort to apply some of these techniques, successful in Vietnamese history, to South Vietnam's present problems.

Changes are necessary, both in the composition of the armed forces and in the way they fight. This essay describes a concept of military organization and tactics that will be more tailored to South Vietnam's needs and capabilities than what it has now. It takes into account the limitations imposed by South Vietnam's economy, the possibility that American military assistance will be reduced, and the range of threats likely to be posed by the enemy.

A TENACIOUS ENEMY

South Vietnam faces a tenacious enemy that is determined to go on fighting. North Vietnam has not abandoned its objective of total victory. The Vietnamese have a tradition of long wars, and the North Vietnamese government has thus far shown itself more capable than the South Vietnamese government of imposing on its people the regimentation and austerity necessary to fight one. Members of the Hanoi government are themselves the survivors of thirty and forty years of struggle against the French and the Americans. They are not going to quit now, with the Americans withdrawing and with South Vietnam facing serious economic problems and in greater political disarray than usual. North Vietnam is unlikely to withdraw the 100,000 troops it maintains in South Vietnam or the more than 100,000 it maintains in Cambodia and Laos. Even if they cannot march on Saigon and take over the country, they keep South Vietnam under pressure and can exploit any signs of weakness. The ever-present threat they pose forces South Vietnam to undertake costly offensives such as the one launched last spring in Laos and burdens its society with an expensive defense effort.

Within its borders, South Vietnam also faces the persistent threat of the Viet Cong, who survive though weakened. Government programs aimed at neutralizing the Viet Cong infrastructure have succeeded, at the political cost of alienating many of the people, only in netting a number of mostly low-level cadres, who can be easily replaced. Although

at reduced strength, Viet Cong military units still remain: large ones are holed up in the traditional base areas such as the U Minh Forest, and small ones often hide in orchards just outside villages now rated secure. They are feared, and in some areas -- traditional strongholds of antigovernment resistance -- they are still popular.[1] In Binh Dinh Province alone, where the Viet Minh and later the Viet Cong have been around for so long that they have almost created a Viet Cong society, sympathizers are reported to number 300,000, nearly a third of the province's total population.

South Vietnam does not have and is not likely to attain the military capability to destroy the North Vietnamese army or drive it back home, nor can South Vietnam deter North Vietnam by any credible threat of retaliation. Reduction of the traditional enemy base areas in South Vietnam will take years, and total elimination of the Viet Cong underground and active sympathizers seems hardly possible. South Vietnam must be able to sustain its defenses in a war that, with occasional interruptions of peace, could continue indefinitely.

INADEQUATE HUMAN RESOURCES

The country has neither the men nor the economic strength to support its present military establishment. Almost one-half of South Vietnam's able-bodied men are already soldiers, not counting those who serve part-time in the People's Self-Defense Force.[2] Because of the high casualty rate and even higher desertion rate, the annual net loss to the armed forces exceeds the potential influx of young men who reach the draft age each year.[3] The armed forces maintain their present size only by not allowing the release of any soldiers and by dipping deeper into the manpower pool of 18- to 38-year-olds who have not already served.[4] In the past, this was facilitated by the rapid expansion of government control in the countryside, which made more men available for conscription, but now that 90 percent of the country is under control, the gains from this source have peaked and the available manpower pool is drying up.

The withdrawal of American forces compels the South Vietnamese army to redeploy its forces and assume a greater share of the fighting, both of which in the past have increased the desertion rate. This problem is exemplified most dramatically by South Vietnam's difficulties in redeploying or maintaining units in the Demilitarized Zone. Often a scene of the heaviest fighting, the DMZ has become South Vietnam's "Eastern Front." Many South Vietnamese soldiers regard being sent there as a form of punishment.

The interminability of service adds another motive for desertion. Death, disability, and desertion are now the only means of exit from the army: Defection to the enemy is rare. Usually the soldiers just go home to care for their families. They object more to fighting *away from home* than fighting itself, for they often join local militia units to remain at home, defend their own families, and not be drafted again.[5] The desertion rate of the Regional Forces, whose soldiers serve in their own provinces, is considerably lower than that of the regular army, and the desertion rate of the Popular Forces, whose soldiers serve in their own villages, is lower yet.

Some believe that a smaller army would be able to handle the future threat, and thus that South Vietnam can begin to demobilize. While this may be true in the long run, rapid demobilization could be as dangerous to South Vietnam's society and economy as sustained mobilization is debilitating. Many of South Vietnam's soldiers have been in the army so long that they have no other profession, and they would not be absorbed easily into the civilian economy.[6] Those that did not return to the family farm but drifted to the cities might simply add to the urban unemployment problem produced by the withdrawal of American forces. Groups of unemployed veterans could combine with the mobs of disabled veterans who are already demonstrating against the government. They might resort to banditry. There are increasing reports that idle soldiers are turning to looting and highway robbery, and able-bodied soldiers as well as disabled veterans openly engage in racketeering among businesses in Saigon.[7] Rapid demobilization (without subsequent absorption of those released into the active labor force), or even a steep decline in the number of

men inducted into the government forces, would furnish the Viet Cong a manpower pool. Persuaded that they had been exploited and then abandoned by the government, veterans today could become Viet Cong tomorrow.

THE ECONOMIC BURDEN

It costs about $3.5 billion a year for South Vietnam to maintain its armed forces and fight the war. (This excludes what is spent on the American forces.) With no reduction in the size of its armed forces and the style of fighting unchanged, the cost will not change significantly. Most of the economists who have looked at the Vietnamese economy would agree that the country is unable by itself to support a military force such as the one currently deployed. South Vietnam's economy has been dislocated by the war. Rice and rubber exports, the two traditional revenue producers, have declined dramatically, and recapture of these markets would take time, perhaps a decade, under the best of conditions. Meanwhile, the provision of services and products to American soldiers has become one of South Vietnam's major industries and its principal source of foreign exchange, but this is declining with the withdrawal of American forces.

True, as a result of American expenditures during the war, new capabilities have been created -- port facilities, a road network, and many trained personnel -- but these are more relevant to postwar economic growth than they are to the country's ability to support its present military effort. The problem is not one of postwar economic development, but rather a continuing state of war. South Vietnam will continue to be almost totally dependent on the United States to finance its defense effort. Given the climate of opinion in and the obvious economic difficulties of the United States, no guarantee can be given that it will provide the necessary financial support indefinitely.

Even with continued American assistance, South Vietnam faces economic difficulties that could produce popular unrest, political agitation, and government instability, which ultimately would be reflected in weakness on the battlefield. Dissatisfaction over continued inflation;

unpopular government measures to impose economic austerity or raise revenue; unemployment resulting from the American withdrawal; and the plight of South Vietnam's soldiers, who find themselves impoverished by low salaries and soaring costs, could lead to an explosive situation in the urban areas where the population is concentrated.

AN ARMY WELL EQUIPPED BUT ILL SUITED

If South Vietnam's present armed forces cannot be adequately manned and paid for, their effectiveness hardly seems relevant. Nevertheless, many would question their effectiveness even if they could be adequately maintained. While South Vietnam's army has become more competent and more aggressive -- in other words, has performed more like us -- it suffers from many of the disadvantages of a large conventional army faced with an unconventional foe. Despite the apparent superior mobility afforded by its armored personnel carriers and helicopters, it cannot seem to concentrate its forces rapidly enough to trap or pursue the enemy. In battle, the army, says one Vietnamese officer, "is addicted to the opium of heavy weapons."

A former Viet Cong battalion commander with almost twenty years of experience observed that so accustomed were South Vietnam's regular soldiers to relying on heavy artillery and air support that they often left their own mortars at home and thus found themselves outgunned by the Viet Cong, who brought small mortars with them.[8] And as South Vietnam's forces retreated under heavy U.S. air cover from the Cambodian town of Snoul, General Abrams himself was heard to say, "Dammit, they've got to learn they can't do it all with air. They've got to do it on the ground with infantry."[9]

The performance of the South Vietnamese army contrasts unfavorably with that of its opponent, whose weapons a man can carry or pull and whose mobility is measured by now far and how fast it can march. Except near the Demilitarized Zone, rarely has the enemy used armor or artillery, and not once has it relied on air support. Perhaps General Chassin, who once commanded the French Air Force in Indochina, was right when he wondered if the Viet Minh were not compelled by their lack of heavy weapons to practice methods of warfare that were capable of stalemating most modern armaments.[10]

Superior firepower is useful only in battles where firepower is relevant. Large deployments of artillery and American B-52 bombers give the South Vietnamese forces a clear-cut advantage in large engagements only where the enemy is willing to stand and trade punches. But these are rare; in the most common kind of engagement, the enemy has an advantage in being able to choose whether to fight, or to avoid battle, conserve losses, and thus prolong the war.

Reliance on heavy weapons is expensive -- over a third of the regular army's operating costs go for artillery ammunition alone -- and it is also extremely destructive. It has contributed heavily to the South Vietnam army's dependence on American support and alienation from the people. As reliance on foreign technology replaced local support, the army grew indifferent to the people. When soldiers have helicopters, they seem to worry less about the disposition of the population along the roads they would otherwise have to travel. When they have armor, the attitudes of villagers seem less important. The indifference is reciprocated. Some people in South Vietnam have come to regard their own army as a foreign army, fighting according to an imported doctrine and entirely dependent on foreign support, or, according to the propaganda of Hanoi, as "puppets." Its destructive style of fighting coupled with the bad behavior of many of its soldiers cause the people to fear the army that is supposed to be defending them as a bigger threat to their own security than the enemy.

NOTES

1. These traditional centers of dissidence can tentatively be identified as the highlands and some coastal areas of the northern part of the country, particularly Quang Nam, Quang Tin, Quang Ngai, and Binh Dinh Provinces; portions of Tay Ninh and Hau Nghia Provinces, the Plain of Reeds, and parts of the Ca Mau Peninsula. Some of these areas have been Viet Minh, and later Viet Cong, strongholds for years. A typical example is part of Hau Nghia Province. Traveling in the area in 1962, Gerald C. Hickey observed that the peasants used Viet Cong propaganda in their everyday speech. For example, they naturally used the expression "Diem-American gang" to refer to the government. Some families boasted of three generations of males in the Viet Minh. (See Gerald C. Hickey, *Accomodation and Coalition in South Vietnam*, The Rand Corporation, P-4213, January 1970, pp. 37-41.) This same area can boast of many generations of rebels, bandits, and river pirates before the Viet Minh. It was mentioned by French officials as a rebel stronghold as early as the 1860s, and the French missionary Bouillevaux described the same parts of western Cochinchina as being infested with river pirates in the 1840s and 1850s.

2. South Vietnam's population was estimated to be 18,331,000 in 1970. Males between the ages of 15 and 49 numbered 4,425,000, of whom 2,555,000 were judged physically fit for service. Approximately 1.2 million men are full-time soldiers or policemen.

3. Approximately 115,000 young men reach the draft age of 18 annually.

4. Approximately 160,000 men are inducted into the armed forces each year.

5. No figures are available to show what portion of the deserters who are not returned to the service have rejoined local units under assumed names.

6. The authors of the Joint Planning Group study recommending programs for South Vietnam's postwar economic development estimate that even without demobilization, South Vietnam must provide 200,000-300,000 new jobs a year and will face serious unemployment. See Joint Planning Group, *The Postwar Development of the Republic of Vietnam: Policies and Programs*, Saigon: Vol. I, March 1969, pp. 123-148.

7. When the author was last in Saigon, January through April 1971, he personally witnessed shakedowns of owners of small businesses by disabled veterans and was told about many others. See also Iver Peterson, "Crimes Said to Rise in Vietnam's Army," *New York Times*, September 7, 1971.

8. Discussion between the author and Captain Phan Van Xuong, Saigon, April 16, 1971. Captain Xuong joined the Viet Minh in the 1940s. In 1954 he went north, returning to South Vietnam in 1958. He rose through the ranks of the Viet Cong until he commanded a battalion in the Quyet Thang ("Victory") Regiment in 1968, a temporary organization created for the Tet offensive. He rallied to the government's side in 1968. Xuong said that a Viet Cong regiment normally has nine to twelve assorted mortars (60mm, 81mm, 82mm, occasionally a 120mm), which it uses for close support. These, plus the AK47 and AK50 assault rifles, machine guns, and small rocket launchers, often give the Viet Cong initial fire superiority.

