

**THE CAMBODIAN CIVIL WAR AND THE VIETNAM WAR:
A TALE OF TWO REVOLUTIONARY WARS**

by

Boraden Nhem

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science and International Relations

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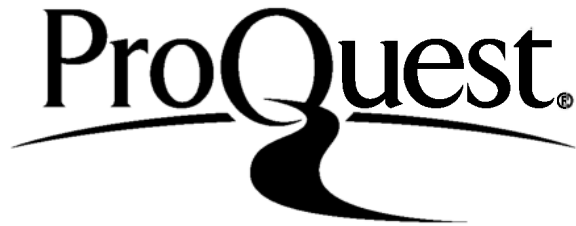
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A TALE OF TWO REVOLUTIONARY WARS**

by

Boraden Nhem

Approved: _____

Gretchen Bauer, Ph.D.

Chair of the Department of Political Science and International Relations

Approved: _____

George H. Watson, Ph.D.

Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

Approved: _____

James G. Richards, Ph.D.

Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed:

Stuart J Kaufman, Ph.D.
Professor in charge of dissertation

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed:

Mark W McLeod, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed:

Mark J Miller, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed:

Matthew S Weinert, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|-----------|--|
| ANKI | Armée National du Kampuchea Indépendant (English equivalent: National Army of Independent Kampuchea). |
| ANS | Armée Nationale Sihanoukhiste (English equivalent: Sihanouk's National Army). |
| ARVN | Army of the Republic of Vietnam. |
| ASEAN | Association of South East Asian Nations. |
| CAP | Combined Actions Platoons. |
| CGDK | Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea. |
| CIDG | Civilian Irregular Defense Group. |
| CPK | Communist Party of Kampuchea. |
| CTZ | Corps Tactical Zone. |
| DRV | Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam). |
| FUNCINPEC | Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique, Et Coopératif (English equivalent: National United Front for a Cambodia Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative). |
| ICP | Indochina Communist Party. |
| KPNLAF | Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces. |
| KPNLF | Khmer People's National Liberation Front. |
| KPRA | Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Army. |
| KPRP | Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party. |
| MAAG | Military Assistance and Advisory Group. |
| MACV | Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. |
| MR | Military Region. |
| NLF | National Liberation Front. |

| | |
|--------|--|
| NR | National Road. |
| OMZ | Operational Military Zone. |
| PAVN | People's Army of Vietnam. |
| PLAF | People's Liberation Armed Forces. |
| PMC | Provincial Military Command. |
| PRK | People's Republic of Kampuchea. |
| RF-PF | Regional Forces, Popular Forces. |
| RVN | Republic of Vietnam. |
| SNC | Supreme National Council of Cambodia. |
| UNAMIC | United Nations Advance Mission In Cambodia. |
| UNTAC | United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia. |
| VVA | Vietnamese Volunteer Army. |

ABSTRACT

This dissertation compares and contrasts the Vietnam War (from the founding of the Vietnamese first republic in 1955 until the Tet Offensive in 1968) and the civil war in Cambodia (1979-91) in order to draw insights for counterinsurgency theory. The counterinsurgent in Vietnam was not successful because it could not effectively implement its political program, which prevented it from mobilizing enough committed people to fight in order to defend the regime. On the other hand, the revolutionary organization implemented its political program well and received a tremendous amount of external support. The counterinsurgent in Cambodia, on the other hand, was victorious in 1991 due to three factors: an appealing and effectively implemented political program, cohesive military organization, and the use of a hybrid army which was predominantly composed of territorial forces. Using the lessons from the civil war in Cambodia, this dissertation provides insights into the complexity of civil war, the dynamics of hybrid warfare, and the challenges facing a revolutionary organization which struggles to become an effective conventional army. This dissertation argues that a properly organized territorial army can complement the regular units very well, and this army is the underappreciated key to success in countering revolutionary war.

Chapter 1

A LITERATURE BUILT ON DIVERSE FOUNDATIONS

There are countless studies and experts on counterinsurgency warfare (COIN). At academic institutions and more prominently, at government think tanks and research institutions, COIN has become one of the most researched topics. In civilian academic institutions, various disciplines have been used to explain the causes of victory and defeat.

At the practical level, this abundance has not produced significant improvements in the performance of the counterinsurgents in recent wars. The United States (US), for instance, spent ten years fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan without producing any clear solution or long-lasting stability. After the US forces left Iraq in December 2011, the situation began to deteriorate and culminated in the capture of many Iraqi cities by a militant extremist group.¹ Apparently, the Iraqi government still did not have sufficient capabilities to defeat the challenges by guerrilla forces after the US left the country. The fragile situation in Afghanistan could also produce the same result, as the Taliban can simply wait until the US leaves the country.

This is puzzling: the new US Army-US Marines Corps field manual on COIN, FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency*, actually recommended all the proper principles that a counterinsurgent should implement, namely pacification which prescribed the clear-hold-build policy. But why was there instability in Iraq after the US left? Does the doctrine require that the US must stay there forever? Or is there a problem with the

building of local forces? There are only two possible explanations for this puzzle: either the counterinsurgent did not follow the theories, or the theories are inadequate.

Perhaps the current COIN literature is still underdeveloped. This dissertation intends to examine the political/social root causes of revolutionary warfare and the implications for COIN. The project is also pertinent from the standpoint of international relations theory as it relates to one of the long-standing debates in IR theory: to what extent is the use of force relevant in the world's current political environment? If COIN can be won by military power alone, then the use of force is still the most effective operational variable in world politics. This project seeks to examine whether there is any limitation to the use of force and, if there is, when and under what conditions the use of force is effective.

1.1 General Overview of the Literature

The study of revolutionary warfare is somewhat different from the study of conventional warfare, in that scholars are in agreement on most of the terminologies of the latter while those of the former are usually controversial. In the current literature on guerrilla warfare, there are at least three main problems: the definition, nature and dynamics of revolutionary war; the definition, nature and dynamics of COIN; and case selection bias. We shall examine each of these in detail.

1.1.1 What is Revolutionary Warfare?

Firstly, there is a disagreement about the nature of guerrilla warfare. The term "guerrilla," by definition, is more about tactics than strategy. A tactic of hit-and-run, avoiding the strong, attacking the weak, using the enemy's supplies, and protecting one's own forces etc. are only a few defining characteristics of guerrilla warfare.

Indeed, conventional forces can also use small-unit tactics to disrupt the enemy's supplies or outflank a well-defended target.² However, when the term "guerrilla warfare" is used, it normally denotes a case of asymmetric warfare in which one side is far larger and stronger than the other, prompting the smaller side to resort primarily to guerrilla tactics.

The first theorist to conceptualize modern guerrilla warfare was Mao Tse-tung. Given his experience with the Japanese occupiers during WWII and the struggle against the Chinese nationalists, Mao theorized that guerrilla warfare is protracted in nature and needs to be conducted in three stages.³ Using the strategic interactions method, Mao argued that local and international political support, the counterinsurgent's morale (soldiers and civilians) and economic power need to be taken into account in order to win such war.⁴

In the first stage, the guerillas are typically too weak to mount any successful offensive against the government. Mao argued that in this stage, or what he called "strategic defensive" for the guerillas and "strategic offensive" for the counterinsurgent, the guerillas must build political support of the people.⁵ For Mao, because a smaller force attempts to fight a larger one, the former must have the people behind them. This required an attractive ideology and effective political programs which can address the social and political grievances, thus capable of mobilizing the population. This will provide the guerrillas with recruits, sanctuary, resources and intelligence.

In essence, this is a "People's War," which is revolutionary in nature because a smaller force attempts to overthrow the government and seek to bring about radical social and political changes. This concept appears to be born out of Mao's assessment

of the war against the Chinese nationalists and the Japanese occupiers where the communists initially disastrously tried to overthrow the government without a broad-based popular support.

Tactically, in this counterinsurgent's strategic offensive stage, Mao maintained that the guerillas must accept the possible loss of many cities to the counterinsurgent forces: the guerillas must not try to defend these cities through fixed defense or they will be crushed.⁶ The best course of action for the guerillas, according to Mao, is to mount mobile warfare.⁷ Mao assumed that by forcing the counterinsurgent to defend its rear supply line along stretches of railways and highways, significant counterinsurgent forces would be diverted from offensive operations.⁸

If the guerrilla does this correctly, then the war will enter the second stage, when the counterinsurgent still retains offensive capabilities but finds it increasingly difficult to mobilize these with low cost. Most likely, the counterinsurgent then becomes more and more averse towards taking the offensive. As a result, the counterinsurgent will contract its forces in order to consolidate the gains and hold on to the territories already under control.⁹ Mao called this action, "strategic consolidation" for the counterinsurgent, and it is a phase in the war called "strategic stalemate" since both sides do not have the capacity to mount large-scale offensives. The guerillas shall then move into unoccupied or lightly occupied areas to implement their own "pacification" campaign. The guerrillas still should not engage in large-scale fighting since the counterinsurgent is still capable of mounting last-resort offensive actions.¹⁰ In this stage, both sides will appear to divide the territory for control.

Finally, the guerillas will reach the third and final stage, the "strategic offensive," when the counterinsurgent loses its offensive capabilities and is on the

strategic retreat. Positional warfare or fixed defense will become necessary, and the guerillas will expand the areas under their control, this time by fighting to hold on to those areas. As the name implies, the main objective in this stage is purely military from the guerillas' point of view, which would result in them trying to seize power through large-scale engagements. In other words, in the third stage, the guerrillas "graduate" to the conventional level, and the war becomes a conventional one.

1.1.1.1 Definition of Guerrilla/Revolutionary Warfare Used in This Dissertation

The following definition is used in this dissertation: a guerrilla/revolutionary war is a violent struggle to seize political power in order to effect radical social and political changes.¹¹ This dissertation assumes that the ideal strategy for winning is Mao's concept of "People's War," a kind of war that denotes the use of hit-and-run tactics, prolonged conflict and the avoidance of pitched battle, all aimed at exhausting the government before fighting a large-scale engagement in order to decide the outcome of the war.¹² Moreover, the words "change or reshape society" imply that the guerrillas should have an effective political program which can address the grievances and attract a large majority of the population if they want to be successful.

Therefore, to avoid confusion in this dissertation, the author uses the term guerrilla "warfare" to denote the strategic level of the war, in essence, a revolutionary war. Whenever the author wants to refer to the tactical aspect of the war, the term "guerrilla tactics" is used instead. While the terms "guerrillas" and "revolutionaries" are considered to have the same meaning, this dissertation would prefer the term "revolutionaries" to describe the insurgent or rebel movement. Its adversary will be referred to as either the "government" or "counterinsurgent."

1.1.1.2 Why Do Peasants Fight?

Why do people fight? What compels them to accept an underground life and hardship in order to rebel against the established power? This section will examine a few causes that are commonly found in cases of revolutionary war. Knowing why people fight is the first step towards understanding effective COIN.

According to Mao, all revolutionaries fight to redress social and political grievances. As a result, even though the revolutionaries start small, they will eventually be victorious if they could harness the popular grievances to their advantage. But historically, Mao's three-stage model is not always followed: most guerillas do not pay much attention to the first stage (political issues) but are more interested in the military component of the war. Mao himself has criticized people, whom he called the "quick victory theorists," who want to attack the counterinsurgent in the initial phase where he (the counterinsurgent) still retains offensive capabilities.¹³

The alternative approach to Mao's three-stage theory, called "focoism," was developed by Che Guevara during the Cuban Revolution.¹⁴ This was a completely *militaristic view of guerrilla warfare*. A close reading of Che's writing on guerrilla warfare reveals surprisingly little difference from Mao's writing: the three stages, secured base areas, attacking the enemy's rear, and the consideration that the war is a political-military task. What did differ from Mao, however, was crucial.¹⁵ Che was much more influenced by the Marxist-Leninist ideology, and this seemed to affect his views of the war.¹⁶ Che made it clear that the guerillas are the "vanguard" of the people, and they must incite the people through a quick and large insurrection.¹⁷ The people are considered to be naturally revolutionary, but many are perhaps still fatalistic about the prospect of change in the capitalist government.

As a result, a large-scale violent insurrection is needed to make the people conscious of their situation. An insurrection led by a small cadre of revolutionaries would provide “focus” for the discontent of the population, which would lead to a general insurrection. Che argued that the guerrillas need to incite a quick insurrection, which will draw overreaction and brutal responses from the government, thus pushing more people into the revolutionary movement. In other words, the government’s response against the guerrillas’ *foco* is self-defeating.

Che would immediately move to the fighting without consideration of political-military conditions on the ground or even the different ways the government could possibly respond.¹⁸ With less than 100 soldiers from several foreign countries, Che led his group into the Bolivian wilderness with very few and small population centers. The group could not resist the battalions of the Bolivian army. His theory failed in its application in Bolivia, and Che was killed as a result.

Nonetheless, both Mao’s and Che’s approaches are important in understanding COIN. One question that confounds many scholars is the nature of the battle in this war: will there be guerrilla actions or conventional battle? The answer is mixed. If a guerrilla group follows Mao’s prescriptions, then the counterinsurgent will encounter small guerrilla attacks but no large-scale battle at the beginning. On the other hand, if the guerrillas follow Che’s prescription, then there will be large-scale attacks at the onset of the war.¹⁹ For this reason, many scholars who did not examine in detail the nature of revolutionary war fail to understand why the revolutionaries sometimes use guerrilla tactics and sometimes use conventional tactics. In reality, the revolutionaries have to use both.

The issue is not black and white. Even when the guerrillas follow Mao, not all provinces in a country mired in a revolutionary situation are in the same stage. Some provinces might be in stage one while others might be in stage three. This would create a situation which one sees everything in that country, from terrorism to guerrilla attacks and conventional battles. That is the source of confusion, and anyone who considers the war as either guerrilla or conventional in nature would easily overlook its hybrid nature.

One similarity between these two approaches (Mao's and Che's) is the assumption that the guerrillas are (or have to be) ideological to some extent. But does this mean that the guerrilla organization must always maintain a sophisticated propaganda organization manned by people who are well-versed in ideology? Mao would say that every guerrilla soldier must be first and foremost a teacher who educates the people about the cause. But not all scholars agree with this theory.

In a relatively recent study, Kilcullen instead argued that a person joins the guerrillas perhaps not so much because of his or her ideological baggage which characterizes Mao's (and to some extent, Che's) approach but because of the threat any war presents to their local community or if people to whom they are socially related had joined the guerrilla movement.²⁰ As long as their lives are affected, or if their kin and their community are affected, people would be willing to become the "accidental guerrilla," as Kilcullen called it, to defend their community. The concept could be used to explain how the Iraqis who were fighting alongside Al-Qaeda at the beginning of the Iraq War changed sides when they discovered that this group was even more brutal and presented a more serious threat to their community than the

Americans.²¹ This was the beginning of the formation of the Awakening Council which, for a time, had stabilized the situation in Iraq.

While Kilcullen's argument took away political ideology from revolutionary/guerrilla warfare, Jeffrey Race presented a connection between this concept and Mao's. Using a case study from a Vietnamese province, Race argued that everyone would fight to change that which threatens their community, and this would make them more susceptible to the revolutionary propaganda.²² In Vietnam, Race claimed, the people were fighting to defend the land distributed to them by the Viet Minh and the National Liberation Front (NLF).²³ While they were not communist from birth, the poor peasants were the first supporters of the policy that promised land distribution. People could fight for various reasons: sometimes it is ideology, but most of the time, it is very personal. An ideology that attracts people well is one that immediately and directly affects their lives.

Lastly, the study on why peasants fight comes from the literature on peasant revolt. Using a rational choice approach, Lichbach argued that the revolutionaries (what he called "dissident organization") and the counterinsurgent (what he called "authorities") will attempt to compete in attracting the peasants to their respective sides using both material means and symbolic means (ideological appeal).²⁴ The reforms that might potentially result from successful rebellion are public goods for all peasants, but the cost is private for individual peasant, thus creating a collective action problem for any dissident organization to lead *all* peasants to revolt (i.e. avoid free-riding). Lichbach examined what he called "selective incentive" to explain when peasants decide to revolt in spite of collective action problems. He concluded that peasants will ally with the one that provides the most selective incentive, i.e. private

rewards for participating (and private punishment for not participating) in a collective action.²⁵

In this sense, the counterinsurgent stands in an advantageous position since it generally possesses more resources than the revolutionary organization. Thus, the only way for a revolutionary organization to win this competition is to locate itself in areas far from the counterinsurgent's control so that it can become the monopolistic supplier of selective incentive.²⁶ Lichbach did not specifically talk about how the revolutionaries can use military power to further that goal, but we can infer that terrorism and small-scale military operations can be used to drive the government forces out of remote villages, thus making the revolutionary organization the sole suppliers of selective incentive.

We can draw one important implication from this analysis: the peasants will align with the party that has shown the ability to win the war (even the people might only see that at the village or hamlet level) as well as protecting them from the adversary's retaliation. In other words, the one who could stay closer to the people and spend most of the time with them, will be in a good position to identify targets for selective incentives.

Lichbach also argued that sometimes it is necessary to use violence to make sure the peasants follow the revolutionary organization and to maintain collective actions. Yet, he also admitted that selective incentive (both rewards and violence) have diminishing returns. As a result, only when combined with a sound ideology can the revolutionary organization maintain the support of the peasants even in times of hardship and constant pressure from the government.²⁷

From the standpoint of the counterinsurgent, however, there is a dilemma. Should it try to defend all territories in order to provide selective incentives, then its forces will be overstretched. On the other hand, if the counterinsurgent tries to consolidate its forces, then the revolutionaries will capture remote villages. Depending on how important the remote villages are and how big the counterinsurgent forces are relative to the revolutionary forces in specific cases, the dilemma can make a difference. The counterinsurgent's resources are an advantage, but the question is will it be enough?

While Lichbach's argument can be inferred to support this point, we do not find any mention of specific military operations that can serve this end or support such operations. Can peasants be attracted only when the military stays in their village? Are there any other military instruments? Will the militias system be effective, thus substituting the need for conventional forces? Nevertheless, Lichbach's model is a generalized model and, perhaps, is not intended to answer detailed tactical questions. That does not diminish the significance of his argument: selective incentive is important, but it has diminishing returns, thus requiring ideology to mobilize people.

1.1.2 COIN Schools of Thought

Given what we know about the different approaches of revolutionary warfare, how do scholars suggest we deal with it? Currently, there are three main schools of thought that seek to explain success and failure in COIN warfare: the Coercion School, the Winning the Hearts-And-Minds (WHAM) School, and the Technical School. Their different recommendations on how to fight guerrilla warfare stem mainly from their disagreement over the nature of the revolutionary warfare and the role and effects of political and social grievances.

1.1.2.1 The Coercion School²⁸

Surprisingly, one of the main advocates of this school, Roger Trinquier, a French veteran of the Algerian war, actually conceptualized guerrilla warfare in Maoist terms. Trinquier knew the war could not be won by military power alone, and he argued that “Our military machine reminds one of a pile driver attempting to crush a fly, indefatigably persisting in repeating its effort.”²⁹ The problem, however, is how to secure the support of the population and by what means.

For Trinquier, the guerillas use terror tactics to coerce the population, and he argued that the government should use the same tactics to secure population support. He noted about this causality:

We know that the *sine qua non* of victory in *modern warfare* is the unconditional support of a population. According to Mao Tse-tung, it is as essential to the combatant as water to the fish. Such support may be spontaneous, although that is quite rare and probably a temporary condition. If it doesn't exist, it must be secured by every possible means, the most effective of which is *terrorism*.³⁰

A second variant of this school gives some importance to the coercion method, albeit only under certain conditions. Arreguin-Toft theorized that the guerrillas have two main strategic options: Guerrilla Warfare Strategy (GWS) and direct defense (conventional war). The counterinsurgent also has two strategic options: direct attack (conventional war) and barbarism, which is the use of coercion and terror tactics.

Using a strategic interactions thesis in an asymmetric conflict, Arreguin-Toft argued that the counterinsurgent's barbarism strategy can be effective if the guerillas use GWS.³¹ Arreguin-Toft claimed that if GWS is used and if the counterinsurgent does not respond by using barbarism, the war will be prolonged and the public opinion in the strong actor's country will become impatient and demand the end to the war.³²

In this logic, barbarism would end the war quickly and it is more effective than moderate level of violence over a long period of time.

Another author, Gil Merom, vindicated this point of view in his book *How Democracies Lose Small Wars* by showing that democratic states tend to be quite impatient in wartime and would normally demand a quick resolution to the war.³³ In a guerrilla war situation, according to Merom (and Arreguin-Toft), barbarism is effective because the strong actor (the counterinsurgent) has the capability to easily destroy the guerrilla base of support, which is the local population.³⁴ By that logic, Arreguin-Toft argued that barbarism employed by a strong actor is effective if the weak actor uses GWS, regardless of the fact that by definition, barbarism consists of strategies that affect noncombatants and systematically violate the laws of war.³⁵

There are two problems with this analysis. First of all, even though Arreguin-Toft did not conduct extensive statistical analysis, he did provide a long list of cases of guerrilla warfare and COIN in the appendix. In order to accommodate such extensive comparison, however, Arreguin-Toft was forced to use a restricted ideal-typical set of strategies. In his analysis, each side has only two possible strategies: barbarism and direct attack for the counterinsurgent, and direct defense and GWS for the guerrilla. But in reality, the guerrillas would almost never start with direct defense mainly because they are normally too weak at the beginning.

On the other hand, strangely enough in Arreguin-Toft's conception, the counterinsurgent would not be allowed to use COIN. Perhaps Arreguin-Toft was correct in arguing that barbarism was effective because there were indeed historical cases where it did. Yet, the choices were so restricted to only two, thus eliminating other potential cases where the counterinsurgent could win without barbarism.

To be fair, one reason why this school continues to be popular is that there are indeed cases where violence seems to work. Arreguin-Toft argued that there are four interactions in this case study, and one in particular is pertinent here: the Phoenix Programs.³⁶ Arreguin-Toft argued that the US won this interaction since the programs succeeded in destroying most of the NLF cadres and its armed wing, the PLAF (People's Liberation Armed Forces). While he did not examine whether that victory in one particular operation intensified anti-war sentiments both in Vietnam and in the US, and ultimately led to defeat in the war as a whole, the revolutionaries were indeed hard hit by the Phoenix Program.³⁷ The American Indian Wars and the Philippines insurrection in the 1990s are two prominent cases where the guerrilla organization was devastated in the face of barbarism strategy. Unfortunate as it may be, violence does seem to work under some conditions.

When arguing that barbarism can suppress the local population and prevent them from joining the revolution, one implicitly distinguishes between a presumably innocent civilian and a seasoned revolutionary and affirms that by suppressing the civilian then the counterinsurgent will win. This does not fit with Mao's concept of a People's War. An innocent civilian today can become a battle-hardened revolutionary with a high commitment tomorrow, perhaps because of the government's barbarism in the first place. In the very first battles, barbarism may work well, but as more and more of it is applied, the people would not like it. As Griffith duly noted, "what have we to lose? When a great many people begin to ask themselves this question, a revolutionary guerrilla situation is incipient."³⁸ Thus, the debate continues.

A third variant of the Coercion School was born out of the Vietnam War strategic debate. Harry Summers argued that the Vietnam War was a conventional

war.³⁹ Because the guerillas in fact fought the war using regular units, it follows logically that the counterinsurgent would have been better off using conventional capabilities.⁴⁰ The main problem in Vietnam, Summers claimed, was political interference in what should have been strictly military operations.⁴¹ By his logic, Vietnam was lost due to the restrictions placed on the military regarding the use of its capabilities and because the politicians and the media were very hostile to effective military operations.⁴²

This view can be called the “back-stabbing hypothesis:” the soldiers did their job until abandoned by the politicians and the home front and, worst of all, the soldiers were unjustly blamed for the failure.⁴³ This thesis seems to vindicate that of Merom’s: because the military was not able to conclude the war quickly, the public began to abandon the military. Arreguin-Toft might have recommended to the military a greater use of barbarism before the public turned against them.

1.1.2.2 The Winning the Hearts-and-Minds School⁴⁴

The Coercion School was severely criticized by scholars who argued for the primacy of the political solution to the conflict. The first variant was born out of the Vietnam strategic debate and as a direct response to Summers. Because of the significance of the Vietnam strategic debate in the context of American COIN literature, the debate resurfaced again as the US began to fight the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Krepinevich characterized Summers’ view as associated with “the Army Concept” which refused to recognize COIN since it is contrary to their standard operating procedures.⁴⁵ For Krepinevich, pacification is the best COIN practice. Pacification in this sense focuses on population security and improving the livelihood of the local people, usually accomplished by having small units of troops dispatched to

work with each village.⁴⁶ Once the local militias are formed and security is maintained, the troops will move to other villages, thus gradually expanding the government's control. This is the so-called "oil-spot" strategy.⁴⁷

Krepinevich also argued that this and other COIN strategies such as CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support), CAP (Combined Actions Platoon) were implemented too little too late in Vietnam.⁴⁸ He claimed that the main reason why the PAVN was able to sustain the fight in the South was because they relied on local NLF infrastructures.⁴⁹ In other words, pacification strategies could have prevented the Vietnamese revolutionaries from winning the war.

Krepinevich's efforts were squarely aimed at challenging Summers' arguments. And that is where the discussion diverged. Summers argued that the COIN prescriptions were simply irrelevant because, after all, it was the PAVN that defeated the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), and it was a purely conventional war.⁵⁰ Krepinevich challenged that argument by trying to show that a significant number of the PLAF were the main forces that engaged the American military and the ARVN.

However, Krepinevich and Summers were both talking about two different sides of the same coin. In fact, if we consider the Vietnam War as a natural progression along the lines of Mao's methodology (and Giap's), then Krepinevich was talking about the early stage of the war (1965-72) while Summers was talking about the latter stage (post-1972). In other words, they did not engage each other directly because they focused on different periods of the conflict, during which the nature of war was different.

In another work within this school, Lomperis went further by specifically stressing political legitimacy as the main front of the COIN effort.⁵¹ He argued that guerrilla warfare is revolutionary or, to put it simply, a violent overthrow of the existing political order. If the status quo regime is not considered legitimate, then the guerillas will have a higher chance of overthrowing that government.⁵² By comparing different cases of the dismal attempts by Western countries to fight revolutionary wars, Lomperis concluded that the main impetus for the war was the “crisis of legitimacy,” which cannot necessarily be solved by violence alone.

It takes a long time to establish a working constitution, legitimacy, and effectiveness of the government in question to discharge its responsibility. But that is the only way to enlist the support of the people. For Lomperis, the main responsibility of outside forces can only be one of maintaining the viability of the local government during the critical transition period.⁵³ Another author in this school, Guenter Lewy, would have concurred with Lomperis that building a good political program is key to success in COIN. Lewy argued that the main problem in Vietnam was that the host government, the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), was very corrupt while the US spent more time in killing the enemy rather than addressing the political aspect of the war.⁵⁴

For some scholars, there would be no serious revolutionary threat if there were no serious political controversy or unaddressed social grievances.⁵⁵ By default, the population is not naturally revolutionary, and it would take quite a lot of problems and grievances to provoke the peasants.⁵⁶ More specifically, Eric Wolf argued that the most important grievances that provoke the people to take up arms are issues that severely affect their everyday lives, as well as the prospect of security both for the present and in the future.⁵⁷ Lichbach concurred and argued that the peasants are more

susceptible to the grievances that affect them directly rather than the grand, overarching goals such as nationalism or the solidarity of world laborers, etc.⁵⁸

The Coercion School, on the other hand, sees the political context as important but argues that it is not their job to address the political problem. General William Westmoreland, for example, saw the war in Vietnam as inherently a political problem, but he claimed he had tried not to meddle in RVN's political affairs.⁵⁹

Another difference between the WHAM School and the Coercion School is the techniques used to enlist popular support. For the former, if the main cause of revolutionary warfare is social and political grievances, then terrorism does not really solve the problem. The signature policies of this school are: pacification, population security, avoidance of civilian collateral damage, and economic relief program.⁶⁰ The objectives of these instruments are to convince the people about the government's causes and to rally them by peaceful means.

David Galula, another veteran of the Algerian War and a contemporary of Trinquier, disagreed with the latter about the nature of the Algerian Civil War.⁶¹ While Trinquier wrote at the height of the war, Galula wrote after the end of the war. Reflecting on the mistakes that were made by the French army in Algeria, Galula argued that population protection would have been more effective than military coercion.⁶² For Galula, the guerillas and the government fight the war from two different positions. By definition, the former is the revisionist and the latter is the status quo power.⁶³ As a result, while the revisionist seeks to overthrow the government by violent means, the government has the responsibility to protect the people and maintain law and order. If barbarism is used, then there would be no

difference between the government and the guerrilla, and the government would not be able to claim the moral high ground to enlist support from the people.⁶⁴

The first criticism (and perhaps the only one) of the WHAM School was Charles Wolf, Jr., a researcher of RAND cooperation. Wolf argued that by using pacification strategy, the counterinsurgent effectively raises the level of material well-being for the general population, but that surplus will also become available for the revolutionaries.⁶⁵ Using system analysis, this is equivalent to increasing the inputs for the revolutionary movement. For Wolf, pacification is effective if and only if it is *quid pro quo*, meaning that only the groups of peasants that give something back to the counterinsurgent will benefit whereas others will suffer.⁶⁶ As Austin Long put it, this approach is the “carrot and stick approach” applied to the rational peasants.⁶⁷ Rational peasants will then see both the cost of fighting the government and the benefit of joining it.⁶⁸ At best, this policy will gather popular support and at worst it will reduce the inputs for the revolutionary movement.

This raised a lot of reactions from other scholars within RAND itself.⁶⁹ Wohlstetter argued that this general repressive policy can change the preference of the peasants and paradoxically pushed many of them to join the guerillas.⁷⁰ The key here lies in the ambiguity of the peasants’ preference (from the counterinsurgent’s perspective). The stick policy might anger and change the preference of the peasants so radically that the carrot policy would not be able to compensate.⁷¹ Ellsberg maintained that in this case, the government needs to invest more rewards to entice the peasants that they had made angry, whereas the revolutionaries would need less resources (than what would have been otherwise) to gather support.⁷²

Wohlstetter argued that repression cannot be implemented indefinitely.⁷³ Melnik went on to say that repression has a diminishing return and that it could turn the peasants against the counterinsurgent too quickly for the carrot policy to take effect.⁷⁴ In sum, the counterinsurgent's barbarism approach (according to Wolf, Jr.) might end up hurting the government by making the previously indifferent peasants angry.

While the WHAM School has touched on a very important issue in COIN, namely the political cause of war, it hardly moved beyond that. The WHAM School occasionally talked about the military-technical aspects of the war and when it did, it usually did not connect the political advantage and the military actions. It is true that without political capital, both the counterinsurgent and the revolutionaries would find it hard to carry out their operations. But what is the link between political programs and military strategy? How can one translate political advantage into military success? The WHAM School was silent on this matter.

1.1.2.3 The Technical School

The third school concerns itself mostly on how a third party intervener could help the local counterinsurgent win the war. This school did consider the political aspect of the war as an important determinant in the outcome, but usually fell short of elaborating it further. Instead, this school of thought paid more attention to the nation-building tools such as organizing police forces, security forces, and how the third party intervener could help the local counterinsurgent to organize itself to fight. Eventually, most of the literature in this school of thought contributed to the development of the US Army-USMC capstone doctrine, FM 3-24 Counter-insurgency in 2006.

Born out of the need of the military to have some guidelines or SOPs on how to defeat guerrilla/revolutionary wars, the Technical School is different from the Coercion School in that the former is more concerned about controlling violence and collateral damage. In essence, this approach does not preclude the use of force, but it prescribes the conditions under which it is most effective in the context of COIN. It is the “technique” that matters. Some of the techniques include: deployment of special forces, conventional sweeping operations (forced relocation and free-fire zones), urban grid systems (including random domestic raids and coercive interrogation), and nation-building.⁷⁵

Special force operations are themselves a special type.⁷⁶ They are often organized as a very small unit, perhaps up to the company level in a few cases, but they rarely, if at all, reach the battalion level (MACVSOG in Vietnam could reach such level). This concept was perfected by the *Commandos de Chasse* in Algeria.⁷⁷

The main goal of special force operations, as described here, is to strike fear into the enemy, impose additional cost for their logistical operations, while simultaneously reducing collateral damage.⁷⁸ Body count is not necessarily the objective of this kind of operation.⁷⁹ For example, in Malaya, the convenient logistical routes used by the communist insurgents were usually denied by special forces, and the communists went to great lengths to avoid these likely routes of ambush. Towards the end of the Malayan emergency, the main problem with the insurgent movement was a lack of food because they were cut off from convenient supply points by small but deadly units of the Senoi Praaq.⁸⁰

The second, closely related tactic is conventional military sweeping operations to accompany pacification. These operations are usually conducted in rural areas far

from the control of the central government. Often, these operations start with a forced relocation to establish the so-called strategic hamlets. Areas in-between these hamlets would be designated 'fire zones' meaning that the military has the full authority to open fire upon those who cannot present proper identification.⁸¹ These operations usually sweep through the areas to clear all possible insurgents' hideouts. In Vietnam, these operations later degenerated into a purely military tactic more commonly known as "search and destroy" operations.⁸² These operations were extensively used in Malaya, but with considerable success.⁸³

There is ample evidence that these operations can cripple the insurgents' capabilities in a very short period of time: the insurgents still remain, but they can no longer operate above the platoon level.⁸⁴ Again, this effectiveness would come to haunt the counterinsurgent if more regular units were put in to conduct these operations and if civilian casualties began to rise.

A third technique to win the war concerns how the counterinsurgent itself is organized. This organization, in turns, reflects the military culture of the country that it serves. When Krepinevich criticized Summers regarding his arguments about the reasons why the US lost the war in Vietnam, Krepinevich used an organizational approach to explain how inter-service and inter-agency politics were the main reason why COIN was not adopted.⁸⁵ The approach was confirmed by the study on the history of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV): the air force asserted its influence and pushed for a generous use of air power, the State Department tussled with the military command over who should take over the COIN efforts, and the military command disliked the CIA's handling of the militias system.⁸⁶

These were parts of the main reasons why conventional tactics and strategy were chosen over COIN in Vietnam. Lewy went further to argue that the organization within the US military itself at that time such as the short-term, rotational tour of duty made it difficult for COIN to be successfully implemented.⁸⁷ As soon as an officer knew what was going on in his area of operations, he already came to the end of his tour, and the officer must rotate in order to advance his career and to give a chance for his replacement to “punch his ticket” to advance his career as well. The problem worsened toward the disengagement and withdrawal of MACV, when many of the US troops did not focus on their mission because the only thing on their mind was to go back home.⁸⁸

While this approach tells us how COIN could be lost, it does not tell us how COIN could be won. Can one achieve victory by simply doing the opposite of what MACV was doing, organization-wise? Without a comparative case study, it is a bit hard to answer the opposite question: what is the type of organization that could win the war?

