INTRODUCTION

5. It has been over twenty years since a monograph last addressed this topic, the semi-official account contained in Richard A. Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam’s Hearts and Minds* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995). Much of the archival material used in the present volume was not available to Hunt.
6. Among the new sources drawn on in this book are a collection of oral debriefings with Americans and South Vietnamese who were involved in the nation building in South Vietnam, housed in the Allan E. Goodman Papers in the Hoover Institution Archives. Some of these interviews are also available in the National Archives facility at College Park, Maryland. The extensive collection in the Goodman Papers has not, to my knowledge, previously been cited by researchers. Some 112 interviews, which have an average length of twenty-two pages, were reviewed in the preparation of this book. Because of a restriction imposed by Goodman’s deed of gift to the Hoover Institution, which bans the identification of any person still living, it is not always possible to name the individuals whose words are being cited or to give precise details of when and where they served in South Vietnam. Instead, broader descriptions such as “a province senior adviser who served in the delta just after the Americanization of the war” are used in this book. For extended discussions of individuals, pseudonyms such as “Mike,” initially in quotation marks, are assigned in addition to these descriptions. As printing the folder titles themselves would in some cases violate this deed of gift, interviews are instead cited by number and box, which is sufficient for any researcher to locate the cited material with ease.

10. Mark Atwood Lawrence has written that the “respectful reception” of the revisionist thesis has been influenced by the fact that “most scholars of the Vietnam War are less comfortable with” the historical facts of the later period of the war. The present monograph aims to increase their comfort levels. See Mark Lawrence Atwood, “Too Late or Too Soon? Debating the Withdrawal from Vietnam in the Age of Iraq,” Diplomatic History 34, no. 4 (2010): 589–600.


19. Frank Ninkovich, The Global Republic: America’s Inadvertent Rise to World Power (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 67–78. This is not to deny that security-oriented considerations, or at least justifications, played a part in the spread of the American empire.


22. For an example of a single work that expands the definition of “nation building” to encompass extremely diverse policy practices see Jeremi Suri, Liberty’s Surest Guardian: Rebuilding Nations after War from the Founders to Obama (New York: Free Press, 2012).


25. Around the same time, policy makers were embracing “modernization theory” as an all-embracing way of understanding—and influencing—these non-Western political processes. See Michael E. Latham, The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).


31. A fact that has not prevented many historians appropriately applying the term to a range of American activities in the conflict.


36. North Vietnam also benefited from the rotating presence of hundreds of thousands of Chinese engineering and antiaircraft artillery units in North Vietnam, freeing up the NVA to carry the war to South Vietnam. But, unlike the GVN, the Hanoi regime never relied on foreigners to fight for it. Chinese troops were withdrawn from North Vietnam in 1969–1970 following a breakdown in relations between Hanoi and Beijing, and yet North Vietnam was still able to win its war. An analogous withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Vietnam would have led to the South’s immediate collapse.


### 1. THE DIEM YEARS


28. Race, 179.


32. On this “preemptive” social strategy see Race, *War Comes to Long An*, chap. 4.

33. Race, 161.

34. Race, 128.


49. Tana, *Nguyen Cochinchina*.


52. Dang, 5.

53. Dang, 143.

54. Debrief no. 15679, box 101, Allan E. Goodman Papers (hereafter GP), Hoover Institution Archives (hereafter HIA), 4. For details on citations and the pseudonyms used when referring to these materials see note 6 in the introduction.


57. Quoted in Jumper, “Mandarin Bureaucracy,” 52.

59. Quoted in Chau, 58.


75. Although Phillips has published a memoir of his experiences and is relatively well known to historians, Fraleigh has received much less attention. The new sources used in this book allow his role to be explored.

76. Fraleigh, “Story of America’s Counterinsurgency Efforts,” 9; Debrief no. 3672 (Fraleigh), 3.


82. Dang, *Viet-Nam*, 87.


92. Chau, 237.


95. Elkind, *Aid under Fire*, chap. 3; Luce and Sommer, *Viet Nam*, 18.


101. Fraleigh claimed that he was involved in convincing Wisconsin congressman Clement Zablocki of the value of the Peace Corps, and that Zablocki then sold the concept to President Kennedy. See Fraleigh, “Story of America’s Counterinsurgency Efforts,” 12. See also Debrief no. 3672 (Fraleigh), 10.