9. Quoted in *Newsweek*, August 2, 1971.

10. Quoted in Bernard B. Fall, *Viet-Nam Witness 1953-66*, New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966, p. 253.

III. A STRATEGY OF PROTRACTED DEFENSE AND A PEOPLE'S ARMY

The South Vietnamese need to gear for a long struggle in which staying power will be more important than firepower. Their strategy should be that of a "protracted defense," to develop the capability of fighting beyond the fifteen, twenty, or more years that Ho Chi Minh promised to fight, and to convince Ho's successors that they can do so. A strategy of protracted defense implies a style of fighting that is cheaper, less destructive, and that conserves men. It also means marshaling the country's manpower for the war effort in a way that interrupts production and economic growth as little as possible. President Thieu himself recently summed up the problem:

> Now that we have built a powerful army, naturally, we must gradually assume the responsibility to fight in place of the repatriated allied soldiers. We only need to continue to be supplied with the sufficient necessary means to fight. However, our problem is not simple because, on the one hand, we are poor and must reserve national resources and foreign aid for developing our social welfare and our economy and, therefore, must not forever maintain an army too that can become a burden for the national budget. On the other hand, we must have very powerful armed forces to defend peace as soon as peace is restored, and to stand ready to oppose every act of reaggression by the communists. This has led us to think about a national defense that is not too expensive but still efficient, and that can allow the people to have enough time to improve their livelihood and contribute to developing the country.[11]

THE CONCEPT OF A PEOPLE'S ARMY

The kind of army most suitable under a strategy of protracted defense, one that would preserve military readiness while providing for the nation's economic development, is not the overly mechanized, costly regular army of today. South Vietnam will need, instead, a low-cost but effective force such as the following: a vast militia of armed peasants and part-time soldiers backed by a much smaller conventional army. Most of its members would serve part-time and thus would be able to engage in their own economic activities. To avoid long separations of soldiers from their families and the expense to the government

of supporting soldiers' dependents on army bases, all members of this militia, part-time and full-time, would serve close to their own homes. This is a good idea also since local soldiers tend to behave better because they are close to home and do not desert as often as soldiers serving far from their homes. Many South Vietnamese call this concept *quan doi nhan dan*, which means "army of the people," or "people's army," not because of any resemblance to so-called people's armies in China and North Vietnam but because of its greater reliance on human resources than on costly weapons, and on people defending their own homes than on full-time professional soldiers.

The term "people's army" itself seems to offend many Americans. It sounds vaguely communist. The South Vietnamese who support the idea do not share these ideological reservations. The country already has an organization called the People's Self-Defense Force, and the term "people's army" is often used to describe the kind of military organization envisaged in the future. The idea of a people's army has special appeal to the Vietnamese, for it is basically a return to the military institutions and techniques that for centuries enabled Vietnam to preserve its independence against numerically and technologically superior enemies.

SOUTH VIETNAM HAS AN INCIPIENT PEOPLE'S ARMY

South Vietnam already has a people's army of sorts in the Regional Forces (RF), Popular Forces (PF), and People's Self-Defense Force (PSDF). The Regional and Popular Forces, local soldiers whose full-time job is to provide security for the rural population, together outnumber the men in South Vietnam's regular army. As these soldiers are intimately familiar with the terrain and people in the area in which they operate, they have the same advantage as the local Viet Cong. They fight well when given support by the local communities. In highly cohesive communities, such as in An Giang Province, where followers of the Hoa Hao sect predominate and by informal agreement with the government hold most command positions in the area's military units and government, local soldiers can be extremely effective. Proportionally, the Regional and Popular Forces also cost very little, less than

a quarter of the cost of South Vietnam's total land forces (the regular army, the Marines, and the two territorial forces).

In many respects, the Regional or Popular Forces soldier is a poor country cousin of the soldier in the regular army. He is the most poorly armed and receives the lowest pay. Constantly facing the danger of being attacked, he cannot depend on quick reinforcement, and if wounded he can expect medical treatment inferior to that given the regular soldier. He joined the Regional Forces or Popular Forces primarily to remain near his home, and despite the hardships he probably would not trade places with a soldier in the regular army. In fact, many of his fellow soldiers are deserters from the regular army who, to avoid being sent back, enlisted in a local unit. Opportunities for advancement are limited. No vocational training is given, and few of the rural soldiers have completed enough schooling to obtain the First Baccalaureate necessary to becoming an officer.

When the enemy launched widespread attacks on the populated areas of South Vietnam in 1968, thousands of people asked the government for arms to defend themselves, their families, and their property. The government responded by creating the People's Self-Defense Force. Since then it has grown to an organization of 4.4 million part-time soldiers, of which 1.3 million have received some rudimentary military training and have been issued 600,000 weapons, to be rotated among them. Members are organized into cells of three men each, squad-size teams, interteams, and combat groups. The interteam of approximately platoon strength is the largest tactical unit. The People's Self-Defense Force is expected to warn of enemy attempts to enter populated areas and to repel incursions by small enemy groups. Performance varies widely. In some areas, the People's Self-Defense Force is poorly organized, poorly trained, poorly led, and as a result, virtually ineffective. In a few areas, however, People's Self-Defense Force units have fought off enemy attacks with no outside help.

The costs of the People's Self-Defense Force are miniscule when compared with the other components of South Vietnam's defense establishment. Its only major investment is in weapons, which have been furnished from excess stocks already in South Vietnam and thus do not

represent a new expense. The operating costs of the People's Self-Defense Force are currently about $9.1 million a year, most of which are to defray the expenses of training interteam leaders.[12] Per trained combat member, this comes to about $7 per year. These expenses are borne entirely by the South Vietnamese government; the United States provides no direct support.

Together, the two territorial forces and the People's Self-Defense Force represent a defense force of 5 million men and women, 1.8 million of whom have received at least some rudimentary military training. They embody the principles of a people's army. They are local: the People's Self-Defense Force member defends his own neighborhood or hamlet, the Popular Forces soldier his own village, and the Regional Forces soldier his own province. They cost little -- $460 million a year, or roughly 15 percent of South Vietnam's total defense costs.[13] And many of them are part-time soldiers and thus have time to pursue their own economic activities. Already deployed throughout the populated areas of the country, they constitute a vast military potential.

They also constitute a vast political potential. A people's army of 5 million would be the largest, and the only other, organization besides the Viet Cong and the regular armed forces whose members are drawn from all social classes, ethnic groups, and religions.

NOTES

11. Quoted from a speech by President Thieu on August 5, 1971, Civil Defense Day.

12. Operating costs and other figures relating to the People's Self-Defense Force were furnished the author by Dr. John C. Russell, Chief of the PSDF/YA Division, CORDS, MACV Headquarters in Saigon.

13. Total defense costs here refer only to those of South Vietnam's armed forces. They do not include the costs of the American forces in Vietnam.

IV. DEVELOPING A PEOPLE'S ARMY

To transform the people's army that South Vietnam already has into a more effective organization capable of assuming a larger portion of the defense burden, the following measures are suggested, not as a blueprint, but as an indication of the direction to take. To decrease the disruption occasioned by any military reorganization, the transformation should be gradual; it could be a three-phased program: some modest immediate measures; a second phase, to begin sometime in 1973; and a third phase, to go into effect sometime after 1975. The actual timing of the phases would, of course, depend on the level and kind of threat posed by the enemy and the success attained in developing a people's army.

IMMEDIATE TASKS

We can assume that for the next two years or so the enemy threat will remain at a minimum what it is now. South Vietnam's armed forces also will remain at their present strength. The measures undertaken in the first phase would not result in any substantial cost or manpower savings. Savings would come later as the regular army is reduced in size and relies less on heavy weapons.

Create a People's Army in Name

To instill the idea of a people's army, the People's Self-Defense Force, Popular Forces, and Regional Forces should be combined under a single command and renamed officially the People's Army. This would provide an administrative framework and would create a vested interest in further change. Moreover, even a simple change of name would have symbolic significance, as it would compel people to think about the People's Army as something *different* from the regular armed forces.

Unlike the Regional and Popular Forces, the People's Self-Defense Force is not now part of the regular armed forces. At the local level, PSDF members select their own leaders, and operational control is assigned to the hamlet chief. At the province level, the deputy

province chief is the formal head of the PSDF, assisted by a Provincial People's Self-Defense Force Committee. At the national level, the PSDF is under the direction of the National People's Self-Defense Force Committee, chaired by the Prime Minister, whose directives pass down through the Ministry of Interior. The national committee in turn is under the Central Pacification and Development Council, whose chairman is the President himself.

Because of the political potential represented by an armed organization of 4-5 million members, South Vietnam's President probably would be unwilling to see the People's Army fall completely under the control of the regular armed forces. On the other hand, observers with long experience in Vietnam fear that if the People's Army were completely removed from the regular army command structure, it would lose vital army support. They advise working from within by creating a Vice Chief of Staff for People's Army, who would serve as titular head of the People's Army, and who would report directly to the Chief of the Joint General Staff. This would allay regular-army opposition to the People's Army and insure a measure of general staff support. However, the national PSDF committee's authority would extend to the entire People's Army, and it would continue to issue policy directives. This would preserve a degree of presidential control.

Working through the military region commanders, province chiefs, and district chiefs, the People's Army commander would be concerned primarily with matters relating to equipment, training, logistics and combat support. The National People's Self-Defense Committee, working with the People's Army commander and through the Provincial, Village, and Hamlet Defense Committees, would be concerned with personnel policy and supervision of political training. The organizational changes suggested would not disrupt current functions. At the local level, the organizational framework would remain the same. Province chiefs would still command Regional Forces companies, village chiefs would have operational control over Popular Forces platoons, and hamlet chiefs would have operational control of the local People's Self-Defense Force.

Increase the Fighting Capability of People's Self-Defense Force

The fighting capability of the People's Self-Defense Force can be increased by giving it a cadre of veterans drawn from the regular army or territorial forces. Young boys, old men, and about 225,000 women make up the bulk of the combat members now. Plans already approved by President Thieu call for the creation of elite interteams, each having four fully trained cadres. These interteams are to replace Popular Forces platoons in secure hamlets, freeing them for redeployment to less secure hamlets. They have already done so in 4681 hamlets. The idea is sound, providing that elite PSDF interteams do not become full-time soldiers competing with the Popular Forces and, like them, requiring a salary. Older regular-army soldiers, particularly those with combat experience, could be released from their units and assigned as part-time cadres to the PSDF. Keeping their individual weapons with them, they would provide the teams with experience and firepower.

By itself, firepower is not the critical determinant of effectiveness. If a local PSDF unit is good with the arms it has now, a few additional weapons will make it better; if it is not good, additional weapons will not make it good. Demonstrated combativeness, competence, and a low weapon-loss rate should be the basis for the distribution of small, crew-served weapons such as light machine guns and small mortars, which are cheap and easy to operate. The ex-soldiers assigned as cadres to the People's Self-Defense Force can teach the civilian defenders how to use them. Following the Viet Cong example, women also can be trained as mortar crews.

The present training program for People's Self-Defense Force members and leaders is inadequate. Training the People's Self-Defense Force should be considered as important as turning out regular soldiers. To train a vast number of people cheaply, the regular army and Regional Forces might form mobile training teams. A thousand such teams of six to ten men could remain in each hamlet for one month every year. A typical team might include an individual-weapons instructor, a crew-served weapons instructor, two instructors of tactics, a political warfare man, and a medical or public health specialist. Training, plus

weapons, will begin to make the People's Self-Defense Force an effective organization. (A more detailed description of these measures and the costs that would be incurred is given in Appendix A.)

Commission Local Officers

Unlike present practice, in which officers assigned to territorial units in the countryside are usually from the city, soldiers should be commanded by officers from the same locality. Local soldiers commanded by local officers should defend their own territory, a basic People's Army principle. At least a third of those newly assigned to these units should be selected from the local ranks, preferably from noncoms of demonstrated competence. That would allow the government forces to offer the same incentive as the Viet Cong, in whose ranks it has always been easier to rise.