By using the organizational approach to COIN, Nagl attempted to answer this question by comparing the Malayan Emergency and the Vietnam War using the concept of organizational learning.⁸⁹ According to Nagl, the British won the war in Malaya because they were able to change and adapt their organization to adopt COIN tactics whereas the US military in Vietnam could not do the same.

Nagl identified three organizational traits that allowed the British to successfully adopt COIN tactics: close civil-military cooperation, the ability to identify and solve problems by civil power, and the use of decentralized, small units.⁹⁰ As an empire in need of policing its dominions, the British were more aware of “small

wars” than the US military, which was more accustomed to large-unit maneuver warfare.

The Technical School did not preclude violence, it only asked how violence can be used in a smart way to win the war. In Malaya, for example, Nagl claimed that “collective punishment” actually worked if applied correctly: a village was informed that unless undercover communist agents were identified, all villagers would be indiscriminately punished.⁹¹ But unlike the Coercion School, this school would give all villagers a chance to denounce the agents through a secret ballot in which everyone would write the agents’ names on a piece of paper and then put their papers in the box. This secured the anonymity of the ones who made the denunciation, and Nagl claimed it was very effective in rooting out the undercover communist agents.⁹²

Other techniques include: “peaceful” pacification, amnesty, and rewards programs. Pacification, at first glance, is an uncontroversial term. In conventional usage, pacification and economic development involve the provision of public goods and the training of local militias to defend villages.⁹³ This is one example of the “clear-and-hold” strategy, one that was adopted into the joint US Army-USMC field manual on counterinsurgency (FM 3-24) which we shall discuss later in this section.

In some cases, however, pacification was used to accommodate forced relocations (Algeria and Malaysia). In Algeria, General Faivre claims that only 15 percent of the relocated decided to regain their former villages after the war.⁹⁴ The main reasons were probably the fact that the new village provided modernization such as clean water and decent housing. In Vietnam, most people did not like relocation because it cut them off from their rice paddies that were the main sources of revenue as well as devastating their ancestral graves.⁹⁵ In Malaya, just like Vietnam, the people

suffered much from the usually riviled program called “new village.”⁹⁶ This idea was to actually cut off contact between the communist guerillas and the Chinese ethnic groups who were their main supporters. This involved forcibly relocating both the aboriginal and the Chinese who lived in and on the border of the jungle, respectively, to the newly fortified strategic hamlets.⁹⁷

1.1.2.4 Summary of the Literature on COIN

The literature on guerrilla/revolutionary warfare is much simpler than the literature on its solution. Over time, techniques of guerrilla warfare were propagated to many places where the weak attempted to fight against the strong, and so were the COIN countermeasures. Whether guerrilla/revolutionary warfare is a war, pure and simple, or whether it is a different kind of war sparks a debate in COIN literature that continues to this day. As a result, COIN literature is divided among many schools of thought. The Coercion School believed that guerrilla warfare is a conventional war fought with peculiar tactics, but a normal war nonetheless. Thus, it requires conventional military actions in response. The disagreement with WHAM is bitter, and the reason is simple: the military organization is, in principle, resistant to change, especially if that change comes from a non-military source. To make matter worse, these WHAM recommendations are usually non-military in nature or things that the military thinks are not the missions its organization was designed to accomplish.

On the other hand, the WHAM School squarely addressed the political dimension of the war. It was concerned with the larger picture and was preoccupied with justifying a political intervention into military operations because it believed that all revolutions resulted from unaddressed social and political grievances. Unlike the

Coercion School, the WHAM School did not support the use of unlimited firepower and barbarism, which could turn a neutral peasant into a committed guerrilla fighter.

The problem with these two schools is that scholars failed to engage with each other directly. When they did engage with each other they often talked about two different aspects of the same concept and war. This is especially true in respect of the conditions under which military operations can be effective. An unguided offensive, for example, may paradoxically create a political phenomenon in which the bystanders and the indifferent peasants might think an actor will win the war and decide to ally with likely victors. In Malaya, the Malayan Communist Party and the British actually competed in many offensive operations just to convince the aboriginal tribes that they each were the future winners.⁹⁸ The common shortcoming between the two schools is the relations between politics and military affairs.

The third school of thought argued that the best way to fight guerrilla/revolutionary wars was through proper techniques, including good organization, special operations forces, and nation-building. Yet, while this school acknowledged the importance of legitimacy and political solution to the conflict, it did not elaborate on those points. Instead, this school talked about the proper techniques, assuming the political issue is constant.

1.1.2.5 The American Way of War: Political COIN vs. Military COIN

COIN literature is one of a few literatures that has significant impact on the policy-making world. Debate in the COIN literature is, in some way, not dissimilar to the COIN policy debate. The American COIN policy debate, in particular, shifted back and forth between different schools of thought. However, the inertia of military organization and doctrine tends to push the policy away from the WHAM School.

America had ample experience with interventions and fighting against revolutionary warfare. But the results were mixed. At one extreme, the United States had successfully solved the problem by using military power exclusively. During the American-Indian Wars between 1622 and 1924, military power was largely effective in quelling rebellions. It was thus not strange to see “punitive expeditions” in the historical records. During the Philippines-American War (1899-1902) and later the Hukbalahap Rebellion (1942-54), military power once again prevailed. While there were indeed political reforms, it is also not hard to find “extermination campaigns” in the historical records.⁹⁹

At the other extreme end of the continuum, there were cases where the US had successfully ended the local rebellion, or prevented one, without relying on brutal military tactics. The two prominent cases were Japan and Germany in the period after World War II. These two cases were perhaps the only examples where America had successfully conducted “nation-building” after the conventional war had ended. There was indeed American military victory, but the nation-building that followed did not include brutal tactics. Other cases, such as the Iraq War in 2003, were also cases of initial military victory, but the insurgency relapsed in the post-war phase.

Nation-building is something that is useful in the context of revolutionary warfare, but the US has, since then, shied away from using that term openly. Today, almost no scholar or policy maker would suggest that the US should conduct nation-building, even though everything else does not seem to work as well. Not surprisingly, there was only one publication by the RAND Corporation which had used the term “nation-building” openly.¹⁰⁰

Located in the middle of this continuum is the gray area where the US relied on military power but was unable to achieve its desired political end state. The earliest American experience with this conundrum was the Reconstruction Era (1863-1877) after the end of the American Civil War.¹⁰¹ Vietnam, of course, was a similar case.

Although the term “nation-building” does not seem to be a favorite term in American society today, Jeremi Suri argued that the historical records said otherwise. Suri took the Philippines Insurrection and the Reconstruction after the American Civil War as among the two earliest examples of American involvement in nation-building.¹⁰² Yet, in his review of Suri’s book, Robert Kagan emphasized that although Suri’s examination of the two cases was not wrong, Suri forgot to mention that cases like the Reconstruction, for example, consumed 80 years simply to achieve the original goal of giving equal rights to the former slaves.¹⁰³ In both of these cases, one fact was clear: nation-building required lengthy commitment.

Kagan noted that the lengthy commitment was perhaps the reason why the American public did not like the term nation-building. This is understandable if we believe what Russell Weigley argued about the “American way of war” which prefers quick, decisive, and cheap victory.¹⁰⁴ This way of war is not compatible with lengthy commitment, i.e. nation-building. Echevarria further argued that because of the American model of civilian control of the military, Americans have a tendency to think that the two spheres are separate, thus exacerbating the effects of the American way of war as well as creating a gap between military victory and political victory.¹⁰⁵

This argument about the American way of war and its incompatibility with nation-building seemed to reflect the scholarly debate on COIN. In the Vietnam War, the debate was between the theorists of quick-and-decisive military victory (Harry

Summers) and those of patience (Andrew Krepinevich). As the US was drawn into the complexity of the Iraq War, Krepinevich once again advised the US military not to fall into the military-victory trap.¹⁰⁶ This time, however, Krepinevich found supporters in the policy world. At the head of the US Army Combined Arms Center (aptly dubbed “the Intellectual Center of the Army”) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, was Lieutenant General David Petraeus, whose doctoral dissertation was about the lessons of the Vietnam War. Prior to his command at the Combined Arms Center, Major General Petraeus had served in Iraq where he had ensured stability and peace in the area under his command.¹⁰⁷ That peace eventually collapsed after he left. It was hard, therefore, not to link Petraeus’s efforts to the peace that he had established during his command.

A joint US Army and US Marines Corps field manual on COIN, FM 3-24 *Insurgency and Countering Insurgency*, was published in 2006 and then the newly promoted General Petraeus left the Combined Arms Center to lead the multinational forces in Iraq during the surge in 2007. In 2008, the violence in Iraq decreased significantly. Once again, it was hard not to link these events.¹⁰⁸ The manual (FM 3-24) was subsequently revised, the latest version being updated in June 2014.

This development was reinforced by the US Army’s decision to reform its combat organization with the creation of the “brigade combat team” (BCT) concept. This concept was born out of the frustration with the slow mobility of Task Force Eagle in Bosnia in the 1990s. In the BCT concept, the division would have to sacrifice its military assets (most notably artillery) to the brigade, which was deemed to be more mobile. With the addition of new assets, the BCT will be both mobile and strong.

Whether by design or by coincidence, the BCT concept was compatible with the small-unit warfare recommended by COIN scholars such as Krepinevich, Lewy, and Nagl. John Nagl, in particular, argued in his book *Learning to Eat Soup With a Knife*, that small-unit action was key to British success in Malaya.¹⁰⁹ The book itself made it to the reading list of the US Army Chief of Staff at the time, General Schoomaker, who also wrote a foreword to Nagl's book.

In summary, in the early 2000s, COIN theorists in the WHAM School seemed to have triumphed. Nevertheless, this victory seemed short lived. In 2013, Colonel (retired) Gian Gentile, a former veteran of the Iraq War, published a book with a telling title, *Wrong Turn*, in which he criticized the US military's approach to COIN as the wrong doctrinal turn.¹¹⁰ For Gentile, the focus on irregular wars distracted the US military from the core mission that all military institutions should be prepared for: conventional war. Gentile argued that defeat in a conventional fight would be more catastrophic than the one resulting from low-intensity, i.e. revolutionary, wars.

For Gentile, perhaps it was wrong in the first place that the US got itself involved in the irregular warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan, believing that the "COIN myth" would help it succeed. He believed that victory in conventional warfare is preferable because it will allow the US to buy some time to deal with the low-intensity warfare. While we cannot characterize Gentile as part of the Coercion School, he was indeed a sharp critic of the WHAM School. Perhaps Gentile was right when he argued that outside power such as the US would not be able to solve local political problems. Calling American interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq "nation-building at gunpoint," Gentile suggested that perhaps the US should not intervene in places where it was not prepared to solve local political problems.¹¹¹

This view seemed to gain traction as the American officers of the WHAM generation left command. In addition, with the US defense budget cut looming large, the US Army began to move away from the BCT concept, and the divisions are now regaining their functional capabilities. Because the US Army has only ten active divisions but more than fifty BCT, the move to shift the assets from the BCT to the divisions will save money because it will reduce the total number of BCTs. The first unit to do so was the 212th fire brigade (i.e. artillery), which was part of the first armored division. On 23 July 2014, seven years after it was detached from a division to serve in a BCT, the artillery unit has returned to the division.¹¹²

In the low-intensity environments in Iraq and Afghanistan, soldiers and officers of the functional units such as artillery and air defense observed with dismay as their troops who were trained for technical capabilities became truck drivers and security details for the logistics convoy. The reason was simple: in Iraq and Afghanistan, the threat was guerrilla attacks, ambush, and improvised explosive devices while there was no enemy air plane for the air defense to shoot down or enemy artillery to worry about. As Russia intervened in the Crimea in early 2014, a threat which was conventional in nature, the US Army must be prepared to respond in kind. Simply put, an artillery man driving a truck or an air defense soldier running logistics will not win such conventional war. Because of these reasons, it is reasonable to believe that the trend towards building a conventional US Army is not going away.

In summary, after a few years of experiment with an army that was tailored to cope with the low-intensity and hybrid environment inherent in revolutionary wars, the US Army has had enough. As the officers who were WHAM-oriented left command, new officers came in with the idea of building an army that was oriented

towards other threats they considered more pressing. This was not very dissimilar from the Cold War era where the US military struggled to build a force that could respond to both the Soviet conventional threat in Western Europe and the low-intensity environment in revolutionary wars such as the Vietnam War. In the end, it looks as if the US Army had turned full circle. Just like the academic debate on COIN, the US doctrine on COIN was also divided. Conventional army, it seems, will continue to fight in revolutionary wars.

1.1.3 Case Selection Bias and the Organizational Approach to COIN

A major problem in the current COIN literature was methodological. The current literature suffers from analysis of the single-case study. There are four different types of case selection methods employed in COIN literature. The majority of works on guerrilla warfare are based on a single case study. Purely deductive work as well as rigorous large-n statistical study is very rare in the literature.¹¹³ The main reason for this, perhaps, is the complexity of each case as well as the variety of the cases, which makes it difficult for both purely deductive theory and statistical work to produce widely accepted conclusions.

Single cases study give an in-depth understanding of the country in question. For example, when Race studied the Vietnam War, he focused on revolutionary movement in only one province, Long An, before the American escalation.¹¹⁴ He found that the land issue was very important in Vietnam and it remained the major source of popular discontent throughout the war, a factor which pushed most of the population into the hands of the NLF.¹¹⁵ Further on the importance of the NLF's political platform, McLeod and Hunt maintained that the southerners also had their own reasons for the revolution which were actively exploited by the NLF.¹¹⁶ Similar

efforts have been put into the thematic studies of revolutionary wars, especially in prominent cases studies such as Malaya and Algeria.¹¹⁷

Apart from the single case study, deductive method, and large-n statistical method, a fourth approach emerged, one that studied a few cases and then compared them. For example, Merom used three case studies (but only France in Algeria and Israel in Lebanon received chapter-length analysis) to explain how democratic societies were not very patient in fighting guerrilla warfare.¹¹⁸

One of the best, but also perhaps one of the most problematic, attempts to compare cases of COIN is John Nagl's *Learning to Eat Soup With a Knife*, which sought to compare COIN in Vietnam with that in Malaya.¹¹⁹ Such work is a good compromise because it studies the depth of each case and yet it is still able to compare with other cases to find a more generalized conclusion. However, Nagl's work is plagued with many methodological problems, most notably a case selection problem.

In Nagl's narratives of the Malayan Emergency, the British initially found themselves in a situation similar to the one the US military found itself in Vietnam, culminating in the ambush that killed the British governor Sir Henry Gurney. But when Field Marshall Gerald Templer took over as high commissioner for Malaya, the British military changed its tactics from conventional, large-unit maneuvers to COIN. The new tactics took a heavy toll on the guerillas, effectively ending the war in 1960.

In his book, regarding the questions of effective COIN tactics, Nagl made an assumption. For this question, Nagl explicitly stated that his book was greatly informed by the work of Sir Robert Thompson, but he did not evaluate further whether Thompson's assertions were correct.¹²⁰ Without this evaluation, the research risks ignoring the correct alternative explanations. Perhaps, it was not the tactics that

mattered, but it was other factors such as the ethnic relations, climate, political issues, or the guerrilla's strategic blunders that allowed the British to win.

By not re-examining whether Thompson was correct in assuming the above set of tactics as effective COIN tactics, Nagl's argument was particularly vulnerable to alternative explanation of success in Malaya, most notably the role of local forces. Perhaps Nagl's work suffered from the same implicit assumption that Thompson made in his books: the British military alone was largely credited with the victory in Malaya. The actions of local forces received only minimal attention in the literature. This problem was compounded by the fact that Nagl drew the conclusion by comparing Vietnam and Malaya. Yet, he did not really examine the similarities and differences between the two cases in the process of making that comparison.

1.1.3.1 Malaya Revisited

This section briefly recounts some aspects of the Malayan Emergency that have always been the source of misconceptions in the literature. The Malayan case has always been lauded as the best case of COIN with a humane approach, so much different from Vietnam. At least, that was the impression one gains from the reading of Thompson's books (and to some extent, Nagl's as well). Nagl mentioned that Thompson laid out five principles of COIN for the government to follow: 1. Have a clear political aim, 2. Function within the law, 3. Have an overall plan, 4. Defeat the political subversion, not the guerrillas (i.e. not body count), and 5. Secure the base areas in the guerrilla phase of the war.¹²¹ The last point is very important and it leads to the first misconception. Securing the base area means pacification, and in Malaya that came under the form of forced relocation.¹²² The first misconception was that pacification is perhaps the best and most humane approach amongst all COIN tactics.

When Austin Long described *pacification* in his review of RAND's COIN research, it was conceptualized as a purely humanitarian approach to fighting COIN. For Long, "Pacification" is an enhanced version of community policing plus development program.¹²³ This was quite an ingenuous description of pacification. When Krepinevich and Lewy described the pacification in Vietnam, they implied that the policy was flawed because it was not the same as in Algeria or Malaya.

In truth, however, all pacification operations in Algeria, Malaya, and in most cases in Vietnam were one and the same. There were three steps in a pacification technique in all three cases above (Algeria, Malaya, and Vietnam): 1. Forced relocation, 2. Creation of a "free-fire zone" (evolved from the French word "*zone de tir*") in the evacuated zone, and 3. Creation of "strategic hamlets" outside of the free-fire zone protected by barbed wire and local militias.¹²⁴ This was *pacification* in Malaya. Pacification is not as peaceful as it sounds.

In Algeria, later in the war, these "civilized" villages later became the center for torture and interrogation camps.¹²⁵ The human cost of such policy was also drastic. In Malaya, for example, Clutterbuck noted: "this was the resettlement of the 423,000 squatters [of a country with approximately 6 million people] which was accomplished in one year. Inevitably there were errors and injustices."¹²⁶ What he meant by "errors and injustices" was the refugee problem. In Vietnam, the issue was never satisfactorily resolved, and Lewy argued that it was the major factor aggravating the grievances.¹²⁷ Both Faivre and Clutterbuck, however, claimed that the people who were forcibly relocated did not want to move out of those strategic hamlets even after the security had been improved in their former villages.¹²⁸ Perhaps it was this claim that gave pacification a good name and this good name has been evident ever since. But if

pacification is as brutal as described here, then why did the British still win in Malaya? Does that confirm the basic tenet of the Coercion School?

This brings us to the second misconception in the literature on COIN, namely that the British won the war in Malaya because the British applied pacification in a correct way, different from Algeria and Vietnam. For a time (and perhaps it is still true today), this claim was common in the literature. In 2001, Roy Davis Linville Jumper published a book entitled *Death waits in the dark: The Senoi Praaq, Malaysia's Killer Elite*, which described in detail the genesis of a special force unit well known in Malaysia but which remains obscure for most Western scholars.

Jumper speculated in the introduction of his book that the Malaysian Royal Police (which was mostly formed out of this unit) kept the story to themselves for a very long time until they felt the need to publicize their capabilities both for the sake of history and to serve as a deterrent against "some neighboring states."¹²⁹

According to Jumper, the Malaysian Races Liberation Army (MRLA), the armed wing of the Malaysian Communist Party (MCP), was so successful in the war that it could organize countless ambushes, one of which killed Sir Henry Gurney, the British governor in Malaya.¹³⁰ Gurney's replacement was Sir Gerald Templer, a veteran of World War II and an intelligence officer. In the standard literature, this was where the situation improved drastically.¹³¹

But Jumper gave a different account.¹³² According to him, even after Templer replaced Gurney, the British were still stuck with forced relocation and search-and-destroy operations supported by air strikes, intended to open the way for commando troops to go deep into the jungle and try to eliminate the guerillas.¹³³ However, they were easy prey for the MRLA and the aboriginal tribes.¹³⁴ Then the New Village

program was implemented. This was when Templer's career as intelligence officer proved advantageous for the British. Among those who were forcibly relocated in the refugee camps were the Orang Asli, the aboriginal people of Malaya. Of the total population of Malaya (approximately 6 million at the time), over half were Malays, around 2 million were Chinese and the estimate for the Orang Asli and other aboriginal people were around the order of 500,000.¹³⁵

The forced relocation killed thousands of the Orang Asli due to psychological shock and their inability to adapt to the new environment.¹³⁶ Yet, through interviews with these tribes, the British learnt that the communists depended heavily on these peoples. In fact, it was the Orang Asli who gave the British a hard time in the jungle. For example, it was known that the Orang Asli helped support a staggering eleven MRLA regiments in seven Western Malayan states.¹³⁷ As a consequence, the MCP could achieve many operational successes with almost no support from either the Soviet Union or China.

As an intelligence officer, Sir Gerald Templer took this information seriously. But to mask the difficulties that the British faced in the war from the public, he created the Department of the Aborigines to try to heal the rift and grievances resulting from the brutality inflicted on the Orang Asli during the forced relocation. A British soldier named R.O.D. Noone was in charge of turning the Orang Asli into a fighting unit. But Noone's title was "Adviser on Aborigines and Director of Museums and Archives."¹³⁸ This work looked like simple anthropology and the British went to those great lengths to hide their difficulties in the war.

Judging from how positively many people viewed the British handling of the Malayan Emergency in the mainstream literature today, that public relations campaign

could be said to be very successful. In the end, the masked program produced the Senoi Praaq, one of the world's deadliest special force units. The Senoi Praaq did not rely on firepower. Instead, they used the jungle to their advantage and carried only a blowgun or blowpipe loaded with poison darts, improvised from the materials in the jungle itself. Ammunition, therefore, can easily be replenished.

Coincidentally, the MCP also made a strategic blunder. In terms of terrain and sanctuaries in the jungle, they relied on the aboriginal people, but in terms of logistics, they relied on the sympathy and fear of the Chinese ethnic groups in the urban areas. When the New Village program was implemented and thousands of Chinese households were forcibly relocated, the MCP decided to take to the jungle, instead of challenging them (unlike what the NLF and PLAF did in Vietnam). By doing so, the communists cut themselves off from the main support base, and what they found in the jungle was the deadly Senoi Praaq, who had, by then, already allied with the British.

Jumper claimed that later in the war, the main problem for the MRLA was not even ammunition, but simply how to find food in the jungle environment or how to transport food across the jungle without running into the Senoi Praaq, who prowled in the dark of the jungle.¹³⁹ After the war, the Senoi Praaq and the aboriginal people, the Orang Asli, were rewarded with a respected role in the Royal Malaysian Police. Some units were sent to the Republic of Vietnam during the war, but they could not replicate their success as in Malaya.¹⁴⁰

Such was the way in which the British won the war. One can say it was luck that Sir Gerald Templer was an intelligence officer, and he understood and took the strategic information seriously. The organizational design also helped to some extent, but it was the integration of local forces and the catering of political solutions to enlist

their support that proved decisive. And that leads to the overall question, how did the British win in Malaya?

First and foremost, it was good intelligence and the willingness to innovate tactics and organization. Pacification almost did not work, except for the fact that it accidentally brought the Orang Asli to the attention of the British. This had a significant effect on Nagl's work, as well as other works, that assumed a positive view of pacification. It was not entirely organizational learning that helped the British, but local conditions such as ethnic relations as well as geography and the absence of external support to the insurgency that helped the British.

This section illustrates one potential pitfall of the Technical School: insufficient attention to the local counterinsurgent as well as the political context of the war. Case selection and omitted variables are the problems in this case. One can easily show that the third party intervener and the local counterinsurgent used a certain set of tactics and the outcome was positive. But that does not necessarily prove there is a connection between the tactics and the outcome, however. That is correlation, not necessarily a causation. Many other factors can also influence the outcome. As a result, the same people (Sir Robert Thompson) and units (Senoi Praaq) were sent to Vietnam to apply the same tactics, but the results were markedly different. In sum, context matters. This ties in to the next problem: how do we select comparable cases?

1.1.3.2 Controlled Comparison: Method of Difference-Most Similar System

Another problem in Nagl's book is case selection bias. The description of the context of the Malayan Emergency in both Thompson's and Nagl's books was incomplete, making any comparison with other cases extremely difficult. Nagl did not try to explain rigorously why he chose the two cases and not others. Instead, in

Learning to Eat Soup With a Knife, Nagl only sought to use “structured, focused comparison” methods in his book to standardize his comparison of the cases.¹⁴¹

According to George and Bennett, this method was borrowed from statistics and it serves to make all the cases readily comparable via designing “a set of standardized, general questions of each case, even in single case studies.”¹⁴² The method was first developed to deal with problems associated with the first emergence of the field of comparative politics, where numerous case studies were conducted in such a haphazard manner that they prevented correct comparison.

This technique is used to standardize pre-selected cases to facilitate comparison, but this is not the technique to select cases per se. To develop theory out of the techniques used by Nagl, a researcher risks missing important factors that are not included in the standard question set. In the cases of Malaya and Vietnam that Nagl studied, for example, important factors such as ethnicity (the relations between the Malays and other ethnic groups) and social and political grievances were overlooked.

This was important because in Vietnam, the US and the RVN were having a difficult relationship with a significant segment of the Vietnamese population including the Montagnard minority. In contrast, the British in Malaya were allied with the Malays, who were the majority in the country. Later in the war, the British also secured the allegiance of the Orang Asli.

George and Bennett cautioned that to develop theory out of case study comparison, the cases must be similar in all but one (or very few) aspects. Then we can apply Mill’s method of difference: if two cases exhibit different outcomes, then we can say that the independent variables that are not the same in the two cases might

actually be the ones that cause the outcomes to differ.¹⁴³ Bennett and George called this methodology “most similar system.”¹⁴⁴

George and Bennett cautioned that the method must meet several strict conditions to be applicable.¹⁴⁵ First of all, *all* of the relevant aspects (independent variables) must be accounted for, and among them only one or two aspects can differ. If too many aspects are different (too many different potential causes for the different outcomes), then we will run into a problem called “under determinations” where the variables are more than the cases.¹⁴⁶ For this very reason, George and Bennett admitted that the method of difference in the controlled comparison methodology is very difficult to achieve in social science.

1.2 Summary of the Objectives and Contributions of the Current Dissertation

This dissertation offers three main contributions. Firstly, this dissertation will introduce a new case study, the Cambodian Civil War, where a socialist regime fought and won a counterinsurgency war. An original contribution, as will be seen in subsequent chapters, is the study of the “Cambodian socialist military organization” in the COIN context.¹⁴⁷ This dissertation shall examine the relationship between political programs, the military organization, and their joint effects on the outcomes.

The second contribution of this dissertation is the attempt to use the case selection method more rigorously to try to distinguish between cases with different contexts, and also cases that are similar enough to be compared. This dissertation will try to compare *the case of the Vietnam War and the Cambodian Civil War* using the method of difference in order to generate a theory of COIN. Previous literature rarely discussed why a certain case was chosen over another, and most cases that are selected were accepted perhaps mainly because they were well-known. It is perhaps due to this

bias that many important factors were usually left out of the analyses, creating a discord in the literature. This dissertation does not claim that the Vietnam War and the Cambodian Civil War were the same. But the dissertation will examine the similarities and differences before drawing theoretical conclusions from the two cases.

Thirdly, the Cambodian Civil War will present a serious testing of the COIN schools of thought. This dissertation will make use of Harry Eckstein's "crucial case" method, which can clearly prove or disprove a theory if the conditions are right. A crucial case study is one that is based on a single measure on any pertinent variable.¹⁴⁸ According to King, Keohane, and Verba, crucial case study has two variants, the "most likely" case and the "least likely" case.

In the most likely case, a theory is expected to perform well in the testing. If it does not live up to expectations, however, we can say that the theory has failed the testing process. If it passes, however, it only passes the "plausibility probe": it was expected to perform well.¹⁴⁹ On the other hand, in the least likely case, if a priori the theory was not expected to perform well, but it passes the test nonetheless, then we can say that the theory has passed a difficult test and there are reasons to believe in its explanatory power. In other words, if a theory passes a difficult test, then we have reason to believe that it will certainly pass an easy one.

The Cambodian military at the time was influenced by the socialist system in which the military was fully politicized under the direction of the party. The political direction was strong and ran down to the lower level. The military itself was instructed to maintain good behavior towards the people and it followed the instructions quite willingly.¹⁵⁰ This would be a least likely case for the Coercion School which would argue that brutality is the most effective COIN tactic. If the leniency of the Cambodian

counterinsurgent could explain the outcome of the war, then the finding would undermine the Coercion School.¹⁵¹ On the other hand, since the WHAM School expects that military to fight with a clear political consideration, then the Cambodian counterinsurgent would only be a “most likely” case for the WHAM School.

King, Keohane, and Verba, however, cautioned that while the method is indeed a powerful tool, it also has some weaknesses if not applied properly.¹⁵² Two problems stand out. First of all, King, Keohane, and Verba cautioned that we need to be aware of alternative explanations. Just as in the earlier discussion involving Malaya, the outcome and the stated independent variable seemed correlated, but a pertinent factor was ignored (the role of ethnic relations). To resolve this first issue, this dissertation will devote a section of the final chapter to examine alternative explanations that could have also determined success in Cambodia.

Second, King Keohane, and Verba mentioned that the use of a single observation in the crucial case method can give the wrong impression that the world is deterministic. This is somewhat related to the first issue. A review of alternative explanations should resolve this issue.

1.3 Plan of the Dissertation

The current dissertation is divided into 7 chapters. Chapter 2 will compare the two cases to determine whether they constitute the most similar systems. Following this method, the chapter will list potential variables that could have influenced the outcome of COIN in the two cases. This method requires that all potential independent variables be accounted for, and preferably only one variable should be different between the two cases. Thus, some variables will be the same across the two cases and

become controlled variables. The variables that diverge will be examined in detail in subsequent chapters.

The dissertation will follow what George and Bennett called “analytic explanation,” which is a variant of process-tracing.¹⁵³ Instead of studying the whole war, the chapter will look at only a few pertinent points identified by the COIN literature as important in determining the result. This is assisted by the structured, focused comparison method, i.e. design a list of questions that will be asked from both cases. This list is essentially constructed from the divergent variables found earlier.

Chapter 3 will summarize the key events in Vietnam following the list of pertinent research questions designed in chapter 2. In chapter 3, the analysis has been greatly aided by the vast existing literature on the Vietnam War. The historiography of the Vietnam War will not be discussed in detail, which would otherwise exceed the normal length of this dissertation. Instead, only a compact version of the history of the Vietnam War will be presented. The Vietnam War case occupies only one chapter. It is relatively short compared to the Cambodian case mainly because the counterinsurgent’s political programs in Vietnam were not effective at attracting the majority of the people. The Cambodian case had an effective political program and a slightly different form of organization that require much more detailed examination.

In addition, because the Cambodian Civil War received relatively less attention in the literature, this dissertation will devote three chapters to this case. Chapter 4 will provide a background to the conflict. Chapter 5 will examine the military organization of all four factions as well as key events in the Cambodian Civil War. Chapter 6 examines the guerrilla offensive in 1989. Finally, chapter 7 will discuss prominent counterarguments to the arguments developed in this dissertation. This chapter will

also give a final assessment as well as summarizing the findings in the two cases. A concluding section will draw some recommendations about the future of COIN.

¹ Yasir Ghazi and Tim Arangojan, "Qaeda-Linked Militants in Iraq Secure Nearly Full Control of Falluja," *New York Times*, 4 January 2014. Accessed: 20 October 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/05/world/middleeast/shelling-in-iraqi-city-held-by-qaeda-linked-militants-kills-at-least-8.html?_r=1.

² Peter Paret, Gordon A. Craig, and Felix Gilbert, eds., *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 834, and William H. McRaven, *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare, Theory and Practice* (New York: Presidio Press, 1996), 3-4.

³ Paret et al, eds., *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 815-62, and Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000). These two works provide an accessible interpretation of Mao's theory. A more nuanced and complex version can be found in volume II, *On Protracted War*, of another of Mao's writings, Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung: 5 Volumes* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967-69).

⁴ Mao, *Selected Works*, vol II, 137.

⁵ Contrary to typical portrayal of his theory, Mao actually considers political support to mean both local and international political support. For example, in his writing, we can find numerous references to "the aid from the Soviet Union". See, for example, Mao, *Selected Works*, vol II, 137-38.

⁶ Mao, *Selected Works*, vol II, 137. Mao used the Kuomintang military as an example to show how a fixed defense in this stage is counterproductive for the guerillas.

⁷ In addition to Mao and Che, Vo Nguyen Giap is another theorist of guerrilla warfare. In the second stage, Giap also advocated the use of mobile warfare, but he defined mobile warfare differently. According to Giap, mobile warfare will be conducted by regular units in conjunction with the guerillas forces. This seems to be the middle ground between Mao (who was cautious in the use of regular units in early phases) and Che (who was not shy in using regular units), but it also mirrored Giap's application of his theory in Vietnam where the PAVN fought vigorously alongside the PLAF. See Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War, People's Army: The Viet Cong Insurrection Manual for Underdeveloped Countries* (Honolulu, HI: University Press of the Pacific, 1962).

⁸ Mao, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, 66-69. The offensive capabilities of the counterinsurgent can be drawn down by forcing the counterinsurgent to defend these long supplies lines.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁰ Shy and Collier noted that in the second stage Mao made significant references to the Jominian concept of interior and exterior lines. See Paret et al, eds., *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 884. In *Selected Works*, Mao made references to one of the most enduring natures of guerrilla warfare: the war has no clear fixed front. Mao calls it "A War of Jig-Saw Pattern." See Mao, *Selected Works*, vol II, 145.

¹¹ This definition is similar to the one used in Paret et al. eds., *Makers of Modern Strategy*. 817. Guerrilla/revolutionary warfare is known by many names, but here the dissertation will study only one particular kind of warfare. The introductory chapter of Galula provided a good explanation of some important terms. See David Galula. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publisher, 1964), 1-11.

¹² Mao. *On Guerrilla Warfare*, 51-58; Roger Trinquier. *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency*, trans. Daniel Lee (New York: Praeger, 1964), 6; and Paret et al. eds., *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 845-849.

¹³ Mao, *Selected Works*, vol II, 132-34.

¹⁴ Paret et al. eds., *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 815-62.

¹⁵ See for example, Walter Laqueur, ed., *The Guerrilla Reader: A Historical Anthology* (New York: New American Library, 1977), 203-11.

¹⁶ Others provide a cultural argument for Che's bias. Shy and Collier (in Paret et al. eds. *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 815-62) agreed with Chaliand, who boldly claimed that Che's focoism is allegedly related to the impatience inherent in the Latin American culture. See Gerard Chaliand, ed., *Guerrilla Strategies: A Historical Anthology from the Long March to Afghanistan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 26. and Gerard Chaliand. *Revolutions in the Third World*, trans. Diana Johnstone and Tony Berrett (New York: Viking, 1977), xvii. Such argument also seems plausible from the reading of Che's writing. He noted that the protracted nature of the war might lead some fighters to lose faith and seek compromise. Thus, he implied that the war should be shorter (Laqueur. *The Guerrilla Reader*, 201-203). Mao, on the other hand, implied the purge of those who seek compromise and was very mindful of defective elements in the second stage. Mao seemed to be more patient and more practical (Mao. *Selected Works*, 325-328).

¹⁷ Laqueur. *The Guerrilla Reader*, 210.

¹⁸ Ibid. It can also be argued that as a communist, Che assumed that political grievances are automatically present, and the issue is how to exploit it. On the absence of stage I in Che's focoism, see Paret et al. eds., *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 850.

