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Introduction

Chairman Snyder, Representative Akin, distinguished Members, thank you for inviting me here today to discuss current and historical perspectives on doctrine and strategy for Provincial Reconstruction Teams. I am honored to be here.

Today I want to talk briefly about civil-military and interagency relations in Vietnam. Although the scale and historical circumstances of Vietnam differ greatly from those of Iraq and Afghanistan, some aspects of intergovernmental relations in Vietnam may offer valuable lessons for today. Like the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Vietnam was a war in which the United States was itself a belligerent (as opposed to a third party intervenor), it was a war in which the United States suffered significant casualties and expended significant resources, and it was a war which had an enormous impact on our national security interests and domestic politics.

The CORDS Program

“Pacification” efforts in Vietnam – what might today be called counterinsurgency or post-war stability operations – involved returning government control to a countryside that was infiltrated by Viet Cong insurgents. It focused on local security efforts, but also included distributing food and medical supplies, agriculture support, and land reform. As the American commitment to Vietnam increased, the military, USAID, CIA, the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), and other agencies’ in-country teams all began to expand accordingly.

The Civil Operations and Rural Development Support program was created in 1967 after years of unsatisfactory attempts at coordinating the activities of multiple agencies under the U.S. Ambassador’s Country Team. President Johnson appointed Robert Komer to the position of Deputy to Gen. William Westmoreland, the commander of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV). The deputy commander carried a three-star rank. The union of the previously separate civilian and military pacification efforts into the combined CORDS program resulted in what may have been the only truly integrated civilian-military command in U.S. history. The integrated command placed civilians in charge of military personnel and vice versa. It also placed military resources,

including logistics, transport, and force protection assets, at the disposal of civilians. Military and civilian units were co-located, often in the same building, at the national, regional, province, and district levels.

Komer developed a cordial relationship with Westmoreland, as did Komer's successor, William Colby, with Westmoreland's successor, Gen. Creighton Abrams. In turn, Gens. Westmoreland and Abrams showed great flexibility and allowed their civilian deputies considerable leeway in setting priorities and allocating resources. By placing almost all pacification related programs under a single headquarters and investing the single-manager with unprecedented access to resources, Komer had sufficient leverage to force the various agencies to develop and implement a nation-wide pacification plan in conjunction with the South Vietnamese government.

Much of the impetus for reorganizing CORDS came from President Johnson himself. Johnson viewed pacification in Vietnam as an extension of his vision for his domestic "Great Society" policies and began to describe the effort to help the Vietnamese people as the "other war."

CORDS and PRTs

The scale of the pacification effort in Vietnam dwarfed the PRT efforts in both Iraq and Afghanistan. For example, there were almost 8,000 U.S. participants in CORDS, and as much as 800,000 South Vietnamese army, police, and government participants. All of this against a backdrop of half a million U.S. and 400,000 South Vietnamese conventional forces. Compare Afghanistan, with approximately 30,000 coalition forces, and PRT personnel of all coalition nations numbering about 3,000. While there are more US and coalition troops in Iraq, there are fewer PRT personnel. The lessons from CORDS have to do more with organizational structure.

- Many former participants (State, USAID, military) talk about the surprising level of cooperation, large amounts of financial resources available for pacification projects.
- Symbiotic relationship: military needed civilian expertise; civilians needed military counterinsurgency knowledge, lift capabilities, and protection.
- Compare original structure in Iraq: a retired three-star general headed up reconstruction efforts, separate from the military command, with no access to

resources. No matter how competent, a retired three-star cannot compete for resources and influence with an active duty four-star general in charge of the entire operation.

Non-Traditional Security Assistance

I want to make just a couple of points about non-traditional security assistance, and the growing role of DoD in development assistance. My fellow panelists will speak more to this. But I want to draw a sharp distinction between stabilization, pacification, counterinsurgency activities in a war zone, and development activities, train and equip activities, and security cooperation arrangements in non-crisis countries. In my view, it is entirely appropriate for the military to have the lead on reconstruction activities in a war zone. The lesson of CORDS in Vietnam is that this structure works better than having a civilian lead.

In Vietnam, pacification had priority over traditional development assistance. Everyone agreed that security had to come first before reconstruction. One example I would point to today in Iraq is state-owned enterprises. There is still disagreement between State/USAID and DoD over whether to rehabilitate the SOEs or privatize them. This is an area I worked on at CPA in Iraq. It is my view now, as it was when I was in Baghdad, that the SOEs should be rehabilitated where possible to get people back to work and off the streets, for security purposes.

Conclusions

These are the key lessons:

- *Unity of command.* In a major contingency, such as Vietnam, post-war Europe, or Iraq, there should be unity of command between military and civilian efforts. In a non-secure environment, the lead should be with the military. Unity of effort can only be assured with an integrated command structure. No matter how collegial or well-intentioned, interagency coordination and cooperation cannot substitute for focused, integrated leadership.

- *Mandatory control structure.* The civil-military chain of command should be established at the highest levels of the executive branch, and the interagency chain of command should be established at the highest levels of the executive branch or by Congress. There will be intense organizational resistance to concession of control of agency assets to a unified interagency headquarters.
- *Integrated command, integrated resources.* Where civil-military relations are involved, the single chain of command should also entail integrated personnel and financial resources. Only military assets can bring sufficient resources to bear on the local problems faced. With CORDS, the command arrangement gave Komer and Colby a seat at the military table when decisions were made and resources were distributed.
- *Focus on local population.* Counterinsurgency and stabilization activities require a focus on local populations, on understanding and fulfilling their needs.
- *Security first, then economic well-being.* CORDS stressed village security above everything else. Along with security, the restoration of economic livelihoods is a critical factor in establishing security or defeating an insurgency. Economic progress was always considered the linchpin of the containment policy.
- *Encourage host nation ownership.* CORDS was designed to empower the South Vietnamese government to provide security and essential services to the districts and villages. European governments designed their own recovery programs under the Marshall Plan.
- *Build the private sector.* CORDS and the Marshall Plan were designed to build the agriculture and industrial bases of Vietnam and Europe rather than as temporary employment programs or one-time donor contributions.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to appear before you today.