Establish Local Defense Committees

Popular legend has it that when Vietnam was faced with an invasion by a Mongol army in the twelfth century, a General Tran Hung Dao assembled 10,000 old men from all over the country and asked them for advice on whether to submit or fight. They shouted for war, and, thus assured of the people's support, Tran Hung Dao went on to defeat the invaders. Long before Mao Tse-tung put it in different terms, the Vietnamese realized that military operations must have popular support if they are to succeed.

To insure that at least smaller military operations have the support of the local people, defense committees should be organized in each village. Each committee would comprise local military and civilian leaders and notables, the sort Tran Hung Dao would have asked for advice, and it would recommend or advise against certain military operations in its area; explain broad military objectives to the people; and summon and coordinate their support. The committee would *not* command units, but it would have the authority to mobilize its own People's Self-Defense Force and even recall demobilized veterans to temporary active duty. Guaranteed of local support, the units assigned to the area could increase dramatically in effectiveness.

Create a Rotational Reserve System

To prepare for eventual demobilization, South Vietnam should create a reserve system to insure that its veterans can be remobilized when needed and to draw continuing benefits from their military training and experience. It should be an uncomplicated system, local rather than national, and could be built around the present Regional and Popular Forces by creating reserve RF and PF units and attaching them to existing units. Local units could monitor their reserve members more easily than could a national organization, and veterans might be less likely to evade a local than a national call-up. The development of such a system would give South Vietnam the capability to expand its forces rapidly and, just as rapidly, to return its soldiers to productive tasks once the threat has subsided.

The South Vietnamese might also adopt a system of rotational active duty for the reserves. It is an old solution to an old problem in Vietnamese history. In the fifteenth century, the Vietnamese emperor, finding himself with a bigger army than he could afford, divided it into five contingents and rotated them on active duty. While one contingent remained at arms the other four worked in the fields. In the future, reserve soldiers might similarly be divided into contingents, the number depending on the civilian occupations of the reservists and the local security situation. When it is his contingent's turn to serve, the reservist would report to the local Regional or Popular Forces unit to which he had been assigned.

Rotational active duty lends itself to agricultural pursuits, which are themselves seasonal. Since South Vietnam's peasants are often seasonally unemployed, their serving as soldiers part-time would not hinder production. Planting and harvesting seasons vary throughout the country and even within individual provinces, so there would be no one time when an area was stripped of its troops or farmers. The regular rotation of reservists in the ranks would also keep the units constantly apprised of the latest local conditions. The Popular Forces in some areas might adopt a similar rotational system and begin releasing soldiers for a certain number of months each year. If

required to remain in the village, they could easily be recalled to active duty if needed.

Use Soldiers to Reoccupy Abandoned Farmland

Soldiers can be used to reoccupy abandoned farmland, a traditional role for Vietnam's army. Volunteer soldiers could be organized into soldiers' agricultural colonies, or *don dien*, the historical institution by which the Vietnamese transformed veterans into farmers. The volunteers would be formed into company-size units and, with their families, would settle in strategic areas. While farming, they would keep their weapons and remain under military command. (A detailed account of the development of the *don dien* is given in Appendix B.)

Rewrite Tactical Doctrine

The Vietnamese must rewrite their own tactical doctrine, not translate it from French or English. Specifically, the army must review the way it fights with a view toward relying less on air and artillery support and more on maneuvering small units.[14] This could result in increased effectiveness and eventually in substantial savings of money and manpower. With a third of its current operating costs going for artillery ammunition alone, the army could make an immediate savings simply by relying less on artillery. Air support, even more expensive, can probably also be reduced.

The argument will arise that less artillery and air support means more friendly casualties, implying a direct trade-off between tonnage of ordnance and soldiers' lives. True, if the South Vietnamese continue to fight using the tactics we have taught them -- which require artillery and air support -- less support would probably mean more casualties. But tactics can be changed. Military organizations that, for various reasons, have had less support, have developed and employed different tactics with considerable success. The outstanding example, of course, is the tactics developed by the Viet Cong. Moreover, most artillery and air support is *not* used in direct support of troops in combat, and its value to them cannot be demonstrated easily. Nor does

the ordnance fired or dropped in direct support of troops in combat guarantee that they will not have to face the same enemy another day. Only when the enemy is determined to overrun a fixed position are his losses from artillery or air support obvious. More often, he withdraws before artillery or airpower can be brought to bear.

THE SECOND PHASE

The withdrawal of American forces probably will have been completed by 1973. If any American soldiers remain, they will be advisors, perhaps merely observers, or involved in the mechanics of providing and maintaining the military equipment that the United States has given the South Vietnamese. South Vietnam alone will face the enemy, and the North Vietnamese Army will continue to be a major military threat. Although food production, particularly rice, will have increased significantly by 1973, serious economic problems will remain. Development of the divilian economy willddepend on releasing some of the country's trained manpower from the armed forces.

If the measures recommended for the first phase have been followed, the People's Army will exist, its command structure will have been worked out, and its tactical doctrine established. The country will have a reserve system and a means of employing those soldiers who wish to resume farming. With more local officers commanding the territorial forces, a growing cadre of combat veterans in the People's Self-Defense Force, better training, additional weapons, and local defense committees to generate and coordinate local support, the effectiveness of the People's Army should increase so that gradually it will be able to assume a greater share of the defense burden. In the second phase, South Vietnam can take additional steps to expand the People's Army, further increase its effectiveness, and prepare to reduce the regular army.

Begin Limited Demobilization

As the People's Army becomes capable of assuming a larger portion of the defense burden, South Vietnam can begin a limited demobilization.

Those released first should include some of the technicians now serving in the army and soldiers who volunteer for the farming colonies. Many technicians were drafted in 1967 and 1968, and their loss to the army was a serious blow to South Vietnam's economy. Of course, not all the technicians can be released, but those that could be spared would easily be absorbed into the civilian economy, producing immediate benefits.[15]

Provide Soldiers with Civilian Skills and Jobs

For soldiers who are not technicians and who show no talent for farming, a program of vocational training should be started. Because the war has lasted so long, many of South Vietnam's soldiers know no other profession than soldiering. Vocational training would facilitate the absorption of veterans into the economy and insure a more productive future for them than that of unskilled laborers. The training could be given on a part-time basis in order not to interfere with military duties. Industries requiring skilled or semiskilled workers could be encouraged, through tax benefits or the promise of government contracts, to set up training programs at nearby army garrisons, or soldiers could be released part-time to receive on-the-job training at nearby industries.[16]

South Vietnam also faces the task of finding suitable employment for its officers, who during the years of war have acquired considerable experience in management and have grown accustomed to command. Positions must be found for them that offer income and authority commensurate with what they now enjoy. Otherwise they may oppose any reduction in the size of the armed forces.

Create an Urban Auxiliary Militia

The defense of a large city is militarily a more complex operation than the defense of a hamlet. Only when a city is actually penetrated by enemy forces, as in 1968, is a rifle behind every lamppost useful. With many veterans expected to remain in the cities when demobilized, the urban People's Self-Defense Force will expand rapidly. An urban

auxiliary militia should be created as part of the PSDF to use this excess of urban veterans more effectively. Members of the urban auxiliary militia working part-time could easily assume many of the routine tasks now performed by full-time soldiers. Disabled veterans could be utilized as well. The urban auxiliary militia would also provide an additional apparatus for maintaining control in the cities, a problem that is likely to increase as economic crises continue and more soldiers are demobilized.

Reduce the Number of Competing Security Organizations

South Vietnam must begin to reduce the number of organizations charged with maintaining security in the countryside, not simply for the sake of military principle, but to reduce the confusion arising from overlapping responsibilities and commands. At one time, there were fourteen different armed organizations concerned with rural security; at present there are eight.[17] The Revolutionary Development Cadre could ultimately be absorbed as cadres into the People's Self-Defense Force. The Popular Forces and Regional Forces could be combined, perhaps along with the National Police Field Force, into a single territorial force of the People's Army that would have the same mission as the Regional and Popular Forces now have. Soldiers could volunteer to serve in platoons stationed in their own village or in companies stationed in their own province. Requiring of those stationed outside their own village a shorter period of service would provide the necessary incentive to fill the ranks of the provincial force.

Assign the Army to Reconstruction

Freed from some of their local-security responsibilities by the People's Army, units of the regular army would be able to devote more attention to dealing with the threat posed by the North Vietnamese regulars. When not engaged in combat, some of the units could undertake reconstruction and development tasks, concentrating on those that fulfill the basic needs of the population. In the urban areas, they would include repairing and expanding facilities for water, power,

sewage, housing, and education, all of which have been overwhelmed by the rapid urbanization that has taken place in South Vietnam. In the rural areas, the army could concentrate on clearing land, building roads, canals, and schools, and providing medical attention and basic education.

THE THIRD PHASE

As part of the burden of defense is transferred to the People's Army, South Vietnam's regular army could become a small professional force of around 300,000 men, the figure that President Thieu foresees. The present elite Airborne, Ranger, and Marine battalions would form the fighting core. They might well be organized in brigades rather than the present cumbersome divisions. Meanwhile, the army's heavy artillery could be territorialized under a separate command. If properly deployed in batteries of two to three guns each, the current number of heavy artillery could be made to cover most of the country, and, in semi-permanent positions, the guns could be pre-zeroed, enabling them to respond quickly to calls from units of either the regular army or the People's Army. The mobile units of the regular army would retain their lighter 105mm howitzers for operations in remote areas not covered by the big guns. In the future, they might rely more on mortars, which are a great deal cheaper and more portable.

The fully constituted People's Army would consist of the part-time People's Self-Defense Force (6,000,000-7,000,000 strong, including about 200,000 veterans as cadre), supported by about 300,000 full-time local soldiers of the territorial units. At the edge of the densely populated area, or surrounding some of the traditional enemy base areas, would be several hundred *don dien*.

A man's service would begin at the age of 16, when, as now, he would be required to join the People's Self-Defense Force. At the draft age of 18, he would become a full-time soldier in a local territorial unit of the People's Army, where he would serve at least a year before becoming eligible to enter one of South Vietnam's military academies or to join the regular army, air force, or navy.[18] Near the completion of his service, he could elect to join a *don dien* and receive land and

assistance from the government or to receive vocational training for a civilian job. Upon discharge, he would automatically return to the People's Self-Defense Force.

REDUCING THE BURDEN

There are two ways of reducing South Vietnam's defense budget: by reducing the size of the armed forces, and by changing their style of fighting. For example, since the cost of ammunition is a large part of the total cost of fighting, changing the style of fighting to consume less ammunition would, other things being equal, reduce the defense budget.

The burden of defense could be gradually transferred from the expensive regular army to a much cheaper people's army. Over a four-year period, 1972-1976, the regular ground forces could gradually be reduced to 200,000 men, while the Regional Forces would remain roughly the same size. The Popular Forces would be absorbed into the People's Self-Defense Force. It is a process of demobilization by degrees. Soldiers would not be released from the service entirely, but would become part-time soldiers or cadres in the People's Army; thus, each reduction in the size of the regular ground forces would be matched by increased strength in the People's Army.[19] If such a reduction is made, then eventually more than $700 million a year could be saved on South Vietnam's land forces, which now cost about $2 billion annually. Added expenses incurred in assigning additional cadres and expanding and strengthening the People's Self-Defense Force would be approximately $70 million, resulting in a net savings of approximately $630 million. Less reliance on air support would result in additional savings.

The saving of $630 million would not be enough to make South Vietnam independent of American assistance (the United States would save most of the money). However, South Vietnam would reap benefits from the saving in men. During the six-year period, 400,000 soldiers would be added to the nation's civilian labor force, 60,000 of them becoming

farmers in army-run *don dien*. This would bring roughly 240,000 hectares of abandoned or new farmland under cultivation. And with two-thirds of all the full-time soldiers serving in their own village or province, the desertion rate should decline.

MEETING THE THREAT

South Vietnam's armed forces must be able to fight against a broad spectrum of contingencies ranging from protracted war to conventional invasion. Preparing for one threat increases the probability that the enemy will respond with another. For the time being, the enemy appears to have decided to continue a low-level, protracted war, which could, of course, be punctuated by periodic offensives. A large army designed to meet only the maximum conventional threat will exhaust itself in a protracted war. A vast people's army backed by a much smaller mobile regular army is a more appropriate instrument to meet this variable threat. It is cheap, conserves manpower by relying heavily on part-time soldiers, and provides the people with their own adequate defense force independent of regular army units.