¹⁹ Shy and Collier (in Paret et al. eds. *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 815-62) give an example of the Viet Minh in their failed offensive against the French in 1950.

²⁰ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 79-84.

²¹ Stephen Biddle, Jeffrey A. Friedman, and Jacob Shapiro. "Testing the Surge: Why did Violence Decline in Iraq in 2007?" *International Security* 37, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 7-40. They argued that the violence in Iraq dropped significantly because of two inseparable factors: the surge of American forces and the Sunni Awakening.

²² Jeffrey Race. *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 150.

²³ Contracted from *Việt Nam Độc Lập Đồng Minh Hội*. English: League for the Independence of Vietnam. The movement was created in 1941 as the Vietnamese Communist-led movement fought against the French.

²⁴ Mark I. Lichbach, "What Makes Rational Peasants Revolutionary? Dilemma, Paradox, and Irony in Peasant Collective Action," *World Politics* 46, no. 3 (1994): 383-418.

²⁵ Ibid. 385.

²⁶ Ibid. 412.

²⁷ Ibid. 385-406.

²⁸ This is probably the most interesting COIN school of thought for both scholars and practitioners. We can give an alternative name for this school of thought, the "brutality school." The name is self-explanatory. It is interesting that, throughout my interactions with scholars on COIN either at conferences or research institutes, people uniformly admitted that they have a feeling that the measures advocated by this school are effective, but no one can openly defend the thesis that brutality is effective. Social sciences seem to be confusing with normative and moral issues. Most scholars shy away from claiming that torture and state terrorism are effective measures in guerrilla warfare. This explains the difficulty in finding references.

²⁹ Trinquier, *Modern Warfare*, 4.

³⁰ Ibid., 8.

³¹ Arreguin-Toft categorized direct strategy to include frontal attack (for the counterinsurgent) and fixed defense (for the guerillas). The indirect strategies include barbarism (for the counterinsurgent) and guerrilla war strategy (for the guerillas). See Ivan Arreguin-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict," *International Security* 26, no. 1 (2001): 99-104.

³² Ibid., 100. Arreguin-Toft theorized that there are two types of strategies: direct and indirect. Direct strategy is the one aimed at combatants, and the indirect strategy is aimed at the noncombatants. Similar arguments about the Japanese public can also be found in Mao's writings. Merom provided additional mechanisms: as the war dragged on, anti-war movements in the strong actor's (the counterinsurgent's) country will have time to build and consolidate their coalition, which intensifies anti-war sentiments of the already war-weary public. See Gil Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 208-213.

³³ Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars*, 20. Merom called it the "balance of tolerance."

³⁴ "Barbarism works as a COIN strategy because by attacking either or both of the essential elements of a GWS -- sanctuary and social assistance -- it destroys an adversary's capacity to fight." (Ibid., 109).

³⁵ Ibid., 101-102

³⁶ Ibid., 113-120. The four cases are: Rolling Thunder, Main Force Units War, and two instances of GWS.

³⁷ On the counterproductive political effects of the Phoenix Programs, see for example, Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam: Illusion, Myth, and Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 281-284, and Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars*, 41-42. As a counter to these views, Karnow wrote that he did not believe in the program's effectiveness until the end of the war when he had a chance to talk to the former revolutionaries. See Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 616-617. Another scholar, Alistair Home, made the argument that barbarism in Algeria was effective in the early phase of the war, but was ultimately responsible for the erosion of support both in Algeria and metropolitan France. See Alistair Home, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 183-207.

³⁸ Mao, *On guerrilla Warfare*, 6.

³⁹ Harry Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (New York: Presidio Press, 1981), 74.

⁴⁰ Ibid. To the extent that the PAVN regular units were eventually responsible for the last stage of the Vietnam War, Summers' argument cannot be discounted. Even if one uses Mao's model, regular units are still retained by the guerillas. But there is one caution: although Mao often referred to "regular armies," he simultaneously prohibited positional warfare (Mao, *Selected Works*, vol. II, 136-40). Summers did not examine Mao's contention or the question whether or not the regular units were present when the war was already in the final stage. In his refutation of Summers, Krepinevich argued that the war was won by local NLF operatives before the PAVN regular units got involved. In another work, Zasloff instead categorized the PAVN involvement as external support rather than asking whether or not the guerillas operations are the same as conventional operations. See Joseph Zasloff, *The Role of North Vietnam in the Southern Insurgency* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1964).

⁴¹ Summers criticized the military for distracting itself from military operations due to interference from politicians. This, according to him, was the main problem behind insufficient military response and eventually defeat in Vietnam. Similar arguments can be found in the writing of General Westmoreland who lamented the fact that he could not mount military operations in neutral Laos and Cambodia (at least not under his command). See William Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (New York: Doubleday Garden City, 1976), 153.

⁴² In one example, the "search and destroy" operations were so unpopular among the American public that both General Westmoreland (as he explained in *A Soldier Reports*, 83) and General Abrams were later forced to change the name to "reconnaissance in force," which is more acceptable to the American public. See Graham Cosmas, *United States Army in Vietnam, MACV the Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal, 1968-1973* (Washington, DC: Center for Military History, 2007), 134.

⁴³ Merom identifies similar feeling among the pro-war factions in many other cases besides Vietnam. See Merom's cases in Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars*, 81-218.

⁴⁴ The term "winning the hearts and minds" of the people was first used by Sir Gerald Templer, the high commissioner of British Malaya during the Malayan Emergency. See Austin Long, *On "Other War," Lessons from Five Decades of RAND Counterinsurgency Research* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2006), 23.

⁴⁵ Andrew Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 262-63.

⁴⁶ Ibid. There is an extensive case study of pacification. Many works provide good examples. Long's *On "Other War"* provided a good overview of works done at RAND. Isolated episodes of pacification conducted by the USMC can be found in the writing of Robert Komer, described in David Sullivan and Martin Sattler, eds., *Revolutionary War: Western Response* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 35-50. In *War Comes to Long An*, Race provided a good case study of pacification conducted in the Vietnamese province of Long An as well as the reasons that pushed the previously apolitical peasants into taking up arms. Maurice Faivre, *Les 1000 villages de Delouvrier: Protection des Populations Musulmanes contre Le FLN* (Sceaux: L'esprit du livre éditions, 2009), 12-71, gave an analysis of the housing programs provided to local Algerians. Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare* is an example of the theory about the interactions between soldiers and the local populace. For pacification in Malaya see Noel Barber, *War of the Running Dogs: How Malaya Defeated the Communist Guerrillas, 1948-1960* (London: Cassell, 2007), Roy Davis Linville Jumper, *Death Waits in the Dark: The Senoi Praaq, Malaysia's Killer Elite* (New York: Praeger, 2001), Sir Robert Thompson, *Defeating the Communist Insurgency: Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1978), Harry Miller, *The Communist Menace in Malaya* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), Richard Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War: Counterinsurgency in Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1966), and John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup With a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁴⁷ Andrew Krepinevich, "How to Win in Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 5 (2005): 87-104.

⁴⁸ Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 173-180.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 161.

⁵⁰ Summers, *On Strategy*, 39.

⁵¹ Timothy J. Lomperis, *From People's War to People's Rule: Insurgency, Intervention, and the Lessons of Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

⁵² Lomperis seems to take a sociological or constructivist argument here in that the people expect something that is supposed to be appropriate for any government to do. If the government fails to discharge those responsibilities, then rebellion might be justified. Similar argument can be found in Douglas Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era: US Doctrines and Performance, 1950 to the Present* (New York: Free Press, 1997), and Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999).

⁵³ Lomperis, *From People's War*, 54.

⁵⁴ Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 192-194.

⁵⁵ Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars*, 277-279.

⁵⁶ Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) provided a useful analytical framework about the political context behind successful revolutionary movement. The framework lists some conditions that seem to be present

in dysfunctional governments. These conditions include: the defense of unpopular economic, social and cultural institutions, indiscriminate violence, repression and exclusion, weak policing capabilities, implementation of arbitrary policies that weaken counterrevolutionary elites. Goodwin found that in the cases under his study covering Southeast Asia and Central America, the losing counterinsurgents possess these common features.

⁵⁷ Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars*, 292-293. Wolf focused on the land issue which he claimed was the pre-eminent cause of the Chinese revolution.

⁵⁸ Lichbach, "What Makes Rational Peasants Revolutionary." 407.

⁵⁹ Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 121, 369. According to Cosmas, Westmoreland did try to meddle in the RVN's affairs, at least when he tried to maintain the integrity of the ARVN after the anti-Diem coup. See Cosmas, *MACV: The Years of Escalation*, 144-147.

⁶⁰ Long, *On "Other War."* provided a good collection and summaries of works that were done during the Vietnam War era.

⁶¹ Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*.

⁶² In *Pacification in Algeria*, Galula narrated his experiences where he claimed his close interactions with local people helped him understand the war and prevented the insurgents from gathering popular support. See David Galula, *Pacification in Algeria, 1956-58* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006).

⁶³ Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁶⁵ Charles Wolf, Jr., *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency: New Myths and Old Realities* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1965), 5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁷ Long, *On "Other War."* 24.

⁶⁸ A counterargument would be that of Lichbach who postulated that the government might not be able to control all areas, and the guerillas might slip in through the cracks. Because the government's stick is more visible than the carrot in those remote areas (the guerillas can effectively make that happen), the guerillas can in fact compete with the government.

⁶⁹ Long, *On "Other War."* 26.

⁷⁰ Albert Wohlstetter, *Comments on the Wolf-Leites Manuscript: "Rebellion and Authority"* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1968), 3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* See also Constantin Melnik, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Algeria* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1964), and Daniel Ellsberg, *Revolutionary Judo: Working Notes on Vietnam No. 10* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1970).

⁷² Ellsberg, *Revolutionary Judo*, 2.

⁷³ Long, *On "Other War."* 30. Wohlstetter pointed out that this is even more true in a democratic country where it is too costly (audience cost) or simply unthinkable for the government to push repression to the limits.

⁷⁴ Melnik, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency*, 146.

⁷⁵ It is necessary here to emphasize one thing about special forces. The current American doctrine calls these actions, Special Operations Forces (SOF), which is an umbrella term that covers many things, not just commando-type, kinetic operations. According to the doctrinal document, the Joint Special Operations Task Force Operations (JP 3-05.1), SOF can perform reconnaissance in force (very close to search-and-destroy operations), but can also build local forces ("foreign internal defense" and "counterinsurgency operations").

⁷⁶ Jean-François Allès, *Commando De Chasse Gendarmerie: Algérie 1954-1962, Récits Et Témoignages* (Paris: Atlante Editions, 2000).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 15-16. A typical unit consisted of about ten to fifteen people with the French being the officers and the local Algerians (called the *harkis*) as the enlisted men. Based on intelligence provided by the regional general staffs headquarters, each unit was expected to identify a specific enemy unit and plan ambushes along the routes that the enemy unit was expected to take. They would then camouflage themselves for a few days in a single location waiting to ambush the identified enemy unit. In about a week before their rations run out, they would have covered several likely routes. The commandos had strict rules of engagement in order to avoid collateral damage. Ambush was initiated only when it was absolutely sure that the targets really were guerillas.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 16. See also Raymond Béal, *Les Commandos De Chasse "Gendarmerie" En Algérie: 1959-1962* (Paris: Écrivains Associés, 1997).

⁷⁹ This is the case of the French in Algeria. After initial success, more and more conventional troops (mostly from the paratrooper units whereas the initial units were from para-military police forces, known as the *Gendarmerie*) were put into action and took over these roles. Civilian accidents increased dramatically, but the French high command did not care. In an interview, author Robin asked General Aussaresses about the name of the commando units in Algeria and if the term "death squads" (*escadrons de la mort*) was fair. General Aussaresses answered calmly, "yes, we called them 'death squads,' just like that." See Marie-Monique Robin, *Escadrons De La Mort, L'Ecole Française* (Paris: La Découverte – Poche, 2004), 106.

⁸⁰ Jumper, *Death Waits in the Dark*, 62-63.

⁸¹ In Algeria, the French called it "champs de tir" or "zone de tir." See Guy Pervillé and Cecile Marin, *Atlas de la Guerre d'Algérie: De la Conquête à l'Indépendance* (Paris: Éditions Autrement 2003), 37.

⁸² See Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 168, Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 50, and Philip Davidson, *Vietnam at War: The History, 1946-1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 350.

⁸³ Bernard Droz and Evelyne Lever, *Histoire de la Guerre d'Algérie: 1954-1962* (Paris: Editions du Seuil 1991); and Michel Hardy and Thierry Sarmant, *Pouvoir Politique Et Autorité Militaire En Algérie*

Française: Hommes, Textes, Institutions, 1945-1962 (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002). For maps of operations, see Perveillé and Marin, *Atlas de la Guerre d'Algérie*.

⁸⁴ For a good example in the case of Algeria, from the perspective of the insurgents, see Mohammed Harbi and Gilbert Meynier, *Le FLN, Documents Et Histoire: 1954-1962* (Paris: Fayard, 2004) and Dalila Ait-El-Djoudi, *La Guerre d'Algérie Vue Par l'ALN: 1954-1962* (Paris: Editions Autrement, 2007). In the case of Malaysia, see Jumper, *Death Waits in the Dark*, 53-71, Barber, *War of the Running Dogs*, 162-190, and Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 101-121.

⁸⁵ Inter-service rivalry concerns the rivalry among the services, traditionally, the Army, Air Force, and Navy. Inter-agency rivalry, on the other hand, denotes the conflicts between different agencies within the government, e.g. between foreign policy apparatus (embassy) and the military command.

⁸⁶ Graham Cosmas, *United States Army in Vietnam, MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962-1967* (Washington DC: Center for Military History, 2006), 36-70.

⁸⁷ Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 118.

⁸⁸ For instance, many positions were overrun due to a lack of basic, routine security operations, and this relative lack of motivation further complicated the transfer of responsibility to the ARVN during the critical period of US forces withdrawal. See David Fulghum, Terrence Maitland, and Boston Publishing Company, eds., *South Vietnam on Trial: Mid-1970 to 1972* (Boston, MA: Boston Publishing Company, 1984), 42-49.

⁸⁹ Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup*, 6-11.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Long, *On "Other War,"* 52.

⁹⁴ Faivre, *Les 1000 Villes*, 10.

⁹⁵ Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 105-113.

⁹⁶ Jumper, *Death Waits in the Dark*, 40-42.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 42-44.

⁹⁹ Lomperis, *From People's War to People's Rule*, 173-198.

¹⁰⁰ James Dobbins, John G. McGinn, Keith Crane, Seth G. Jones, Rollie Lal, Andrew Rathmell, Rachel M. Swanger, and Anga R. Timilsina, *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008).

¹⁰¹ Robert Kagan, "Nation-Building, Our National Pastime," *The New York Times*, 14 October 2011.

¹⁰² Jeremi Suri, *Liberty's Surest Guardian: American Nation-Building From the Founders to Obama* (New York: Free Press, 2012).

¹⁰³ Kagan, "Nation-Building."

¹⁰⁴ Russell Frank Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1973).

¹⁰⁵ Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Toward an American Way of War* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2004).

¹⁰⁶ Krepinevich, "How to Win in Iraq," 96.

¹⁰⁷ Petraeus' exploits were documented in various books. One example is Kirsten Lundberg, *The Accidental Statesman: General Petraeus and the City of Mosul, Iraq* (John F Kennedy School of Government, Case Program, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2006), accessed: 30 October 2013. <https://www.case.hks.harvard.edu/casetitle.asp?caseNo=1834.0>.

¹⁰⁸ In fact, one may argue that the decrease in violence was directly associated with the Sunnis who had changed their allegiance following the brutality perpetrated by Al-Qaeda. This was known as the Sunni Awakening, which happened around the time of the surge of American troops in Iraq. Nevertheless, Gen. Petraeus was largely considered as the reason behind the success. This was evidenced by his continued rise in the course of which he was appointed as the commander of the US Central Command (CENTCOM) and then as director of the CIA.

¹⁰⁹ Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup*, 192-195.

¹¹⁰ Gian Gentile, *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency* (New York: The New Press, 2013), 3.

¹¹¹ Gian Gentile, "America's Nation-Building at Gunpoint: An Army Colonel Assesses the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 August 2013. Accessed: 20 October 2014, <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/aug/13/opinion/la-oe-gentile-army-colonel-gives-iraq-and-afghanis-20130813>.

¹¹² Neely, Alexander (Sgt.) and Peavy, Joel (Master Sgt.), "DIVARTY back in Army 'Iron Steel' Brigade comes to Bliss, 212th FB bids farewell," *Fort Bliss Bugle*, 23 Jul 2014. Assessed: 10 October 2014. <http://fortblissbugle.com/divarty-back-in-army-iron-steel-brigade-comes-to-bliss-212th-fb-bids-farewell/>.

¹¹³ Above, I have given a few examples of both categories. For example, Arreguin-Toft, "How the Weak Wins War" is an example of a case that tried to achieve a large-n statistical study while Lichbach, "What Makes a Rational Peasant Revolutionary" is a case of purely deductive method.

¹¹⁴ Race, *War Comes to Long An*.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 130. Later in the book, Race retracted the argument that land was the main impetus for the revolution in Vietnam. Instead, he acknowledged that propaganda and social positions were part of the problems.

¹¹⁶ Mark McLeod, "Indigenous Peoples and the Vietnamese Revolution, 1930-1975," *Journal of World History* 10, no. 2 (1999): 353-389. See also David Hunt, *Vietnam's Southern Revolution: From Peasant Insurrection to Total War, 1959-1968* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009).

¹¹⁷ Specifically for the issue of race and ethnicity which were the major grievances in Malaya, see Lucian Pye, *Guerilla Communism in Malaya: Its Social and Political Meaning* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956), 47-57. Alvin Rabushka, *Race and Politics in Urban Malaya* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1973), 56-97, and Jumper, *Death Waits in the Dark*, 11-16. For the case of Algeria, see Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, 23-80, and Droz and Lever, *Histoire de la Guerre d'Algérie*, 11-36.

¹¹⁸ Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars*, 81-218.

¹¹⁹ Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup*, 13-18.

¹²⁰ Nagl had reasons to do what he did. After all, Thompson was considered by many to be one of the leading theorists of COIN. He was permanent secretary for defense in Malaya during the Malayan Emergency and was naturally credited with helping to win the war. Thompson's two works, *No exit from Vietnam* and *Defeating Communist Insurgency* were lauded as being amongst the foremost writings on COIN. In the 1970 updated edition of *No Exit from Vietnam*, the subtitle reads "The recent recommendations of the author to President Nixon on a new course in Vietnam based on his analysis of how American policy went wrong." Thompson was sent to Vietnam to work in an advisory capacity, and Nagl implied that the US failed to heed his advice at great cost. COIN tactics advocated by Thompson appeared to be relatively simple: initiatives from the lower echelons, small-unit special force operations, and controlled violence.

¹²¹ Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup*, 29.

¹²² Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 55-65.

¹²³ Long, *On "Other War."* 52

¹²⁴ For case of France in Algeria, see Faivre, *Les 1000 Villes* and for the case of Malaya, see Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War* and Jumper, *Death Waits in the Dark*, 12-36.

¹²⁵ Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, 208-230.

¹²⁶ Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 60.

¹²⁷ Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 192-193.

¹²⁸ Faivre, *Les 1000 Villes*, 175-191. Faivre cautioned that the regroupment policy was not perfect. The use of violence played an important role in defeating the original purpose of the policy as a counter-revolutionary measure.

¹²⁹ Jumper, *Death Waits in the Dark*, xix-xx.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹³¹ Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup*, 87-91.

¹³² Other authors such as Barber and Clutterbuck also concurred, especially on the issue of the MCP's strategic blunder after the British courted the Orang Asli.

¹³³ Jumper, *Death Waits in the Dark*, 31-45, and Barber, *War of the Running Dogs*, 75.

¹³⁴ Jumper, *Death Waits in the Dark*, 32-33.

¹³⁵ Barber, *War of the Running Dogs*, 17.

¹³⁶ Jumper, *Death Waits in the Dark*, 40.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 79-93.

¹⁴¹ Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup*, 10-11.

¹⁴² Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 69.

¹⁴³ An opposite method that Mill also mentioned was the method of similarity: same outcomes that are thought to be caused by the same aspects found in the two cases. As George and Bennett noted, Mill himself admitted that the method of difference is stronger than the method of similarity. *Ibid.*, 157-160.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁴⁷ It is worthy to note briefly here that the word "socialist" here does not denote a study on the political system nor is it a justification of the merit of such system. Instead, it will study the historical case of a military system that was molded to follow the party's line. This is a work of military history.

The vices of a socialist system are numerous, but if they ever had one thing right, it is that the effectiveness of their military system in fighting a people's war, at least in the Cambodian case. The concluding chapter will discuss this issue further and its implications for the future of COIN.

¹⁴⁸ Gary King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 209.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ As the evidence in subsequent chapters will show, the military had followed the instructions to a great extent. Chapter 5 and 6 will discuss this issue in detail.

¹⁵¹ In the Cambodian case, as we shall see in chapter 5 and 6, most of the Cambodian military personnel had suffered under the Khmer Rouge, and they asserted their belief that brutality was below them. No known village was harmed even though there was clear evidence that the villagers cooperated with the Khmer Rouge (e.g. had more guns than what were given by the KPRA for self-defense). Chapter 5 and 6 will elaborate on this point. It suffices to say here that this dissertation assumed the KPRA was lenient in its treatment of the population because of two reasons. First of all, the official history of the KPRA's units tended to assert this point and it correlated with the fact that they could recruit a lot of people into the armed forces without a conscription law. The KPRA units could also move between provinces with little interference from the CGDK, which leads this dissertation to believe that its local militia system was quite strong. Second, non-PRK sources had never mentioned any atrocity committed by the PRK on the population. The only exception was Slocomb's analysis of the K-5 Plan which forced many people to build the border wall. But, even then, Slocomb also mentioned that some leaders of the PRK such as Prime Minister Hun Sen had already disowned the strategy. Moreover, the plan was a genuine defense strategy, not an intentional strategy to punish the people. In short, the current literature and the current state of the evidence did not support the argument that the PRK committed atrocity towards the population who could not prove its complete loyalty to the regime. For Slocomb's examination of the K-5 Plan, see Margaret Slocomb, *The People's Republic of Kampuchea, 1979-1989: The Revolution after Pol Pot* (Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2004), 229-251.

¹⁵² King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, 210.

¹⁵³ George and Bennett, *Case Studies*, 211.

Chapter 2

ANALYTICAL COMPARISON

2.1 Method of “Most Similar System” Applied to the Cambodian Case Study

This dissertation will apply the method of difference (or most similar system) to justify how it is possible to compare the Cambodian case and the Vietnamese case. The first step in this process requires a listing of all potential variables that could influence the outcome of COIN and guerilla warfare. Eight variables are usually cited as independent variables which could potentially explain whether a state can defeat a revolutionary movement: external support, geography, ratio of force (paramilitary vs. conventional forces), ethnic composition, ethnic relations, strategy, military organization, and political program/ideology.¹

2.1.1 Variable 1 – External Support and Sanctuary

Did the guerilla enjoy outside support and sanctuaries that are off limits to the counterinsurgent? As a general rule, guerilla movements start small and weak. In Mao’s “People’s War” model, sanctuary and external support are not the necessary cause for success of the revolutionary movement. While it is not unusual, and perhaps advantageous, for the revolutionaries to procure external support and develop sanctuaries that are off-limits to the counterinsurgent, the main support base of the revolutionaries should still be the local population.

That being said, external support and political sanctuary are indeed welcomed for any revolutionary movement. As Prince Sihanouk once duly noted: “In order to

fire artillery, you need to be a mathematician.” What this means is that regardless of the grievances and the will of the revolutionaries, it will be difficult for them to attain necessary skills and capabilities enough to counter the well-equipped counterinsurgent’s army without outside help. Small unit encounters might be effective for the revolutionaries but to move to Mao’s third stage of strategic offensive, the revolutionaries need to at least master some heavy weapons. That skill is difficult to obtain under constant pressure from the government.

Another type of external support is political sanctuary. This particular type of sanctuary is typically defined by a mere boundary between two countries. The revolutionaries can stay just a few kilometers from the counterinsurgent forces, with little natural obstacles between them, but could still rest more or less at leisure in their bases. Attacking the revolutionaries is not a military problem for the counterinsurgent; it is rather a political problem.

The Cambodian Civil War and the Vietnam War exhibit the same characteristic in this area. At its peak, the US military personnel in Vietnam topped half a million soldiers, and it was arguably the world’s greatest conventional military force. The air power alone could smite anything in its path. But that was not the game its enemy was playing. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) knew that in a conventional, set-piece battle, its forces would be crushed by the US military. Instead of fighting a direct war, the DRV sought to fight an indirect one, in essence, a mix of guerilla war and conventional battles. Even without the support of the DRV, the South had already seen its share of rebellion.² Seeking to intensify the response to grievances, the DRV clandestinely supported the National Liberation Front (NLF) through a mechanism called the Central Office for South Vietnam. As the war

escalated, the DRV's regular forces, the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), also joined the fight.

However, to fight with hundreds of thousands of men means that the logistics, both foodstuffs and ammunitions (and later, fuel), was a momentous task. The revolutionaries made use of the Ho Chi Minh trail, which cut through the supposedly neutral Laos and Cambodia. General Westmoreland, the commander of Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) lamented that, although, in his view, everyone knew the war could be cut short by an open attack on the DRV or at the very least, by open interventions into Cambodia and Laos, political expediency dictated otherwise.³

That said, the US military did intervene in Cambodia and Laos when Westmoreland's successor, General Abrams was in command of the MACV. In 1970, the US military conducted a series of joint operations with the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) into Cambodian territory known as the Cambodian Incursion (Operation Rockcrusher). Despite having eliminated some arms depots, the operations achieved little concrete results, and the political backlash in Washington was enormous for Richard Nixon. In Cambodia, the political and military backlashes were even worse. In March, a coup deposing Prince Sihanouk was already carried out and the operation further weakened the new Cambodian government by pushing the PAVN and the PLAF deeper into Cambodia.⁴

In 1971, a similar operation, called Lam Son 719 (the year 1971, on Route 9, hence the name 719) was launched into Laos. This time, however, due to the political constraints after the Cambodian Incursion, American ground troops were not allowed to participate beyond providing fire and air support operations.⁵ The operation was a

disaster. It once again brought more political repercussions for Nixon.⁶ In summary, political sanctuary does not guarantee absolute security, but it does prevent the counterinsurgent from using its full strength to achieve its ideal objectives.

In the Cambodian Civil War, the counterinsurgent faced a similar problem. The Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Army (KPR) fought alongside the PAVN against the Khmer Rouge and other two non-communist resistance movements. Thailand was the only sanctuary for the Cambodian insurgency, and it was a very good sanctuary. Any eventual war between Vietnam and Thailand would likely have drawn other states in to fight against Vietnam. China was particularly concerned with Vietnamese influence in Cambodia and had already carried out a limited war in the northern border of Vietnam after the latter toppled the Khmer Rouge in early 1979.⁷ The US, on the other hand, saw the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia as an extension of the Soviet influence in Southeast Asia when the Soviet Union gained access to the Cam Ranh Bay.⁸ Any strategic move by the Vietnamese into Thailand would certainly invite strong reactions from both superpowers.

Consequently, Thailand became the paradise for the Cambodian insurgency. The advantages included, but were not limited to: sanctuary, recruitment pool (refugee camps situated in Thai territory), logistics, training camps (run by the CIA and the American allies, such as the British SAS), rest and recreation, and combat support in operations along the border.⁹ Thailand was off-limits to KPR/PAVN air power, limited though it was. In a tight fight, a strafing run could easily have strayed into Thai territory, providing a legitimate cause for retaliations.

This case is somewhat similar to the Vietnam War because the PAVN did fight on Thai territory, but not to the same extent as what the US did in Cambodia and

Laos.¹⁰ The PAVN had tried to restrict those activities within the confines of the tactical engagement, and Thai reconnaissance planes were occasionally shot down in Cambodian territory during the encounter.

In sum, the revolutionaries in both the Vietnam War and the Cambodian Civil War enjoyed a significant level of protection from political sanctuary located in neighboring countries. This allowed them to outlast the counterinsurgent and especially to wait until the third party intervener left. In both cases, after the third party intervener left, the revolutionaries consolidated and fought conventional battle to seize territory. In other words, after the third party left, the revolutionaries “graduated” to the conventional level.

2.1.2 Variable 2 – Natural Sanctuary, Geography, and Climate

To whom does the geography give the advantage? Who benefits from the force of nature? Geography is often a very important factor in guerilla warfare. The importance of geography and climate lie in their ability to offer sanctuaries to the revolutionaries. Sometimes, the climate negates numerical or technological superiority, and this normally helps the revolutionaries who always starts as the weaker side.

Two points here are noteworthy. First of all, the geographic features alone could not determine which side would win the war. They only give advantage to one side, and how that side makes use of such advantage (or negates such disadvantage) is still left to the players. Second, it is clear that while the natural sanctuary could protect the revolutionaries, they still need to gather popular support if they want to move to fight in conventional operations. While the revolutionaries have to live among the

people, as Mao noted, like fishes live in water, the political cadre and the armed wing still need natural hiding places during the time of government pressure.¹¹

For this variable, the Vietnam War and the Cambodian Civil War exhibit almost identical features, mainly because they both occurred in the same geographical area. First of all, the climate and the seasonal weather patterns are similar. Because Indochina is located in the tropical area, the average temperature ranges between 25 to 40 degrees Celsius, while the lowest temperature hovers around 10 degrees Celsius. The area is influenced by the Monsoon wind and has only two seasons, the rainy season and the dry season. This weather pattern, in turn, very much influenced the tempo of operations of both the counterinsurgent and the revolutionaries. As a general rule, the counterinsurgent was more active during the dry season when the weather allows the use of superior weaponry and equipment. On the other hand, the revolutionaries were generally active during the rainy season when the superior firepower of the counterinsurgent could not be brought to bear.

The second similarity, the one that usually accompanied mountainous terrain, was the dense jungle that the guerillas could use as sanctuary. In both Cambodia and Vietnam, the mountainous and jungle areas cover some of the crucial areas (please refer to Map 1. Indochina Topography). In Cambodia, the mountains and jungle were located to the north of the country where the revolutionaries already enjoyed political sanctuary in Thailand (please refer to Map 2. Cambodian geography). A large segment of the border between Cambodia and Thailand, i.e. some 500 kilometers, is covered by two mountain ranges.

As a result, we can see that South Vietnam and Cambodia exhibited little difference in terms of geography and topography that could have explained why we see COIN success in one case and failure in the other.

2.1.3 Variable 3 – Ethnic Composition

What is the ethnic distribution in the country? Is there a balance? Who has grievance vis-à-vis the government? Ethnic composition can also be very important in determining success. There is a stark difference between a case where 99% of the population has grievances vis-à-vis the government, and a case where only 1% does. In some cases, grievance is directly related to ethnic issues. The dynamic of an ideological revolutionary war is not the same as that of an ethnic revolutionary war. Because this dissertation covers only ideological revolutionary wars, we have to make sure both wars were generally ideological in nature.

Variable 3 and Variable 4 (which will be examined next) are similar in that they both talk about the different ethnic groups that are plunged into the confusion of war. But Variable 3 here discusses only the nature and, more importantly, the numbers of these different groups while Variable 4 will examine the relationships between these groups. An ethnic group is important in a revolutionary war if two conditions are met: 1. the grievances exist, and 2. the group that has the grievances must be large enough or occupies a strategic location to cause problems for the other group. Without these two conditions together, ethnicity will be less likely to play a decisive role in the war. If there is no grievance, then revolutionary war is unlikely. If the affected ethnic group is small or if it does not occupy a strategic location, then its grievances, hence its participation, would likely do little to influence the outcome of the war.

So how did the counterinsurgent in Vietnam, the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) compare with the Cambodian counterinsurgent, People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) in terms of ethnic composition? We shall examine each case in turn. According to McLeod, apart from the majority Vietnamese, Vietnam as a whole (D.R.V. and R.V.N.) had three main minority ethnic groups, two of which were in the south.¹² The first group resided in the north, in the Viet-Bac Mountains surrounding the Red River Delta, located north of the country towards the Chinese-Vietnamese border, numbering around 3 million.¹³ This group is excluded from this study as they live outside of the area where the war was being fought.

The second group was the non-Vietnamese lowland people, basically the Cham and the Khmer. The Cham had maintained a kingdom around central Vietnam before it collapsed under the Vietnamese "Southern March" between the 16th and 18th century. The Khmer were native of the Khmer Empire and the inhabitants in South Vietnam, almost entirely in the Mekong Delta, were part of a collection of provinces lost to the Vietnamese around the 17th and 18th century. To Cambodians, they are still called Khmer Krom (lowland Khmer). This group, therefore, resided in the south. McLeod estimated that the Cham numbered around 60,000 while the Khmer Krom was estimated to be 500,000.¹⁴

The third group was probably the most well-known, the Montagnards (from French, meaning mountain people or the mountaineers). The Montagnards were not a monolithic group but it was a catchall name the French gave to the highlanders, those who lived on the mountains and relied on a different type of agriculture than those of the lowlands. Differences in languages, lifestyles, religions, and appearances created frictions and animosity between these groups and the majority, lowland Vietnamese.

The Montagnards made up of the following tribes: the Mon-Khmer group, which includes the Bahnar, Sedang, Mnong, and Stieng, and the Malayo-Polynesian group, including the Jarai, Hroi, Rhadé, Churu, and Roglai.¹⁵ Together they made up of about 1 million in the early 1960s.¹⁶

In sum, with the total population in the RVN amounted to about 15 million in 1960, we can estimate that the non-Vietnamese, lowland people accounted for around 3.7 percent (3.3 percent for the Khmer Krom and .4 percent for the Chams) whereas the Montagnards accounted for 6.6 percent of the total population. Comparing this number with the case of revolutionary wars which has strong ethnic undertone is instructive. The discrepancy between these number and the ethnic composition in Malaya is staggering. In 1948, the Malays accounted for over 50 percent of the total population of 5,300,000 people, but the Chinese who were the main guerilla fighting force accounted for almost 37.73 percent of the total population (around 2 million people).¹⁷ 600,000 of this 2 million were squatters, Chinese households who lived on the fringes of the jungle as they tried to escape the Japanese occupation in WWII.¹⁸

In addition, there were also half a million Indians living in Malaya, an equivalent of 9.4 percent of the total population. The last category of ethnic group in Malaya was the aboriginal people, the tribes who lived in the jungle and who were, according to Barber, the ones who always refused to bow to the power of the Malay Sultans. There were between fifty and one hundred thousand of the Aborigines in Malaya, which translated into between 1 and 2 percent of the total population.¹⁹ A quick look at the numbers reveals that there is a significant discrepancy between the ethnic composition in South Vietnam and that in Malaya. As a result, the role of ethnic

group in both wars could also be different. In Nagl's study, this difference was completely overlooked in the comparison between Vietnam and Malaya.

The ethnic makeup of Cambodian society is much more similar to that of South Vietnam than to Malaya. The numbers were not exactly the same but the ratios were certainly similar. The majority ethnic Cambodians are known as Khmer, a word that is also used for the language and an ancient empire which flourished between the 8th and 15th century. There are four main minority ethnic groups living in Cambodia: the Muslim Cham, the Chinese, the highland tribes, and the Vietnamese.