104. Debrief no. 3672 (Fraleigh), 25.


106. Luce and Sommer, *Viet Nam*, 206.


111. Forrestal to Bundy, memo, 8 September 1962, folder “Vietnam, general, 9/1/62–9/14/62,” box 196, NSF: Countries, JFKL.
2. THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION AND NATION BUILDING

1. For an account that stresses Johnson’s personal agency in escalating the war see Fredrik Logevall, Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).


9. Richards to Westmoreland, memo, 30 November 1964, folder “#10: History Backup [II],” box 3, Westmoreland Papers, LBJL.


19. Johnson and Bundy, recording of telephone conversation, 31 May 1965, #7848, LBJL.
20. Johnson and McNamara, recording of telephone conversation, 12 September 1965, #8851, LBJL.
30. Johnson and Rusk, recording of telephone conversation, 3 February 1966, #9612, LBJL.
31. Johnson and Manatos, recording of a telephone conversation, 4 February 1966, #9619, LBJL.
37. Ky, Buddha’s Child, 132–33, 239.
38. Ky, Buddha’s Child, 191; Bui Diem, In the Jaws of History, 163.
41. Ky, Buddha’s Child, 191; Bui Diem, In the Jaws of History, 163.
42. NLF statement printed in Vietnam Courier (Hanoi), 2 February 1966, 1, 7.
44. Bui Diem, In the Jaws of History, 162.
50. Such “low modernist” approaches have been discussed in Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).
52. Holbrooke to Komer, memo, 27 February 1967, “Report to the President [8/66],” box 8, Robert W. Komer Files (hereafter RKF), LBJL.
53. Komer to Johnson, memo, 9 May 1966, folder “RWK CHRON FILE May 1966 [2 of 2],” box 6, Robert W. Komer Papers (hereafter RKP), LBJL.
55. Komer oral history interview, no. 2, 27.
56. Komer to McNamara, memo, 1 September 1966, folder “McNamara/Vance/McNaughton,” box 5, RKF, LBJL.
58. Komer oral history interview, no. 3, 28.
59. Komer oral history interview, no. 3, 32–33. See also Komer oral history interview, no. 2, 26.
60. Komer to Porter, 11 May 1966, letter no. 8, folder “RWK CHRON FILE May 1966 [2 of 2],” box 6, RKP, LBJL.
64. Komer to McNamara, memo, 29 September 1966.
67. Johnson and McNamara, recording of telephone conversation, 5 October 1966, #10924, LBJL.
73. Komer to McNamara, memo, 29 September 1966.
74. Komer to Johnson, memo, 28 February 1967, folder “Supplement to Komer report [3/67],” box 8, RKF, LBJL.
75. Komer to McNamara, memo, 29 September 1966.
76. Komer, memo for the record, 2 November 1966, folder “RWK CHRON FILE October–December 1966 [3 of 3],” box 6, RKP, LBJL.
77. Holbrooke to Komer, memo, 27 February 1967, “Report to the President [8/66],” box 8, RKF, LBJL.
79. Johnson and McNamara, recording of telephone conversation, 5 October 1966, #10923, LBJL.

3. SETTING UP CORDS

12. Ahern, CIA and Rural Pacification, 203.

15. Luce and Sommer, 41.


22. Chau, Vietnam Labyrinth, 241–47; “Establishment of the National Training Center,” 1; Ahern, CIA and Rural Pacification, 196.

23. Colby to Komer, memo, 16 August 1966; Chau, Vietnam Labyrinth, 241–47.


27. Debrief no. 21666, box 100, GP, HIA, 10.


30. Debrief no. 15681, box 97, GP, HIA, 2.

31. Quoted in Ahern, CIA and Rural Pacification, 154.

32. Debrief no. 126712, box 99, GP, HIA, 2.


38. MACV Dir 10–12, 28 May 1967, “Vietnam 1C (1). Revolutionary Development program. 2 of 2,” box 59, NSF, CF, LBJL.


42. MACV Dir 10–12, 28 May 1967, 4.

43. “Pacification Program in Vietnam,” briefing, 23 October 1967, 3. The number of PSAs exceeded the number of actual provinces in the country—forty-four—because three autonomous cities also had PSAs.