North Vietnam may decide, shortly before or after the completion of American troop withdrawal, to launch a large-scale offensive in the belief that without the presence of half a million American soldiers, South Vietnam's armed forces could not defend their country. The offensive might take the form of a marked increase in North Vietnamese infiltration followed by widespread attacks on population centers, such as occurred in 1968, or attacks focused on a particular geographic area in South Vietnam. From its newly consolidated strongholds in northeast Cambodia and southern Laos, the enemy might attempt to overrun the Vietnamese central highlands and split the country in two, a repeat of the 1964 strategy; or, North Vietnam might choose to increase infiltration across the Demilitarized Zone and focus attacks on the northern provinces of Military Region I.

Such a test of South Vietnam's capability is likely to come before the nation has been able to organize, train, and field an effective people's army. For this reason, any reductions in the size of the regular army should be gradual. The measures suggested for the first

phase would not diminish regular army strength except for the loss of the cadres assigned to the People's Self-Defense Force. The measures in the second phase, between 1973 and 1975, would require only about a 30-percent reduction in the regular ground forces. Large reductions would not be made until the third phase. The gradualness of the reorganization would provide a testing period during which the performance of the people's army could be evaluated. As the people's army became more effective, it could better forestall any enemy build-up such as ordinarily precedes a quasi-conventional offensive. By its continuous presence in all populated areas of the country, the people's army could deny the enemy its sources of local sustenance and intelligence; impair its ability to pre-position the weapons and supplies necessary for a major offensive, thus forcing it to rely on a more conventional, more vulnerable system of logistics support; and reduce its ability to move and mass troops invisibly, thus depriving it of the advantage of tactical surprise. Forced out in the open, faced with a stubborn defense by local units, the enemy would be compelled to operate in larger units, making it even more vulnerable to counter-attack by air power and regular army units.

Much of the regular army is still tied down in territorial defense. Redeployment of a unit often means stripping a province of its defenses. This has always been a problem. In the 1968 enemy offensives, the lack of an adequate territorial defense force compelled the regular army to disperse its forces in order to defend hundreds of beleaguered population centers. Many villages were abandoned to the enemy simply because there were no units available to defend them. The critical factor in a protracted war or a Tet-style offensive is the availability and effectiveness of territorial forces. They bore the brunt of the 1968 offensives; they bear the brunt of the fighting now; and they are most likely to be the first hit in any new offensive. For this reason, the number of full-time territorial soldiers in the people's army should remain high. An effective people's army comprising both full-time territorial soldiers and part-time members of the People's Self-Defense Force would free the regular army from the task of local security, allowing

it to concentrate on attacking large enemy units and conventional supply lines.

The chance exists that North Vietnam will launch a conventional invasion across the Demilitarized Zone to seize South Vietnam's northernmost provinces, hoping thereby to shatter the morale of the South Vietnam army and compel its government to sue for peace. The fear of a Korean-style invasion led to the development of a conventionally structured South Vietnamese army in the first place, and has dominated allied thinking for the past fifteen years. It remains one of the principal arguments against changes in the structure of South Vietnam's regular forces or reduction in their size.

North Vietnam's armed forces have become more conventional. They have acquired Soviet tanks and heavy artillery, and have displayed their willingness to use these weapons to defend vital infiltration routes. A conventional invasion involving the use of such heavy weapons would require the North Vietnamese to depart dramatically from their traditionally austere style of fighting, and to take enormous military risks. The logistics train needed to sustain tanks and heavy artillery in combat would be extremely vulnerable to air interdiction. The initiation of conventional warfare on a large scale in the South would moreover impose a serious drain on North Vietnam's own resources, including its skilled manpower, and increase the country's dependency on external support.

Nevertheless, it is possible that North Vietnam might accept the risks of failure and retaliation to launch a conventional invasion. The crucial element in meeting this threat is not the regular army's total size, but its deployable strength. By assuming a greater share of the defense burden throughout the country, the people's army would allow gradual redeployment of regular army units to the parts of the country that are vulnerable to conventional invasion. The regular army would thus be able more rapidly to concentrate its forces at the point of attack without exposing the rest of the country to attack by smaller enemy units that might move to fill the vacuum.

NOTES

14. A number of Vietnamese officers have already begun to question American military doctrine and develop their own. An example is the recent book by Do Ngoc Nhan, *Can de chi dao chien luoc chien tranh Viet-Nam (The Problem of Strategic Leadership in the Vietnam War)*, Saigon, 1970. The following quote is typical: "There must be a limit to quantity. The increase of military strength still depends on the country's population, on its economic condition, and on many other factors. The strengthening of armed forces by increasing their size cannot go on forever.... On the battlefield, there are numerous examples of small but well-trained and organized units which defeated enemy units of twice their size." (p. 60.)

15. In 1967, it was estimated that there were approximately 73,000 skilled specialists in South Vietnam's armed forces. Many of these were engineers, engineering technicians, or administrative specialists. Joint Planning Group, *Postwar Development*, p. 133. The general mobilization of 1968 drafted additional technical personnel from industry. Republic of Vietnam, Joint General Staff, Combat Development and Test Center, *Report of the Study on Living Standards, Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (Army)*, Saigon: 1969, pp. 51-52.

16. The Vietnamese have already taken steps in this direction. Recently, the commander of army logistics announced that certain units in the army could work two shifts, one for the army and one for themselves.

17. They are: Regional Forces, Popular Forces, People's Self-Defense Force, National Police, National Police Field Force, Provincial Reconnaissance Units, Revolutionary Development Cadre, and Armed Propaganda Teams.

18. Some observers believe that new soldiers should serve in the regular army first and then in the territorial forces. This would result in a young army whose soldiers would not be burdened by wives and children. As the soldiers acquired a family, they would in effect work their way home, serving in the Regional Forces and Popular Forces on the way. Others, the author included, disagree. Because South Vietnam's future army will be much smaller than it now is, it must be more proficient, hence will require a greater number of professional soldiers. The Viet Cong select soldiers for their elite main-force units from the ranks of the local forces. A soldier works his way up. The notion that young soldiers have no family responsibilities is questionable, as Vietnamese soldiers must often support their parents, brothers, and sisters.

19. The suggested scheme is phased as follows. In 1972, 35,000 of the spaces (not necessarily the men) allotted for the Revolutionary Development cadre would be reassigned to the People's Self-Defense Force.

The remaining spaces would be phased out altogether. The Popular Forces would be reduced by 86,000 men -- an acceleration from Thieu's suggested reduction of 50,000 a year. No reduction would be made in the Regional Forces or regular army.

If security conditions allow, another 86,000 Popular Forces soldiers would be released from full-time active duty in 1973, along with approximately 30,000-40,000 soldiers in the regular army.

The remaining members of the Popular Forces would be released during 1974. Since a number of Regional Forces soldiers are assigned to support functions for the Popular Forces, the demobilization of the Popular Forces would allow a modest reduction in Regional Forces support personnel. Approximately another 30,000-40,000 regular army soldiers would also be released.

During 1975, another 50,000-60,000 regular army veterans would be released from full-time active duty.

Soldiers and militiamen who were released from full-time active duty would be assigned as cadres to the People's Self-Defense Force or would be assigned to *don dien*.

V. POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN ESTABLISHING A PEOPLE'S ARMY

The other half of the coin of Vietnamization is, of course, de-Americanization. No matter how much South Vietnam may need a people's army, we Americans cannot create it for the Vietnamese as we have created their regular army. The Vietnamese will have to develop their own military structure and style of fighting. There are many indications that South Vietnam's leaders are willing to move toward creating a people's army. President Thieu seems to favor the idea. His Prime Minister, Tran Thien Khiem, is also considered by many observers to be favorably disposed. The realization that South Vietnam cannot support its present army for very long is shared by others in the Senate and House. For example, Ton That Dinh, a retired army general and chairman of the Senate's Defense Committee, has spoken of the need for a "people's army," and Tran Van Don, also a retired general and now a deputy in South Vietnam's Assembly, has frequently used the term "people's army" himself to refer to an ideal army of the future.

Being politicians foremost, these men recognize not only the economic necessity of creating a people's army but also its political utility in providing whoever leads South Vietnam with a power base independent of the regular army. This is why many of South Vietnam's military leaders will oppose it. The generals would also be reluctant to entrust much of the country's defenses to an army consisting largely of armed peasants and part-time soldiers. As professionals, they prefer to rely on regular-army divisions. But some of the generals may oppose it primarily because they see a people's army as a direct threat to the political power they exercise as commanders of large military formations. It is to Thieu's credit that he has succeeded in reducing much of the political power wielded by South Vietnam's division and corps commanders and freeing the presidency from a military veto. But this was accomplished during a period of military buildup, and commands were not threatened. When the regular army is being reduced in size, it may be more difficult to obtain the cooperation of some generals, who might see not only their political power jeopardized but their military commands as well.

Many of the Vietnamese proponents of a people's army, rightly or wrongly, perceive the Americans as a major obstacle to implementing this concept. Perhaps they have learned from long experience that changes in the structure of their forces away from the American prototype have little chance of acceptance by their American advisors. "As long as we are dependent on the Americans for support," said one Vietnamese officer, "we will not be able to alter the structure of our armed forces." It is in Americans' interest to realize that the problem is actually the converse: that is, as long as the structure of the armed forces and style of fighting remain unchanged, the South Vietnamese will continue to be totally dependent on that American support.

We can remove ourselves as obstacles to a people's army. We can encourage its development and help overcome some of the political resistance by pointing out that the economies of both the United States and South Vietnam eventually will compel the South Vietnamese to develop a cheaper way of maintaining their defenses. We could also point out that the development of a people's army (along the lines suggested here) requires no rash military risks and no major, destabilizing reorganization. Finally, we could point out that with a cheaper people's army, South Vietnam has a much better chance of receiving American support for a longer time than with its present costly army. By nature, if not always by necessity, Americans like economy, and the people's army looks like a bargain.

These arguments should not be pushed on the Vietnamese as part of a new "American plan." The people's army is very much a Vietnamese idea, and it should not be made to appear as another foreign import. A wise strategy for American advisors would be quietly to encourage the interest that already exists in the top levels of government and the military.

Development of a people's army thus holds much promise for South Vietnam. Its development might also reveal principles of defense organization that could be applied in other nations in Southeast Asia. There is a need in the region as a whole for the creation of low-cost but effective defense capabilities that are not an overwhelming burden upon local societies and economies and that will result in greater self-reliance and less dependence on American assistance.

Appendix A

HISTORICAL SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM OF SUSTAINED MOBILIZATION

Modern South Vietnamese military institutions are foreign imports. At present, the Vietnamese armed forces are organized, equipped, and fight in the fashion of the American armed forces. Before American advisors took over, the Vietnamese army was patterned after that of the French. Precolonial military institutions are largely forgotten. Today's Vietnamese officers know the victories of Napoleon and the tactics taught at Fort Benning, Georgia, better than they know, for example, the development of military organization under the feudal dynasties of Vietnam. Were they less products of French education and American advice, they might profitably look to their own military traditions.

Despite their ultimate failure against the French challenge in the nineteenth century, Vietnam's precolonial military institutions for nine centuries preserved the country's independence against numerically and technologically superior enemies. Confronted with the ever-present threat of invasion by the Chinese; frequent incursions by tribal peoples from the mountains that border three-quarters of the narrow country; a turbulent frontier in the south; and incessant internal revolts, the rulers of Vietnam devoted a great deal of attention to military organization and introduced a number of "modern" features very early in their history.

National conscription, for example, was introduced under the Ly Dynasty in the eleventh century. All male inhabitants in the realm were registered and classified according to their eligibility for military service. There were five categories: princes, mandarins, professional military men, special professions such as priests, physicians, actors, all other men between the ages of eighteen and sixty, and the aged and the sick.[1]

The Ly emperors also removed the army from feudal command and placed it under national command, thereby greatly reducing the power of rebellious princes.[2] The military mandarinate they created was

divided into nine degrees or grades. Promotion required passing an examination that tested physical strength, skill with various weapons, and knowledge of military tactics and history.[3] National conscription and the creation of large reserves enabled Vietnam to mobilize fairly large armies.[4] But the long wars that are a regular feature of Vietnamese history required fielding these armies for extended periods of time, and this caused severe strains on the population.