The total population of Cambodia in 1979 was estimated to be between 6 and 7.5 million with around 1 million living in refugee camps along the border.²⁰ For practical purposes, this dissertation will use 7 million as the total population in the heartland, as this is the number of people available for both sides. Once one were in a refugee camp, there was little choice as to which side one would join, except running away into the wilderness, where dangers lurked everywhere.

The first group, the Chinese, amounted to 425,000 before 1975, according to Ben Kiernan.²¹ Despite the fact that China was almost the only ally of Democratic Kampuchea, the Chinese in Cambodia were not treated preferentially.²² What perhaps helped this group to some extent was their skills in Chinese language, which the Khmer Rouge found useful in the communications and interactions with the Chinese advisors in Cambodia.²³ Kiernan estimated that about 200,000 of this groups survived in 1979.²⁴

The second group of minority in Cambodia was the Muslim Cham, the remnants of the Champa Kingdom that ruled Central Vietnam from the 7th Century to 1832. The estimates of the Cham population before 1975 and after 1979 differed

significantly. Kiernan estimated that the pre-1975 number was at least 250,000, of which 90,000 of those perished under Democratic Kampuchea.²⁵ Ysa Osman, on the other hand, claimed that between 400,000 and 500,000 Cham perished between 1975 and 1979, and further that the Cham population fell to under 200,000 after 1979, giving a casualty rate of almost 66 percent.²⁶ While Osman and Kiernan disagreed about the number of casualties, we can infer that they somewhat agreed the Cham population after 1979 was about 160,000.

The number of Vietnamese in Cambodia is a controversial issue, and many estimates are politically-charged. The relations between Cambodians and Vietnamese were tense. Kiernan estimated that after 1979, most of them returned to Cambodia, but the number was well below 200,000.²⁷

Finally, Cambodia also has the Khmer Loeu (highland Khmer) tribesmen, most of whom had close ethnic ties with the tribes in Vietnam. This group numbered about 120,000 according to a United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) report in 1992.²⁸ While still subjected to forced cultural assimilation under Democratic Kampuchea, the Khmer Loeu received less harsh treatment relative to other minorities group because Pol Pot trusted them for their relative lack of exposure to the market system.²⁹ Pol Pot's closest bodyguards were drawn from these groups.

Table 1. Ethnic Composition During the war in Cambodia, the RVN, and Malaya.

| Categories | Cambodia | | South Vietnam | | Malaya | |
|------------|------------------------|------|---------------------------|------|------------|--------|
| Majority | Khmer | ~92% | Vietnamese | ~88% | Malays | ~51% |
| Minority | Chinese | 2.8% | Non-Vietnamese lowlanders | 3.7% | Chinese | 37.73% |
| | Chams | 2.2% | Highlanders | 6.6% | Indians | 9.4% |
| | Vietnamese | ~2% | | | Aborigines | 1-2% |
| | Khmer Loeu Highlanders | ~1% | | | | |

The table shows that in both Cambodia and Vietnam, the ethnic minorities made up only around 10 percent, which made it difficult for them to affect the war significantly. In the Malayan case, however, the dominant group accounted for half of the total population while the largest minority group (the Chinese) represented 37.73 percent. The minority groups in all three cases could significantly affect the war, but it would be harder to fight the 30% ethnic group than to fight the 10% ethnic group.

This being said, the dissertation does not mean that the small minority groups are irrelevant. On the contrary, as discussed in chapter 1, the Orang Asli played a very important role in the last phase of the war in Malaya. In Vietnam, the Montagnards controlled the Central Highlands, whose allegiance with the revolutionary facilitated the functioning of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. While the minority situation in Cambodia perhaps could not be compared to that of Vietnam, this dissertation does argue that the government should address all grievances, regardless of whether those affect the majority or the minority.

2.1.4 Variable 4 – Historical Precedence of Past Wars and Conflict

What is the history of interactions between the ethnic groups in society? Was there any longstanding grievances? Relations between the majority ethnic group and the smaller ones were different in Cambodia and Vietnam. As will be explained in subsequent chapters, in Cambodia, the minority groups had grievances vis-à-vis the revolutionaries (due to the Khmer Rouge genocide) while in Vietnam, the minority groups (especially the Montagnards) had grievances vis-à-vis the Vietnamese majority who were present on both sides of the war. Another difference was that, in Vietnam, the Montagnards were located in the Central Highland which was a corridor for the PLAF/PAVN to channel troops and matériels into the RVN.³⁰

Despite these differences, however, the dissertation shall argue that the outcome does not contradict with the main conclusion, namely that victory in revolutionary war depends on the resolution of the grievances. As subsequent chapters will show, as long as the government does not address the grievances of the minority, it is bound to have problems. If that minority is also large enough or if it happens to occupy a strategic location, then the problem might be fatal for the government.

2.1.5 Variable 5 – Political Issues (Social and Political Grievances)

What are the major political/ideological or social issues that drive people to fight each other? One of the things that motivates a person to fight is his or her political conviction and the belief that to satisfy said political goal requires military actions. In the case of revolutionary war, social and political grievances are usually the main motivations that drive peasants to take up arms. As Griffith aptly put it: “‘what have we to lose?’ When a great many people begin to ask themselves this question, a revolutionary guerilla situation is incipient.”³¹ Social and political grievances allow

one to send out messages that resonate with those who have grievances and mobilize them to fight the war.

Because the revolutionaries will be under constant pressure from the government during the guerrilla war stage, the cadres need to remain as underground agents who work covertly in their locale. The guerilla could, of course, resort to violence or fear to keep their rank and file in line, but loyalty will still be questionable, given the constant presence of the government. A strong ideological persuasion, however, would preserve the cadres and their morale under duress even when they were stretched to the limit.³²

Without an appealing cause, no one would risk his/her life for the guerillas. Terror and fear can only do so much. Lichbach argued that all selective incentives, coercion included, have diminishing returns and therefore, the guerrilla must find a way to sustain the motivation, most preferably an appealing ideology.³³ Without a cause to fight for, the guerillas will be no more than an armed gang. In most such cases, they tend to degenerate into something else, like bandits, drug cartels, or criminal organizations.³⁴ Any clear and appealing social or political grievance that is not addressed by the government is a clear advantage that could be exploited by revolutionaries. Various issues might count as grievances: land, livelihood, anger towards corrupt officials, religious persecution, and resentment towards the presence of foreign troops, etc. What matters is whether the grievances and its counterpart (the government's political program) have broad-based appeal.

At the beginning of the Vietnam War, the RVN was ruled in a system where landlords owned large swaths of land, on which the debt-stricken peasants had to work for their subsistence.³⁵ Based on the Viet Cong Motivation Study conducted by

RAND. David Hunt noted that most of the former communist fighters covered in the interviews came from broken families, the result of chronic and intergenerational poverty.³⁶ The French essentially created this system, a system which the Viet Minh abolished in the areas they controlled. The Viet Minh then redistributed the land to the peasants. After the Geneva Conference in 1954, which dictated that the armed supporters of the DRV must be relocated to the North, many of these newly established small holders in the South lost their land to the landowners because the Viet Minh's policy was not recognized.³⁷ Therefore, not having land title was a major grievance that sustained the NLF. Subsequent land reforms by the Diem governments and its successors failed to produce any significant results due to corruption.³⁸

A second major grievance that alienated a segment of the population was the discrimination faced by the ethnic minority, most prominently the Montagnards. To a large extent, the American special forces were the only catalysts between the ARVN and the Montagnard. While the relations were tense, the US military managed to integrate them into a fighting force under a program called the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG). The third major factor which intensified these first two factors were the corruption of the RVN's local officials and the patronage system in the government which maintained the corrupt officials in power.³⁹

In the case of the Cambodian Civil War, on the other hand, the government and the guerillas both had somewhat equally appealing and obvious propaganda messages. The Khmer Rouge communists was responsible for the killing of at least one million people.⁴⁰ As a result, it was not difficult to persuade people to organize to defend themselves against the return of the Khmer Rouge. The PAVN also used this fact to argue that their intervention was for humanitarian reasons, and it would stay

until the Khmer Rouge threat was eliminated. Even Prince Sihanouk, as the most prominent leader of the resistance, conceded that the Vietnamese intervention was the lesser of two evils (but the Prince also added that this being the case, it is not an acceptance of a “permanent Vietnamese protectorate”).⁴¹

While the PRK emphasized the prevention of the second coming of the Khmer Rouge genocide, the Khmer Rouge and other resistance groups stressed the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia as their main motivation for war.⁴² In a strange twist of irony, the Khmer Rouge’s propaganda actually drew quite a number of recruits for the very simple reason: the Vietnamese presence was more visible than the genocide. During the Cambodian Civil War, the Vietnamese presence was viewed with contempt by many people, and had it not been for their overthrow of the Khmer Rouge’s genocidal regime, it would have been almost impossible for the Vietnamese forces to stay.

In summary, the two cases are both similar and different. They are different because in the Vietnam War, the counterinsurgent had could not effectively implement its political program while in the Cambodian Civil War, the counterinsurgent could implement its political program better than the revolutionaries.⁴³ Yet, they are similar in that neither side could be said to have any advantage that was deterministic or even decisive when it came to the third party intervener.⁴⁴ The RVN could be safe as long as the US military stayed in Vietnam, but the American domestic support tended to fade over time. In the Cambodian Civil War, there was a different problem. The Vietnamese presence protected the PRK from the Khmer Rouge, but it was that very presence was the grievance that gave the Khmer Rouge and other guerrillas the reason to exist. The Vietnamese presence in Cambodia was paradoxical: they had to leave in

order to make the PRK safe but by doing so, they left the PRK to face the guerrillas alone.

It is necessary, however, to note that there is one related variable that could account for the different outcome. One may argue that the RVN had faced a more dangerous threat than the one the PRK encountered in Cambodia: the PAVN, a sophisticated military organization that defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu. Bernard Fall, for example, showed that the PAVN already organized itself as a modern army having many versatile divisions by the time of the siege at Dien Bien Phu, something that the ARVN could not match.⁴⁵ One might argue that the guerrillas in Cambodia were never as strong as the PAVN and PLAF in South Vietnam. This alternative explanation requires a deeper discussion that this dissertation will cover in the last chapter.

2.1.6 Variable 6 – Tactics, Strategy, and War Dynamic

When talking about the tactics and strategy, one can distinguish two types of actions: conventional military operations and COIN tactics. In the former case, regular units are used with either set-piece battles or small unit operations intended to fight clearly identifiable opponents. The latter form, on the other hand, entails more political actions and some restrictions on the use of force. Pacification, organization of local militias, intelligence operations, economic and development program, and propaganda are some examples of COIN tactics.⁴⁶

To be fair, rarely did a counterinsurgent adopt only one type of tactic or strategy throughout the war. Some scholars characterized this form of warfare as “hybrid threat” in which hit-and-run actions and terrorism are used in conjunction with large-unit battles to wear out and destroy a larger force.⁴⁷ *A review of the literature*

reveals that the counterinsurgents in the Vietnam War and the Cambodian Civil War adopted both types of tactics (conventional and COIN). Because the subsequent chapters will discuss the issues in detail, it suffices here to sum up the events to facilitate the comparison.

Most of the Vietnam War was fought on conventional battlefield as well as small-scale battles because the revolutionaries already controlled most of the countryside with a large network of underground agents and a variety of fighting forces. Before 1960, the revolutionaries could only conduct guerrilla activities due to a lack of political directions and support from Hanoi.⁴⁸ As the repression from Diem intensified, many southerners were prepared to go their own way, which forced Hanoi's hand.⁴⁹ With support from Hanoi, from 1960 to 1965, the guerrillas began to organize a series of local offensives which drove most local officials out of the villages and hamlets to the district towns. Towards 1964 and 1965, the revolutionaries started attacking in large, conventional formation and devastated the many units of the South Vietnamese army (ARVN). However, the introduction of the American combat forces in Vietnam in 1965 brought the war to a stalemate.

The revolutionaries were apprehensive for the integrity of their movement if stalemate continued, and they pushed Hanoi for an offensive to end this stalemate and to take the initiative.⁵⁰ The climax came during the Tet celebration of 1968, when the PLAF and PAVN mounted the offensive that took the Americans and RVN largely by surprise. While the PLAF lost most of its manpower during the offensive, the American public was convinced that the war was not going well, and the support for the war began to plunge.

That was arguably one of the reasons why Richard Nixon was elected to the presidency by running on a platform of ending the war. Not much later, General Creighton Abrams replaced General Westmoreland, and the American troops began to withdraw from Vietnam. The US carried out a counteroffensive under the aegis of the Phoenix Program which targeted the leadership of the NLF, but the PLAF and the PAVN also continued their offensive known as "Little Tet."⁵¹ After 1968, the PAVN began to take up combat roles in place of the PLAF.

But despite the belated gains, because the US had already made the decision to withdraw from Vietnam, the ARVN was in a predicament. By the time the PAVN carried out the 1972 Easter Offensive, the bulk of the American combat troops had already left Vietnam. Support, training, and advisory staff remained to coordinate air power, which turned the tide of battles in late 1972.⁵² But that tactical victory also brought the Paris peace talks to a conclusion in 1973, precluding further American involvement in Vietnam.⁵³ In 1975, the PAVN carried out another offensive and this time, without the US to provide support, the ARVN faltered and the RVN collapsed.

The Cambodian Civil War exhibited a similar pattern in that there were surprisingly many conventional operations. While the war was viewed through the lenses of revolutionary warfare by the PRK, the strategy called for the use of conventional operations to close down the border and pacify the country. After the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge in January 1979, the PAVN immediately facilitated the establishment of five conventional divisions. In hindsight, we can infer that the PRK adopted a three-stage plan to win the war which involved both conventional forces and paramilitary forces (chapter 5 will examine this issue in detail).

Between 1984 and 1989, there were almost no major operations between the guerrilla and the counterinsurgent and the focus shifted to spoiling attacks and population mobilization. But as the Vietnamese forces gradually moved to the rear in 1987, the KPRA divisions moved forward to defend isolated outposts.

Therefore, the counterinsurgents in both cases tried out the COIN tactics but they were drawn to the conventional battles as the war dragged on. There seemed to be a belief that conventional battles were decisive because guerrilla war was still a war nonetheless. A critical difference was that the PRK, perhaps because of its socialist ideals, clung to its concept of People's War and organized accordingly (Variable 8).⁵⁴

Table 2. Summary of Major Turning Points From the Counterinsurgent's Perspective

| Vietnam War | | | Cambodian Civil War | | |
|-------------|---|--|---------------------|--|---|
| Stages | Major events | Conventional, COIN, and political strategy | Stages | Major events | Conventional, COIN, and political strategy |
| Pre-1965 | -Transition from MAAG to MACV; fallouts from anti-Diem Coup; Gen. Westmoreland played more of a housekeeping role to keep the integrity of the ARVN. -With PAVN support, the NLF launched conventional operations, but withdrew due to American air power. | COIN, then transitioned to Conventional | 1979-1984 | Offensive on the border, K-5 border strategy, and Vietnamese forces began small drawdown of non-essential units. | COIN |
| 1965-1968 | Search-and-destroy, forceful pacification, Tet Offensive. | Conventional | 1984-1987 | KPRA defensive posture, establishment of dual-duty (political and military) company. | Predominantly COIN; but COIN units transitioned to conventional. |
| 1968-1972 | US drawdown, intervention in Cambodia (<i>Operation Rockensher</i>) and Laos (Lam Son 719). | Conventional | 1987-1989 | Prince Sihanouk met with Prime Minister Hun Sen and the political negotiation started, Vietnamese forces started large drawdown. | Predominantly conventional, COIN unit continued the transition to conventional. |

| | | | | | |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|--|--------------|
| 1972-1974 | Easter Offensive, land-grab fighting. | Conventional, negotiation | 1989-1991 | Guerrilla offensive, political negotiation followed the tempo of military operations, ceasefire. | Conventional |
| 1975 | Ho Chi Minh Campaign | Conventional | 23 October 1991 | Paris Peace Accord concluded, all parties agreed to call of a UN-sponsored election. | |

Another point of comparison is the graduation of guerrilla war into conventional war. In Vietnam, this occurred several times. The first graduation occurred as a series of offensive in 1964 and 1965 where the PLAF carried out conventional attacks against the ARVN.⁵⁵ In the 1968 Tet Offensive, even though the PAVN was present in the order of battle, the PLAF did play an important role. In My Tho province in the Mekong Delta, for example, the PLAF mustered nine battalions during the Tet Offensive.⁵⁶ In the 1972 and 1975 offensives, even though the local forces still led the way, one can argue that the PAVN did most of the fighting.

In Cambodia, that graduation happened only once, in 1989. As the Vietnamese forces left in September, there was a brief pause as both sides prepared for the big things to come. Finally in October 1989, the guerrilla graduated to the conventional level and all hell broke loose. All of the five divisions stationed along the border in Battambang-Banteay Meanchey provinces either hastily withdrew or were routed. But unlike in Vietnam, the guerrillas in Cambodia did not receive any conventional units from outside forces. The PRK slowly recovered and the conflict concluded with a peace negotiation which favored the PRK.

Therefore, the 1989 offensive in Cambodia was similar to the Tet Offensive in that the guerrilla graduated to the conventional level. Among the four major

campaigns in the Vietnam War (1964-65, 1968, 1972, and 1975), the 1968 Tet Offensive was the most similar to what happened in Cambodia in 1989. In terms of scale, both campaigns had a chance of being decisive: they both covered a large part of the country and involved a substantial number of units. Unlike in 1964 and 1965, the campaign in 1968 affected the majority of South Vietnam and was conducted by the majority of the PLAF's combat power in addition to the PAVN. The 1968 campaign had a chance of being decisive. In 1972 and 1975, the campaigns were largely carried out by the PAVN. In Cambodia, in 1989, the campaign was the largest where the guerrillas had thrown everything into the offensive. Moreover, the offensive was aimed at wresting control of the northwestern provinces. The 1989 campaign also had a chance of being decisive. These were the factors that drove the comparison between the Tet Offensive and the 1989 offensive in Cambodia.

While the two campaigns had similarities, they also differed in important ways. In Vietnam, the war did not end in 1968 and when it ultimately ended in 1975, it had already become a full-scale conventional war. In Cambodia, the war ended in a political settlement in 1989. Secondly, the third party intervener was still in the country when the revolutionaries graduated in 1968 while in Cambodia, the Vietnamese troops had already withdrawn by 1989.

This dissertation will limit the analysis of the Vietnam case to only 1968 in order to facilitate the comparison. The differences in the two cases will be examined in the counterarguments section of the conclusion chapter. Chapter 7 will continue to examine this issue after the events of the two cases are narrated and analyzed in chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6.

This dissertation hypothesizes that despite the differences in the two cases, the following two Variables could be credited for the PRK's recovery but not the ARVN: numerical superiority and the territorial forces organization. The inability of the ARVN to build a large and cohesive army forced it to rely heavily on the US military. As the 1968 campaign eliminated this strength, the ARVN had no chance to defeat the PAVN. In the Cambodian case, a large and cohesive counterinsurgent force was built, largely based on territorial forces. These territorial forces were neither well trained nor well equipped but they knew the terrain and more importantly, when combined with the regular troops, they outnumbered the guerrillas. It was simply not easy to fight against a larger army who were committed, fully indoctrinated, and knew the terrain well. This was the difference between Cambodia and the RVN and it was the difference that might explain the outcome.⁵⁷ The PRK survived even after the third party intervener left but the RVN did not. We shall turn to these two variables next.

2.1.7 Variable 7 – Ratio of Force Between the Conventional and Paramilitary Forces of the Counterinsurgent

What made up the strength of the counterinsurgent? Conventional units of paramilitary units? The ratio of force is also important in revolutionary warfare, but its nature and effects are very difficult to measure. Unlike in conventional warfare, the people's (and soldiers') loyalty is questionable in revolutionary wars. One day a person is a peasant, and the next day he may become committed revolutionary. The guerilla forces are always weak at the beginning but may gradually build their ranks with government's deserted soldiers or with sections of previously uncommitted population. The number can rise and fall with the circumstances in each case and cannot be accurately predicted. Due to this complication, this dissertation will not look

at the ratio of force per se, but will instead examine another ratio, that between the conventional and territorial forces within the counterinsurgent's army.⁵⁸

Unlike in conventional warfare, territorial forces can play an important role in revolutionary wars. When there is a large number of territorial forces, it could potentially mean two things. First, this can be an indication that the counterinsurgent might actually have a political program that can attract a lot of people. Second, because in terms of combat, revolutionary wars tend to be hybrid in nature (i.e. a mix of conventional and guerrilla fighting), an effective mix of conventional and territorial forces could permit the counterinsurgent to better respond to the threats.

It is important to note that number alone cannot determine victory. Soldiers must also have effective organization as well as a certain level of morale (which is linked with the political ideology). The most likely role of numerical superiority, on the other hand, is an intervening variable (see below). In the Vietnam War and the Cambodian Civil War, both counterinsurgents mustered a large number of territorial forces. But the nature and ratio were different.

The number of RVNAF soldiers can be estimated as follow:

Table 3. Order of Battle of the Counterinsurgent⁵⁹

| | ARVN | RVN Air Force | RVN Navy | RVN Marine Corps | Regional Force | Popular Force | Total |
|------|---------|---------------|----------|------------------|----------------|---------------|-----------|
| 1964 | 220,000 | 11,000 | 12,000 | 7,000 | 96,000 | 168,000 | 538,210 |
| 1965 | 220,000 | 11,000 | 12,000 | 7,000 | 96,000 | 168,000 | 743,090 |
| 1966 | 220,000 | 11,000 | 12,000 | 7,000 | 96,000 | 168,000 | 964,420 |
| 1967 | 303,000 | 16,000 | 16,000 | 8,000 | 151,000 | 149,000 | 1,247,440 |
| 1968 | 380,000 | 19,000 | 19,000 | 9,000 | 220,000 | 173,000 | 1,487,520 |
| 1969 | 416,000 | 36,000 | 30,000 | 11,000 | 190,000 | 214,000 | 1,519,030 |

| | | | | | | | |
|------|---------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|-----------|
| 1970 | 416,000 | 46,000 | 40,000 | 13,000 | 207,000 | 246,000 | 1,438,630 |
| 1971 | 416,000 | 46,000 | 40,000 | 13,000 | 207,000 | 246,000 | 1,233,820 |
| 1972 | 410,000 | 50,000 | 42,000 | 14,000 | 284,000 | 248,000 | 1,146,120 |

In the above estimate (Table 3), the number of paramilitary forces made up less than half of the total forces at any time. The estimate of the order of battle during the Cambodian Civil War was very different.

Table 4. An Estimate of the PRK's Military Power (1987)⁶⁰

| Categories | Estimate | Percentage of total | Notes |
|---|----------|---------------------|--|
| Regular troops | 75,000 | 24% | Mobile divisions, commanded by the general staff HQ and the Ministry of Defense. |
| Territorial forces | 55,000 | 17.62% | Troops at the district level and above. This included regular troops under the authority of the province. |
| Village militias (including national road militias) | 16,000 | 5.12% | Controlled by the village. Received a substantially lower salary than the regular troops. Weapons were provided by the KPRA and can be requisitioned on the battlefield. |
| Hamlet militias | 150,000 | 48% | Controlled by the hamlet. Did not have salary, frequently received rice allocation. Weapons can be requisitioned on the battlefield. |
| Railroad and rubber plantation militias | 7,000 | 2.24% | Sustainment and logistics during operations covered by the government. |
| Government establishment militias | 9,000 | 3.02% | Guard the government office buildings at night. |
| Fishing lot militias | N/A | N/A | A small segment of militias in charge of security of the fishing lots in the Tonle Sap Lake area |
| Sub-total militias | 182,000 | 58.33% | |
| Sub-total militias and territorial troops | 237,000 | 75.96% | |
| TOTAL | 312,000 | | |

If we refer back to Table 3 for the Vietnam War, the ARVN (excluding other non-ground units) outnumbered either the territorial or the popular force by a ratio of about 2 to 1. When we combine the number of territorial forces and the popular forces, then the number was roughly equal to the number of ARVN soldiers. In the

Cambodian Civil War, on the other hand, the difference was staggering. The number of militias (popular forces) alone outnumbered the regular troops by a ratio of almost 2 to 1. When combined with the territorial troops, this ratio jumps to an astonishing 3 to 1 numerical superiority in favor of the territorial and popular forces.

In summary, the number of militias and territorial troops was different between the two cases. Two things that could have accounted for the difference in the force ratio between the two cases are Variable 5 (grievances and political program) and Variable 8, the way in which the military was organized.⁶¹ In chapter 3 of this dissertation, we shall see that the ARVN recruited its soldiers via draft while chapter 5 will show that the KPRA recruited its soldiers via the transfer of territorial unit to the regular units. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, political ideology or program can motivate people to join the fight while the territorial-based military organization can produce a large and cohesive army. The finding in this section will supplement the WHAM School of thought. The WHAM School argued that in order to be successful, a counterinsurgent must have good political program. Yet, it did not say how the counterinsurgent can capitalize on that advantage. This dissertation hypothesizes that the counterinsurgent can capitalize on its good political program through military organization. Military organization can bring committed people together to build a cohesive army, thus translating political advantage into military success. The next variable discusses the counterinsurgent's military organizations in both Cambodia and Vietnam.

2.1.8 Variable 8 – Military Organization

How was the military organized? What were its missions? How the military organization is designed could be closely related to the type of government in power.

Thus, this dissertation distinguishes between the Western system (which in fact is standard among most conventional units) and the Cambodian socialist system, which was heavily influenced by the Chinese and Vietnamese models. For the basic warfighting functions and combat organization, the two systems were not very different. Squad was the basic unit, and it added up arithmetically to create each larger unit; generally three units comprise the next higher echelon.

In the Vietnam War as well as the Cambodian Civil War, the usual largest tactical unit was the division, and divisions combined to create corps. Territories were divided into military regions (Cambodia) and tactical corps zones (South Vietnam). Each military region or tactical corps zone controlled several provinces.

Both military organizations also had units that dealt with civilians. The Western system called them "Special Operations Forces," and one of their areas of expertise was psychological operations (psyops). The Cambodian socialist system, on the other hand, used political commissars or political officers. At the company level and below, there was usually a unit assigned to do only political work and propaganda, called the "armed propaganda unit." While the Western System had "psyops" units as the equivalent of the armed propaganda units, it did not have the person in the form of political commissar or political officer, except perhaps the chaplain who oversees soldiers' spiritual welfare.⁶²

The concepts of operations and focus, however, were different, and it was this difference that accounts for the position of the political commissar/officer. The Western system commonly functioned as a pure military unit whose missions consisted mostly of military aims with somewhat restricted civilian intervention. Civilian control tended to occur at higher level such as strategy and budget. The

Cambodian socialist system, on the other hand, blended politics with military command to make sure the military respected and followed the party line.⁶³ The political commissar ensured the soldiers followed the party lines. Units at the company level and higher had both a military commander and a political advisor or political commander. The former retained operational control while the latter had political control.

Moreover, the mission focus was also to be different between the Vietnam War and the Cambodian Civil War. In analyzing special operations in the Vietnam War, one cannot ignore the fact that most of these operations were aimed at destroying the enemy's political infrastructure (also called the Viet Cong Infrastructure, or VCI) as well as eliminating the enemy's fighting forces.⁶⁴ In the Cambodian case, conversely, the stress was on building local government, recruiting local security units, and mobilizing the masses. This difference in focus translated into the difference in the order of battle, as illustrated in Variable 7.

Another major difference was the role that the counterinsurgents accorded to these territorial forces in their COIN strategies. In the Cambodian case, these territorial forces were almost considered as a branch of the military. In all articles that appeared in the *People's Army* newspaper, whenever the authors talked about the military components, they always mentioned three major components together: the regular forces, the territorial forces, and the militias.⁶⁵ The territorial forces and militias were organized systematically throughout the country, and their mission was more general and expansive than that of the CIDG in Vietnam. A better equivalent in the Vietnam War was the Combined Actions Platoon (CAP), implemented by the US Marines Corps.

In the Vietnam War, the territorial forces were the Civil Guards and the Self-Defense Corps, which were later transformed into the Regional Forces and Popular Forces, respectively (abbreviated as RF-PF, pronounced colloquially as “ruff-puff”). However, these forces were more like residual forces, and there were many restrictions as to the people they could recruit because the able-bodied men were reserved for the conventional units, the ARVN.

MACV had also experimented with the Montagnards, which led to the establishment of the CIDG. In the Vietnam War, these were part of a specific strategy. To the extent that the CIDG program was implemented, its main purpose was to interdict enemy infiltration along the border. It was never used for mobilization of the masses. Moreover, strained relations between the ARVN and the RF-PF as well as the Montagnards prevented close coordination. The US doctrine also did not count these paramilitary forces as viable regular forces. They were integrated into the ARVN only after 1969 when the Vietnamization program kicked in.⁶⁶ During the 1972 Easter Offensive, the American advisors attempted, unsuccessfully, to put these forces together to repel the PAVN.

In sum, the difference in the focus and concept of operations and some differences in the organization were the main causes why the ratio of the regular forces to the territorial and militias forces in the Vietnam War and the Cambodian Civil War was different. As we shall see, their morale and effectiveness were also different.

2.2 Summary of Comparison

Table 5. Summary of Comparison

| Variables | Vietnam War | Cambodian Civil War |
|--|---|---|
| <i>Variable 1 – External Support and sanctuary</i> | <p>-Similarity: The revolutionaries and the counterinsurgents in both cases received external supports for organization, training, financing, and sanctuary. Both counterinsurgents in Cambodia and Vietnam received support in the form of a conventional, regular army from Vietnam and the US, respectively.</p> <p>-Difference: The revolutionaries in Vietnam received an external support in the form of a conventional, regular army (the PAVN) while the revolutionaries in Cambodia did not have such support.</p> | |
| <i>Variable 2 – Natural Sanctuary, Geography, and climate</i> | Similar | |
| <i>Variable 3 – Ethnic composition</i> | The ethnic minority groups in Cambodia and Vietnam made up less than 10 percent of the total population. | |
| <i>Variable 4 – Ethnic relations</i> | <p>-Difference: Vietnam’s southern highlanders, who straddled critical communications pathways critical to the war efforts of both sides, deeply resented Lowlander interference in their affairs. The NLF and PAVN were able to exploit this to mobilize effectively among these peoples.</p> <p>-Similarity: The fact that this difference can determine the outcome confirm the hypothesis of this dissertation, namely that the strength of the political program determines the outcome.</p> | <p>-Difference: The ethnic minority was well represented in the PRK. There was no notable grievance which pushed one ethnic minority to join any side.</p> <p>-Similarity: The fact that this difference can determine the outcome confirm the hypothesis of this dissertation, namely that the strength of the political program determines the outcome.</p> |
| <i>Variable 5 – Political Issues (social and political grievances)</i> | <p>-The counterinsurgent was not able to effectively implement its political programs mainly due to corruption.</p> <p>-The revolutionaries were able to implement their political program better than the counterinsurgent was. The revolutionaries also subverted the local government, thus further debilitating the implementation of the counterinsurgent’s political programs.</p> | <p>-The counterinsurgent and the revolutionaries both had appealing political programs.</p> <p>-The counterinsurgent was able to implement its political programs better than the revolutionaries were. The Khmer Rouge only controlled remote villages.</p> |
| <i>Variable 6 – Tactics and strategy (War Dynamic)</i> | <p>Similarity:</p> <p>-Mixed of COIN and conventional strategies</p> <p>-The guerrillas graduated in 1968</p> | <p>Similarity:</p> <p>-Mixed of COIN and conventional strategies</p> <p>-The guerrillas graduated in 1989</p> |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| <i>Variable 7 – Composition of counterinsurgent’s military forces</i> | The ratio of counterinsurgent’s conventional forces (only the ARVN, not the other branches) to territorial and militias forces was roughly equal | The ratio of the counterinsurgent’s conventional to territorial and militias forces was 1 to 3 |
| <i>Variable 8 – Military organization</i> | <p><u>Similarity:</u> Organization of the warfighting functions, combatant units and psyops units.</p> <p><u>Differences:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -No distinct position for the psyops officers and soldiers. -Psyops units focus was on special operations. -Psyops units did not have systematic geographical organization. -The ARVN considered the RF-PF as misfits. | <p><u>Similarity:</u> Organization of the warfighting functions, combatant units, and propaganda units.</p> <p><u>Differences:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Distinct position for the political officers. -Political officer focus was on mass mobilization. -Armed Propaganda Units had systematic geographic organization. -Territorial and militias troops were considered to be almost a branch of the military. |

One can always argue that two cases of revolutionary wars are never the same. This dissertation would offer, however, that while the differences always exist, the question is whether they are significant enough to have caused the different outcome. In the comparison between the Vietnam War and the Cambodian Civil War, we can see that there are four variables that can be used as controlled variables since they stay more or less the same in the two cases.

Firstly, the counterinsurgents in both Cambodia and Vietnam received supports in organizations, training, and financing from a third party intervener. They also received a regular army: the MACV in Vietnam and the Vietnamese troops in Cambodia. On the other hand, the revolutionaries in both cases received external supports in the forms of sanctuary, training, organization, and financing. The difference was the fact that the revolutionaries in Vietnam also received support in the form of a conventional army (the PAVN) while the revolutionaries in Cambodia did not.

Secondly, both cases were located in the same geographic areas. Thirdly, the ethnic composition was also similar. The ethnic relations were different in the two cases. However, this dissertation addressed this problem in another variable: the political programs. Fourthly, the counterinsurgents in both cases fought the war in almost a similar manner, which a mix of conventional and COIN tactics. The revolutionaries in both cases also graduated to the conventional level. In Vietnam, the graduation of 1968 was chosen as the case study and in Cambodia the only time it happened was in 1989.

Three other variables, however, are different: political programs, ratio of territorial forces to conventional forces, and military organization. By political program (Variable 5), this dissertation means the political program of not only the counterinsurgent but also that of the revolutionaries. The former, as status quo power, generally tries to implement political programs to solve social and political grievances. The revolutionaries, as revisionist movement, try to exploit the social and political grievances and offer a competing political program. This variable is derived from the basic tenets of the WHAM School. Yet, having good political program is not enough. One had to operationalize it and turn this advantage into military advantage. This dissertation offers Variable 7 and 8 as the two ways in which political program can be implemented and how military organization can benefit from a good political program.

From a slightly different perspective, Variable 7 is the counterinsurgent's internal force ratio, i.e. the ratio of regular forces to territorial and militia forces. But number alone rarely confers any advantage. Morale is also an important factor if the numerical superiority is to confer any advantage. Morale and numbers also depend on *how the units are organized and whether they were integrated into a unified fighting*

forces. This is where Variable 8 comes into play: a motivated populace cannot necessarily help the counterinsurgent to win the war unless they are also well organized.