53. Komer oral history, no. 2, 47.


61. Komer to Westmoreland and Bunker, memo, 30 January 1968, folder “#28: History File [II],” box 15, Westmoreland Papers, LBJL.

62. Komer to Senior Advisor I CTZ, memo, 30 January 1968, folder “#28: History File [II],” box 15, Westmoreland Papers, LBJL, 1. The memo was distributed to all four DepCORDS.

63. Komer to Senior Advisor I CTZ, memo, 30 January 1968, 2.

64. Komer to Senior Advisor I CTZ, memo, 30 January 1968, 2; Komer for Westmoreland and Bunker, memo, 30 January 1968.


69. The quote is from “Project Takeoff” report, 11 August 1967, VI-3.


75. Corson, Betrayal, 213. Emphasis in original.


81. Vann to Ellsberg, 19 August 1967, 3.

82. Bui Diem, In the Jaws of History, 190.

83. Debrief no. 8664, box 94, GP, HIA, 3 (lobbyist); Debrief no. 206612, box 101, GP, HIA, 9, 10 (diplomat); and Debrief no. 7666, box 99, GP, HIA, 8 (con-man).

84. Debrief no. 166612, box 98, GP, HIA, 14–15; and Debrief no. 30663, box 99, GP, HIA, 1–2.

85. Debrief no. 2667, box 100, GP, HIA, 8.

86. Debrief no. 4668, box 101, GP, HIA, 18.

87. Wagonhurst to all PSAs, undated memo, folder “End of tour report,” box 102, CORDS History Files, NARA II, 4. Emphasis in original.


89. Debrief no. 23666, box 94, GP, HIA, 8–9.

90. Wagonhurst to all PSAs, 6–7.

91. Debrief no. 3681, box 97, GP, HIA, 16; Debrief no. 2667, box 100, GP, HIA, 2.
92. Task force minutes, program “CDD,” September 1971, folder “Heilman minutes of task force meetings / Taken from Chamber’s safe, folder I,” box 80, CORDS History Files, RG 472, NARA II, 8.

93. Task force minutes, program “CORDS/PP&P and Mr. John Vann,” 11 October 1971, folder “Heilman minutes of task force meetings / Taken from Chamber’s safe, folder I,” box 80, CORDS History Files, RG 472, NARA II, 19.


95. Debrief no. 30663, 8.

96. Debrief no. 8664, 2–3.

97. Debrief no. 8664, 5; Debrief no. 4668, 19–20; and Debrief no. 7666, 14.

98. Debrief no. 15679, box 101, GP, HIA, 1, 4, 13, 17–18.

99. Debrief no. 15679, 11; Luce and Sommer, Viet Nam, 18.

100. Debrief no. 15679, 11, 12, 14.

101. Debrief no. 56712, box 101, GP, HIA, 1, 4.

102. Vien, U.S. Adviser, 155, 156.

103. Debrief no. 15679, 7, 5, 11.


105. Vien, 10, 12.

106. Debrief no. 146612, box 99, GP, HIA, 9–10; Nguyen Cao Ky, with Marvin J. Wolf, Buddha’s Child: My Fight to Save South Vietnam (New York: St. Martin’s, 2002), 139, 177, 197.


116. Locke to Rusk, telegram, 10 January 1968, folder “Vietnam 1E (2). Post Inaugural Political Activity. 2 of 2,” box 61 2 of 2, NSF, CF, LBJL.


4. THE “OPPORTUNITY”


21. Helms to Katzenbach et al., memo with attachment, 2 February 1968, folder “Vietnam 1EE (1). Post Tet Political Activity. 3 of 4,” box 62, 1 of 2, NSF, CF, LBJL.