Over time, the Vietnamese developed a number of techniques that enabled them to reduce the strain of sustained mobilization while maintaining their defenses. These included special recruiting procedures to minimize the effects on families and villages of losing their able-bodied men; tax exemptions and guarantees of support for families of soldiers; various schemes of rotational active duty; the use of the army to perform a variety of nonmilitary tasks; and the deployment of military farm colonies to clear new terrain and defend the frontiers of the country.

The government of the village was responsible for recruiting soldiers. Conscription was based on the principle that each village owed the emperor a portion of its men to serve as soldiers. How many depended on the population and location of the village. Regular soldiers were drawn only from the "inscribed" citizens of military age. Where the population was dense, as in the Tonkin delta, the required ratio of soldiers to male villagers was lower, one out of every seven, while in the central provinces, one out of every three villagers could be required to serve in the army.[5] In the early nineteenth century, newly conquered areas such as Cochinchina had lower draft quotas so as to provoke less resistance. Under the Emperor Gia Long (1802-1820), the contingent of troops required from each village in the south was equal to one-third of its inscribed citizens of military age; under Minh Mang (1820-1841), this was reduced to one-fifth, and under Tu Duc (1847-1883), it was reduced further to one-seventh.[6]

In addition to princes of the blood, mandarins and sons of mandarins were exempt from military service; so were teachers and students who had scored well on the provincial examinations. Under Gia Long, families with fewer than three sons did not have to provide soldiers, and severe

penalties were prescribed for village officials who attempted to draft an only son.[7] Villages that provided couriers for the postal system were exempt, as were villages in which the headquarters of a high-ranking mandarin were located, since these villagers would have to provide the official with guards. Provinces that had recently suffered floods or droughts were also exempted.

As providing recruits was a responsibility of the village, so was the upkeep of a soldier and his family. The bulk of the regular soldiers came from large families that were sufficiently wealthy in land and sons that the temporary loss of one would not cause great hardship. The soldier's family was charged by the village with his upkeep, in return for which the village subsidized the family by giving it either an allowance, a tax reduction or exemption, or a concession that allowed the soldier's family to use a portion of the communal lands owned by the village. (This contrasts with today's practice, which places the burden of supporting a soldier's family on the soldier himself. The fact that the soldier must move frequently, while his family cannot always follow him, makes it more difficult for him to provide support and illustrates the advantage of placing responsibility for supporting a soldier's family on a geographically fixed institution, such as the village where the family lives.)

Desertion likewise was considered a problem of the village. When a soldier deserted, the army informed his village -- most frequently that was his destination anyway -- and the village was required to return the deserter or replace him with another. One can conclude that the family of a deserter would lose its tax exemptions and the use of communal lands, which probably provided an incentive for the soldier not to desert, and for his family to put pressure on him to return if he did. Desertion was widespread nonetheless.[8]

In his ten-year struggle to defeat Chinese invaders in the early fifteenth century, General Le Loi, who later became emperor, assembled an army of 250,000 men. Vietnam could not permanently support an army of that size, so Le Loi reduced it to 100,000, and further divided it into five contingents that rotated on active duty. While one contingent remained at arms, the other four worked in the fields.[9] Upon assuming

power following a long civil war, the Emperor Gia Long faced problems similar to those of Le Loi. During the civil war, everyone had been pressed into service; the country had been ravaged by war and the fields neglected. Gia Long rewarded the veterans who had stayed with him by giving them land, a common practice in Southeast Asia. He divided his army into two parts, sometimes three, which rotated on active duty. A soldier spent four months of every year in the army and the other eight working his fields in his own village. During his eight months off-duty, he was still subject to recall to labor on government projects such as the construction of roads and forts.[10] The term of enlistment was ten years, upon completion of which the discharged veteran was exempted from one-half of his taxes. If he reinlisted for an additional ten years, he was granted total exemption upon retirement.[11]

The concept of rotational active duty seems to offer a means by which the burden of mobilization can be reduced, both for the soldier and for the state. The soldiers released from regular army units for certain periods of time need not be totally dismissed from military obligations. They could be settled with their families in villages and employed in agriculture or public works projects under military command. Or, they could be rotated into local militia units near their homes for several months each year. This measure would not only allow the soldier to spend more time with his family but would increase the effectiveness of the local militia units as well. To fill in for the one-third to one-half of the regulars who would be absent at any given moment, men from local militia units could be required to serve several months of each year with regular units in the area. This would provide the regulars with a resident's knowledge of the area in which they were operating.

The idea of employing military units in economic and social tasks did not originate with the Vietnamese but with the Chinese. Among the nonmilitary tasks that Vietnamese soldiers have performed when not fighting are the clearing of jungles, the draining of swamps, the digging of canals, and the building of dikes and roads.[12] In the seventeenth century, some soldiers harvested rice for the government, while others raised silkworms and wove silk.

Another institution borrowed from the Chinese was the military colony, or *don dien*, as the Vietnamese called it. The historical development of this institution and its relevance to current problems are described in the following section.

NOTES

1. Le Thanh Khoi, *Le Viet-Nam, histoire et civilisation*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1955, pp. 146-147. Under the Emperor Le Thanh Tong in the fifteenth century, the "inscribed" population was divided into six categories: (1) the able-bodied (*trang hang*), who were suitable for military service; (2) the military (*quan hang*), who remained at work in the fields but who were ready to be called in time of need; (3) simple inhabitants (*dan hang*); (4) the aged (*lao hang*); (5) the mercenaries (*co hang*), who were those without land and who hired themselves out as laborers, and (6) the indigent (*cung hang*).

2. *Ibid.*

3. Pierre Pasquier, *L'Annam d'autrefois; essai sur la constitution de l'Annam avant l'intervention française*, Paris: Société d'Éditions Géographiques, Maritimes, et Coloniales, 1929, pp. 119-125.

4. The lack of precise figures and a tendency to exaggerate the size of the armies that engaged in historic struggles make it difficult to estimate the actual number of men under arms. A Vietnamese historian, Truong Minh Ky, suggested that the Emperor Dinh Tien Hoang (968-980) led a military force composed of ten armies of 100,000 each, a million soldiers! But a later French historian, Alfred Schreiner, suggests that the figure might have been closer to 131,000. Alfred Schreiner, *Abrégé de l'histoire d'Annam*, Saigon: Chez l'Autour, 1906, pp. 35-36. Le Thanh Khoi reports that Tran Hung Dao defeated half a million invaders in 1284 with a Vietnamese army of 200,000. Le Thanh Khoi, pp. 183-189. Le Loi was reported to have an army of 250,000 in the fifteenth century. Le Thanh Khoi, *Le Viet-Nam*, p. 217. Observers in Vietnam in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries reported Vietnamese military strengths at between 80,000 in times of peace and 200,000 in times of war. See Charles B. Maybon, *Histoire moderne du pays d'Annam (1592-1820)*, Paris: Libraire Plon, 1920, pp. 367-369. The military strengths reported did not necessarily include the number of soldiers in *don dien*.

5. The figures vary: Under the Nguyen Dynasty, in the area north of Song Gianh, the traditional stronghold of the preceding Le Dynasty, only one-seventh of the able-bodied males were required to serve. In the areas populated by Montagnards, no more than one-tenth were required to serve. In the central provinces from Quang Binh to Binh Thuan, patrimony of the Nguyen, the quota was higher. This ensured that the army would contain a large number of soldiers who were loyal to the Nguyen. Le Thanh Khoi, *Le Viet-Nam*, p. 330.

6. Alfred Schreiner, *Les institutions annamites en Basse-Cochinchine avant la conquête française*, Saigon: Claude & Cie, Imprimeurs-Éditeurs, 1900, Vol. III, p. 56 (cited hereafter as Schreiner, *Les institutions annamites*).

7. Le Thanh Khoi, *Le Viet-Nam*, p. 146; Schreiner, *Les institutions annamites*, Vol. III, pp. 57-60; Pasquier, *L'Annam d'autrefois*, p. 128.

8. Dennis J. Duncan, *Government and Revolution in Vietnam*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1968, p. 60, citing Eliacin Luro, *La pays d'Annam*, Paris: 1876, p. 117.

9. Le Thanh Khoi, *Le Viet-Nam*, p. 217.

10. Maybon, *Histoire moderne*, p. 366; Schreiner, *Les institutions annamites*, Vol. III, p. 61.

11. Schreiner, *Les institutions annamites*, Vol. III, p. 61.

12. Joseph Buttinger, *The Smaller Dragon: A Political History of Vietnam*, New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1958, pp. 143-144.

Appendix B

DON DIEN

Traditionally, the emperor of Vietnam dealt with villages, seldom with individuals. The taxes to be paid and the quotas for conscription were calculated by the central government and sent to the villages, which had the responsibility for collection and recruiting. Those who were not inscribed on the rolls of a village posed a problem for the emperor as there was little government machinery for dealing with people as individuals. Indeed, there was little place for them in Vietnamese society. The citizens already inscribed were unlikely to welcome additional members in their villages; they would only increase their draft quota and add mouths to feed from the same amount of land. Inscribed villagers tried to get rid of any uninscribed residents, sometimes by sending them off to the army in place of the inscribed residents. This was expressly forbidden. Military service was a d y of inscribed citizens, not landless vagabonds. Although the latter could volunteer for special units, they could not replace inscribed recruits, and severe penalties were prescribed for the village notables who tried to substitute them as recruits.[1] If the uninscribed could not be easily absorbed into existing villages, then the solution was to have them establish new villages on new land. Eventually, they could become inscribed citizens themselves, and the land they cleared and crops they grew taxed and added to the emperor's wealth. The first act of a new village was the establishment of an official register of its residents and a land register from which taxes could be calculated. The continual formation of new villages required territorial expansion, certain to be resisted by Vietnam's neighbors. It required war and conquest, which meant the possibility of reprisals. New villages on the frontier had to be able to defend themselves.

To meet these requirements, the Vietnamese developed the *don dien*, or military colony.[2] Veterans of the army, uninscribed citizens, and sometimes convicts were settled with their families on the frontier. They cleared the land and defended the frontier until a new military expedition

and a new generation of *don dien* pushed it forward and the old *don dien* became regular villages.

The *don dien* was thus a means by which the uninscribed, the landless, the poor, the malcontents, and the vagabonds, always a threat to internal stability, could be made into villagers, that is, placed in a framework the emperor could deal with. Second, it was a means of developing the wealth of the nation (*khan hoang*). Literally translated, it means to exploit or cultivate (*khan*) virgin or abandoned land (*hoang*), but it implies more than merely cutting down trees. Cleared land was the primary manifestation of wealth in Vietnam. "A bit of land is a bit of gold," runs an old Vietnamese proverb, so to clear land implied economic development in a broad sense.[3] Some Vietnamese historians prefer to translate *khan hoang* as the French expression *mise en valeur*, "to make worthwhile," or "to develop." *Mise en valeur* was a mission of the French army in the colonies. It came after conquest and pacification, and it implied that the army's work was not done until the conquered and pacified area was developed into something worthwhile. Roads and railroads had to be built, towns laid out, markets established, and trade opened. The third function of the *don dien* was defense.

Settling soldiers and their families on the frontier where they can farm and defend the border at the same time is an ancient concept. As early as the second century B.C., the Chinese are known to have settled army veterans on newly conquered land. Chinese military colonies were established in Vietnam under the T'ang Dynasty.[4] Later the Vietnamese borrowed this institution for themselves, as much for internal political reasons as for security. Having won its independence from China in the tenth century, Vietnam was plagued by civil wars and Chinese invasions. In the early part of the fifteenth century, internal upheavals in Vietnam brought in another Chinese army to occupy the country. After ten years of fighting, the Chinese were driven out by Vietnamese forces led by General Le Loi. Following his victory, General Le Loi became the first emperor of a new dynasty, under the name Le Thai To. The long campaign against the Chinese invaders left a surplus of soldiers and much of the riceland abandoned. It was essential to the economic and political survival of the new dynasty that abandoned land

be brought under cultivation, that employment be found for the soldiers, and that the lot of the landless peasants be improved.[5]

Le Thai To put soldiers and landless peasants to work on abandoned rice fields or sent them to clear virgin land. Under his successor, Le Thanh Tong, people of this category were organized into regular military colonies. As land in the Tonkin delta was limited, eyes turned south toward the coastal plains inhabited by the Chams and, beyond them, the Khmers. From the eleventh century on, the Vietnamese advanced steadily down the coast, consolidating their territorial gains by populating them with landless peasants and veterans. Internal stability was thus linked with territorial expansion, an idea that still persists among many Vietnamese today.