2.3 Process Tracing and Historical Explanation

This dissertation hypothesizes that political program and the military organization are the independent variables that influenced the outcome of the war (or decisive campaign in that war) by providing the counterinsurgent with a numerically superior and cohesive army. Therefore, “Numerical and Morale Superiority” (which was due to the high number of troops as manifested in Variable 7) is the intervening variable.

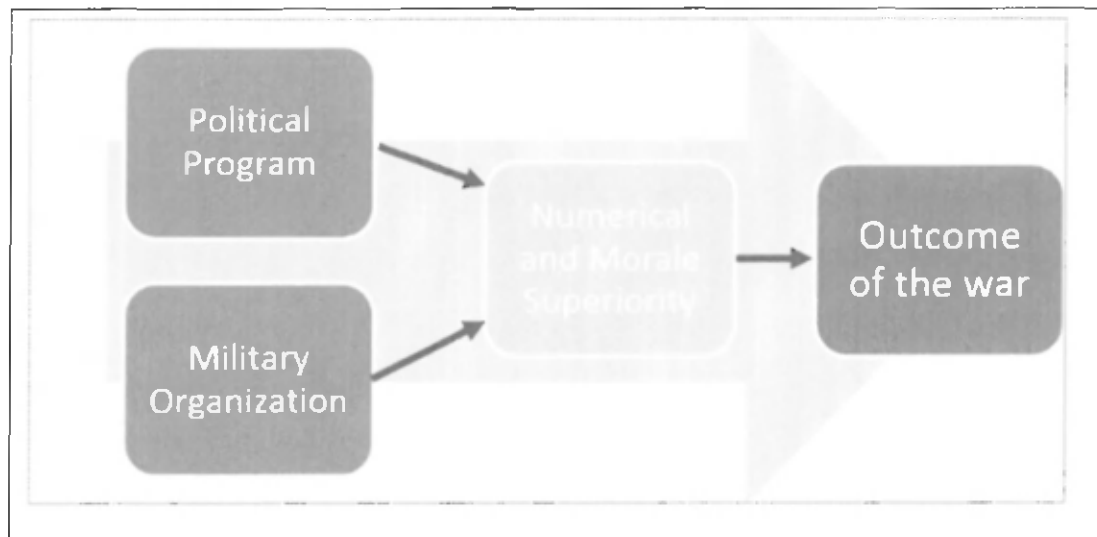


Figure 1. Hypothetical Illustration: Outcome of the War From the Counterinsurgent's Perspective.

To test this hypothesis, this dissertation will use a method called “process-tracing,” which is an attempt to discern the causal chain and causal mechanisms that link the posited independent variable and the observable dependent variable.⁶⁷ In most instances, we could observe that the independent variable and the dependent variable co-vary, but that does not necessarily mean that there is a causal connection between the two, as alternative explanations might have accounted for the differences. Process-tracing is precisely used to mitigate this problem by trying to investigate if there is a direct connection between the dependent and independent variable.⁶⁸

Moreover, process-tracing allows the researcher to test a theory by using only pertinent events instead of the whole history of a case. Consequently, one variant of the process-tracing technique, called “analytic explanation,” requires the formulation of one or more hypotheses where the researcher draws observable implications as well as matching those implications with what was actually happening in a case.⁶⁹

In the hypothetical formulation in the previous section (Figure 1), this dissertation speculates (pending further investigation in subsequent chapters) that political program and military organization could help the counterinsurgent win the war through the establishment of a force that is superior to the guerrilla in both number and morale. To win in a revolutionary war context, the counterinsurgent must deal with the hybrid military threat presented by the revolutionaries.⁷⁰ Having a military that is strong both in number and in morale is hypothesized as precisely the solution to this hybrid threat.

This dissertation hypothesizes that one way to deal with guerrilla threat is through popular mobilization. This, in turn, requires an effective implementation of the political programs (i.e. aimed at addressing the grievances). By doing this, the

government could sap the strength from the revolutionaries who rely on mobilizing the population against it (the government). If a belligerent can secure the allegiance of the people, he would receive a lot of benefits including, but not limited to, governance, tax collection, intelligence, and participation in the army. Given the current state of the evidence, there is no systematic data on how a belligerent gained intelligence or tax collection from the villages that it controlled. The only clear data that is available, however, is the popular participation in the army and the morale of the soldiers (professional soldiers and militias). This dissertation measures the effective implementation of a political program through voluntary, popular participation in the armed forces.

While the revolutionary's main goal should be popular mobilization and the conduct of a hybrid war in different stages, sometimes circumstances and the availability of external support could push it to adopt conventional warfare as well. In the context of a sudden onset of conventional war, effective implementation of the political program alone is not enough. The government must also deal with that conventional threat. This means that, in addition to effective implementation of the political program, the government must have a good military organization which would hold its army together in the face of conventional attack.

In order to win, this dissertation hypothesizes that the government needs to have two things: effective implementation of the political programs and good military organization.⁷¹ The model is very intuitive: first, we must raise an army and second, we must organize them. These are the two independent variables. If the government can do this, it will be able to overwhelm its opponent with an army that has two characteristics. First, that army would be big and second, it would have high morale.

Therefore, a large, high-morale army is the intervening variable in the hypothesis presented in this dissertation.

One particular issue in this hypothesis is the nature of morale and its measurement. Morale is important for the counterinsurgent during both the guerrilla and conventional stage. Morale here is defined as simply the strength of the belief in a cause. High morale leads people to be willing to serve in the military and put their lives in danger in pursuit of certain political (or personal-preservation) goals. This dissertation further hypothesizes that morale could be created and enhanced by indoctrination. An effective indoctrination program, in turn, counts as part of an effective implementation of the political program. Furthermore, the military organization should have some mechanism that maintains an indoctrination program in order to sustain morale. If the implementation of the political program is strong and there is high morale and a high number of recruits, then it is likely that indoctrination leads to military strength.

Another related issue is the measurement of morale. By definition, a high-morale military unit is the one that has relatively less desertion than a low-morale army. This dissertation measures morale of an army by “wholesale desertion,” meaning desertion to the point where the unit can no longer function effectively in combat. Two points are noteworthy. Firstly, all military units will certainly suffer some degree of desertion in war. A wholesale desertion, however, is a clear sign that morale has become a critical problem in that unit. Second, and related to the first point, in both the Vietnam case and the Cambodian case, there was no precise data on desertion, which makes it extremely difficult to measure morale beyond subjective judgment of the degree of desertion. Therefore, in the chapters that follow, morale is

measured by the degree of desertion of each army. That degree, in turn, will be subjectively assessed based on the existing anecdotal data from authoritative sources.

From this hypothesis, we can construct major guiding questions for the cases study as follow:

1. What were the political programs of the counterinsurgents in both cases?
2. Were they effectively implemented to attract the majority of the population?
3. What was the nature of indoctrination of the counterinsurgent's military?

Were indoctrination programs regular and systematic?

4. How did the counterinsurgents in both cases organize their military? What were the roles of the external supports?

5. Were the revolutionaries well organized? What were the roles of the external supports?

6. What was the degree of desertion of the counterinsurgent's military? Was there any "wholesale" desertion (e.g. a rout)?

7. What was the role of the territorial forces in relations to the conventional forces? Given the difference of the counterinsurgent's internal force ratio (between regular forces and the paramilitary forces), did the territorial and militia forces affect the outcome of the war? Was there any connection between political program and their commitment?

Nevertheless, George and Bennett cautioned that there are two limits to using process-tracing.⁷² Firstly, the causal links must be direct and uninterrupted between the independent, intervening, and dependent variables. This first limit is somewhat linked to the second one, namely that the alternative explanations or alternative hypothesis will threaten to unravel the theory. The last chapter will attempt to mitigate

this problem by considering various alternative explanation that might have accounted for the outcome.

¹ The list is by no means exhaustive, but these are the most prominent variables in the literature. It is true that not all of these variables have been decisively proven to be the real causes explaining the outcome of the war. But for our purposes, the "potential" causes will suffice for the analysis because we are not looking to prove or disprove all of them. What we are looking for here are the factors that vary and those that do not between the two cases so that we can apply the most similar research design.

² Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 30-42.

³ Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 15.

⁴ Sak Sutsakhan, *The Khmer Republic and the Final Collapse* (Washington, DC: US Army Center for Military History, 1980), 59-65.

⁵ Fulghum et al., eds. *South Vietnam on Trial*, 70-71.

⁶ Sorley argued that the operation was a success in the sense that the ARVN had reached its objective in the village of Tchepone which was reportedly a large PAVN's supply depot. See Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1999), 259-260. Fulghum et al., on the other hand, argued that the operation was a disaster because nothing significant was found in Tchepone: the ARVN only reached the location to claim victory. Moreover, all the ARVN's fire bases and the rear of the formation were virtually wiped out by the PAVN even before the ARVN had reached its objective. It was here that the image of an ARVN soldier hanging on to the helicopter skid as it returned to Vietnam showed how hopeless the war had become. See Fulghum et al., eds, *South Vietnam on Trial*, 90-91.

⁷ Nayan Chanda, *Brother Enemy: The War after the War* (New York: Collier, 1988), 320-325.

⁸ Nicolas Régnaud, *Cambodge dans la Tourmente: Le Troisième Conflit Indochinois 1978-1991* (Paris: Harmattan, 1992), 45-60.

⁹ Kenneth Conboy, *The Cambodian Wars: Clashing Armies and CIA Covert Operations* (Modern War Studies, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2013), 271-272.

¹⁰ The years 1983 and 1984 were marked by the PAVN's offensive on the refugee camps controlled by the guerrillas. For discussion of such operations, see John McBeth, "The Border Erupts: Vietnam's Bloody Dry-Season Offensive Spills into Thailand," *Far East Economic Review*, 14 April 1983.

¹¹ During the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and their handful of followers could find sanctuaries in the Sierra Maestra Mountains, escaping the authorities while building popular support. They eventually succeeded. Che tried to export that method to Africa and finally in the Bolivian wilderness with little popular support. Che and his followers lost the war of attrition with the Bolivian authorities, and Che himself was caught and killed. In Algeria, when the French applied their brutal

COIN tactics, the guerilla cells in the urban centers were subdued, but sections in the Kabylie Mountains still survived. All in all, while not determinant, the effects of nature cannot be discounted. A guerilla who has a jungle in his backyard probably has a higher chance of survival than the one that has nothing but barren desert. Paret et al., *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 815-862.

¹² McLeod, "Indigenous Peoples," 355.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 356n7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 355n6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 357.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 357n12.

¹⁷ Barber, *War of the Running Dogs*, 15-19.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁰ Odd Anne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge, eds., *The Third Indochina War: Conflict Between China, Vietnam, and Cambodia, 1972-79* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 207-209.

²¹ Ben Kiernan, "The Survival of Cambodia's Ethnic Minorities," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1990). Accessed: 30 October 2013, <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/ourpublications/csqa/article/the-survival-cambodias-ethnic-minorities>.

²² Marie Alexandrine Martin, *Cambodia: A Shattered Society*, trans. Mark W. McLeod (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 177.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Kiernan, "The Survival of Cambodia's Ethnic Minorities."

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Ysa Osman, *The Cham Rebellion: Survivors' Stories from the Villages* (Phnom Penh, Cambodia: The Documentation Center of Cambodia, Documentation Series 9, 2006), 3-5.

²⁷ Kiernan, "The Survival of Cambodia's Ethnic Minorities."

²⁸ Quoted in "Minorities in Cambodia", a report by Minority Rights Group International, 1995. Accessed: 15 October 2013, <http://www.minorityrights.org/3415/cambodia/khmer-leou.html>.

²⁹ Justin Corfield, *The History of Cambodia* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2009), 93.

³⁰ McLeod. "Indigenous Peoples," 382.

³¹ Mao, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, 6.

³² Race showed that the Diem government constantly applied pressure on the communist cadres in the countryside in Long An province. They faced severe hardship, but most cadres still adhered to the party line. See Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 97-104.

³³ Lichbach. "What Makes Rational Peasants Revolutionary," 406-407.

³⁴ See for example, Paul Shemella, ed., *Fighting Back: What Governments Can Do About Terrorism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Security Studies, 2011), 11-26.

³⁵ Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 88-91.

³⁶ David Hunt. *Vietnam's Southern Revolution: From Peasant Insurrection to Total War, 1959-1968* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 10-28.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 74-78.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 150-151.

³⁹ See Race. *War Comes to Long An*, 60, and Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 219.

⁴⁰ The current literature on the casualties of the Khmer Rouge regime failed to find a consensus. Estimates vary between 700,000 to 3 million, mostly due to extrapolation and double counting errors. Michael Vickery put the number at 740,800 deaths. See Michael Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982* (Thailand: Silkworm Books, 1999), 187. Ben Kiernan, on the other hand, puts the number at 1,671,000 deaths. See Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 458. The PRK, on the other hand, always maintained the death toll of the Pol Pot regime was approximately 3 million. See Slocomb, *The People's Republic of Kampuchea*, 302n4.

⁴¹ Prince Sihanouk's interview with Peter Schier in 1984. See Peter Schier. "An Interview with Prince Norodom Sihanouk, 1st December, 1983." *SUDOSTASIEN aktuell*, January 1984, 84-90.

⁴² Nhem, *The Khmer Rouge*, 108.

⁴³ Chapter 3 will discuss the implementation of the RVN's political program while chapter 4 and 5 will discuss how the PRK implemented its political programs in Cambodia.

⁴⁴ The conclusion section of chapter 3 will discuss how the nature of the third party intervener in Vietnam changed over time and how that affected the war.

⁴⁵ Bernard Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002), 486.

⁴⁶ Although the term might appear redundant, it helps us distinguish the pacification that was applied in Algeria, Malaya, and Vietnam, and the pacification that was considered as effective in the literature.

⁴⁷ See for example, Williamson Murray and Peter Mansoor, eds., *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), and Paul Brister, William Natter III, and Robert Tomes, eds., *Hybrid Warfare and Transnational Threats: Perspectives for an Era of Persistent Conflict* (New York: CESNA, 2011).

⁴⁸ William Duiker, *Sacred War: Nationalism and Revolution in a Divided Vietnam* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 110-116.

⁴⁹ Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 97-104.

⁵⁰ Duiker, *Sacred War*, 120-126.

⁵¹ Mark Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: The CIA's Secret Campaign to Destroy the Viet Cong*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 243.

⁵² Fulghum et al., eds., *South Vietnam on Trial*, 142-145.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁵⁴ Chapter 5 will discuss this issue in detail.

⁵⁵ The graduation devastated the ARVN units but was later crushed by American air power. Once the US military escalated in 1965, such war became impossible, until 1968. See Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*.

⁵⁶ Hunt, *Vietnam's Southern Revolution*, 215.

⁵⁷ The ARVN and its auxiliary forces also received political training, but the indoctrination was inconsistent and irregular. On the other hand, in Cambodia, the indoctrination was systematic, facilitated by the institution of the political commander. Chapter 3 will discuss the indoctrination of the ARVN and its auxiliaries while chapter 5 will discuss the issue of indoctrination and how its effects can be observed.

⁵⁸ One caveat in the number comparison is the number of police personnel, which could be counted as part of the COIN efforts as well. But in the Vietnam War and the Cambodian Civil War, the police force was not one of the priorities. Both sides focused on military and paramilitary forces. Although the PRK started using police units in the war after 1989, the bulk of these forces acted as special force units at the village level, and only one conventional-type police unit had been involved in conventional operations in Kampong Thom province in 1990-91. Usually viewed by foreign media as a case of security force asserting itself in the affairs of the state, the performance of that police unit in Kampong Thom was less than impressive. This dissertation will exclude the police force as a critical variable and will only mention it in passing.

⁵⁹ Spencer Tucker, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military History* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clío, 2011), 1266.

⁶⁰ The estimate is that of a former deputy chief of staff of the KPRA. See វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាតំបន់ ៥ [History of Military Region 5] (ភ្នំពេញ, កម្ពុជា: អគ្គនាយកដ្ឋានយោធាយុទ្ធសាស្ត្រនយោបាយ, ក្រសួងការពារជាតិ, ភ្នំពេញ) [Phnom Penh, Cambodia: General Department of Policy and Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Defense, 2013]), 48. The number roughly corresponds to the estimate of western scholars. Westad and Quinn-Judge, for example, put the number of regular troops at 100,000 and the militias at 200,000; both numbers are for 1989. See Westad and Quinn-Judge, eds., *The Third Indochina War*, 219.

⁶¹ A third force may also play a role in the difference of the force design of the two counterinsurgent forces: the perception of threat. In the Vietnam War, one can argue that the threat was perceived by the ARVN and the American forces to be conventional in nature due to the presence of the PAVN. Thus, the ARVN was built as a conventional army. In the Cambodian Civil War, on the other hand, the rebels could never muster a conventional force that could fight with the same tenacity as the PAVN did in Vietnam. Therefore, one can argue that because the counterinsurgent perceived no conventional threat in Cambodia, its forces were designed as a hybrid army.

⁶² Douglas Pike, *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1986), 212-232.

⁶³ We shall see how the two systems differ and how that difference is the key to success and failure in COIN. The study of the Socialist system will inevitably require at least a brief mention of the socialist political system and beliefs. It should be noted that this dissertation intends to study the military aspects of the socialist system and this dissertation will not attempt to delve deeper than necessary into the socialist ideology nor will it attempt to make a value judgment as to what political ideology or system is the best. This is a work of military history, and the dissertation will strictly adhere to this principle.

⁶⁴ Davidson, *Vietnam at War*, 352-357.

⁶⁵ The official army's newspaper of the PRK. It appeared weekly and ran from 1979 to 1992.

⁶⁶ Fulghum et al., eds., *South Vietnam on Trial*, 50-64.

⁶⁷ George and Bennett, *Case Studies*, 206.

⁶⁸ Or alternatively known as degree of freedom problem. *Ibid.*, 207.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁷⁰ In this context, hybrid military threat is simply defined as a combination of guerrilla and conventional threat.

⁷¹ Good military organization here is defined simply as an organization that can hold an army together to face the conventional threat of the revolutionaries. This dissertation does not hypothesize about the detailed nature of such organization beyond this general definition, i.e. prevent large-scale desertion in the face of attack. Specific judgment on the Vietnam case will be conducted in chapter 3 while the judgment of the Cambodian counterinsurgent's military will be discussed in chapter 4 and 5.

⁷² George and Bennett, *Case Studies*, 222.

Chapter 3

THE VIETNAM WAR: REVOLUTIONARY WAR, HYBRID WAR

It is not very easy to describe in details in a short space and time a topic as controversial and as complex as the Vietnam War. To some extent, when one talks about the Vietnam War, one is also obliged to talk about related events in Cambodia and Laos, a comprehensive enterprise to study a larger event called the Second Indochina Conflict. In this section, instead of taking this enormous endeavor, the dissertation will trace the political and military history of the Vietnam War from the end of the First Indochina Conflict to the Tet Offensive of 1968. In line with the hypothesis that was developed in the previous chapter, this chapter asks two questions: what was the political program of the counterinsurgent? Did it implement those program successfully? How was its military organized?

3.1 Political Context

3.1.1 Birth of a Revolution

After repeated frustrations with the elusive Viet Minh (from the Vietnamese word *Việt Nam Độc Lập Đồng Minh Hội*, or in English "League for the Independence of Vietnam"), the French decided to mass their troops in a remote area near the village of Dien Bien Phu in 1954 in an attempt to lure the Viet Minh into the area and then destroy them with their superior firepower. The plan did not work as intended when the Viet Minh cut off all land-based supplies routes to the base and the French eventually had to surrender when almost all of the combat outposts and fire bases

either exhausted their ammunition or were overrun.¹ The Geneva Conference convened later the same year called for a ceasefire with a temporary demarcation line around the 17th parallel beyond which the forces of both sides had to regroup to either north or south. In reality, however, as time went by, people tended to go back and forth in anticipation of future hostility.² The conference established an International Control Commission to oversee this re-grouping, although they almost had no power to enforce.

When the French came to Vietnam in the 19th century, what they found was a feudal society where the many of the farmers who worked on the land did not own it and those who did were in chronic debts. William Duiker accepted an estimate that as late as in the 1950s in South Vietnam, less than 1 percent of the total population owned over half of the entire cultivated land.³

Land issue was one reason that allowed the revolutionaries to attract many people. It was neither propaganda nor communist ideology that allowed them to recruit massive number of people, but it was because the revolutionaries succeeded in relating these activities and values to the land issue. Race argued that at least in Long An, the peasants lived at almost a level below subsistence and they had to rely on chronic debts to the landlords.⁴ As such, the peasants were more numerous, but the system forced them to live at the mercy of the landlords.⁵ When the Viet Minh came, it persecuted a large majority of the landlords (some decided to co-opt with the communists) and then distributed the land to the poor peasants. However, the rejoicing was short-lived as the Geneva Conference forced many, if not all, Viet Minh fighters to regroup to the north. The landlord returned and re-established the system that

prevailed under the French rule.⁶ To the poor peasants who benefited from the Viet Minh's land redistribution, this did not sit well.

Beyond the land issue, ethnic animosity between the lowland Vietnamese and the highland tribesmen was another major issue that the RVN found it hard to cope with.⁷ The US-sponsored CIDG program which sought to include the indigenous people into the Vietnamese military was one factor which prevented this problem from getting worse.⁸ Compounding these two problems was the corruption of the local officials which continued to plague the RVN's performance throughout the war.⁹

The rise of Ngo Dinh Diem as the president of the RVN did not help in resolving these problems. Diem came from an upper class family, and to make matters worse he was indifferent towards the peasant's plight. He was also a Catholic in a country that was predominantly Buddhist (the Catholics counted for around one million or only 7 percent of the population of the RVN in the 1950s).¹⁰ Moreover, Diem was not interested in dealing with problems using peaceful means, especially if the problems involved threats to his authority. With the help of his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, Diem had many successes in suppressing the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects in the Mekong Delta area.¹¹ This perhaps led to the belief that violence worked, and the poor peasants' revolts must have been just another proverbial bump on the road. In addition, the landlords remains a strong support base for Diem.

While Diem's performance was dismal, he did have a very appealing political program. *Diem had tried* to build a viable and independent non-communist alternative to the DRV.¹² However, the fact that he ran the state as autocrat and functioned like a police state essentially defeated many implementations of such policies. The

implementation of the political program was short-lived, and the effects were eventually cancelled out by the corruption of local officials.

Diem's government failed to solve several crucial governance problems (ineffective local officials, brutality, corruption, minority relations, and land issues). The first problem was the difficult relationship between the RVN and the minority tribes. This issue will be discussed below in the section on the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG). The second problem was the brutality of Diem's government in dealing with the population. In the early period of the founding of the RVN, Diem had used violence to repress private armies and paramilitary groups (such as those belonging to the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects and the Binh Xuyen gangs) that were threatening the unity of the RVN. This enabled him to further extend his power in the countryside.¹³ When this power stabilized, however, Diem did not stop the violence.

In April 1960, for example, a number of politicians issued a "Caravelle Manifesto" which called for the guarantee of minimum civil rights for the population in the hope that the people would feel they were fighting for their rights.¹⁴ But these politicians were all jailed and Diem continued to tighten his grip, which extended into the military as well.¹⁵ The repression continued even with the launching of the Agrovillage program and its successor, the Strategic Hamlet program, which were supposed to guarantee security for the people. According to Lewy, there were usually attacks by the RVN on areas that were inaccessible to the government forces in order to push the people into government-controlled areas.¹⁶ The local officials were somewhat indifferent towards the people's suffering because, according to Kahin, most local officials that Diem appointed were Catholics who left the northern part of

Vietnam after the DRV was proclaimed and who had little prior interactions with the people in the RVN.¹⁷

The problem seemed to worsen after the American intervention. When the US escalated the war in 1965, it often practiced “search-and destroy” tactics which were devastating for civilians who were caught in the cross-fire between the US military and the PLAF or PAVN.¹⁸ Lewy noted that until late 1968, the uncodified policy regarding the population was one of forced relocation and crop destruction to push the people out of the enemy’s (revolutionary) controlled areas.¹⁹ By the end of 1967, the number of refugees had reached close to one million, and Lewy noted that there was a correlation between this number and the level of military activity.²⁰

The RVN did pay attention to lenient counterinsurgency tactics such as amnesty and a reward program for returnees to areas of RVN control. However, corruption among RVN officials eventually sabotaged the programs. Lewy noted a program called Chieu Hoi (Open Arm), which distributed rewards to those who returned to the RVN.²¹ From its inception in 1963 to 1967, the program was estimated to have attracted 75,000 revolutionaries and PAVN soldiers to rally to the RVN.²² Later in 1967, substantial rewards were given to those who could lead the RVN to the revolutionaries’ ammunition caches, or who could induce the revolutionaries to return to the RVN.²³ According to Lewy, this so-called Third Party Inducement program increased the number of ralliers by 30,000 between 1968 and 1969.²⁴

Nevertheless, because substantial monetary rewards were involved, it was the corruption of the RVN officials that disrupted these programs. American advisors later discovered that the amnesty and rewards programs had become big money-making businesses and most of the money (which was provided by the US) actually went to

RVN officials and soldiers who brought in fake ralliers.²⁵ According to some estimates, as many as one half of all the ralliers were revolutionary-pretenders, and the American advisors discovered these fake ralliers in the thousands.²⁶

Moreover, it was also the ineffectiveness of local officials and the RVN's bureaucracy which undermined Diem's effort to implement the land reform program. According to Kahin, after the Geneva Conference, Diem leaned toward supporting the landlords in reprocessing the land, which the Viet Minh had redistributed to the peasants.²⁷ Diem did impose a limit of 25% maximum rent that the landlord could charge the peasants, but Kahin believed that such leniency still cannot be compared with the Viet Minh's policy of free land redistribution.²⁸ Furthermore, the courts that were established to settle such disputes were dominated by landlords and RVN officials who were biased in favor of the landlords, while the minister of agrarian affairs was himself one of the biggest landlords in the RVN.²⁹

In 1958, the US pressured Diem to implement further reform by imposing a maximum limit on the land that a landlord could own and redistributing the excess to the peasants.³⁰ Nevertheless, Kahin noted that the limit was 284 acres in regions where land was fertile while the peasants still had to pay in full for the excess land that they could to buy.³¹ Kahin estimated that only about 10 percent of the more than one million tenant households had obtained title to land.³² This is actually an improvement on Duiker's estimate that less than 1 percent of the people owned cultivated land in the 1950s.³³ Whether or not this improvement could defeat the Viet Minh's policy of free land redistribution is another matter.

Kahin, however, concluded that *the reforms were not very effective in stopping the revolutionary potential in the RVN while other unsolved problems intensified this*

potential. For example, he noted that the southern revolutionaries had actually carried out assassinations and adopted terror tactics against RVN officials even before Hanoi gave instructions.³⁴ Finally, Kahin noted that the southern revolutionaries carried out their own military campaign even without Hanoi's support in what he called the Ben Tre uprising where a battalion-size force of the "Liberation Army" had overrun the position of a regimental-size ARVN garrison on 25 January 1960.³⁵

This failure of the Diem's regime to implement reform programs had a major consequence, namely the continued suffering of the people, thus creating revolutionary potential in the RVN.³⁶ The peasants who had better experience with the Viet Minh and who did not intend to lose their chance of having their own land fought back. But the revolts in the 1950s did not receive full support from Hanoi. Hunt and Race shared a similar belief that the Politburo in Hanoi did not agree among themselves as to the direction to take in the RVN, i.e. between political and military struggle.³⁷ The causes of this indecisiveness ranged from the unclear promise of support from Beijing and Moscow to the worry about the maturity of the revolutionary fervor in the South. Giap, for example, reflecting on the first failed revolt against the French, wrote that, if not careful, the Southern revolution might risk being destroyed prematurely.³⁸ The Politburo called for political struggle, but in reality, it seemed more like indecision. Several events in the RVN forced Hanoi's hand, however.

Firstly, even though after the Geneva Conference the RVN cancelled the Viet Minh's land redistribution, the RVN did have a land reform program of its own. For example, it tried to impose some financial burdens on the landlords who did not use their land. The latter had to lend out their land at an affordable price to farmers who did not have land. But the landlords could always find the loopholes and combined

with a lack of enforcement, the land reform program was almost totally ineffective. A persistent land problem, at least according to Hanoi, would give the South a revolutionary potential.³⁹

This revolutionary potential was both an opportunity and a problem for Hanoi. On the one hand, Hanoi hesitated to provide significant help out of fear that a violent revolution was premature. But the Southern farmers already organized themselves, albeit not in a very sophisticated manner, as small movements in many provinces in South Vietnam. They were willing to carry out armed insurrection. As a result, Hanoi's inaction could either estrange these local movements, or they could be under a leadership that might not necessarily serve Hanoi's agendas. In other words, Hanoi had to act or risked losing influence over the Southern revolution.⁴⁰

Secondly, Hanoi's actions must be swift and timely because the Southern revolutionaries were either prepared to go their own ways or risked being crushed by the authority, neither of which was desirable for Hanoi. The agitations in the South had been going on since 1959 in many different places in a haphazard way in the absence of Hanoi's instructions. Diem responded to the uprising with both reforms as well as heavy-handed measures, most notably the Law 10/59 in October 1959, which gave more power to the security forces to suppress the peasant revolts. This created quite a hardship for the peasants.⁴¹

Thus, since 1959, local revolutionaries were prepared to go their own way if the North still did not lend support. Under such circumstances, Hanoi had no choice but to act. And that also explained why the local revolts had been going on since 1959 but Hanoi's instructions came only in 1960. Hunt argued that while Hanoi created the

term “concerted uprising” in an attempt to take credit for the revolution in the South, the Southern uprising was still an indigenous phenomenon.⁴²

Thus, starting in late 1959 and early 1960, the Workers Party of Vietnam (or commonly known as Lao Dong Party) began to advocate armed struggle in tandem with political struggle and they planned for a “concerted uprising” or “spontaneous uprising” sometimes in 1960, preferably during the anniversary of the Geneva Conference.⁴³ Like Hunt, Race concluded that the concerted uprising was an attempt by Hanoi to unify the Southern revolutionary (most of whom acted independently) under its command. To lead this joint effort, Hanoi created the National Liberation Front (NLF) on 20 December 1960 and the armed wing, the People’s Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF), also contemptuously known as Viet Cong, in January 1961.⁴⁴ But some scholars emphasized that despite Hanoi’s directions, the revolution remained a Southern effort. For example, the local guerrillas, at least in the Mekong Delta area, called the movement “Front” or “Liberation Front” instead of “National” Liberation Front as advocated by Hanoi.⁴⁵

In summary, the Diem regime did not resolve the land issue and that was the main impetus for indigenous Southern revolution in the late 1950s. Incompetent and corrupted local officials were also the reasons why the peasants decided to take up arms.⁴⁶ Hanoi did not create the revolution, it only gave ideology, i.e. a sense of purpose, and an organization to lead a movement that was born out of local grievances, especially the land issue. Meanwhile, the communists also made contact with the indigenous peoples who also suffered from Diem’s repression and recruited these people into the insurgency.

In an attempt to counter this burgeoning insurgency, Diem had tried to use nationalism as an ideology to attract popular support. Nationalism used to be the Viet Minh ideology. The circumstances, such as the French denial of genuine Vietnamese demand for independence, allowed the communists to make a claim for nationalism.⁴⁷ Tuong Vu noted that this claim was backed up by a combination of good leadership, violence, and some luck. The scholars on Vietnamese nationalism refused to accept that the communists in Hanoi held the status of the nationalist movement. But this attitude changed in the late 1960s as the RVN lost that status.⁴⁸ Diem's repression was then linked with American support, which eventually defeated the nationalist image of the RVN.

Similarly, Jeffrey Race observed in his study of the southern insurgency that the Saigon government, not the insurgency, was the side that really employed a nationalist approach in its quest for rural support.⁴⁹ This is perhaps another reason which explained the success of the NLF. According to Lichbach, the ideology that attracted the peasants most is the one that affected the everyday life of the peasants rather than nationalistic ideals.⁵⁰ But even in the area of nationalism, the RVN did not succeed.

In summary, even though the presence of the PAVN in the South helped the insurgency, these forces would have to operate with difficulty without the support of local movements. William Duiker aptly described this symbiotic relationship in an often-quoted formulation: "the insurgency was a genuine revolt based in the South, but it was organized and directed from the North."⁵¹ So it was a combination of grievances, ethnic animosity, and incompetent and corrupted local officials, and

Hanoi's organizational and ideological support that made the PLAF and PAVN so strong. Meanwhile, the RVN was in crisis.

3.1.2 The RVN in the Abyss and the NLF's "Golden Period"

Despite some strange twists (which we shall discuss below), Diem and Westmoreland could be said to be the advocates of COIN warfare, at least in the beginning. Two sources exposed Diem to COIN: the arrival of Sir Robert Thompson and William Colby, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) station chief in South Vietnam. Both had experiences and knowledge of COIN, however controversial it might have been. But things never went as planned. William Colby, the head of the CIA station in the RVN in the late 1950s and early 1960s saw the war as a revolutionary war and sent many books on COIN to Ngo Dinh Nhu, Diem's brother, thought to be the man behind the throne, in the hope that Nhu would be a better strategist.⁵² Ironically, that made Nhu believe in himself as the *only* COIN expert in Vietnam and prevented the reception of new ideas or criticism.⁵³ Certainly, that stubbornness was a source of friction between the US and the Diem's government later on.

Coincidentally, this happened around the time of Sir Robert Thompson's arrival. Thompson proposed to Diem the concept of strategic hamlet as the proven COIN tactic, a tactic which called for forced relocations of the population, a precedence to the search-and-destroy tactics which added the application of force to this disruptive tactic.⁵⁴ Two notable COIN tactics that Diem employed were the *Agroville program and the Strategic Hamlet program*. The two programs followed essentially the same premises.

Faced with increasing communist pressures in the countryside, the RVN under Diem inaugurated the Agrovillage program (shortening of the French term meaning agricultural village) in mid-1959.⁵⁵ The program was based on the concept of population security. However, the security was thought to be achieved through forced relocation of the rural population into a single locality which should facilitate defenses. The measure, however, took away the people from their ancestral graves which they revered and therefore was met with much discontent.⁵⁶ Moreover, while the people could find safety within the confine of this Agrovillage, they still needed to go out into the field to work on the farm and rice paddies. As a result, the RVN still could not totally eliminate the NLF's influence.

Diem envisioned the Agrovillage as a place where several thousand villagers would reside and get all the amenities for a good life such as water, electricity, and health care. Nevertheless, the corruption of local officials made life even worse than in the villages, effectively turning the Agrovillage into something more like "concentration camps" than ideal villages.⁵⁷ To make matters even worse, there was no adequate security forces to protect those Agrovillages, and those that did man their posts came under constant harassing attack from the insurgents.⁵⁸ The program failed shortly after it was implemented. According to one estimate, the RVN constructed fewer than 20 Agrovillages, and those that were in operations were in ruin within months.⁵⁹

The Agrovillage program's collapse coincided with the arrival of Sir Robert Thompson whom many considered the architect of COIN during the Malayan Emergency. Thompson applied what he did in Malaya where the Chinese squatters and the local populations were relocated to fortified villages to cut off the contact between the guerrillas and the local population. Perhaps because of the belief that this

was the reason for success in Malaya and perhaps because the concept was not very different from the Agroville concept, Diem accepted and implemented the Strategic Hamlet program in 1961.