27. “Project Recovery,” memo for the record, 28 February 1968, folder “#17: History Backup [I],” box 6, Westmoreland Papers, LBJL.
28. “Project Recovery,” memo for the record, 16 February 1968, folder “#17: History Backup [I],” box 6, Westmoreland Papers, LBJL.
32. See the budget data in HQ MACV, CORDS, Community Development Directorate (hereafter CDD), General Records, 1967–1972, boxes 3–5, RG 472, NARA II.
33. Elliott, Vietnamese War, 2:1036.
36. Ky, Buddha’s Child, 139, 197.
40. Bunker to Rusk and Johnson, telegram, 9 February 1968, Saigon #18699, folder “Vietnam 1EE (1). Post Tet Political Activity. 2 of 4,” box 62 1 of 2, NSF, CF, LBJL.
45. Bunker to Johnson, telegram, 15 February 1968, 8.
47. Bunker to Johnson and Rusk, telegram, 9 February 1968, Saigon #18583, folder “Vietnam 1EE (1). Post Tet Political Activity. 2 of 4,” box 62, 1 of 2, NSF, CF, LBJL.
50. “Threat of Nguyen Duc Thang to Resign as Chief of Staff to the Committee for the Relief of the People,” intel cable, 9 February 1968, folder “Vietnam 1EE (1). Post Tet Political Activity. 2 of 4,” box 62, 1 of 2, NSF, CF, LBJL; “Vice President Ky’s Reasons for
Resigning as Task Force Chairman,” intel cable, 22 February 1968, folder “Vietnam 1EE (2). Post Tet Political Activity. 4 of 4,” box 62, 2 of 2, NSF, CF, LBJL.


52. Don, Our Endless War, 176–77; Ky, Buddha’s Child, 237.


58. Bunker to Rusk, telegram, 5 March 1968, Saigon #21218, quote at p. 2.


70. Ky, Lansdale, and Berger, memcon, 26 April 1968; Bunker to Rusk, telegram, 3 June 1968, Saigon #28958.

71. Bunker to Rusk, telegram, 3 June 1968, Saigon #28958.

72. Rostow to Johnson, telegram, 13 June 1968, CAP #81287, p. 5 of attachment.


80. Rostow to Johnson, telegram, 13 June 1968, CAP # 81287, p. 7 of attachment.


84. Bunker to Rusk, telegram, 18 March 1968, Saigon #22386, 6, 10.


91. Bunker to Rusk, telegram, 6 April 1968, Saigon #24147.


95. Komer, “New Model,” 86.


5. THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION AND NATION BUILDING


4. Jeffrey Kimball, for instance, writes that pacification was not relevant to Nixon’s strategy because it was unlikely to alter the strategic balance or provide leverage at the negotiating table. See Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 74.


12. Thieu, Laird, et al., memcon, 8 March 1969, folder “Vietnam: Secretary Laird’s trip to South Vietnam, March 5–12,” box 70, NSC Files, VSF, NPL.
13. Laird to Nixon, memo, 13 March 1969, folder “Vietnam: Secretary Laird’s trip to South Vietnam, March 5–12,” box 70, NSC Files, VSF, NPL.
20. Lake and Morris to Kissinger, memo, 21 October 1969.


38. Ellsberg, 246–49.

39. Lynn to Kissinger, memo, 25 August 1969, folder “VSSG meeting 10–24–69, Mtg 0751,” box H-001, NSC Institutional Files, Committee Files, Vietnam Special Studies Group Meetings, NPL.

40. NSDM 23, 16 September 1969, folder “NSDM 23,” box H-211, NSC Institutional Files, Study Memorandums, National Security Study Memorandums, NPL.


51. VSSG minutes, 19 November 1969, folder “VSSG meeting 11–19–69, Mtg 00752 (N),” box H-001, NSC Institutional Files, Committee Files, Vietnam Special Studies Group Meetings, NPL, 3–4.


53. “Situation in the countryside,” 20–21.


57. “Situation in the countryside,” 37, 40.