As a result of dynastic struggles in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, two powerful families emerged in Vietnam: the Trinh in the north, who both served and dominated the succeeding Le emperors, and the Nguyen in the south, who broke away to rule the southern half of Vietnam as an independent kingdom. This led to a half century of warfare between the two parts of Vietnam. The southern part of Vietnam maintained its independence despite seven major invasions by the north. Cut off from the southern frontier by the Nguyen and blocked on the west by mountains that were ill-suited for planting rice, military colonies in the north declined in use under the later Le emperors.[6] Not so in the south under the Nguyen, who realized that their continued defense against the north's repeated attempts to reconquer the south depended on increasing their own resources. This required continued territorial expansion, so the Nguyen encouraged the establishment of military colonies. Even prisoners of war taken during the war between north and south Vietnam were sent by the Nguyen to cultivate lands that they had taken from the Chams.[7]

Military colonies were established by the Nguyen on their northern frontier as well. The area to the south of the Song Gianh, the border between the two Vietnams, was one vast military camp inhabited by soldier-farmers who took up arms to defend their fields.[8] Being close to their source of supply gave the Nguyen troops a great advantage, since the northern armies invariably ran short of food if their campaigns lasted too long.

Nguyen Phuc Anh made extensive use of *don dien* in his long struggle to regain power. He was the last surviving member of the Nguyen family, which, along with its rivals in the north, the Trinh family and the Le emperors, had been overthrown in a revolution. The leaders of the revolution were the Tay Son brothers, themselves descendants of North Vietnamese prisoners of war who had been captured by the Nguyen army and sent to a military colony near An Khe. They launched their revolt in 1771 and after fifteen years of fighting managed to establish control over all of Vietnam. Nguyen Anh was forced to flee with the remainder of his army to Bangkok, where he established *don dien* to sustain his troops during their exile.[9] He returned to South Vietnam in 1787 and began a fifteen-year struggle against the Tay Son. From the start he realized that the success of his struggle depended on establishing, in the southern provinces he controlled, an economic base that was independent of the north for its supply of rice. The southern delta was not yet the rice bowl it later became and was dependent on the north. To rapidly expand the production of rice in the delta, Nguyen Anh offered a number of incentives: farmers who achieved certain quotas of rice production were exempted from military service. Mandarins were directed to make loans to individuals for the purchase of draft animals and farming tools. The loans were to be paid back in rice after harvest. Reserve troops were also made to farm, and if they achieved a certain quota they were not sent to the front. At the same time, Nguyen Anh established *don dien* in the parts of the delta that were not already under cultivation. Their mission was to provide rice to sustain the army, rations for military operations, and rice for export that could be converted to cash to buy military equipment.[10]

To accelerate the movement of people from the cities to the countryside, Nguyen Anh initiated a land rush by decreeing in 1791 that all land unclaimed in twenty days would be taken over by the army to establish new *don dien*. No more claims would be accepted after that time. Fearing that the army would grab everything, people rushed to the countryside t stake their claims and file their applications. The lack of communications in the country and the twenty-day time limit still gave the army a definite advantage in the massive land grab,

which may have been Nguyen Anh's intention. Land was often the reward for service in the army. These measures enabled Nguyen Anh to rapidly expand production in the delta, which provided him with resources to carry on the war. The masses of people organized in the *don dien* also provided him with a vast reserve force that could be called up in time of war.

In addition to establishing military-agricultural colonies, or *don dien*, the Vietnamese also established civilian agricultural colonies called *dinh dien* from *dinh* meaning "camp" and *dien* meaning "farm" or "rice field." The *dinh dien* had no particular military function. Nguyen Anh's efforts to resettle people in *don dien* or *dinh dien* were not always successful. Often the recruits ran away after receiving financial assistance and farming tools from the government. This was because the land soldiers cleared in *don dien* and *dinh dien* was given to them as communal land, while if people cleared land for themselves and paid taxes on it from the beginning they could obtain individual title. Less interested in justice than in increasing production and revenue, the government did not always punish the deserters. Generally *don dien* were more successful than *dinh dien*. Members of the former, as soldiers, were still subject to military discipline. When soldiers of the *don dien* were called to the front, their land was turned over to neighboring villages as communal land.[12]

Years after Nguyen Anh defeated the last of the Tay Son brothers and proclaimed himself emperor, adopting the name Gia Long, the use of *don dien* was revived again, this time in 1830 by Le Van Duyet, Viceroy of Cochinchina under Gia Long's successor, the Emperor Minh Mang. Minh Mang was determined to continue colonizing the Mekong Delta. This was related to his resumption of a more active imperialist policy toward Cambodia and to his attempts at agrarian reform. Le Van Duyet established his *don dien* around the "citadel" of Saigon. Following the traditional pattern, the *dien tot*, or soldiers of the *don dien*, were farmers in peacetime summoned only in time of war. Their peacetime mission was farming the land conceded to them by the emperor and, of course, guarding their own villages. They had no camps or forts and lived in their own homes. Once a year, they assembled in Saigon to

practice and parade, then returned, unarmed, to their villages. All were volunteers. Rank was by age, providing the soldier had at least two years of service in the *don dien;* the grade was that of the regular army.[13] Historians differ as to what ultimately became of these particular *don dien.* One early French historian states that they were dissolved after a serious revolt in Cochinchina in 1833, and another states that the *dien tot* were absorbed into a special regiment of the regular army in 1842.[14] Some veterans of the old *don dien* apparently were reunited in My Tho under the command of one of their former officers. They began to cultivate land on the edge of the Plain of Reeds and established a market at Cay Lay.[15]

In 1850, Nguyen Tri Phuong, another viceroy, established *don dien* of fifty men each in the six provinces of Cochinchina. The bulk of the volunteers came from the overpopulated provinces of central Vietnam, where the land was poor for farming, particularly Quang Nam, Binh Dinh, Khanh Hoa, and Binh Thuan. In return for a personal tax exemption for seven years and the right to farm two hectares of land, the soldiers of the *don dien* had to clear the land and live together in hamlets -- dispersion would have impaired their defense function. Each company had to establish a marketplace. If the soldiers attained the rank of noncommissioned officer or served well for three consecutive years, the land became theirs to pass on to their children. Unlike the *don dien* of Le Van Duyet, whose members were made up entirely of rice farmers, the *don dien* of Nguyen Tri Phuong included men of all professions. Nor did they assemble in Saigon once a year as the *don dien* soldiers of Le Van Duyet had; instead, they were inspected annually in the provinces. In time of war, they were called to serve in their own regiments at the side of the regular troops.[16] In 1854, the emperor issued a decree joining *ap,* new hamlets whose inhabitants also had certain military obligations, to existing *don dien.* At the same time, civilian authority replaced military command. It was an intermediate step between military colonies and regular villages.[17]

By the time the French arrived in 1859, Nguyen Tri Phuong had organized twenty-four regiments of *don dien,* a total of 12,000 men. They cleared thousands of hectares of land, established numerous

villages, and proved particularly effective in driving the Cambodians out of the Mekong Delta; their aggressiveness was encouraged by the fact that during war with the Cambodians the pillage of the conquered was theirs. Had it not been for the French conquest, the Vietnamese in the *don dien* probably would have taken over the southeastern provinces of Cambodia. *Dien tot* were also summoned to fight the French. Additional rifles were distributed to them, and some fought at the side of the Vietnamese regular forces in the battle of Ky Hoa in 1861.

Impressed with both their military and development capabilities, the French for a while considered employing *don dien* to assist them in the pacification of the delta. On March 19, 1861, Admiral Charner issued a decree perpetuating them in areas of French rule; however, subsequent revolts in which *dien tot* participated caused the admiral to reverse his decision, and on August 22 of the same year he ordered the suppression of the *don dien* in the areas controlled by the French. Their little forts were destroyed, and the veterans were either absorbed into existing villages or fled to join bands of rebels in Cochinchina. Some returned to central Vietnam.[18] When the French occupied all of Cochinchina in 1867, they suppressed the remaining *don dien* and at the same time created a regular militia, which they hoped would be a more reliable institution for their purposes.

Throughout the history of Vietnam as an independent nation, *don dien* were used to perform a variety of functions. Under Le Thanh Tong, the main concern was to transform vagabonds into landed villagers, to absorb the veterans left after a long war against China, and to restore the economy devastated during ten years of fighting. Under the early Nguyen lords, the mission of the *don dien* was to increase the resources of a nation, to feed soldiers defending a frontier in the north, and to expand and defend a frontier in the south. Under Nguyen Anh, their function was dedicated more to production in support of a protracted offensive war, less to defense. Under Minh Mang, *don dien* were used to satisfy the appetites of landless peasants and to support an aggressive imperialist policy toward Cambodia. Finally, under Nguyen Tri Phuong, the *don dien* became a self-supporting militia that could be summoned to fight in regular military formations. There was less

concern with clearing land, evidenced by the fact that not all members were even farmers. Possibly *don dien* were also meant to be pockets of loyalty in rebellious areas (this could have been a use under Le Van Duyet and Nguyen Tri Phuong), but as such they were not entirely successful, for rebellions sometimes broke out in the neighborhoods of *don dien*. Perhaps their greatest contribution to the internal security of the nation was in drawing off the landless, the unemployed, the malcontents, exiled criminals, and army veterans -- people who otherwise would have increased internal dissidence at home -- and making them productive, inscribed citizens. Or, in the words of one French historian, the *don dien* made "useful, industrious workers of the pariahs of Vietnamese society."[19] But not always. The *don dien* had a tendency to become predatory. Poor, and jealous of the regular villagers who lived nearby, soldiers of the *don dien* occasionally took advantage of local upheavals to pillage their neighbors,[20] and villagers were said to have abhorred the *don dien*, regarding them as refuges for brigands and those escaping debt.[21]

During the French colonial period in Vietnam, the meaning of the term *don dien* changed and acquired an ugly connotation. No longer was it a concession of land given by the emperor to a colony of settlers who in return developed the land and performed military duties. It became instead a concession of land given by the colonial government to an individual, more often a large corporation, for the purpose of commercial development. *Don dien* came to mean plantation; its military connotation was dropped. Its source of recruits remained the same. To get cheap labor for the rice, rubber, coffee, and tea plantations in the south, the French sent recruiting agents into the overcrowded and poor provinces of the north. They particularly favored provinces recently hit by famine. When recruits were insufficient, convicts were sent to the plantations, just as convicts had been consigned to the frontier by the emperor in pre-colonial days.

Conditions on the plantations were harsh. "Recruits" signed a three-year contract that made them virtual slaves. They had no hope of owning the land they cleared. They received little pay, could not legally leave the plantation, and were subject to corporal punishment.

Living conditions were poor. Few men returned healthy; few reenlisted; many deserted. The term *don dien dat do* evokes particularly bitter memories among Vietnamese even today. These were the "red soil plantations," so called because of the reddish color of the soil in the highlands, where rubber trees were found to grow well but living conditions were harsh.