In order to ensure success, Nhu put a lot of pressure on the local officials who had no choice but to falsify the number to show progress. In some cases, they simply erected a fence around the hamlet and reported it as a strategic hamlet.⁶⁰ While the program produced little results, it did create a lot of refugees due to forced relocations. Even Sir Robert Thompson shied away from praising the program and the US military, the Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) criticized the program for putting the security forces on the static defensive position.⁶¹ But Diem remained inflexible. The Strategic Hamlet program began to lose momentum soon after and it completely fell apart in the wake of the anti-Diem coup in 1963.

The failed pacification program, Diem's inflexibility and apathy towards American concerns, and the continued violent crackdown on oppositions and critics created a rift between the US and the RVN under Diem. The US was drawn to an acquiescence, if not outright support, of a coup against Diem. Nhu's heavy-handed approach when implementing Diem's policies created a lot of enemies, and it was not hard to find the ARVN's senior officers who were willing to carry out a coup against them. On 1 November 1963, the coup broke out, and Diem and his brother were killed the next day. General Duong Van Minh became the Chairman of the Military Revolutionary Council of the RVN. American advisors reported that there was an "upsurge of cooperativeness" between the ARVN and the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) in the wake of the coup.⁶²

Nevertheless, the coming of the new government did not resolve the key problem in the countryside. In addition to the corruption of local officials, the constant instability in Saigon destroyed almost all of the capable ones. In 1964 alone, there were three coups, and since the 1960 coup attempt, each episode brought a large-scale purge of local officials who could not prove their loyalty to the regime, regardless of their effectiveness.⁶³ As a result, the NLF operated in an almost uncontested environment in the countryside. During this period, the village notables, the landlords, the local officials, police, and even the often-praised Self-Defense Corpsmen and Civil Guardsmen (who later evolved into the Regional and Popular Forces, respectively, or RF-PF for short) all had to escape to the provincial or district capitals.⁶⁴ David Hunt called this the “golden period” for the NLF.⁶⁵

3.2 Military Organization

3.2.1 Regular Force: Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN)

The story of the ARVN began in November 1949 as the French signed an agreement with the Vietnamese ex-emperor Bao Dai to create the Vietnamese National Army (VNA) to fight against the communists.⁶⁶ The plan was to raise four divisions, but it was completed only by the end of the war in 1954. Since its inception, the VNA was plagued with problems. At the heart of the issue was the reason why it should fight. The government was perceived to be under French influence.⁶⁷ The French also played a part in creating the deficiency in the VNA as they turned over only outdated equipment from World War II to the VNA. Moreover, as a colonial army, France led the VNA with its own officers and non-commissioned officers, which left the VNA with very few able leaders.⁶⁸ The new, Vietnamese officer corps

which came to replace the French were mostly Catholic and came from the upper class of society while the soldiers were largely Buddhist and came from less advantaged backgrounds.⁶⁹

This contrasted significantly from the DRV, where the PAVN gradually became a modern army by the time of the decisive battle at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Started during World War II in the fight against the Japanese, in 1944 the Viet Minh established the first “armed propaganda team” led by Vo Nguyen Giap. With the first infantry division established in 1949, the PAVN eventually would reach a strength of six divisions in 1954.⁷⁰ Moreover, the DRV advanced the policy of free land redistribution throughout Vietnam, which was in contrast to the landlord-based system that prevailed under the French and Bao Dai. Even during the siege of Dien Bien Phu, the local irregulars made up of peasants fought as hard as the regular divisions and provided many essential combat supports and sustainment.⁷¹

The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) was established in 1955 as the French left Indochina. As the heir of the VNA, the ARVN would have been decisively defeated by the PAVN had it not been for the assistance from the United States. The ARVN began reorganization with the support of the MAAG in the late 1950s. At its peak, the RVN’s military numbered around one million troops with the army (ARVN) numbering around 400,000 in 1968.⁷² The armed forces were organized into four echelons, although the first echelon (regular army and air force) received more attention. The second echelon was the regional forces. The third echelon was the paramilitary units at the local level and the fourth echelon was the Vietnamese forces embedded in American units (the Combined Actions Platoon and the Civilian Irregular Defense Group). We shall return to these last two echelons in the next section.

The ARVN was organized into thirteen divisions, seven ranger groups, and other independent elite battalions, regiments, and support units.⁷³ The first and second echelons were closely related. In the second echelon, the military administration more or less followed the civilian administrations. In general, the military units of several provinces were organized into a military region. By the time the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) came into effect, the combined garrison in several provinces was called Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ) but it did function as military region. There were four CTZs in Vietnam (please refer to Map 3. Vietnam Corps Tactical Zones). The conventional units were then arrayed in various CTZs.⁷⁴

It was these units and commands who played a major part in the war and received most attention from MACV. But problems that plagued the VNA continued to cause problems for the ARVN. The problems were numerous: corruptions, failed conscription policy, patronage and nepotism, lack of capable senior leadership, and flawed tactical and operational doctrine. Corruption was a major problem that hindered the functioning of the ARVN as a modern army. This problem was an extension of the conscription system and the patronage system implemented by Diem. Because Diem was a Catholic, most of the officer corps were also Catholic, especially the senior officers, while the majority of the soldiers were Buddhists. Lewy speculated that this fact prevented the officers from understanding the livelihood of their soldiers.⁷⁵ Moreover, they preferred staff positions and jobs at command headquarter instead of battlefield-related jobs.

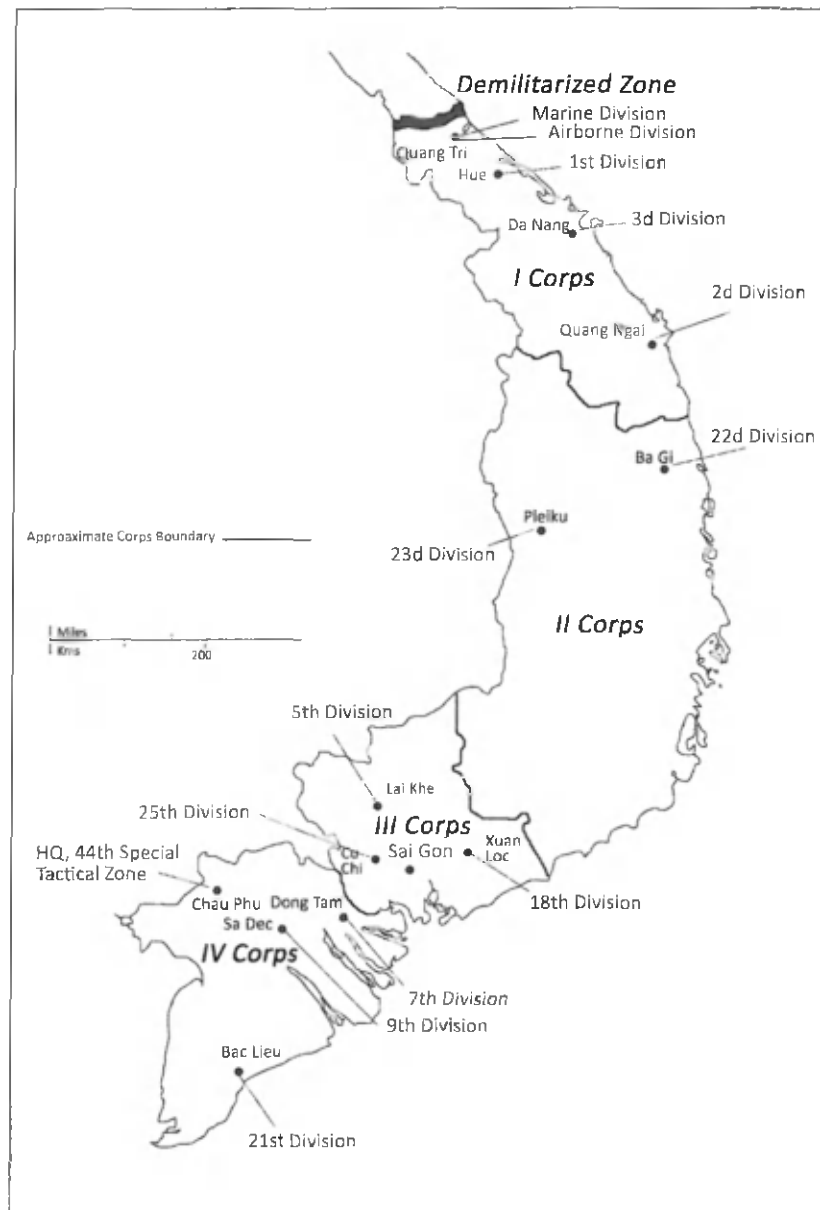


Figure 2. Map of the Republic of Vietnam's Corps Tactical Zone⁷⁶

This disconnect created many problems. First of all, because battlefield promotion (because of battlefield victory) was very rare, the soldiers saw the risks of getting into combat as too high and the search-and-destroy missions usually became

“search-and-avoid.”⁷⁷ Due to their prior training under the French doctrine, the senior officers also lacked aggressiveness, offensive mindset, and quick actions. Unlike the American doctrine which called for quick mobile warfare supported by superior firepower, the French commanders preferred to observe developments on the battlefield before acting.⁷⁸ The enlisted soldiers and non-commissioned officers did not fare better. Low pay and lack of motivation pushed the low-ranking ARVN soldiers to have an indifferent view towards the plight of the peasants and that was bad for pacification. Looting and abuses were also frequent. As Lewy noted, the 9th division in the IV Corps was known as “chicken division” as it often stole chickens wherever it went.⁷⁹

In fact, the VNA that the US inherited from the French was not really a citizen army, and most of the people who joined the army were conscripted. As a nation on a war footing, the conscription policy continued under the ARVN. Conscription system perhaps exacerbated the above problems because senior officers did not have to care about whether the soldiers wanted to join the army; it was simply a matter of law that they did. Under MACV, the US had tried to improve the ARVN, but the anti-Diem coup interrupted this process. The waves of purges in the aftermath of the coup rooted out any commanders who could not prove their loyalty to the changing regimes in Saigon.⁸⁰

Perhaps one thing that the US succeeded in instilling in the ARVN's doctrine was the offensive capabilities. But in the context of the Vietnam War, the consequence was not desirable. Coming fresh from WWII and the Korean War, the US Army was geared towards offensive actions supported by superior firepower. The ARVN seemed to catch up fast, but perhaps only to avoid the risky close combat, a risk which its

enemy, the PAVN, was willing to take. As early as 1963, some American analysts expressed their worry about the ARVN's penchant towards the use of excessive firepower. Roger Hilsman, the Director of Bureau of Intelligence and Research wrote:

You also have the impression that the military is still too heavily oriented toward sweep-type operations. There is still the same emphasis on air power as there was before. Almost every operation so far as I can tell still begins with an air strike which inevitably kills innocent people and warns the Viet Cong that they should get moving for the troops will be coming soon. I think it justifies [*signifies?*] that the Americans are as much to blame for this as the Vietnamese. That MACV has requested an augmentation of the Farmgate group. . . Apparently, air strikes have gone from one hundred a month to over a thousand a month partly as a result of the ARVN learning more about our air power and how to use it.⁸¹

In 1971, a RAND study echoed a similar problem:

The problem with the ARVN was that it 'is addicted to the opium of heavy weapons'. So reliant on air support and artillery that they usually left their mortar at home only to later find themselves outgunned by the PLAF and PAVN who brought their own mortar with them.⁸²

These problems should not be an issue, however, if one condition could be met: the US stayed in Vietnam for an indefinite period. In 1965, this prospect did not seem far-fetched at all. *Offensive mindset* could have been beneficial as well because all revolutionary wars are bound to graduate to the conventional level anyway.

However, there was a bigger problem. The Vietnamese society was not an industrial one which made it difficult to rely on firepower-intensive warfare without US support. Its inability to fight the early phase of counterinsurgency could also allow the enemy to recruit many people, so much so that the firepower could not compensate. In other words, the US was trying to build an army in its image, albeit one that cannot sustain itself without US support. During the Tet Offensive of 1968, and the Easter Offensive of 1972, the ARVN could still fend off attacks, but only with

dramatic American fire support. In 1975 when the US support was prohibited by the US Congress, the ARVN and the RVN collapsed. Unlike the ARVN, the continued support from the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China allowed the PAVN to fight as a modern conventional army despite not having an industrial base.

3.2.2 Irregular Forces 1: Regional Forces-Popular Forces (RF-PF)

3.2.2.1 History and Organization

The third echelon of the South Vietnamese armed forces were the local units. Much of the detailed information of these units came from a former commander of the IV CTZ, Lieutenant General Ngo Quang Truong who wrote a monograph for the US Army Center of Military History after the war.⁸³ Much of Truong's work celebrated the achievements of the Regional Forces-Popular Forces (RF-PF, usually pronounced "Ruff-Puff"), but it never said why the war was lost despite the major achievements of the RF-PF that he claimed. Further examination showed that the concept was sound but the implementation was flawed. Nevertheless, Truong's work provided good descriptive information on the RF-PF.

The RF-PF was supposed to function as militias. Both traced their root to the time of French colonial rule. Before 1964, the Regional Force was known as Civil Guard and the Popular Force was known as Self-Defense Corps (SDC). Civil Guard consisted of provincial forces, normally organized as rifle companies who would assumed the role of guaranteeing internal security. They were established in 1955. The Self-Defense Corps, on the other hand, operated at the village and hamlet level and was organized as squads and platoons. Both of them were collectively part of the "territorial forces."

But their command and control system seemed superfluous at best with both units performing many different missions as well as serving many bosses at different levels. Command of the Civil Guard stopped at the provincial level whereas the SDC's command structure existed at the central level (SDC Directorate), at the province office (SDC Office), at the district (SDC section), and an SDC commissioner at the village level. Moreover, Truong claimed that the South Vietnamese wanted to turn these forces into military formations, but the US did not agree and considered them to be only rural police and were thus not supported by the Military Assistance Program. It was until 1960 that the US began to see utilities in these forces and began to fund them in 1961 when the command and control were transferred to the ministry of defense. Gradually, the command and control of these two forces were fused and unity of command was achieved with the head of the province becoming the person in charge of these paramilitary units. Truong claimed that later on, these forces eventually morphed into conventional units but it was too late. They could have achieved better results had the transformation occurred earlier, or so he claimed.⁸⁴

Gradually, the military commander became the province chief.⁸⁵ In 1964, the Regional Forces, Popular Forces (RF-PF) were created to replace the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps, respectively. The RF was commonly organized as a company and served a province whereas the PF was organized as a platoon and below and served a district, thus mirroring the old Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps.⁸⁶

But just like their predecessor, the RF-PF never received equal attention to that of the ARVN and that issue continued to plague their effectiveness throughout the war. The first problem was the fallout of the ARVN's conscription and draft policy. Reflecting the priority given to the regular units, selection and draft for the ARVN

took precedence. If a person was eligible to serve in the ARVN, then he or she cannot join the RF-PF. That person can only serve if he or she was not already in the ARVN or was already discharged from service. This measure was put in place to counter those who wanted to evade the draft and stay at home (i.e. serving in the RF-PF).⁸⁷

As a consequence, the ARVN was in competition with the RF-PF over the pool of recruits, which further hurt the latter. Normally, the people between 18 and 30 were prioritized and reserved for the ARVN and the age range “donut-hole” has to be manipulated whenever the RF-PF required an increase.⁸⁸ In other words, people who joined the RF-PF were either too young or too old for military service.

Even in the pool of recruits for the RF-PF itself, the quality, personal character and integrity of the personnel were not ideal. Many people saw the RF-PF was a way to beat the draft. So those who joined the RF-PF were either draft evaders or those who had committed unlawful acts of some kinds (which would have precluded them from joining the ARVN). That called into question their commitment and esprit de corps, let alone effectiveness, in their defense of the villages and hamlets. Those who were not affected by these aforementioned problems tend to come from many places instead of one single village or district, making it difficult for the junior leadership to maintain unit cohesion.⁸⁹

While the place of origin should determine the membership in the RF-PF (because it will give them morale boost as they have to defend their homes), this was not always practiced, however. By reading Truong’s monograph, one gets the feeling that Truong never examined why the RF-PF was in a very bad shape personnel-wise. He had a tendency to suggest that it was because the priority was with the ARVN and in some places he even suggested that it was partly because the US insisted on

building a purely conventional forces at the beginning.⁹⁰ Only after 1968 that the American advisory effort began to pay attention to the RF-PF, but even then, only 11 percent of the resources was allocated for that effort.⁹¹

But William Duiker and Jeffrey Race offered a different view.⁹² For them, the problem with the Civil Guard and the Self-Defense Corps (and later the RF-PF) was that they were never local to begin with. When the system functioned under the colonial rule, they were local in nature. But in the late 1950s, when the NLF stirred up trouble in the countryside, especially during the anti-Diem coup, the Civil Guard and the Self-Defense Corps were effectively chased out of the villages and hamlets. They and the village and hamlet chiefs mostly stayed in the district towns, and the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps would act as bodyguards whenever these officials wanted to visit the villages and hamlets.⁹³ After the visit, they all returned together to the district. In fact, Hunt pointed out that programs such as the Agrovillage and Strategic Hamlet failed because the “people” (read: NLF) stormed the fortifications, and the Civil Guard or Self-Defense Corps could not do anything.⁹⁴

Therefore, when the RF-PF inherited the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps systems, they were local in names only. It was the NLF and the PLAF who controlled the rural areas. The RF-PF, just like their predecessors, was simply a more austere branch of the military and was not rooted in the local area at all. Truong tended to overlook this crucial aspect of the RF-PF. In the monograph, many facts that Truong presented could actually be used to show that the RF-PF was not effective at all because it had weak connection with the locality where they operated.

Truong claimed that as the war progressed, more and more ARVN officers and non-commissioned officers requested transfer to the RF-PF because they wanted to

serve near their hometown.⁹⁵ He saw that as a progress. But this can also be taken to mean that the RF-PF never had local people in their rank and that was why more people began to request the transfer. In fact, prior to that trend, Truong lamented that the officers of the ARVN who were transferred to the RF did not want to remain in that service if given a free choice because they considered the service in the RF as degrading and low-level, unbecoming of a regular force. In essence, one can choose between the ARVN which offered better pay, ranks, promotions and decorations and the service in the RF-PF which did not have all these things but one had the benefit of staying closer to home. In 1965 and 1966, the RVN started to improve the working conditions of the RF-PF by providing similar pay to that of ARVN soldiers.⁹⁶

Because many RF-PF units had no local root, they were more eager to move around and this fitted perfectly with the American doctrine which emphasized mobility on the battlefield. As a results, attempts were made under General Abrams to make these RF-PF units more mobile.⁹⁷ He said that if the RF-PF were to be stationed in their hometown, they would not feel it was their fight.⁹⁸ So they had to get to the fight. William Colby, the former CIA chief in Vietnam and then the deputy of Robert Komer, argued for the static concept of the RF-PF, but Abrams and his subordinate wanted to use the RF-PF for pacification efforts, i.e. moving from a pacified place to pacify another.⁹⁹

While the role of the RF-PF began to shift decisively to a mobile one, many other organizations were created which further pushed the RF-PF in the direction of mobile warfare. Many smaller organizations were created to help with the pacification efforts such as *Combat Youths*, *Rural Youths*, and *Civil Defense*, without any clear attempts to unify the efforts. It was perhaps because of the disconnect between the RF-

PF and the rural population that the NLF and PLAF could launch the surprise Tet Offensive.

In response to the Tet Offensive in 1968, a decree by the RVN has created yet another new organization called People's Self-Defense Force (PSDF), something very akin to a true guerrilla militias system. The PSDF actually tried to do what the RF-PF was supposed to do from the start: The RF-PF would lead the way and the PSDF will occupy and pacify the areas. But the PSDF was instituted during a time of panic and the Thieu government sought to create the PSDF as an attempt at "general mobilization".¹⁰⁰ Although the age donut-hole requirement was still in place, now other people such as the women, the young adults and old people were also encouraged to participate in the program. Once again, in a war where loyalty is questionable, the units that were hastily assembled to deal with the problem were bound to have loyalty issue as well.

Truong noted that in 1964, there had been an experiment to get out of the "siege" mentality and the solution was to adopt mobile defense, i.e. take away the combat as far from the population center as possible. But they still needed a point of support, rest and recuperation and the Truong saw no better alternative than the outposts. As a result, he accepted the outpost system as an inevitability. In essence, the RF-PF did not operate in the populated areas but would go out to defend key infrastructure and rest in a series of isolated but fortified outposts. So described, the village defense plan looked eerily similar to a strategic hamlet system, only on a larger scale. Even today, US forces would operate out of the burgeoning "forward operating base" which provided all the luxuries of normal life in the middle of combat zone but which also takes the soldiers away from the population.

3.2.2.2 The Question of Effectiveness

The RF-PF did not recover from its fundamental problem: lack of local root. This disconnect between the RF-PF and the local population created many problems in the context of revolutionary warfare. The first problem was a lack of local battlefield knowledge. Truong made one important observation. He noted that in the process of clearing out the enemy, the RF-PF also suffered heavy casualties mostly due to mines and booby traps.¹⁰¹ *For militias-type forces, this was a clear indication of failure. If one stayed in the village or hamlet, one would exactly know all the paths, ditches, roads, ravine and all other features as the back of one's palm. Any minute change in the surrounding would be immediately picked up, especially if it was trampled with in the process of laying mines or traps. This clearly contrasted with the Cambodian militias which we shall see in the next chapter.*

As the RF-PF moved away from a static system and started to fight mobile warfare and operated in foreign environment, they simply became another branch of *regular forces, albeit a much more inferior one. The data was a clear evident of this problem. In conventional fights, the RF-PF incurred heavier casualties than the conventional units: in 1970, they incurred 15,783 to 5,602 losses for the ARVN. In 1971, the number reached 17,750 compared to 4,232 for the ARVN, and from 1968 to 1972, the total was 69,291 to the ARVN total of 36,932.*¹⁰² Truong also noted that as the RF-PF began to fight as mobile unit, the casualties that resulted from guerrillas' attacks on the outposts outnumbered the casualties from their activities on the outside.¹⁰³ In other words, the RF-PF was a major victim of doctrinal error. They were stripped of their main role, which was local security and transformed into a conventional unit that had less fighting power than any other conventional unit. Unlike Lewy, who saw the higher casualties rate as an indication of success, this dissertation

offered a competing view that such high casualties rate was in fact due to the doctrinal error.

The second problem was morale. As the RF-PF were not necessarily rooted in the areas where they operated, they would care less about the well-being of the people in the area. It was not their fight, so why should they fight hard? In a case study of integration with the 101st airborne division, the American officers noted:

The individual RF/PF is a product of the village and hamlets of rural Vietnam.... Consequently, individual and unit discipline is not as highly developed as in a U.S. unit. [Tactically], fire discipline is generally poor – the RF/PF reconnoiters by fire when and where the mood strikes him, his rucksack becomes a home for stray chickens, small pigs, rice, or other items he passes.¹⁰⁴

Truong also admitted that the RF-PF fought without conviction or dedication because they were not aware of the national causes that they were fighting for. On the other hand, the communist propaganda made more sense as it tapped into the natural xenophobia of the foreigners and the local issue at hand. In June 1965, the RF-PF command initiated “morale armament” in order to indoctrinate the people into the cause they were fighting. The program consisted of 10 days of classroom and 2 days of “real-life lab”. It was hard to imagine how could this short term morale course would be able to beat the communist propaganda which indoctrinated people almost on a daily basis. But even these short courses were not for everyone. Truong claimed that by late 1967, only 50 percent of the PF units were indoctrinated.

Even after the PLAF’s devastating losses after the Tet Offensive, they still retained a formidable force and the RF-PF seemed unable to stop them. In a declassified, secret intelligence report by the US Department of Defense in preparation for the Vietnamization process, the comparison between the revolutionary forces and

the government's territorial forces at the village and hamlets level were (the numbers are in the thousands, for the year 1970):¹⁰⁵

-PLAF and local guerrilla forces: 95-138, RF-PF: 162.6

-Self-defense force and Assault youth (communist): 90-140, PSDF and related: 173.5,

-VCI (Viet Cong Infrastructure): 70, friendly cadres: 99

Total: Enemy: 255-348, Friendly: 435.1

In other words, while being devastated by the 1968 Tet Offensive (the loss rate seemed to be about 50 percent), the local infrastructure was still formidable. Although the RF-PF outnumbered these forces in a ratio of 2 to 1, they still could not eliminate the communist forces. The document noted that, surprisingly, the limited data available suggested that the RF-PF neutralized only 7.5 percent of the VCI.¹⁰⁶ Eventually, the regular American forces, not the local forces, became the main player in eliminating the VCI. The RF performance varied from excellent to unsatisfactory while the PF was almost always ineffective.¹⁰⁷

Recruitment into the RF-PF was also the problem. The study noted that about 80 percent of the PF were recruited from their own or adjacent villages but only 25 percent served close to home.¹⁰⁸ Finally, the study concluded that the difference was because the NLF had an integrated infrastructure to attain political objectives through military and psychological war whereas the RVN's structures remained unintegrated.¹⁰⁹ As noted earlier, the RVN's responses and reforms were also haphazard and ill-coordinated as it tried to seek out short-term measures which it hoped could provide quick results, instead of designing a holistic strategy.

Eventually, the counterinsurgents in Vietnam thought of the war as primarily a military matter with political overtones while the insurgents saw the war as a political-military matter. The RVN and the US were militarily superior, but the RVN was politically and organizationally inferior. Because the RF-PF were never considered crucial to the war effort, they lacked manpower and equipment. Moreover, many different units were created and that tended to sap the manpower from the RF-PF. Even before the RF-PF could be stabilized or produce real performance, there had already been discussion about phasing it out, giving the manpower to other units such as the Rural Development cadres, the police, as well as transferring people to the lightly armed PSDF.

John Paul Vann, as an advisor during the war and who had worked with the paramilitary forces, had firsthand experience with the RF-PF. Vann observed that while the RF-PF received a boost in personnel policy after the government's general mobilization decree which followed the Tet Offensive, it still suffered from the same problem that the ARVN did: number inflation.

Desertion already starved the number available to the RF-PF but most of the names on the list never existed. Vann called it "ghost soldiers" or "potted-tree soldiers."¹¹⁰ Truong called the latter "ornamental soldiers," in the sense that these soldiers were like ornaments that decorated the city but have never been in battle in the jungle. In many instances where Vann advised the RF-PF, only about half of the names on the list showed up for training and in total while Sheehan estimated that about one third of all the soldiers in the RF-PF were ghost soldiers, fictitious names that the commanders used to inflate the payrolls.¹¹¹ When the revolutionaries attacked, the US and allies would discover this problem the hard way.

3.2.3 Irregular Forces 2: Combined Actions Platoon (CAP) and Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG)

The last echelon was the Vietnamese soldiers who were embedded with the American forces. Two of them were very notable in Vietnam: the Combined Actions Platoon (CAP) who were embedded with the US Marines Corps and the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG), Montagnards tribesmen who were trained by the US Army Special Forces (Green Berets). The CIDG, in particular, exposed another major problem that the RVN cannot solve. In earlier section, this dissertation has mentioned ethnic animosity as a grievance that the RVN could not solve. That continued to be a problem. This grievance, however, was somewhat contained by the American forces who had integrated part of the Montagnards minority into the CIDG.

3.2.3.1 Combined Action Program: Combined Action Platoon (CAP) and Companies (CACO)

The CAP was managed by the US Marines Corps because it was in line with the Marines' concept of operations. At its inception, the US Marines Corps was smaller than any other branches and its reason for existence was to do something that other branches did not want to do, i.e. act as instruments of American foreign policy in the Caribbean.¹¹² In the so-called "Banana Wars", the Marines conducted brutal small-wars, counterinsurgency operations to suppress local rebellion. In Vietnam, the Marines brought some versions of this tradition with them. As a small branch, the Marines could not afford to fight big-unit conventional battle like the Army and it returned to its root as small-war expeditionary forces. The III Marines Amphibious Force (III MAF) operated in the I Corps (first CTZ) and consisted of the 1st and 3rd Marines division and an air component. It was here in I Corps and here only that the Marines oversaw the CAP program.

One can argue, however, that the CAP was nothing more than a method of defense in depth the Marines used to defend their air base. Unlike the US Army which got used to mobile and big-unit warfare, small-unit positional defense was compatible with the Marines' experience in small wars in the past. The CAP basically made use of the existence of the PF which was numerous and omnipresent but lacked leadership and combat support.¹¹³ The root of the CAP was the Joint Actions Company, established on 1 August 1965, consisting of platoons of PF embedded with a Marines squad in each of the platoon. On average, therefore, one Marine would operate with three local PF fighters.

The Marines squad leader would assume operational control of the CAP with the PF sergeant as his assistant and the district chief would assume administrative duties. Later, the control was separated to avoid the connotation that the Vietnamese were under direct control of the US.¹¹⁴ At the beginning, responses from the PLAF was slow, and it was not until later in November that an ambush by the CAP occurred.¹¹⁵

Since its inception, the program encountered many problems. The first problem was the internal struggle between the locals as well as the RVN crackdown on the protesters. The second problem was that, since the strategy was not the official version of the US doctrine in Vietnam, the Marines officers and non-commissioned officers participated in the program on a volunteer basis. And volunteering is a way the battalion commanders of the III MAF could dispense the misfits who "were volunteered" into the program in place of those who were more fitting and would have volunteered given the chances. The program continued despite continuous problems.

Since the CAPs were still under full control of their parent battalions, they had to move whenever the battalions moved. Otherwise, there was either an administrative complications or the CAP units were deprived of their essential equipment. Sometimes, the CAPs had to resort to extraordinary measures to get what they wanted: barter, outright purchase, and “midnight requisitions” (i.e. theft).¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, the program moved forward. On 4 May 1967, the CAP and CACO (Combined Action Companies) were incorporated into the Combined Actions Program, which maintained a certain degree of independence from the maneuver battalions. The independence did not really helped the CACO but actually cut it off from supplies. As one commander of the Combined Actions Groups noted, there was only one jeep at the headquarters when it opened and that jeep itself was stolen from somewhere else.¹¹⁷

The Marines were unable to meet the goal of 74 CAPs that were planned for 1966 (only 57 Caps were established at the end of 1966).¹¹⁸ In 1970, the projected CAPs was 114 but only 79 or 80 were in place, 35 short of the original goal. Nevertheless, as of 1970, the Combined Action Program eventually produced 114 CAPs, organized into 20 CACOs, under the command of four Combined Action Groups (CAG) which acted as the headquarters of these forces.¹¹⁹ The largest CAG was the 2nd CAG in Quang Nam province which had 8 CACOs and 36 CAPs while the smallest, the 4th CAG in Quang Tri province had 3 CACOs and 18 CAPs.

The assessment of the effectiveness of the CAP was quite complicated. First of all, just like many Marines writings, the research on CAP does have some tendency to err on the side of effectiveness of the program. This is no surprise, however, as the Marines, who is the smallest branch in the military, has to strongly show their effectiveness in order to justify their existence. In Vietnam, it was no different from

any other time. The Marines were proud of their doctrine, which they claimed were better suited in Vietnam than that of the US Army. In one single-case study of the CAP, Francis "Bing" West wrote about his experience with CAP in Binh Nghia province in his book *The Village*.¹²⁰ The CAP was implemented and survived many PLAF's attacks. Later when the Marines and even the PF were withdrawn, the village could survive with just a small self-defense force and a village administration. West pointed to the stark contrast with the US Army's method: a few miles from Binh Nghia was a village called My Lai where the war was waged "on the hamlet" instead of "in the hamlet" like what the Marines had done.¹²¹

In later 1967, leading up to the Tet Offensive in 1968, the PAVN began to mass north of I Corps and that fitted into General Westmoreland's concept of large-scale conventional warfare. But the Marines saw it as evidence of communist's fear of the CAP and its pacification program, which explained why they concentrated on I Corps (which actually contained Khe Sanh). Based on an alleged statement by General Vo Nguyen Giap, the Marines claimed the massing of the PAVN was intended to disrupt their pacification plan, implying that Hanoi was fearful of the CAPs.¹²² The extent to which this claim is true, however, cannot be ascertained because it came from a statement of a Marines General during a conference.

The result was mixed but Peterson admitted that CAPs tended to be effective in places where the PFs were indigenous. The CAPs and CACOs rarely lost and they defeated the larger enemy forces in many instances, unlike the RF-PF which were either overrun or simply routed.¹²³ Peterson went on to claim that after the Tet Offensive, the communists more or less left the CAPs alone and the CAPs also did not

bother stirring up trouble either, which suggested the communists were fearful of the CAPs. Peterson wrote that one Marine in the CAP had put it succinctly:

I don't think the VC ever left this village. We're all just sort of living here together. Oh, we like to think that if we clobbered one night, somebody would come and warned us... It's like when we play volleyball every night. A former VC officer is captain of the villagers' team, probably still is a VC. But he's a real go-getter. Give us a heck of a lot of help when it comes to putting in wells, even if he probably still is a Charlie [American soldiers' colloquial term for Vietnamese communist guerrilla]... Our biggest problem is the village chief. Oh, he smiles a lot, a real yes man, but he's never given us cooperation. The most helpful man in the ville, like I told you, is the VC officer. He gets everything organized.¹²⁴

Finally, Peterson admitted that pacification effort of the CAPs might be overestimated. Of all the CAPs that had been deployed to the hamlets for pacification between 1966 and 1969, only 32 hamlets were sufficiently pacified as to allow relocation of the CAPs.¹²⁵ It is unclear whether this could be seen as a failure of CAP or one should understand that pacification demands lengthy commitment. But lengthy commitment was something that only few people desired.

The NLF was still a formidable challenge to the CAPs according to many CAP veterans, but the main challenge would come from within.¹²⁶ In the wake of the Tet Offensive, a debate arose about the nature of the CAP, between the "compound CAP" which was a static position acting as civil affairs center in the hamlet and the newly proposed "roving CAP" which would jump from one village to another and would seldom stay in one place for a lengthy period of time. MACV, in particular, was supportive of the roving CAP concept because it got them away from the "siege mentality".¹²⁷ On the other hand, because the compound CAP was closely linked with the pacification effort, Peterson claimed that Robert Komer began to propose an integration of CAP into the CORDS program.¹²⁸ Hesitant of losing control over their

unit, the Marines sought a compromise which saw the Combined Action Program producing a mixture of compound CAPs and roving CAPs which satisfied General Westmoreland's demand as well as fending off potential interference from the civilians.

Thus, towards the end of the American commitment, due to bureaucratic pressures, the CAPs began to move away from static pacification effort to mobile warfare, not unlike the RF-PF. In 1969 and 1970, as the US began the Vietnamization process, the Marines started to see many problems as they transferred the management of the CAPs to the Vietnamese. First of all, as they began to integrate the RF, conflicts occurred between the CAPs and the RF due to different command system. The people in many hamlets also did not receive the CAPs well, which forced many Marines officers to reevaluate the effectiveness of the Combine Action Program.¹²⁹ It was perhaps due to the fact that as CAPs moved from one place to another, their affiliation with the local people declined. Nevertheless, it was already too late and Vietnamization continued. On 17 May 1971, six years after the first CAP saw action, the Combined Action Program came to an end with the deactivation of the 2nd CAG. Remaining Marines in the I Corps left a month later. Thus ended another of American courtship with genuine pacification without producing any clear results.