6. CORDS AND THE VILLAGE SYSTEM


7. Colby and Forbarth, Honourable Men, 262.


10. Speech at the National War College, transcript, 10 November 1972, 4.

11. Colby and Forbarth, Honourable Men, 262.

12. Vann to all PSAs, attachment to letter, 1 April 1968, folder “Vietnam assignments: Region III pacification reports [1/2],” box 44, Sheehan Papers, LOC, 3.


22. Thompson, Make for the Hills, 92.

23. Thompson, No Exit from Vietnam, 147.

24. Thompson, No Exit from Vietnam, 147.

25. Thompson hence anticipated, and invalidated, the arguments later put forth by Harry Summers in his famous critique of U.S. strategy in the Vietnam War. Summers
assailed U.S. leaders for having a strategy that was purely defensive and deprived the United States of the ability to gain the initiative in the conflict. But he neglected that it was nation building that made up the “offensive” component of U.S. strategy—the only possible exit strategy for the United States was to oversee the emergence of a self-sufficient GVN behind a defensive military shield. See Harry G. Summers Jr., American Strategy in Vietnam: A Critical Analysis (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2007).

26. For a broader look at the French influence over what is increasingly recognized as a transatlantic counterinsurgency discourse in the 1960s see Elie Tenenbaum, “French Exception or Western Variation? A Historical Look at the French Irregular Way of War,” Journal of Strategic Studies 40, no. 4 (2017): 554–76. It is also worth noting that the existence of this shared transatlantic discourse complicates any simplistic stereotype of Europeans as world-weary and wise and Americans as hopelessly naïve about the possibilities of counterinsurgency and nation building, a trope that continues to be repeated today. The more telling divide was between the military and civilians.


34. Speech at the National War College, transcript, 10 November 1972, 19.

35. Thompson, No Exit from Vietnam, 129.


37. Thompson, Make for the Hills, 128.

38. Vann to all PSAs, attachment to letter, 1 April 1968, 1.


40. Vann to all PSAs, attachment to letter, 1 April 1968, 2.


51. For an account by a journalist who reported on this story from South Vietnam see Grant, *Facing the Phoenix*.


84. Vann, “Thoughts on GVN/VC Control.”

85. Colby to Jacobson, memo, 3 October 1969, folder “M/I liaison reports, Jan–Apr ’70,” box 14, PPP General Records, RG 472, NARA II.


7. IMPLEMENTING THE VILLAGE SYSTEM


6. The National Archives (hereafter TNA), Public Records Office (hereafter PRO) FCO 15/1084 Foreign Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, South East Asia Department, Registered Files (D and FA Series), 20 May 1969, Coombe to Jones, 3.

7. TNA, PRO FCO 15/1673, January 3, 1972, Brash to Douglas-Home, 5, 10 [original unpaginated].

8. TNA, PRO FCO 15/1673, January 18, 1972, Gordon to Brash.


11. Debrief no. 16612, box 98, GP, HIA, 1.

13. Debrief no. 6683, box 97, GP, HIA, 2; Vietnam Area Studies OCO Training Center, n.d., John Donnell Collection, TTVA.
17. Jacobson to Colby, memo, January 29, 1971, folder “Mr Jacobson / Misc files / A C of S / Folder III,” box 36, CORDS History Files, RG 472, NARA II.
29. Marks to Johnson, attachment to memo, 4 January 1966, box 80, WHCF, Subject File Ex CO 312, LBJL. The inclusion of this document on the training curriculum is noted in Vietnam Area Studies OCO Training Center, n.d.
31. Debrief no. 16612, p. 16.
32. Debrief no. 25672, p. 23.
33. Debrief no. 6683, p. 9.
34. Turner to Vann, attachment to memo, 26 February 1971, folder “End of tour / Reports,” box 57, CORDS History Files, RG 472, NARA II, unpaginated.
35. Debrief no. 4696, p. 2.
37. Debrief no. 25687 (Lansdale), box 100, GP, HIA, 1–4.
42. Debrief no. 7666, box 99, GP, HIA, 24.


49. Decree #45, undated [1 April 1969], subsection “Village/hamlet,” folder “The Blue Book / Laws and directives,” box 14, CORDS History Files, RG 472, NARA II.