At the end of the Indochina War, the new government led by Ngo Dinh Diem faced problems that would have been familiar to many pre-colonial emperors of Vietnam. The Vietnamese National Army created by the French was too large for the country to support; one million acres of rice land had been abandoned during the war, and thousands of rural inhabitants had fled to the cities; the partition of Vietnam brought another 900,000 refugees from North Vietnam. Reducing the size of the army from 220,000 to 150,000 men and disbanding the military units of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects (another 50,000) added 120,000 veterans to the almost 1,000,000 local and northern refugees who had to be transformed into productive citizens and absorbed into the society.[22] To meet this problem the government set up relocation centers throughout the country. Abandoned rice land was recultivated, and new land was cleared in the Ca Mau Peninsula and parts of the northern provinces. Some of the resettlement areas were huge, such as that opened in 1956 at Cai San, southwest of Saigon, where 20,000 former inhabitants who had fled to the cities during the war were resettled and 50,000 northern refugees relocated on 190,000 acres of land that had remained uncultivated since 1948. Each family at Cai San received three hectares of land, on which they paid no rent for one year.[23] By the end of 1957 a total of 300,000 people had been settled in 300 new villages. Diem had two advantages in carrying out this resettlement. The first was the availability of land, especially in the fertile Mekong Delta. The second was almost total peace, a condition reflected in the relocation centers, which were *dinh dien* rather than *don dien* in that, with the exception of a sprinkling of demobilized soldiers, they had no military character or function.

The hamlet of Binh Hung established by Father Hoa and his "sea swallows," however, was firmly within the tradition of the *don dien*.

Father Augustin Nguyen Lac Hoa was a Catholic priest born in China, and a soldier in the Chinese Nationalist Army. He fought against the Chinese Communists in the 1930s, the Japanese, and the Communists again. In 1950, Father Hoa led a band of 2,000 Catholic refugees out of China and settled them in the northern part of Vietnam, but, seeing that the Communists were about to win there as well, he moved them to Cambodia. Fearing renewed pressure when Cambodia recognized the People's Republic of China in 1958, Father Hoa and about 375 followers, mostly Chinese veterans and their Vietnamese wives, moved again, this time to South Vietnam. President Diem gave Father Hoa and his followers a piece of swamp land in the remote Ca Mau Peninsula, an area that had long been dominated by Viet Minh and later Viet Cong. There the group established Binh Hung Hamlet. Within months they were attacked by the Viet Cong, whom they fought with knives and staves. Defense was obviously a requirement as much as production, so Father Hoa and his followers organized their own army. Later, they received more modern weapons, including the AR-15 rifle, which they had several years in advance of the Vietnamese army. Second, the "sea swallows," as Father Hoa's troops were called, were able to expand the area under their control and invite new settlers to join them. By 1965 they controlled a sector fifteen miles square on which 18,000 people were settled; 1,000 of them were regular soldiers supported by the entire community. In 1966 the "sea swallows" were integrated with the regular armed forces, but conditions in the Hai Yen ("sea swallow") Special Sector of An Xuyen Province deteriorated as the Viet Cong increased their pressure and the units defending the Sector -- several companies of Regional Forces and Civilian Irregular Defense Group plus the "sea swallows" -- seemed unable to coordinate their activities, which Father Hoa complained about. Some observers feel that Vietnamese government officials were hostile to Father Hoa's "private army" and his habit of going over people's heads to solicit support, and therefore made little effort to help him.[24]

The *dinh dien* of the mid-fifties gave way to agrovilles and later strategic hamlets, but the *don dien* is neither an agroville nor a strategic hamlet, as is commonly mistaken. When acts of violence began to increase in South Vietnam in the late 1950s, the South Vietnamese

government, operating on the principle that the insurgents were being helped, willingly or unwillingly, by the peasants, especially those in scattered settlements where government control was tenuous, decided to relocate them forcibly in *khu tru mat*, literally "closer settlement areas," or agrovilles. There were twenty-three such areas located on former French land concessions still uncultivated. Each one was to be a large fortified village completely controlled by the government, where peasants would be insulated from any contact with the enemy. In all, some 43,000 peasants branded as unreliable were compelled to leave newly settled areas of the Delta and resettle in agrovilles.[25]

Plans for relocating another 150,000 people were not implemented. *Ap chien luoc*, or strategic hamlets, succeeded agrovilles. Strategic hamlets appealed to many Vietnamese, especially those, like President Diem, who came from central Vietnam where many hamlets originated as *don dien* when the Vietnamese were advancing south. The strategic hamlet program was intended to turn every hamlet in South Vietnam, actually 14,000 of a total of 16,000 since some would be abandoned, into a fortified stockade that would defend itself. Hamlets were chosen as the basic defensive unit instead of villages simply because most villages, especially those in the Delta, were geographically indefensible units; hamlets were more compact. To prevent the enemy from overrunning the hamlets by force or infiltrating them by stealth, each hamlet was surrounded by elaborate defensive works, including moats, sharpened stakes, hedges, walls, and barbed wire. Everyone had to be inside the stockade at night.[26]

Neither *khu tru mat* nor *ap chien luoc* worked for a variety of reasons.[27] Most important is that they are not in the same tradition as the *don dien* or *dinh dien*. In the latter, the landless were given the opportunity to become landed villagers, whereas in *khu tru mat* the peasants were compelled to leave land they were farming and even to buy the new piece of land on which they were to be resettled. In the *ap chien luoc*, some peasants were forced to abandon their hamlets, and many had to walk a greater distance to their fields each day. In the *don dien*, soldiers eventually became farmers. In the *ap chien luoc*, farmers were expected to become soldiers in return for nothing except

a sometimes negligible improvement in their security. In other words, both the *don dien* and the *dinh dien* presented an opportunity for economic improvement, while neither the *khu tru mat* nor the *ap chien luoc* offered real economic improvement, subjecting the peasant to increased militarization of his life. One must distinguish between settlement on new land or resettlement on abandoned land by soldiers and landless peasants, and forcible relocation of peasants for military security. The distinction is not a pedantic one. In *don dien* and *dinh dien* the settlers were recruits; in *khu tru mat* and *ap chien luoc*, they were conscripts.

The *don dien* has great relevance to South Vietnam's current problems. It offers a means by which the country can shift some of its military manpower to production without complete demobilization. Thus, without diminishing the country's ability to defend itself, the *don dien* is a limited means of economic development. In purely economic terms, of course, the *don dien* is probably inefficient. Even without the added mission of defense; few of the *dinh dien* of the late 1950s achieved total self-sufficiency.[28] But *don dien* can reduce the extent to which the army must be fed by the rest of society; at least some soldiers would grow their own food. Now they only eat.[29] And, properly distributed, it seems that *don dien* can enhance security in certain areas, open areas for the future settlement of landless refugees, and absorb army veterans as they are demobilized. Finally, an extremely important consideration, the *don dien* is a Vietnamese concept; it is understood by the Vietnamese and draws strength from the fact that it reflects a durable tradition.

Recently, several Vietnamese officials have revived the *don dien* concept. Colonel Nguyen Be, Commandant of the National Training Center at Vung Tau, proposes the use of *don dien* primarily for strategic reasons. Dr. Phan Quang Dan, Minister of State, proposes that *don dien* be established to clear land in less secure areas and open the way for future resettlement of landless refugees, and General Pham Van Dong, Minister for Veterans' Affairs, has established *don dien* to absorb demobilized veterans.

Colonel Be's plan calls for the establishment of *don dien* in belts that would separate the populated areas from the jungle-covered mountains where enemy units have their bases. Each *don dien* would clear the land as well as defend itself. Collectively, they would reduce Viet Cong movement from the remote areas into the more populous areas. (His repeated references to uncultivated foothills near the mountains imply that he is talking primarily about the provinces of central Vietnam.) He described two types of *don dien:* cooperative and private. As in the traditional *don dien*, demobilized soldiers and civil servants would be recruited to clear the land. A veteran officer with the rank of captain or above who could recruit fifty volunteers would be given from 500 to 1,000 hectares, depending on the soil, upon which to establish a cooperative plantation. (In a recent conversation, Colonel Be said that 5,000 hectares should be given to each fifty families to allow for future expansion.) Those who recruited fewer followers would be given a share according to the number of families they recruited. Officers and noncommissioned officers with ten years of service or more, who could afford to buy a tractor, would be given 20 to 50 hectares for a private plantation. All of the settlers would be both farmers and soldiers.

Colonel Be also has suggested that prisoners of war, those serving sentences for helping the Viet Cong, and ralliers, together with "those who have been by their own choice or otherwise expelled from the ordinary hamlets and village communities," be resettled with their families on a large farming center to be established on Phu Quoc Island. Prisoners would do the initial work in clearing the land and building the hamlets. Upon completion of their sentence they could elect to remain on the island and would receive the cleared land to farm. Light industries also would be developed on the island to absorb additional labor. The merits in this plan are that it would end the separation of families during the prison terms, thus removing a burden on the hamlets where families of prisoners live; it would usefully employ prison labor; and conceivably it could offer a useful life to those who had little to return to and who therefore might easily become a threat to future stability. Essentially, this part of Be's plan is a renewal of the

ancient practice of consigning malcontents to the frontier, giving them the opportunity to become productive citizens.[30]

In a plan that now awaits President Thieu's signature, Minister of State Phan Quang Dan has proposed the use of *don dien* to clear land and establish new hamlets. Phan Quang Dan believes that the army has grown disproportionately large for the country to support, and that though it is dangerous for the society and the economy to support such a large army of soldiers who remain idle most of the time, it is equally dangerous to suddenly demobilize them. Rapid demobilization would produce massive unemployment, economic chaos and, potentially, political chaos. Complete demobilization also ignores the fact that North Vietnam will continue the war for years, perhaps decades. The Vietnamese have faced similar problems before; for a thousand years the Vietnamese defended their northern frontier against China while expanding their southern frontier. And they did this with an army of peasants bolstered by a smaller force of professionals -- essentially, a people's army. South Vietnam must now go back to that tradition. Specifically, it must return to the land, its most abundant and most easily exploited source of wealth.

Phan Quang Dan's plan would form special volunteer units of soldiers who have over ten years' service. Unlike Colonel Be, Dr. Dan would keep the volunteers on active duty rather than discharge them. Each soldier and his family would be given three hectares to farm, but would continue to receive his regular salary in addition. Only in this way can South Vietnam improve the lot of its soldiers; raising their salaries would only increase the burden on the economy and cause inflation, and giving them imported goods offers no solution at all. (Of course, Dr. Dan admits that not all soldiers know how to farm, but many do and others can be taught, just as they were taught how to shoot.) Currently, soldiers are paid for defending the country some of the time, and for being idle most of the time. In a *don dien* they would be paid for producing and defending their own and neighboring hamlets. The troops would also build roads and dig canals and wells in return for their salary.

Phan Quang Dan's first target area is located in a heavily vegetated area called the Rung La, northeast of Saigon, where there are over 100,000 hectares of uncultivated land, enough to settle 30,000 families. The water supply is adequate for only one rice crop a year, but other crops can be grown in the dry season, and Dr. Dan says that the area is also excellent for fruit trees. He would begin by establishing *don dien* to clear and farm the land on both sides of the railroad that runs through the Rung La. After the *don dien* were established, landless refugees from Cambodia and the central provinces of Vietnam would be brought in to establish new hamlets in the area.[31]

Looking ahead to the establishment of *don dien*, Phan Quang Dan's idea of recruiting men with over ten years' service in the army seems to be a sound one for a variety of reasons. First, it is an equitable arrangement enabling those who have served longest to improve their situation first. Second, individuals with rural backgrounds, desirable for a *don dien*, predominate among soldiers with over ten years' service. Having joined the army before 1961, while South Vietnam's society was still overwhelmingly rural, the older soldiers have a rural background and are familiar with farming. Young men in the cities, with advantages of education and proximity, could generally avoid the draft by landing government jobs or higher-paying industrial jobs. Those drafted in 1968-1969 included more urban industrial workers.[32] The older soldiers are the ones who most likely want to go back to the countryside. This view was confirmed in many conversations with Vietnamese officers. Typical was the view expressed by Colonel Pham Van Son that the older soldiers, those between 35 and 45, probably would want to return to the countryside, while the younger ones would rather remain in the cities.[33]

A *don dien* composed of fifty men seems a bit small for a defensive unit. Something closer to company size, 100 to 125 men, would be preferable. Giving each soldier three hectares to farm would produce a hamlet of 400 to 500 hectares (allowing for houses and land irregularities), or roughly two kilometers by two or two and a half kilometers. A *don dien* of that size should be able to send out at least one-fifth of its soldiers to patrol the area and set up ambushes nightly without immense hardship. This is not much more than is required for members of

the People's Self-Defense Force and, as in the PSDF, women could share the burden of defense.[34]

One high-ranking Vietnamese officer recommended that General Lyautey's scheme for turning French soldiers serving in Indochina into planters be followed in the establishment of *don dien*.[35] Lyautey ordered his soldiers to clear land and plant crops when not fighting. At the end of three years, one-third of the garrison was released from active duty to become full-time farmers in the land already cleared, and a new contingent replaced them, which, at the end of three years, would have the same privilege. The advantages of this method are obvious: not only does it increase the defensive capabilities of each *don dien*, but it also gives each soldier the visible prospect of becoming a landowner at the end of his service.