3.2.3.2 Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG)

In some sense, the CIDG was very similar to the CAP. But the CIDG was managed by the US Army Special Forces (Green Berets) and focused almost exclusively on the Montagnards in the Central Highlands. There were many unexpected reasons why this program could come into being. The official history of the US Army Special Forces laid down two main reasons: first, the US mission in

Saigon believed that the South Vietnamese effort to create paramilitary units to fight a low intensity warfare needed to be supported and second, the US feared that the NLF would be able to recruit large numbers of minority to fight the RVN.¹³⁰ The locals received the program very well but there was a catch. The minority and the general Vietnamese population never had any cordial relations and that was why they received the American advisors so well.¹³¹ In a sense, the program had a debilitating problem from the start. As the program flourished it then encountered a familiar problem: the drift towards mobile warfare and search-and-destroy tactics.

The CIA was the first to devise the CIDG program in early 1961. In late 1961, a representative from the US embassy (read: CIA) and a medical sergeant entered the village of Buon Enao, home of 400 Rhade tribesmen and began to construct a fortified village. The program was special because the Vietnamese government initially allowed the US full control of the program until it can be transferred to the Vietnamese government.¹³² After the Buon Enao village was fortified, many village chief and the deputies were sent to train there and then the camps expanded to other surrounding villages. More and more American special forces soldiers were introduced to support the training, along with members of the Vietnamese special forces. The official history estimated that while the ratio would fluctuate, the number of Montagnards was always at least 50 percent.¹³³

Recruitment of the Rhade for the CIDG program was so easy that the American advisors did not need to go out as the tribesmen would stand in long line at the recruitment place. The advisors also rooted out the NLF agents who tried to infiltrate the training and by requiring people to vouch for each other, they found out that of the forty villages covered in the program each had about four or five NLF

sympathizers who tried to get into the program.¹³⁴ The US tried to bring the RVN into the picture by allowing the Vietnamese special forces members to be the instructors while the American advisers simply advised and would not take part in instructions. By August 1962, the CIDG program covered 200 villages in Darlac province.¹³⁵ The program expanded so fast that in some cases, members of the Green Berets had to operate without the Vietnamese special forces.

In July 1962, as the MAAG was upgraded into the MACV and as the increasing involvement of the Green Berets required a headquarters, the program was transferred from the US mission to the Department of Defense and henceforth, the Army would retain complete control of the CIDG program. The transfer of responsibility was known as Operation SWITCHBACK which was to be completed on 1 July 1963.¹³⁶ The program actually did not have the name CIDG at the beginning and people called the program different names. After the success at Buon Enao, MACV began to expand it to other provinces. In Da Nang province, in particular, a training center was established where mountain tribesmen received training for long-range, border surveillance mission called "trail-watcher" which would report any NLF movement along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border.¹³⁷

So there it was, once again. Beginning in 1963 and 1964 just like the RF-PF and the CAP, the CIDG began to drift away from population security to mobile warfare. New camps were constructed but they were not close to the villages. Instead, many more camps sprung up close to the border. The CIDG Program was rapidly expanded, as the entire 5th Special Forces Group, U.S. Army Special Forces, moved into Vietnam, and the CIDG units stopped focusing on village defense and instead took part in more conventional operations, most notably border surveillance. The

program expanded to the I Corps and II Corps as well. By December 1963, all four CTZs had the CIDG program and the program itself consisted of 18,000 strike force (mobile) troops and 43,376 hamlet militias.¹³⁸

After the program moved forward so fast in only a few years, the time had come for the transition of authority to the RVN. That was where the trouble arose. We did not really know whether it was because the RVN did not trust the Montagnards or was it simply incompetence, but the transition was a disaster. The RVN divided the CIDG participants into two categories. The strike force (i.e. mobile force in the camps) would still remain CIDG but the hamlet militias would no longer be CIDG but were transferred to other branches such as the RF-PF or the ARVN. The remaining CIDG participants were ordered out of their camps and villages to the provincial capitals for indoctrination and then divided the group and assigned them the missions in different parts of the province, thus destroying unit integrity.

Meanwhile, due to insufficient resources and faulty planning, many participants did not get paid and many were still paid by the US money even after the transition. In addition, the weapons that were provided to the soldiers were ordered by the RVN to be turned in. The official history of the US Army Special Forces noted that this order created a complete mistrust as most CIDG participants considered the weapons as protection for their families and never returned them. The official history also speculated that this particular order was perhaps a major cause of the Montagnard rebellion in 1964.¹³⁹

The RVN's transition plan was done with little to no coordination with the US side. The only place that was secured enough to start the first transition was Buon Enao and its failure was regarded by many Montagnards as another episode of RVN's

renewed promise. In other words, distrust and lack of coordination between the three actors, the US, the Montagnards, and the RVN as well as American generosity in the programs, something that the RVN would not or rather could not emulate, all led to the intensification of the Vietnamese-Montagnard animosity.

The hostility finally erupted in September 1964. On the night of 19-20 September, the Montagnards struck five CIDG camps in the II Corps.¹⁴⁰ They killed their Vietnamese advisors but only disarmed and detained the American advisors. They also marched on to Ban Me Thuot, the capital of Dak Lak province, seizing many district capitals in the process. The hostility ended after lengthy negotiation with the RVN as the American advisors acted as intermediaries. In a subsequent conference with the RVN representatives, the Montagnards issued demands which were all too similar to what the NLF promised: land ownership, language, representative, and quota in the military and government offices¹⁴¹ The CIDG participants and the RVN lived together in an uneasy peace after the incident, but one can only question what would happen after the US withdrawal. In 1965, that was a moot question.

Tactically, the CIDG began to move decisively towards mobile strike team, just like any other units, as the MACV began to implement the search-and-destroy tactic. Each CIDG camp were allocated four companies. Most of the CIDG camps were located along the border and the strike force's main mission was to control the border and interdict PLAF and PAVN infiltration. The latter, however, were smart enough to understand that their purpose was not to fight along the border but to infiltrate and as a consequence, the PLAF and PAVN rarely sought battle along the border. Yet, the latter did concentrate and attacked on camps they considered vulnerable. With the escalation of the war, the CIDG strike force expanded to meet the

threats. As of July 1967, the camp strike force numbered 34,350 while a new category, perhaps exclusively used in search-and-destroy mission amounted to 5,700.¹⁴² The CIDG companies were also divided up into smaller units to suit search-and-destroy missions, which further debilitated unit integrity as well as severing their local root.

In sum, the escalation had both its positive and negative effects. On the one hand, the US commanders could tap into the CIDG for local information crucial for operations. The introduction of large number of American troops could also help strengthen the camps against insurgent attack. The problem, however, was that when the area of responsibility of the US units and the CIDG intersected, the CIDG became indirectly under the control of US commanders who would then draw them into offensive operations and away from population security.

As the CIDG moved to conventional missions, MACV conducted a study which recommended the conversion of the CIDG units into RF by 1967.¹⁴³ The camps would then be used as staging area for the conduct of large-scale search-and-destroy missions. From then on, description of the CIDG operations mirrored those of the ARVN. They could use helicopters and they were better equipped. Yet, the NLF and PLAF still retained the initiatives due to “first-rate intelligence system.”¹⁴⁴ The revolutionaries seldom attacked, but when they did, they must have had a clear advantage. The establishment of and reliance on the camps for the CIDG to operate also handed the initiatives to the enemies who would have ample time to reconnoiter the areas before attacking. Even before 1968, large-scale attacks on the camps were not uncommon and many were overrun.¹⁴⁵

As the CIDG transitioned from an irregular army to an irregular component of the conventional army, they operated just like the US counterpart or ARVN and

encountered the same problem. As the CIDG were moving away from their local area to cover more ground and participated in the attrition strategy, they began to operate in foreign land where the enemy retained the initiatives. From 1966 to 1967, the year where the CIDG decidedly grew, the number of enemy killed (body count) increased by 42 percent (from 1,348 to 1,912) while friendly (US Special Forces and CIDG) killed decreased by 28 percent (from 616 to 446).¹⁴⁶ However, the number of US Special Forces/CIDG wounded in the same time period increased from 344 to 1,080, an increase of 215 percent, due to booby traps.¹⁴⁷ But the bigger problem was that even in the case of victory where the CIDG eliminated the enemy units, they only satisfied the body count metrics but did not provide any population security since the contacts were made far away from population centers.

The handover of the CIDG to the RVN waxed and waned over the years due to the mismanagement by the RVN and lack of preparation. But after the Tet Offensive and towards 1970 where the US began withdrawal from Vietnam, the Vietnamization of the CIDG accelerated. It was decided that the CIDG would be converted into conventional army, although they would become Ranger battalions whose main mission was to control the border and would work closely with the Vietnamese special forces. By January 1971, the conversion created thirty seven Ranger battalions.¹⁴⁸ The participation of the US Army 5th Special Force Group in the CIDG program ended on 31 December 1970.

3.3 The Tet Offensive (1968)

3.3.1 Breaking the Stalemate

Sensing impending defeat of the RVN as the countryside slipped away from their grip, the United States decided to introduce large number of combat troops in South Vietnam in 1965. In fact, the US had been preparing for this eventuality for quite some time with the transition from MAAG which was an advisory effort toward a more combat-type effort, resulting in the establishment of MACV on 8 February 1962, in fact, even before the anti-Diem coup.¹⁴⁹ Unlike the MAAG whose mission was advisory only, MACV was a combat organization.

But the pre-1965 period was known as the “golden period” for the NLF.¹⁵⁰ The authority more or less retreated to the district capitals. After the anti-Diem coup and the instability that followed, many RVN’s officials as well as ARVN commanders were purged, depending on who was in power in Saigon.¹⁵¹ MACV, on their part, was busy organizing a suitable battlefield command to fight. In this process, the State Department and the Department of Defense disagreed over the status of the MACV commander vis-à-vis the ambassador while the US Navy did all it could to prevent the creation of a US Army-dominated command in Vietnam and, by extension, in the Asia Pacific region.¹⁵² These were only some of the reasons why the NLF could operate almost freely in the countryside at that time.

In this NLF’s “golden period”, Hunt claimed, based on testimonies by former insurgents, volunteers for the NLF exceeded the planned recruitment target, and the Front had to refuse many people.¹⁵³ Hunt also cautioned that people were much more eager to join the NLF which was a political organization where life was less brutal than the militant PLAF. The insurgent leadership was also cognizant of this fact and

they offered many benefits, albeit symbolic ones, for high-risk missions. For example, those who were selected for the sapper units tended to receive commemorative celebration due to the dangers inherent in their missions.¹⁵⁴

It was not until 1965 that the government in Saigon began to stabilize as Nguyen Cao Ky and Nguyen Van Thieu were able to establish an uneasy truce and built a somewhat lasting government. MACV also began to receive more American troops as well as equipment to fight a wider war. As escalation heightened, search-and-destroy missions were in full swing as the US and ARVN units relied on superior firepower to eliminate the enemies. Lewy and Krepinevich pointed to this as the major reason for the people's sufferings and eventually the defeat of the American strategy in Vietnam.¹⁵⁵ Some scholars, on the other hand, had a different view of the extensive use of firepower. Hunt suggested that the US and the ARVN abided by a deliberate but unwritten rule of "refugee-generating" policy, i.e. use firepower to move the population out of the communist-controlled areas into the government-controlled areas such as the strategic hamlets.¹⁵⁶

The NLF at first tried to prevent this flow but they understood that it was self-defeating as their shadow government did not have anything to provide the essential basic services to the people anyway.¹⁵⁷ In the end, they allowed the people to move to the government-controlled area because they knew the people had to return to work in the rice fields anyway, which they controlled. The people, on the other hand, were quite ambivalent. Hunt claimed that the majority of the people simply tried to get away from the war and they accused the PLAF for harassing the government's positions which invited the shelling of the villages in retaliation. But the people also blamed the RVN for sometimes shelling the areas with no provocations at all.¹⁵⁸

On this latter point, Lewy gave an account which he claimed was the standard.¹⁵⁹ A hamlet known as Bau Tre became the base of NLF snipers along Route 1 in 1967 and American mechanized units did not hesitate to respond by destroying many houses. The US military declared that, if the people wanted to avoid such atrocities, they should report any NLF/PLAF presence to the US military. In 1968, some people complied by reporting about NLF/PLAF presence prior to the attack. The US military responded by increasing their effort using helicopter gunships destroying more houses. But by then, the NLF/PLAF had already retreated and left only a covering force.¹⁶⁰

After 1965, the NLF/PLAF were frustrated as the situation became stalemated. Easy gains that they had made before then was no longer there. Things were harder for them, in terms of population control and the battle with the firepower-intensive American forces. Several programs such as the CAP and CIDG also threatened to tip the balance in favor of the ARVN, the US forces, and their allies. Thus, in 1967, just like the early 1960s, the southern revolutionary began to push for a wide offensive in the hope of breaking the stalemate and push the American out of Vietnam for good. Fresh in their minds was the victory at Dien Bien Phu, and the southern revolutionaries believed they could do the same to the US and the RVN.¹⁶¹ Once, again, just like the so-called “concerted uprising” in the early 1960s, Hanoi had no choice but to improvise and supported such a plan. Such was the birth of the Tet Offensive.

3.3.2 The Tet Offensive: Objectives, Plans, and Execution

The key player and impetus for the southern revolutionaries was General Nguyen Chi Thanh, the commander of the Central Office of South Vietnam

(COSVN), the political-military headquarter of the communists in South Vietnam.

Thanh believed in the use of a large-unit offensive to break the stalemate, not unlike what they did to the French at Dien Bien Phu. He would find allies in the Politburo of the communist party in Hanoi, particularly the influential and rising Le Duan.¹⁶² A critic of this plan was defense minister and hero of Dien Bien Phu, General Vo Nguyen Giap who argued instead that the time might not be ripe for a large-unit war and that with the American troops stretched too thin, harassing guerrilla attacks would be more suitable. Eventually, even though Thanh suddenly died in July 1967, his ideas and Le Duan's prevailed. But in the end, the Tet Offensive was a compromise between the two ideas and Hanoi would use a combination of PAVN regulars, PLAF regulars, and PLAF paramilitary forces in the attacks.

To understand the effectiveness of the defense (i.e. ARVN), we must ask if the Tet Offensive was successful for the revolutionaries, or rather what were the successes and what were the failures. In order to do this, we must first examine the objectives. According to James Willbanks, the Tet Offensive had three main objectives: 1. Provoke a general popular uprising in the South, 2. Shatter the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF, the three branches), and 3. Convince the US that the war is unwinnable.¹⁶³ The first two objectives were more or less conventional military objectives but the third one is political. The third objective is usually overlooked in the assessment of the Tet Offensive.¹⁶⁴ But William Duiker argued that the communists tend to fight to serve both military and political objectives and it was the third objective that drove them to attack the cities which, they hoped, would expose the weakness of the RVN.¹⁶⁵ It is against these backdrops that we should analyze the Tet Offensive.

Therefore, even though the military objective was to shatter the RVNAF, the communists did not draw them out to fight in the jungle, but instead they would bring the fight to the cities, most of which, hitherto, had not been affected by the war. Giap, who was against the large-unit offensive, ultimately became its key planner. The plan called for the use of both the regular units and the paramilitary units, but each had different tasks. According to the official history of the PAVN, the forces allocated to the operations in the I Corps were assigned “*the missions of annihilating enemy forces and of drawing in and tying down a significant portion of the mobile reserve forces of the US and puppet armies [ARVN], thereby creating the favorable conditions for the focal points of our attacks and uprisings, especially for Tri-Thien and Hue.*”¹⁶⁶ In other words, the I Corps was not the main attack. It was a fixing force, and it was where the PAVN figured more heavily than the local forces in the revolutionaries’ order of battle.¹⁶⁷

The offensive was preceded by several probing attacks along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border to test the strength of the ARVN and the US military and as the offensive drew near, the majority of PAVN regular units and some local units massed in the areas near the DMZ.¹⁶⁸ This fixing force also served as feint to draw the US military away from the cities. It worked. On the eve of the Tet Offensive, an estimated half of the MACV combat strength was concentrated in I Corps to defend Khe Sanh where General Westmoreland thought the main attack would come and the other half was responsible for the rest of the country.¹⁶⁹ In fact, President Johnson, determined not to repeat the French mistake at Dien Bien Phu, had a scale model of the Khe Sanh base in his office at the White House to follow the situation. General Westmoreland

also took the calculated risks of leaving the ARVN to defend the cities, in an attempt to show confidence in the RVN.¹⁷⁰

The first attack came at Nha Trang in the II Corps, followed by other attacks on two cities in the I Corps and other five in II Corps, all on 30 January 1968. For unknown reasons, these attacks occurred one day before the major part of the offensive. On 31 January, the DRV threw in all of their main forces allocated for the offensive. Ultimately, a total of 36 (out of 44) provincial capitals, 5 (out of 6) autonomous cities, and 72 of 245 district towns as well as other military installations were struck by the insurgents which made up of an estimated 80,000-strong PLAF soldiers.¹⁷¹ Surprise was achieved.

3.3.3 Assessments

Who won in the Tet Offensive? In some sense, no one achieved clear victory from the fight, although the revolutionaries achieved more of their objectives than the counterinsurgents did. The first objective of the Tet Offensive was to provoke a general uprising of the South Vietnamese people against the RVN. On this point, the offensive completely failed to achieve the objective. Perhaps the revolutionaries had bought into their own propaganda about the weakness of the RVN that they believed a mere offensive would unleash the people's power. It did not happen and in many cases such as the killings in Hue (a controversial subject which we shall return to below) actually heightened the fear of a communist takeover.

The second objective, i.e. the destruction of the RVN's military, seemed to have a reasonable chance of success given its numerous weaknesses and flaws. But the South Vietnamese put up some stiff resistance in many places. The result was mixed. The PLAF showed that they could muster a large force to fight the government but

despite the ARVN's problems, the PLAF finally suffered horrendous losses as the ARVN and especially the US forces gained momentum and unleashed their superior firepower. The offensive achieved surprise in the early hours of the attack, but most towns were liberated by the ARVN and American troops, days after the offensive. The main problem for the communists was that while they could master the countryside, they had no idea about the urban terrain. Many PLAF units got lost and disoriented when they arrived at the urban areas. For example, Hunt estimated that in My Tho province alone, the PLAF threw eight battalions into the offensive but suffered a loss of between 60 percent and 70 percent of its total combat strength.¹⁷²

On the other hand, the ARVN's effectiveness was also ambiguous. When the PLAF struck Da Lat, the home of the ARVN military academy, the deputy province chief gathered two undermanned RF companies, freshmen cadets and some American soldiers (who were caught in the middle of the fighting while visiting local brothels) and they were able to put up a defense against the communist attacks.¹⁷³ But in Can Tho, a province in the Mekong Delta, Major General Nguyen Van Manh, the commander of IV Corps instead barricaded himself in his mansion while the American advisors had to take over on the battlefield.

The Tet Offensive also exposed the familiar problem of "ghost soldiers" in the rank. During the attack on Saigon, an American advisor, John Paul Vann had tried to gather the RF-PF to defend the city. However, Vann had learned that of the 582 RF-PF in Cholon, only 150 were actually in the rank and the chief collected the pay as it appeared in the roster anyway.¹⁷⁴ One of the RF battalion whose task was to defend the west side of Saigon was called "Chinese Battalion" but consisted of Chinese

shopkeepers who never left their businesses in Cholon. Saigon, along with Hue were the two cities that bore the brunt of the Tet Offensive.

Hue and Saigon were the two symbolic cities in Vietnam. Saigon was the modern capital city of the RVN while Hue was the old imperial capital. In an informal meeting in 1966, when President Johnson asked General Westmoreland what the enemy would do, the latter answered "capture Hue".¹⁷⁵ The capture or at least shattering the security of both cities would provide the communists with a propaganda coup. That was precisely what they did during the Tet Offensive. In Saigon, a mixed task force made up of PLAF (most of whom were Saigon natives) and PAVN infiltrated the capital city and attacked symbolic targets including the US embassy, the Presidential Palace, the radio station, and the major ARVN and American command headquarters. The results of the attacks on Saigon were, once again, mixed.

On the one hand, the PLAF and PAVN did not get what they wanted. They could occupy the US embassy for a short while, as with other places. At the national radio station, the power was cut before they could broadcast their propaganda messages and one PLAF unit assigned to the attack on the ARVN Joint General Staff headquarter arrived late and seized the wrong building.¹⁷⁶ These attacks ended in failure less than a day later, that is, if we define success as indefinite occupation of the locations themselves.

On the other hand, the PLAF could muster 35 battalions to fight against 10 battalions of ARVN and 17,000 police defending the capital city.¹⁷⁷ Surely the latter had the American troops on their side to end the communist attack within a day, but the number disparity told a story of huge difference in the mobilization capacity of both sides. Furthermore, if the revolutionaries were indeed sincere in their third

objective, i.e. to convince the US that the war was unwinnable in order to provoke a policy change, then they were successful in that regards in their attack on Saigon.

The second major city to be struck and the one in which the fight lasted the longest of the offensive in February was Hue. The city had a particular geographical characteristic. It was isolated from the rest of the RVN by the Annamite Mountain chain and it was located near the DRV, which made any occupation much easier than cities like Saigon due to the short line of communication with the DRV and Laos. Hue also exposed the compromise nature of the Tet Offensive: the communists tried to occupy the city but did not have enough troops to defeat the American and South Vietnamese counterattack. The PAVN did the majority of the fighting although they were guided by local NLF sympathizers who prepared targets for attacks and arrests well in advance. After one night of surprise attack, the revolutionaries were in control of the Citadel (former Imperial capital of ancient Vietnam), west bank of the Perfume River.

The attack on Hue was not merely symbolic. The communist agents also rounded up and killed many people whom they considered to have relations to the RVN. The battle for Hue started on 31 January and ended on 25 February 1968, four days after the COSVN ordered a pull back from the cities and returned to harassing guerrilla tactics. Countless civilians died during the time of the American counterattack to recapture the city. Historians were divided on the number and causes of civilian deaths in Hue.

According to Willbanks, the revolutionaries did kill many people whom they considered to be enemies but that some scholars also charged that the ARVN's 10th political warfare battalion might have also sent in their own assassins to kill suspected

communists sympathizers as well while Douglas Pike worked to “manufacture” and exaggerate the story.¹⁷⁸

Willbanks also noted that the communist commanders who were involved in the operations claimed instead that although execution did occur, it was not the only reason for the heavy civilian casualties in Hue. According to this account, many were taken prisoners and the most important figures were supposed to be sent north. But as the American bombardment intensified in the counterattack, the revolutionaries’ chain of command broke down and the soldiers, fueled by the anti-South Vietnamese propaganda and angered by the American bombardment, took matters into their own hands and killed the prisoners.¹⁷⁹ The former communist commander further claimed that the communists took more than ten thousand prisoners and were instructed to guard them, an objective which contradicted the need to retreat in the face of American bombardment.¹⁸⁰ All of these factors led to the massacre of many prisoners.

Perhaps we will never know the truth about what really happened in Hue. But if the claim by the former communist commander was true, it did illustrate the compromised nature of the offensive in Hue. To achieve the three strategic objectives in Hue was simply impossible. The PAVN units and NLF agents assigned to the attack on Hue could barely defeat the ARVN units in a surprise and took control of the Citadel. But they were not capable of doing the three things at the same time: occupying the city, guarding ten thousand prisoners and defending the city against the firepower-intensive American troops. They not only failed and lost a lot of troops, the revolutionaries also created hostility and fear among the South Vietnamese of the DRV’s brutality. Henceforth, the chance for a general uprising seemed problematic. Only a military victory would be able to achieve the North’s political objectives.

Nonetheless, the insurgent's performance in the third objective (change American policy) came out strong. Hue was another example where most of the city was turned to rubble. As if to add insult to injury, the victorious ARVN soldiers looted whatever was left in the destroyed city.¹⁸¹ According to one estimate, among the towns that bore the brunt of the destruction during the Tet Offensive were: 50 percent of provincial capital of Pleiku, 40 percent of the town of Ben Tre, 25 percent of Vinh Long and Ban Me Thuot, and 20 percent of Da Lat were destroyed in the fighting.¹⁸² Half a million more refugees were generated by the offensive.

The RVN clearly could not ensure the security of its own cities and people. Should the US continue to help this government? Back in the US, the majority who answered affirmatively to this question in 1965 turned against such policy after 1968. The Tet Offensive marked the first time that the number of Americans who thought it was a mistake for the US to fight in Vietnam surpassed the number of those who thought it was not a mistake.¹⁸³ The approval rating of President Johnson's handling of the situation in Vietnam dipped more than 10 percent after Tet. On 13 February 1968, Gallup Poll reported that the disapproval rate was 50 percent.¹⁸⁴ By the end of March 1968, the President's war approval rating dipped to an all-time low of 26 percent.¹⁸⁵ Finally, before Tet, the number of American who identified themselves as "Hawk" (61 percent) outnumbered those who considered themselves "Doves" (35 percent) by almost 30 percent. But after Tet, the two numbers moved in the opposite direction, and the number of Hawks equaled that of Doves around mid-March 1968 (each hovered around 40 percent onwards).¹⁸⁶

In other words, despite horrendous losses of the PLAF, despite numerous tactical difficulties and upsets on the battlefield, the revolutionaries achieved their

third objective, that of changing the American policy in Vietnam. So as to sustain this effort, according to Tran Van Tra, a high-ranking PLAF commander, the plan for the Tet Offensive called for follow-on offensive to continue to wear down the American and ARVN forces to reinforce the third objective in case the first and second policy could not be achieved.¹⁸⁷ As a result, in May 1968 a similar offensive, albeit on a smaller scale than Tet, was launched in many provinces. Saigon itself was hit several times. These attacks came to be known as “Mini-Tet”.

On 10 March 1968, the New York Times broke the story about General Westmoreland’s request for additional 206,000 troops. And on 23 March, General Westmoreland was told that of the 200,000-plus troops requested, only 13,500 would be approved. On 25 March 1968, a Harris Poll reported that 60 percent of American public opinion believed the Tet Offensive was either a standoff or defeat of the US cause in Vietnam.¹⁸⁸ As the anti-war protests gained momentum, General Abrams replaced General Westmoreland who became the chief of staff of the US Army. On 5 November 1968, Richard Nixon was elected president on the platform of “Peace with Honor”. In short, the Tet Offensive achieved its objective of changing the American policy in Vietnam. Because the US was perhaps the major obstacle hindering the RVN’s collapse, this change in American policy direction proved decisive for the revolutionaries.

3.4 Summary

The United States came into the Vietnam War having never lost a war before. But Vietnam was a tougher slough because the RVN, which should be the main effort of the American war, was unable to solve grievances, most notably, the land issue and

the ethnic animosity. Attempts to implement political programs were defeated by the corrupt officials who further intensified the popular grievances.

In this area, the revolutionaries got a head start when the Viet Minh redistributed the land, which they did not own to begin with, to the peasant for free. Moreover, the Viet Minh also made contacts and promised to grant the ethnic minority what they could not demand from the RVN. These grievances and the fact that the Viet Minh had shown real actions in addressing those grievances perhaps could explain the difference in the mobilization capabilities as well as the morale of the PLAF and the ARVN. During the Tet Offensive, the PLAF threw many battalions into the operations and while they could not defeat the ARVN or occupy the cities, they could still cause enough damages to cause a shift in American policy.

Counterfactually, had the RVN been able to attract the rural populace, the communists would not have been able to raise the PLAF battalions that fought in the offensive. It would also have been a double loss for the PAVN since it not only would have gotten the support of these battalions, but the PAVN would have had to fight them, in addition to the ARVN and the American forces. Ultimately, the PAVN was not superhuman, although many scholars seemed to adhere to this myth which was a legacy of communist propaganda during the war. The PAVN was a military unit like any other units and correct force mixture and tactics would certainly have allowed the ARVN to defeat this threat.

But two realities in Vietnam prevented the ARVN from achieving this desired state. Firstly, the ineffective implementation of the political programs which was also largely due to the inefficient and corrupt local governments, estranged many rural people and essentially allowed the insurgents to raise a lot of fighters. Secondly, and

which compounded the first point, the military was not organized in a way that allowed it to mobilize the populace either. The superior firepower that the US forces brought to Vietnam could forestall defeat but it is dubious if such tactic was a long-run solution to the underlying problems in Vietnam. Even on that point, the American public started to question the American interests in the region which, after the Tet Offensive, they thought the war was unwinnable and the objective not worth the sacrifice. After the departure of the American troops, the ARVN still could not figure out how to solve the problem. In the 1972 and 1975 offensives, the RVN did not stand a chance.

3.5 Theoretical Discussions

Strange as it might sound, the RVN actually had all ingredients of a successful counterinsurgency warfare. It had a strong ideology, namely nationalism and Diem's vision of an independent and viable non-communist Vietnam. Its military was designed based on the French and then American system. That military also had territorial branches and its equipment was almost as good as that of the US military. The problem with the RVN, however, was the actual implementation of those programs and the questionable integrity of the ARVN in combat.

In the preceding narrative, corruption was usually cited as one of the problems that the RVN failed to solve. Many political programs failed at the implementation stage. Even the land-to-the-tiller program toward the end of the war could not produce any significant impact to change the status quo.

The second problem was the inconsistency and the irregularity of the implementation. There seemed to be no systematic mechanism to sustain the implementation of the political programs. As a result, many initiatives subsided after

the first wave of enthusiasm. The Agrovillage and the Strategic Hamlet programs were two examples in this category. In the military, similar problems affected the RF-PF. Just like the revolutionary army, the RF-PF also received political indoctrination. However, such indoctrination was not systematic and the sessions themselves were ad hoc rather than regular. As we have seen in the preceding sections, to prepare for Vietnamization, many programs were hastily implemented without clear focus, thus further worsening the problem.

The result of this weak implementation of the political program was the difficulties in mobilizing the population against the NLF. Some of the indigenous groups joined the CIDG and fought against the NLF, but that was almost a wholly American enterprise. The relations between the RVN and the Montagnards were always tenuous. The inability of the RVN to mobilize the population allowed the NLF and the PLAF to build its strength and launch the Tet Offensive in 1968. The NLF failed to achieve any lasting military goals during the offensive but it succeeded, albeit accidentally, in changing the American policy in Vietnam. In short, a combination of weak implementation of the political program on the RVN's part and the DRV's sabotage of the local governments sapped the strength from the RVN and forced the RVN to rely heavily on the US. Once the US changed its policy regarding Vietnam, the RVN was inevitably in perils.

Military-wise, the RVN also had some critical problems. The anti-Diem coup brought in a period of instability during which the officer corps was severely shaken. Loyalty replaced competence. Corruption also weakened the ARVN. John Paul Vann, for example, commented that the RF-PF unit that he personally advised in Saigon consisted of mostly "ghost soldiers" and "ornamental soldiers" used by the

commanders to inflate the payroll. The current literature only presented anecdotal evidence of the ARVN's performance and has yet to offer a systematic account. Nevertheless, in the preceding sections, we have seen that the ARVN's combat performance was mixed. During the Tet Offensive, some units did fight bravely with the American units while others were routed.

With the presence of the American units, this mixed performance was enough to save the ARVN from disaster. But when the American units departed after the Tet Offensive, the mixed performance was no longer enough because the ARVN had to fight against the battle-seasoned PAVN. During the Easter Offensive in 1972, despite numerical parity between the two sides, the PAVN simply outperformed the ARVN.¹⁸⁹ The loss of Quang Tri province, which was a major blow for the ARVN, was mainly due to low morale and incompetent leadership.¹⁹⁰ The poor leadership was the result of bad military organization while the low morale was probably the result of poor indoctrination and weak implementation of the political program. As we shall see in the next chapter on Cambodia, there were people who refused to retreat even in the face of disaster. In Vietnam, however, the retreat from Quang Tri was a total rout. The DRV's Easter Offensive in 1972 was defeated only by the superior American air power. In 1975, when the RVN could not enjoy such advantage, it collapsed under the weight of the PAVN's onslaught.

In summary, the inability of the RVN to maintain an effective and systematic implementation of the political program allowed the NLF to sap its strength and sabotage any attempts at popular mobilization. This weakness forced the RVN to rely heavily on the US. Once this advantage disappeared after the Tet Offensive in 1968, the RVN had to fend for itself. The second critical problem for the RVN was the weak

organization of its military. Corruption and poor leadership prevented all elements of the ARVN to work together as a strong unit. Moreover, the territorial units such as the RF-PF were not considered as a useful branch and were mostly neglected at their inception. Without strong implementation of the political program and without a strong military organization, the RVN could only build an army that was nominally large but one that had low morale. In the face of attacks, many units disintegrated. When this occurred, even the units that stood and fought could not win because of a lack of support from fellow units. Consequently, even though the ARVN was designed as a conventional army, and even though it had numerical parity relative to the PAVN, its performance was dismal.

¹ Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place*, 279-292.

² Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 32-35.

³ Duiker, *Sacred War*, 109.

⁴ Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 39-40.

⁵ Hunt, *Vietnam's Southern Revolution*, 10-28.

⁶ Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 16.

⁷ McLeod, "Indigenous Peoples." 358-361.

⁸ Francis Kelly, *US Army Special Forces, 1961-71* (Washington, DC: Vietnam Studies, Department of the Army, 1985).

⁹ The issue of corruption of the RVN officials was well known. See for example, Race, *War comes to Long An*, 3-43, and Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 77-126.

¹⁰ Duiker, *Sacred War*, 108.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹² Geoffrey Stewart, "Hearts, Minds, and Công Dân Vụ," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 6, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 44-100.

¹³ Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 99.

¹⁴ Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 19.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁷ George Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 98.

¹⁸ Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 50-56.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 91-92.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁷ Kahin, *Intervention*, 98.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 99.

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- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Duiker. *Sacred War*, 109.
- ³⁴ Kahin, *Intervention*, 107.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 112.
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ Hunt, *Vietnam's Southern Revolution*, 30-35 and *Race, War Comes to Long An*, 119.
- ³⁸ Vo Nguyen Giap, *The Military Art of People's War: Selected Writings of General Vo Nguyen Giap*, edited and with an introduction by Russell Stetler (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).
- ³⁹ Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 78-79.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 105-113.
- ⁴¹ Hunt, *Vietnam's Southern Revolution*, 34.
- ⁴² Ibid., 242.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 31.
- ⁴⁴ Duiker, *Sacred War*, 141.
- ⁴⁵ Hunt, *Vietnam's Southern Revolution*, 37.
- ⁴⁶ Race, *War Comes to Long An*.
- ⁴⁷ Tuong Vu. "Vietnamese Political Studies and Debates on Vietnamese Nationalism." *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 2, No. 2 (Summer 2007): 175-230.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 187.
- ⁴⁹ Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 180.
- ⁵⁰ Lichbach, "What Makes Rational Peasants Revolutionary," 407.
- ⁵¹ William Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), 198.
- ⁵² *The Man Nobody Knew: In Search of My Father, Spy Master Bill Colby*, by Carl Colby, DVD (Sony Pictures, 2012).