50. Concept and Organization of the National Training Center Vung Tau, in folder “National Training Center Questionnaire,” box 16, CORDS History Files, RG 472, NARA II, 1.


52. Concept and Organization of the National Training Center Vung Tau, 94–98.


57. Message #93, 2 June 1969, subsection “Village/hamlet,” folder “The Blue Book / Laws and directives,” box 14, CORDS History Files, RG 472, NARA II.


60. Debrief no. 15681, box 97, GP, HIA, 32; Debrief no. 6683, p. 4.


62. Former district senior adviser stationed in Phu Yen Province, interview with the author, Austin, Texas, 5 May 2015.


64. Debrief no. 24681, box 100, GP, HIA, 47.


66. Debrief no. 166612, p. 10.


68. Debrief no. 15679, box 101, GP, HIA, 15, 16.


75. Debrief no. 25687, box 100, GP, HIA, 1–4.
84. Thompson, Make for the Hills, 98.
86. Thayer, Systems Analysis View, 175–76.
87. Thayer, 213.
88. Colby, Lost Victory, 232–38; Colby and Forbath, Honourable Men, 168.
90. Law #3, folder “CORDS programs / TSD,” box 18, CORDS History Files, RG 472, NARA II.
93. Truong, Territorial Forces, 69.
95. Khuyen, RVNAF, 128.
96. Quoted in David Elliott, The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930–1975 (London: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), 2:1092. Elliott inserts the word “[commander]” after “Seventh Division,” but it appears from the original quote that the cadre is referring to the division, not its commander.

101. Sorley, Abrams Tapes, 471


103. Truong, Territorial Forces, 85–87.

104. Task force minutes, program “Territorial Security,” 6 September 1971, folder “Heilman minutes of task force meetings / Taken from Chamber’s safe, folder I,” box 80, CORDS History Files, RG 472, NARA II, 4–5.

105. OSD study, South Vietnam’s Internal Security Capabilities, May 1969, p. B-2; Truong, Territorial Forces, 45.


112. Truong, Territorial Forces, 104.


117. Concept and Organization of the National Training Center Vung Tau, 102–3.

118. Truong, Territorial Forces, 104–6.

119. PSDF report, 8 September 1971, “CDLD / Fact sheets / Semi-annual review / MR IV, folder II,” box 71, CORDS History Files, RG 472, NARA II.


122. Truong, Territorial Forces, 106.

123. Truong, 70; PSDF report, 8 September 1971.


126. “Village Self Development Program,” 2

127. Speech at the National War College, transcript, 10 November 1972, 4.


148. For the situation in I and II Corps see Toyryla to DEPCORDS, memo, 21 July 1971, and Strasser to ACoS CORDS, memo, 26 July 1971, both in folder “CDLD / Elections / Circulars,” box 37, CORDS History Files, RG 472, NARA II.


152. “Land Reform in the Republic of Viet-Nam,” press release, 3 July 1974, Douglas Pike Collection, TTVA. The document also claims that no farmer who received an LTTT title had “been forced off his land.” This was certainly untrue. Given the fact the document also misstates the number of acres in a hectare, we can reasonably question how familiar its author was with the program.


156. Farwell to director, attachment to memo, 26 September 1969, folder “GVN village / Taxation,” box 12, CORDS History Files, RG 472, NARA II, 1.


161. Thorson to Farwell, memo, 11 June 1971, folder “LRIP / Local tax program,” box 37, CORDS History Files, RG 472, NARA II.

162. “Status report on the LRIP” document, folder “CDLD / LRIP” box 62, CORDS History Files, RG 472, NARA II.


CONCLUSION


2. Task force minutes, topic “J-2/Security Intelligence Briefing,” 14 October 1971, folder “Heilman minutes of task force meetings / Taken from Chamber’s safe, folder II,” box 80, CORDS History Files, RG 472, NARA II, 21.


9. For critiques of population-centric counterinsurgency see Gian P. Gentile, Wrong Turn: America’s Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency (New York: New Press, 2013);