A *don dien* should remain under military command until the security is improved enough for it to become a regular hamlet. During this period, regular army officers and perhaps some soldiers may be assigned to the *don dien* to facilitate reinforcement and other forms of support. Within the *don dien*, leaders should be elected by the men; numerous Vietnamese officers have made this point in private conversations. Those elected company or *don dien* commander could be given the rank equivalent to a company commander in the territorial forces, and would act as both military commander and hamlet chief until the *don dien* became a regular hamlet and regular civilian officials were elected.

The location of *don dien* must be based on the availability of arable land and its strategic location. *Don dien* should be established only where they can be supported by a larger military unit nearby. Vietnamese officials favor the clearing and occupation of War Zones C and D, the U Minh Forest, and the Plain of Reeds, all traditional insurgent strongholds. Progress in bringing these areas under cultivation is bound to be slow. Canals will have to be dug to drain swamps and bring fresh water, and dikes will have to be built to prevent flooding by sea water. The soil may also have to be treated. Army engineers can be assigned to the larger tasks. Other areas being considered include parts of Tay Ninh Province, Long Khanh Province, the Rung La, the foothills of the central highlands, and the highlands

themselves. In settling the highlands, care must be taken not to usurp the lands occupied by the highland tribes. Forced relocation and land grabbing has provoked dissident movements in South Vietnam before. Resettlement of Cambodian army veterans in the northeastern highlands of that country was one of the causes of the Khmer Loeu (highland Khmers) insurgency, which began in 1968. The highlands of South Vietnam are too strategic an area for Vietnamese to provoke similar dissident movements. Thoughtful Vietnamese suggest that highlanders' land claims be settled before *don dien* are established. *Don dien* composed of highland veterans (of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group and the present Border Ranger Command) can be established in areas where the population is of the same ethnic composition.

It is unlikely that the military duties of a *don dien* soldier will interfere with his farming activities or vice versa. Peasants in South Vietnam traditionally are underemployed and during slack seasons usually seek jobs elsewhere. An economist studying the village of Khanh Hau in Long An Province concluded that "six months of the year . . . the large majority of employable labor in the village does not work except sporadically on largely maintenance tasks." Even during the peak growing season for rice, which lasts 96 days, the total available labor force (men between 17 and 44 years of age and women between 17 and 22) was not fully employed (that is, working six days a week).[36] Another observer studying My Thuan village in Vinh Long Province confirmed this view of rural underemployment.[37] The *don dien* would be most vulnerable during the planting and harvesting of its crops, but the Lyautey plan already described would solve this problem by providing enough men for labor and guards. Additional troops could reinforce the *don dien* and assist in the planting and harvesting. Since the growing seasons vary widely in South Vietnam, there would be no nationwide demand at any single time.

The *don dien* may be organized either as a communal enterprise or as a settlement of individual farmers with collective military duties. The poor production record and widespread resistance to agricultural collectives in North Vietnam hardly encourage the establishment of communes. Individual landownership seems preferable. The traditional

method of transferring land titles could be used. Initially, the land would be held by the *don dien* as communal land, perhaps for one to three years, while it is being cleared and cultivation begun. Soldiers who had served with good records would receive individual land titles at the end of the period. At that same time, full military pay could be suspended or reduced.

Rice and secondary dry-season crops such as vegetables and tobacco are the most likely ones to be planted. The new varieties of "miracle rice" probably would not be grown since they require intensive care and military duties could easily interfere. Azolla, a vegetable fertilizer rich in nitrogen (needed if the new varieties of rice are to be planted) should also be considered. Dr. Phan Quang Dan has mentioned that the Rung La area may be suitable for fruit trees. Growing fruits and vegetables can eventually lead to the establishment of small food processing industries adjacent to the *don dien*. They could, like *don dien*, employ soldiers and veterans as workers who also perform military duties.

Throughout Vietnam's history, the *don dien* has been a solution to a chronic problem. Facing a protracted war with limited economic resources, the Vietnamese could find in the *don dien* a means of reducing their burden of defense.

NOTES

1. Pierre Pasquier, *L'Annam d'autrefois: essai sur la constitution de l'Annam avant l'intervention française*, Paris: Société d'Éditions Géographiques, Maritimes, et Coloniales, 1929, pp. 127-128.

2. The term *don dien* combines the words "military post" (*don*) and "rice-field" (*dien*). On current maps of Vietnam and in dictionaries, *don dien* is translated as "plantation." A *don dien* was a concession from the emperor to a group of soldiers to exploit a piece of land. Later it came to mean a concession from the government to an individual or company for exploiting a piece of land, thus losing its military meaning.

3. *Tac dat tac vang.*

4. M. Coughlin, "Vietnam: In China's Shadow," *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. VIII, No. 2, September 1967, p. 241.

5. Le Thanh Khoi, *Le Viet-Nam, histoire et civilisation*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1955, pp. 217-218; see also Le Kim Ngan, *To-chuc chinh-quyen trung-uong duoi trieu Le Thanh-Tong (1460-1497)* [*Organization of Central Power During the Reign of Emperor Le Thanh Tong (1460-1497)*], Saigon: Bo Quoc-gia Giao-duc, 1963, p. 78.

6. In 1741 there were 33 *don dien* in the north. An imperial edict abolished them in 1757, but the creation of a new one is mentioned in 1773. Dang Phuong Nghi, *Les institutions publiques du Viet-Nam au XVIII siècle*, Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1969, citing *Kham-dinh Viet-su thong-giam cuong-muc* (*Official Summary of the Mirror of History of Vietnam*), Vol. XXXIX, No. 15.

7. Michael G. Cotter, "Towards a Social History of the Vietnamese Southward Movement," *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. IX, No. 1, March 1968, pp. 18-19.

8. Le Thanh Khoi, *Le Viet-Nam*, p.251.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 313.

10. Nguyen Thieu Lau, "Nhan xet ve su khan hoang dong bang Nam Viet nam 1789" ("Assessment of the Exploitation of Uncultivated Land in the Delta of South Vietnam 1789"), *Van-Hoa A-Chau*, Vol. III, No. 1, April 1960, p. 56.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

12. Discussion between the author and Dr. Nguyen The Anh, March 4, 1971, Saigon; see also Nguyen The Anh, *Kinh-te va xa-hoi Viet-Nam duoi cac trieu Nguyen* (*Economy and Society under the Nguyen Dynasty*), Saigon: Lua Thieng, 1968, pp. 155-163.

13. E. Deschaseaux, "Note sur les anciens Don Dien dans la Basse-Cochinchine," *Excursions et Reconnaissances*, Vol. XIV, No. 31, (1889), pp. 133-136.

14. Deschaseaux, *ibid.*, states that the *dien tot* were absorbed into a special regiment in the army, while Alfred Schreiner states that they were dissolved shortly after the 1833 revolt; see Alfred Schreiner, *Les institutions annamites en Basse-Cochinchine avant la conquête française*, Saigon: Claude & Cie., 1900, Vol. III, pp. 66-67.

15. Deschaseaux, "Les anciens Don Dien," p. 134.

16. George Durwell, "Les colonies militaires dans la Basse-Cochinchine, Don Dien," *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises de Saigon*, Ser. I (1898), pp. 16-17; Schreiner, *Les institutions annamites*, Vol. III, pp. 73-74.

17. Durwell, "Les colonies militaires," p. 16; Schreiner, *Les institutions annamites*, pp. 69-70.

18. Durwell, "Les colonies militaires," p. 18; Schreiner, *Les institutions annamites*, p. 89.

19. Durwell, "Les colonies militaires," p. 19.

20. Paulin Vial, *Les premières années de la Cochinchine, colonie française*, Paris: Challamel Aïné, Libraire-Éditeur, 1874, Vol. I, p. 106.

21. Schreiner, *Les institutions annamites*, Vol. III, p. 94.

22. The resettlement of the northern refugees is described by Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled*, New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967, Vol. II, pp. 921-922.

23. *Ibid.*

24. For a description of the development of Father Hoa's "sea swallows," see Jacques Nevard, "Priest Aids Fight on Vietnam Reds," *New York Times*, December 22, 1961; Don Sanche, "Father Hoa's Little War," *The Saturday Evening Post*, February 17, 1962; Dickey Chapelle, "The Fighting Priest of South Vietnam," *Reader's Digest*, July 1963; John Maffre, "Viet Critics Fail to End Priest's Private Army," *The Washington Post*, July 25, 1965; Arthur S. Abbott, *Father Augustin Nguyen Lac Hoa and His Sea Swallows*, Washington, D.C.: American University Center for Research in Social Systems (undated but after 1965). For record of Father Hoa's difficulties in coordinating defense of Hai Yen, see the following Memoranda for the Record by Joseph P. Redick, May 12, 1966; Colonel Joel M. Hollis, May 27, 1966; Major General John C. F. Tillson, May 31, 1966; Colonel Hollis, June 5, 1966; collectively listed as Document 101458, CORDS Information Center, MACV Headquarters, Saigon.

25. Dennis J. Duncanson, *Government and Revolution in Vietnam*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1968, p. 261.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 321-326; Buttinger, *Vietnam*, Vol. II, pp. 987-988.

27. Duncanson, *Government and Revolution*, pp. 325-326; David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire*, New York: Random House, 1965, pp. 172-187.

28. Buttinger, *Vietnam*, p. 921. Buttinger writes that by the end of 1959, only 50 of the 300 new villages established had become self-sufficient.

29. Some idea of the armed forces' consumption of rice can be gained from the following figures: The 1.1 million men currently under arms consume an average of 237,000 metric tons of rice annually (1.1 million x 18 kilograms per month x 12 months). With an average production of two tons per hectare, this represents the production of 118,500 hectares. Soldiers and their families consume approximately 900,000 metric tons a year (74% of 1.1 million soldiers are married and have an average of 4 children per family x 12.5 kilograms per month for the wife plus 10 kilograms for each child x 12 months = 896,340 tons). It would require the establishment of 1494 *don dien*, each containing 100 men and their families farming 300 hectares of land producing two tons per hectare, for the army to become completely self-sufficient in rice for its soldiers and their families. That is a total of 149,400 men assigned to *don dien*, or approximately 14% of the total armed forces.

30. Published letter from Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Be to the President of the Republic of Vietnam, dated December 21, 1968, Chi Lanh; discussion between the author and Colonel Nguyen Be, March 27, 1971, Saigon.

31. Discussion between the author and Dr. Phan Quang Dan, March 16, 1971, Saigon.

32. Republic of Vietnam, Joint General Staff, Combat Development and Test Center, Social Behavioral Division, *Report of the Study on Living Standards, Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Army*, Saigon, 1969, pp. 50-51, discusses the impact on industry of the mobilization of 1968.

33. Discussion between the author and Colonel Pham Van Son, official historian of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces, February 5, 1971, Saigon.

34. Discussion between the author and Dr. John Russell, April 7, 1971, Saigon.

35. For General Lyautey's concepts of military colonization, see Paul Lyautey, "Le rôle colonial de l'armée," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Vol. CLVIII (February 15, 1900), pp. 308-328, and *Lettres du Tonkin et de Madagascar* (1894-1899), Paris: Libraire Armand Colin, 1920.

36. James B. Hendry, *The Small World of Khanh Hau*, Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1964, pp. 164-165. Studying two villages in Dinh Tuong Province in 1966, Robert L. Sansom noted that because of labor shortages caused by the war, the average farmer's workload had increased to 250 days a year. Robert L. Sansom, *The Economics of Insurgency in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam*, Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1970, p. 126.

37. John D. Donoghue, *My Thuan, A Mekong Delta Village in South Vietnam*, Saigon: Michigan State University Vietnam Advisory Group, Agency for International Development, pp. 47-48.