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- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Cosmas, *United States Army in Vietnam-Escalation*, 107n5.
- 55 Tucker, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War*, 12.
- 56 Ibid. See also Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 53.
- 57 Tucker, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War*, 12.
- 58 Hunt, *Vietnam's Southern Revolution*, 41.
- 59 Tucker, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War*, 12.
- 60 Ibid., 1070-1071.
- 61 Cosmas, *United States Army in Vietnam-Escalation*, 86.
- 62 Ibid., 105.
- 63 Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 19.
- 64 Race, *War comes to Long An*, 134.
- 65 Hunt, *Vietnam's Southern Revolution*, 47.
- 66 Tucker, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War*, 1266-1271.
- 67 Ibid., 1266.
- 68 Ibid., 1267.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 Ibid., 1249-1252.
- 71 Ibid., 1251.
- 72 Ibid., 1266.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Ibid., 526.
- 75 Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 170.

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- ⁷⁶ Created by author based on the information in Tucker, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War*.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1266-1267.
- ⁷⁹ Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 178.
- ⁸⁰ Cosmas, *United States Army in Vietnam-Escalation*, 118.
- ⁸¹ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-63, Volume III, Vietnam, January-August 1963: Memorandum for the Record by the Director of Intelligence and Research (Roger Hilsman), 4, 13. "Farmgate" was the code name of the US Air Force Squadron introduced into South Vietnam in 1961 to train South Vietnamese Pilots and to fly coordinated missions with Vietnamese personnel in support of Vietnamese ground forces. (*Ibid.*, n3).
- ⁸² Brian Jenkins, *A People's Army for South Vietnam: A Vietnamese Solution* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND report for the Advanced Research Projects Agency, November 1971), 8.
- ⁸³ Ngo Quang Truong, *Territorial Forces* (Washington, DC: Indochina Monograph, US Army Center of Military History, 1981).
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁵ In late 1958, the CTZ system was put into place in order to prepare for a defense against a hypothetical invasion from the DRV where the corps will control the divisions assigned to them. Although most of these divisions would participate with the US military in search-and-destroy missions, they also had territorial security responsibilities.
- ⁸⁶ Truong, *Territorial Forces*, 26.
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.
- ⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 133.
- ⁹² See Duiker, *Sacred War and Race, War Comes to Long An*.
- ⁹³ Hunt, *Vietnam's Southern Revolution*, 44.
- ⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

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- ⁹⁵ Truong, *Territorial Forces*, 52.
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.
- ⁹⁷ Lewis Sorley, *Vietnam Chronicles: The Abrams Tapes, 1968-1972* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2004), 50.
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 345.
- ¹⁰⁰ Truong, *Territorial Forces*, 66.
- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 80.
- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 128.
- ¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 83.
- ¹⁰⁴ Edwin Brooks Werkheiser II, "'A Far More Formidable Task': The 101st Airborne Division's Pacification Of Thua Thien Province, Republic Of Vietnam 1968-1972," (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Unpublished Master of Military Art and Science thesis, US Army Command and General Staff College, August 2006), 48-49.
- ¹⁰⁵ "Study: Improving South Vietnam's Internal Security Scene, May 1970." US Department of Defense, Declassified 29 April 1980, 19.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, B-5.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, B-2.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.
- ¹¹⁰ Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1988), 514.
- ¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 555.
- ¹¹² Langley, Lester D. *The Banana Wars: United States Intervention in the Caribbean, 1898-1934*. (Chicago: Dorsey Press, 1988).
- ¹¹³ Michael Peterson, *The Combined Action Platoons: The US Marines' Other War in Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1989), 8.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 25. In fact, General Westmoreland never wanted American officers to lead Vietnamese troops. But the III MAF maintained control of all ground units in the I Corps and usually bypassed or ignored Westmoreland's command and liaised directly with their Marines chain of command. See also Cosmas, *United States Army in Vietnam-Escalation*, 333.

¹¹⁵ Peterson, *The Combined Action Platoons*, 8.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 36.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 47.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 50.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 47.

¹²⁰ Francis "Bing" West, *The Village* (New York: Pocket Books, 2003).

¹²¹ Ibid., 359. Written as a book which seemingly glorified the Marines' superior achievement relative to other services, the assertions should be read with caution.

¹²² Peterson, *The Combined Action Platoons*, 31.

¹²³ Ibid., 57-59.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 71.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 59, quoting a research by Bruce Allnutt.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 61-63.

¹²⁸ CORDS stands for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 80.

¹³⁰ Kelly, *US Army Special Forces*, 19-20.

¹³¹ Ibid., 24.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., 25.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 26.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 28.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 30.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 33.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 30.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 43.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 63.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid., 82, Table 6.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 85.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 86.

¹⁴⁵ For some prominent examples, see Kelly, *US Army Special Forces*, 92-95.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 104, Table 7.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 105.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 152-153, Table 8.

¹⁴⁹ Cosmas, *United States Army in Vietnam-Escalation*, 77.

¹⁵⁰ Hunt, *Vietnam's Southern Revolution*, 47-48.

¹⁵¹ Cosmas, *United States Army in Vietnam-Escalation*, 104-105.

¹⁵² Ibid., 37.

¹⁵³ Hunt, *Vietnam's Southern Revolution*, 47.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 48.

¹⁵⁵ See Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* and Lewy, *America in Vietnam*.

¹⁵⁶ Hunt, *Vietnam's Southern Revolution*, 136-152. Chapter 8 discussed this strange game between the NLF and the US and the ARVN.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 146.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 129.

¹⁵⁹ Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 72.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Race used the term "southern revolutionaries" to denote the indigenous insurgent movements in the RVN. Therefore, this excluded the COSVN leadership. See Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 78.

¹⁶² James H. Willbanks, *The Tet Offensive: A Concise History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 8-10.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 10-11.

¹⁶⁴ See, for example, Richard Falk, *Appropriating Tet* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Center of International Studies, 1988). This book provides perspectives from both sides, who tried to interpret the Tet Offensive and its aftermath in their own ways.

¹⁶⁵ Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power*, 265.

¹⁶⁶ Merle Pribbenow, trans., *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975*, Originally published by the Military History Institute of Vietnam, Translated version forword by William Duiker (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 216.

¹⁶⁷ Earlier, we have seen how the CAP was considered successful in its defense during the Tet Offensive. One should be cautioned, however, against reading the success in the CAPs' defense during the Tet Offensive as an indication of effectiveness of the program because the attacks were not the main effort anyway.

¹⁶⁸ Clark Dougan, Stephen Weiss, et al., eds., *Nineteen Sixty-Eight* (Boston, MA: Boston Publishing Company, Series: The Vietnam Experience, 1983), 82.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 12.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 8.

¹⁷² Hunt, *Vietnam's Southern Revolution*, 215.

¹⁷³ Dougan et al., eds., *Nineteen Sixty-Eight*, 14-15.

¹⁷⁴ Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 713.

¹⁷⁵ Dougan et al., eds., *Nineteen Sixty-Eight*, 24.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 14-19.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 14.

¹⁷⁸ Willbanks, *The Tet Offensive*, 101-102. Chapter 10: What Happened at Hue, presented a balanced review of the literature on the massacre at Hue.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 102-103.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Dougan et al., eds., *Nineteen Sixty-Eight*, 38.

¹⁸² Ibid., 20.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 69. The author cited Gallup Poll as the source.

¹⁸⁴ Willbanks, *The Tet Offensive*, 153.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 69.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Tran Van Tra, "Tet: The 1968 General Offensive and General Uprising", in Jayne S. Werner and Luu Doan Huynh, eds., *The Vietnam War: Vietnamese and American Perspectives* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 45-51. According to Tra, the offensive called for three phases of attack and what the allied called the Tet Offensive was only the first phase. Mini-Tet would be Phase II, and Phase III would be launched in September 1968.

¹⁸⁸ Willbanks, *The Tet Offensive*, 157.

¹⁸⁹ Fulghum et al., eds., *South Vietnam on Trial*, 145-152

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Chapter 4

THE CAMBODIAN CIVIL WAR: ROAD TO WAR

4.1 The French Buffer

A major part of modern Cambodian history is dominated by the complicated nature of Cambodian-Vietnamese relations. Grievances and bitter experiences between Cambodia and its neighboring countries, Thailand (formerly Siam) and Vietnam (formerly Annam), run deep throughout Cambodian history. Seeing the potential danger of Cambodia being divided by the two hostile neighbors along the Mekong River, King Ang Doung of Cambodia (who came to the throne with Siamese support) began courting French authorities in Singapore around 1853.¹ Initially, this scheme was interrupted by Siamese threats, but in 1863, Cambodia had become a French protectorate.

When France asserted its control, a major issue arose. A large part of territory known as Cochinchina was formerly Cambodian territory until the seventeenth century. After France left Indochina in 1954 (after the Geneva Conference), Cochinchina eventually became part of the new Republic of Vietnam.² The Vietnamese expansion from the southern border of China was known as the “Southward March” which completely destroyed the Champa Kingdom in 1832.³ Many Cambodians saw the Vietnamese influence in its political affairs in the 1950s as potentially another episode in this expansion. This fear would come to engulf both the left-wing revolutionaries and the right-wing politicians.

Before the First Indochina War, the independence movement in Vietnam organized itself as the Indochina Communist Party (ICP). Between 1930 and 1954, a section of the ICP became the founding members of the future Cambodian leftist movement.⁴ The Cambodian left-wing revolutionaries who would come to power later, considered the ICP as a Vietnamese ploy to dominate Cambodia.⁵ The Cambodian communist movement eventually organized its own party, the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP), on 28 June 1951.

After Cambodia gained independence in 1953, Prince Sihanouk established the Sangkum Reastr Niyum party (Khmer for "populist society party") and won a landslide victory in the general election in 1955. The KPRP also participated in the election, as did other minority right-wing parties, but did not win any seats in the national assembly. At this point, the communist movement in Cambodia had little hope of taking power from the popular Prince Sihanouk. However, international events soon changed that situation.

Prince Sihanouk's rule came at a difficult time in global politics. In order to avoid the adverse effects of the Cold War, Prince Sihanouk adopted a policy of neutrality and non-alignment. However, despite this official policy declaration, events forced Prince Sihanouk's foreign policy to fluctuate between support for the United States and the DRV.⁶

In 1959, several right-wing politicians were implicated in a failed coup attempt against Prince Sihanouk.⁷ In his memoir, Prince Sihanouk wrote that he believed the US was behind the failed coup attempt.⁸ Finally, on 26 April 1965, Cambodia broke diplomatic relations with the US.⁹ Taking advantage of favorable conditions, the DRV tried to ensure that no communist movement in Cambodia threatened Prince

Sihanouk's rule. The DRV insisted that the Cambodian communists should adhere to a political struggle (read: low intensity and long term) rather than a coordinated political-military one (i.e. potentially decisive).¹⁰ The KPRP's prospect for taking power was bleak. It had no army, no broad popular support, no external support, and the public wing of the party was effectively suppressed by the Cambodian regime.

It was amidst this confusion within the Cambodian communist party that a small, but influential, group of new leaders emerged. These leaders would later establish the reign of terror in Cambodia from 1975 to 1979 and bear the notorious name "Khmer Rouge." In fact, the term "Khmer Rouge" started to appear in Prince Sihanouk's speeches in the 1960s when he used the term to describe all Cambodian communists. "Khmer" denotes both the language of Cambodia and ethnic Cambodians while "Rouge" is the French word for "Red," a popular denomination of all things communist.

4.2 From KPRP to the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK)

The communist movement in Cambodia was hit by one disaster after another. The KPRP participated in the general election in 1955, but did not win any seats in the national assembly. In addition, because Prince Sihanouk leaned towards the DRV in the 1960s, the DRV cut off vital support to the communist movement in Cambodia to avoid antagonizing Prince Sihanouk. Finally, in 1962, the second man in the KPRP defected to the Cambodian government and helped the government hunt down Cambodian senior communist leaders.¹¹

According to one account, in the midst of this upheaval, twenty-one junior members of the KPRP met at a secret location in Phnom Penh in 1963 to draw up a charter for a new party.¹² The leader of this junior group named Saloth Sar, alias Pol

Pot, was elected the new general secretary of the KPRP. According to a veteran of the KPRP, upon assuming the position of general secretary in 1963, Pol Pot changed the name of the party from KPRP to the “Communist Party of Kampuchea” (CPK) in an attempt to sever all ties to the ICP and the Vietnamese communists.¹³ Many positions in the party were occupied by people close to Pol Pot.¹⁴ People such as Keo Meas, who was a veteran of the KPRP and had close ties with the Vietnamese communists, did not hold any important post in the new party. Upon taking over, Pol Pot changed the direction of the party and decided that armed insurrection was to be carried out in tandem with political action.¹⁵ To the dismay of his DRV comrades, this new policy meant that henceforth, the overthrow of Prince Sihanouk’s regime was on the communist agenda.

While the communist movement in Cambodia undertook a revolutionary metamorphosis and secretly became the CPK, the DRV either did not know of, or paid little attention to, these developments. After all, it was already comfortable with the support it received from Prince Sihanouk. However, the DRV would soon come to regret this decision as the CPK shifted the policy towards the overthrow of Prince Sihanouk, thus driving a wedge between the Prince and the DRV.

4.3 Turn Right: The End of the DRV’s Free Access in Cambodia

The implicit understanding between the DRV and Prince Sihanouk seemed to be that the Vietnamese revolutionaries could have free access along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border as long as they did not present any threat to the Prince’s regime. However, that changed on 2 April 1968 when a violent revolt took place in Battambang province (northwestern part of Cambodia, cf. Figure 1 Map of Cambodia on page 171). The event started out as a local rebellion by farmers who had no

connection whatsoever with the Cambodian communist insurgent. Responding to the abuse of power by local officials, farmers in a village called Samlot attacked a military outpost, killing two soldiers and capturing many weapons.¹⁶ Pol Pot and his comrades took advantage of this situation and declared responsibility for leading the revolt in Samlot.¹⁷

The Cambodian military responded to the revolt by killing many villagers and burning houses, forcing hundreds or even thousands of farmers to flee into the nearby jungle and mountains. Prince Sihanouk received a detailed report on what had happened. As a result, he dismissed many local officials and forced his Prime Minister to resign.¹⁸ However, Prince Sihanouk simply could not ignore the fact that the communists claimed responsibility for leading the revolt. That suspicion was confirmed when, after Samlot, revolts in other areas became more widespread.¹⁹ In the context of these simultaneous revolts, in addition to reports from some local authorities who had all the motivation to spin the information so that it would point the blame at others, that Prince Sihanouk began to focus on the communists for inciting the revolts.²⁰

This caused a significant foreign policy shift. Prince Sihanouk began to move away from supporting the DRV. Rhetoric against the communists increased, while the relations between Cambodia and the US started to improve. Cambodia and the US reestablished diplomatic relations on 11 June 1969, and in the last days of July, Cambodia sent a letter inviting President Nixon for an official visit to Cambodia. The government also imposed strict controls over the press to avoid antagonizing the US.²¹ Moreover, Prince Sihanouk authorized the Cambodian military to take actions against the Vietnamese revolutionaries along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border.²²



Figure 3. Map of Cambodia²³

The DRV, of course, could not be indifferent about these disturbing developments, because the loss of sanctuaries in Cambodia would prove disastrous for its campaigns in the RVN. On 5 July 1969, Huynh Tan Phat, Prime Minister of the newly formed, underground revolutionary government, the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam, paid an official visit to Cambodia to conclude some economic and trade agreements. The main objective of the visit was an attempt to defuse the tensions resulting from these recent developments. However, the attempt failed when Prince Sihanouk publicly denounced the Vietnamese communists after the visit.²⁴

As the specter of a complete strategic reversal loomed large, the DRV began to look to the remnants of the Cambodian communist party, which was now controlled by the largely unknown Pol Pot, in an attempt to find former allies for support.²⁵ Because Hanoi had no idea who Pol Pot was, it was faced with a dilemma: create a new, malleable Cambodian communist party to undermine Pol Pot and his CPK, thus further weakening the communist movement in Cambodia, or provide support, however temporary, to Pol Pot, at least until victory over the RVN was assured.²⁶ Hanoi chose the second alternative.

4.4 The Coup of 18 March 1970

On 18 March 1970, when Prince Sihanouk was on an official visit abroad, the right-wing politicians and the military carried out a coup to depose the Prince. On that day, the legislature voted, under duress, to remove Prince Sihanouk from power. The National Assembly made this decision behind closed doors while paratroopers took up positions around the National Assembly.²⁷ Soon after, the Khmer Republic was proclaimed.

The coup cut short the official visit of Prince Sihanouk in Moscow. Prince Sihanouk then flew to Beijing where he held a secret meeting on 21 March 1970 with Pham Van Dong (the DRV's Premier) and Zhou Enlai (Premier of the People's Republic of China).²⁸ On 23 March, Prince Sihanouk broadcast a message from Beijing calling for his "children" (denoting the Cambodian population) to go to the jungle and join the Maquis (a French term originated from World War II denoting resistance movement).

The coup in 1970 was an unprecedented and provided a unique if somewhat ironic opportunity for Pol Pot. To be able to return to power, Prince Sihanouk had no

choice but to rely on the communist Khmer Rouge. This enabled the Khmer Rouge to exploit Prince Sihanouk's reputation to attract recruits and build its power base. The coup of 1970 effectively made the Khmer Rouge leaders the servants of Prince Sihanouk, while it positioned them for the future. In addition, the Cambodian communists received military aid from both the PRC and the DRV while their enemy, the Khmer Republic, received less and less aid from the departing American troops.

The Khmer new year of 1975 marked the final offensive on Phnom Penh. On 17 April 1975, the Khmer Rouge took the capital city. Their first step was the evacuation of the city.²⁹ The evacuation marked the beginning of Pol Pot's paranoid and bloody reign. He believed that the "enemies of the revolution" were still hiding in the city, waiting to bring down the revolution after the war.³⁰ He believed the evacuation would disrupt these internal enemies before they could act.

4.5 Democratic Kampuchea: War and Genocide

Upon taking over, the Khmer Rouge established a new government called "Democratic Kampuchea." This new government made a series of decisions that eventually led to disaster. First of all, the Khmer Rouge turned against Prince Sihanouk. Even then, Pol Pot never felt safe. For him, the threat of a Vietnamese takeover was still a distinct possibility, and support for Prince Sihanouk among the Cambodian people was still strong. To deal with these problems, he had to eliminate all enemies, internal and external. The external enemy was Vietnam and the internal enemy included those who had any relations with Vietnam and who planned to destroy the revolution from the inside.

4.5.1 Prince Sihanouk

At the outset, the Khmer Rouge leaders sought to undermine Prince Sihanouk, who was now seen as a liability and not trustworthy. In July 1975, the Khmer Rouge requested the return of Prince Sihanouk from China. Upon his return, Prince Sihanouk was immediately appointed as head of state of Democratic Kampuchea and even presided over a cabinet meeting.³¹ However, just like the cabinet meeting that the Prince presided over, the title of head of state was nominal only. A few weeks later, Prince Sihanouk was forced to go to the United States to petition the United Nations where he successfully reclaimed the Cambodian seat for Democratic Kampuchea.³² Not long after he returned home, but his requests to go to the countryside to meet his compatriots were repeatedly denied, and Prince Sihanouk finally decided to submit a request for resignation in 1976.³³

After an internal meeting in March 1976, the Standing Committee of the CPK accepted the Prince's resignation. The Khmer Rouge leaders never trusted Prince Sihanouk, and they feared that, due to the Prince's immense popularity, any contact between the Prince and the people would undermine their power. Prince Sihanouk survived under Democratic Kampuchea only because of the intervention of China.³⁴ After his resignation, Prince Sihanouk was held prisoner in his own palace, with no contact with the outside world, until January 1979 when Democratic Kampuchea collapsed.

4.5.2 The Four Year Plan (1977-1980) and the Genesis of a Genocide

The Khmer Rouge's second major strategy was to reaffirm the collectivization of private property to maximize rice production. In early 1976, a Four Year Plan (1977-1980) was announced. The Khmer Rouge divided the land into two categories.

Normal land was required to produce three tons of rice per hectare (approximately 2.47 acres), while the best quality land was required to produce at least four to seven tons per hectare. It was this policy that led to famine and the brutal killing of people who were deemed enemies of the state because they could not meet the production target.³⁵

Apart from this simplified system, the Khmer Rouge also established the “cooperatives” system, which was a collectivization of land and private property. The cooperative was a production unit that could cover many hamlets and villages, depending on the scale of the rice fields and the number of workers. The Khmer Rouge abolished the market system and replaced it with this cooperative system. The cooperative was the place where people worked for subsistence. The chief of the cooperative determined the daily food ration for everyone under his control, and the cooperative was the only place where eating was allowed. Anyone caught eating outside of the cooperatives would be considered a traitor to the party and the revolution. The offender would be arrested and executed. Thus, the chiefs of the cooperatives had the authority to kill anyone they deemed “unnecessary” to the revolution. There was no law under Democratic Kampuchea. Justice rested on the will and the mood of the cadres.

The Four Year Plan collapsed almost as soon as it was implemented.³⁶ This had three drastic consequences. First, it generated a famine. Second, as the laborers, weakened by malnutrition, could not work to raise production, they were either considered lazy or enemies of the revolution. Both of these offenses could easily lead to execution. Third, Pol Pot feared that the failure to meet targets must have been the work of internal enemies who plotted to overthrow the revolution. This led to many

waves of purges, which devastated not only the ordinary people but also the Khmer Rouge cadres themselves.

4.5.3 Conflict with Vietnam

The conflict with Vietnam started on 1 May 1975 when a battalion of the Khmer Rouge 164th Division invaded an island south of the Cambodian coast which was claimed by both Vietnam and Cambodia.³⁷ The attack was a debacle. Nevertheless, Vietnam did not take any large-scale retaliation for the event and still maintained diplomatic relations with Democratic Kampuchea. Perhaps still convinced that the Khmer Rouge was subscribing to the idea of world socialist revolutionary solidarity, Vietnam did not take any major actions that might exacerbate the problem. However, the debacle following the invasion of the jointly-claimed island only put a temporary halt to Pol Pot's anti-Vietnamese policy, and it took him just one year to organize another army to fight with Vietnam on a larger scale.

In spite of the disparity in numbers between Vietnam and Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge did not hesitate to pursue an adventurous policy against Vietnam, because it believed its own propaganda that it had defeated the US in 1975. How the Khmer Rouge planned to overcome the disparity in numbers can be discerned from a state radio broadcast on 10 May 1978. In this broadcast, the Khmer Rouge propaganda service briefed the nation about national defense between April 1977 and April 1978:

[W]e are few in number, but we have to attack a larger force; therefore, we must preserve our forces to the maximum and try to kill as many of the enemy as possible. . . . In terms of numbers, one of us must kill 30 Vietnamese. If we can implement this slogan, we shall certainly win. . . . So far, we have succeeded in implementing this slogan of 1 against 30; that is to say, we lose 1 against 30 Vietnamese. . . . We should have 2,000,000 troops for 60,000,000 Vietnamese. However 2,000,000 troops would be more than enough to fight the Vietnamese, because

Vietnam has only 50,000,000 inhabitants. . . . We must use one against 30. This is just the number fixed by the Party, but in concrete, deeds of some of our comrades fought 1 against 10; we shall certainly win with 1 against 10 or 1 against 5. Some of our people have fought 1 against 20, and some have even tried to fight one against 50 or 1 against 100. There was no problem; they were still victorious.³⁸

The mathematics were simplistic, if not totally absurd. However, not long after the above broadcast, fresh campaigns by the Khmer Rouge against Vietnam restarted.³⁹

Meanwhile, the Khmer Rouge never ceased finding and eliminating suspected internal enemies. Suspects were arrested, tortured, and then forced to make new lists of suspects, which led to more purges. This purification policy destroyed the cadres of Democratic Kampuchea to a point where even the Chinese technicians who were sent to help the regime complained about the too frequent disappearances of their Cambodian counterparts.⁴⁰

4.6 Comrades at War

Between 1976 and 1977, small-scale clashes between Khmer Rouge troops and Vietnamese troops along the border were very frequent. Both sides exchanged diplomatic correspondence as well as meeting frequently to try to solve the conflict. However, most of those sessions tended to degenerate into mutual accusations. Finally, on 24 September 1977, the Khmer Rouge launched a furious, and perhaps the most brutal attack of the war, on Tay Ninh province, killing hundreds of Vietnamese civilians.⁴¹ Focused on domestic reconstruction, the Vietnamese still offered negotiation.

On the ground, however, the Vietnamese were less lenient than in previous skirmishes and retaliated on a large scale. The Vietnamese seemed to have sensed that a non-response would be interpreted as weakness, even though at the same time, the

Vietnamese felt the need to leave the channel for negotiation open. The Khmer Rouge ignored the call for negotiation.

On 6 December 1977, the Vietnamese conducted a coordinated counter-attack with brutal efficiency and completely stunned the Khmer Rouge army. One can gauge the severity of the situation by looking at one of the Khmer Rouge's telegrams from the battlefield. On 23 December, one Khmer Rouge commander, comrade Phourng, noted that the Vietnamese moved in very quietly and achieved surprise in many places.⁴² Just fifteen minutes after the first telegram, Phourng relayed another message. The situation was getting worse:

For the Yuon [i.e. Vietnamese. cf. endnote] situation on the 22nd of December 1977, they pushed forward to capture the Krek rubber plantation in its entirety.... We lost contact with the rubber plantation and factory at Memot because the courier has not yet returned.... This Yuon force, according to [our] soldiers, consisted of many trucks and many tanks. The fighting occurred against our forces chaotically, in front and in the rear of our artillery positions, and we could not discern which side was ours and which side was the enemy's. According to my own analysis, we have lost control to a great extent, we lost communication between the troops and the command headquarters; and that was why the enemy could penetrate this deep with ease.⁴³

The Vietnamese army had moved in with only armor and motorized infantry. That was the reason why they could achieve breakthrough this easily. This was a classic blitzkrieg tactic. The Khmer Rouge operations probably ended in late December 1977. The following report reveals a total loss of control:

We have a hole in the middle with no large formation of troops. The rubber plantation's militias could not fight and the big formations went to fight at the border for a long time and were now losing control and as we know, our brothers in the big formations were routed and could not yet establish communication.⁴⁴

In late December 1977, Democratic Kampuchea publicly announced the armed clashes with Vietnam, as well as that it had broken off diplomatic relations with Vietnam. Vietnam unilaterally withdrew all of its forces from Cambodia despite gaining territory during the fight.⁴⁵ As late as 1977, it seemed Vietnam still had not been prepared to undertake anything drastic.

Defeat on the battlefield was not the main problem for the Khmer Rouge, however. It was the new wave of purges that destroyed the regime. By simply looking at the reports that were coming in, one can see that the Vietnamese could easily penetrate the rear of the formations and effectively disrupt the Khmer Rouge supplies and artillery support. Once that occurred, the front formations collapsed. One can easily see that the Vietnamese triumphed because of correct tactics, i.e. a blitzkrieg-type tactic. In the mind of the Khmer Rouge leaders, however, when campaigns initially ran so well and then immediately and inexplicably collapsed, this could only mean one thing: internal treachery that was perpetrated by Vietnamese sympathizers.

4.7 Kampuchea Solidarity Front for National Salvation

4.7.1 East Zone Exodus

In June 1977, when the Khmer Rouge was at war with Vietnam, internally, the purges of the cadres in an area along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border, called the "East Zone," was also under way. A junior Khmer Rouge commander in the East Zone named Hun Sen escaped to Vietnam when he learned that his name was next on the execution list.⁴⁶ He also wanted to seek support from Vietnam in order to return and defeat the Khmer Rouge.⁴⁷ On 27 September, Hun Sen was allowed to meet with Lieutenant General Van Tien Dung, a member of the Politburo of the Vietnamese

communist party, who was also the chief of staff of the PAVN.⁴⁸ At the end of the meeting, however, no explicit pledge for support was given to Hun Sen.⁴⁹ It seemed that as late as 1977, Vietnam still maintained some hope of negotiating with the Khmer Rouge. Perhaps that was the reason why Vietnam did not give any political or military support to the Cambodian refugees who had escaped to Vietnam.

For the Khmer Rouge, the year 1978 was eventful. It marked a much larger Khmer Rouge offensive against the Vietnamese. The most brutal attack of the war was launched in late February 1978 by the Southwest Zone and the divisions from the Central Committee. According to one report, the second wave consisted of around 30,000 to 40,000 troops and was aimed at the Vietnamese Tay Ninh province.⁵⁰ However, just like in 1977, the Khmer Rouge campaign in 1978 was a total disaster.

In April 1978, the PAVN responded in kind with a multidivisional counter-attack. Unlike in 1977, the Vietnamese now used tanks in greater numbers, as well as air support.⁵¹ Khmer Rouge battlefield reports also revealed another important aspect of tactics used by the Vietnamese army. In 1977, the Vietnamese moved swiftly with armor and motorized infantry to penetrate behind the Khmer Rouge lines, avoided strong points, and induced confusion and collapse of the main forward formations of the Khmer Rouge. In 1978, however, the Vietnamese pushed forward more slowly. While the Vietnamese counter-attack in 1977 had been a blitzkrieg tactic, the counter-attack in 1978 was purely attritional.

In April 1978, at the same time that the war reached its climax, Colonel General Tran Van Tra, the commander and chief political commissar of Vietnam's Military Region 7, told Hun Sen that the Vietnamese leadership had already agreed to provide support for a Cambodian resistance movement.⁵² Accordingly, an armed

force, the “Kampuchean Solidarity Armed Forces for National Salvation.” was established on 12 May 1978. Eventually, by recruiting the Cambodian refugees who escaped to Vietnam, the resistance movement had twenty one infantry battalions, one all-female battalion, and one hundred armed operations groups, while the units of the headquarters consisted of a general staff section, a political section, a logistics section, a finance section, one special forces company, one medical company, and one unit for military bands.⁵³ These forces operated out of the refugee camps in Vietnam’s Long Giao province.

On 22 November 1978, the Cambodian resistance army (Kampuchean Solidarity Armed Forces for National Salvation) began drafting a political program to create a political movement.⁵⁴ The political movement was formally established in Kratie province on 2 December 1978.⁵⁵ On Christmas day 1978, the Cambodian resistance army and the Vietnamese army combined forces for a final push into Cambodia to overthrow Democratic Kampuchea on 7 January 1979, ending the Khmer Rouge’s genocidal regime that had lasted for 3 years 8 months and 20 days.

4.7.2 Prince Sihanouk’s Late Departure: Adding One More Insult to Injury

While these actions were in full progress, Prince Sihanouk was still kept in almost solitary confinement by Pol Pot. Nonetheless, in late 1978, Prince Sihanouk noted an unusual generosity and kindness on the part of the regime.⁵⁶ At dusk on 5 January 1979, a senior Khmer Rouge leader came to the house and told Prince Sihanouk that Pol Pot had invited the Prince for evening tea.⁵⁷ Upon arrival, Prince Sihanouk noted that Pol Pot was more courteous than ever before, prostrating himself to welcome the Prince, a standard Cambodian etiquette of respect for senior people and the royal family, something Pol Pot had never done before.⁵⁸ He also addressed

Prince Sihanouk as “His Majesty”. Pol Pot dropped a hint about what he wanted Prince Sihanouk to do:

Comrade Khieu Samphan that Your Majesty had met before had told me that Your Majesty would be happy to represent our government at the United Nations and defend the righteous cause of our people against invasion by the Yuon, in the (political) discussions that might take place in the Security Council...of the United Nations. Your Majesty is a nationalist and Your Majesty has many friends in the world. Your Majesty could be of great advantage to the Cambodian people.⁵⁹

Pol Pot then briefed Prince Sihanouk that the Vietnamese would soon capture Phnom Penh, but reassured the prince that it would not be a problem, as the Cambodian soldiers and people would soon chase the Vietnamese out.⁶⁰

Pol Pot then gave Prince Sihanouk 20,000 USD as pocket money for the mission, the money that the Prince returned in full after departing Democratic Kampuchea. In retrospect, we can see that the Prince had no choice but to agree. It was either take the money and leave, or perish under the Khmer Rouge for non-compliance. Vietnam sent a special forces detachment to rescue Prince Sihanouk so that the new regime could gain legitimacy through the Prince’s popularity, but this operation failed.⁶¹ Prince Sihanouk had already left the Royal Palace the day before.

4.8 Adversaries Line-Up

The infamous legacy of the Khmer Rouge regime was genocide that killed almost one million people out of the total population of eight million.⁶² For the survivors, the Khmer Rouge was an existential threat that they had to fight against at all costs. Preventing the return of the Khmer Rouge and Pol Pot’s genocidal regime became the main propaganda message of the Vietnamese-backed government, the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). The PRK established its army called the

Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Army (KPRA). The genocide message not only pushed many people to join this army, but this was also used to justify Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia. From Vietnam's point of view, the intervention was justified because it was based on the grounds that the Khmer Rouge attacked Vietnam first and that Vietnam intervened to put an end to a genocidal regime. The Vietnamese troops were simply the "volunteer army" who came into Cambodia for "selfless duty for the sake of international socialist solidarity."⁶³ Accordingly, the Vietnamese troops in Cambodia called themselves the Vietnamese Volunteer Army (VVA). In this logic, they were not the PAVN, but Vietnamese soldiers who volunteered to fight for the sake of humanity and for the survival of their fellow socialist regime, the PRK.⁶⁴

However, not everyone saw themselves as victims of the Khmer Rouge. Some Cambodians were too young to understand what had happened. When these young people grew up, they did not see genocide, but they did see the Vietnamese troops, just like the Khmer Rouge's propaganda described. Unlike the victims of the Khmer Rouge regime, these people then joined the Khmer Rouge army and fought ferociously against what the Khmer Rouge called the Vietnamese invasion. Humanitarian intervention did not make sense because the international community was then largely unaware that a genocide had taken place.

Two political groups were caught in a more awkward position. For the remnants of the Khmer Republic who were living abroad, as well as those who stayed along the Cambodian-Thai border after the fall of Phnom Penh in 1975, the Vietnamese intervention was the materialization of the fear in the 1960s and 1970s of the proverbial *Westward March*.⁶⁵ Even though they and the Khmer Rouge now had mutual enemies, they still did not cooperate. Most of the remnants of the Khmer

Republic came together to establish the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) led by Son Sann, a former Prime Minister under Prince Sihanouk.

Another very important actor in this awkward game was Prince Sihanouk. He was still a key player both inside the country and internationally. However, Prince Sihanouk was only one man and he needed a movement to chase the Vietnamese out of Cambodia. Prince Sihanouk faced a dilemma. He had bitter experiences with the Khmer Rouge. Yet, the Khmer Rouge was the strongest fighting force of the resistance groups opposing the Vietnamese and the PRK. Ultimately, Prince Sihanouk was determined not to be fooled by the Khmer Rouge for a second time, and he created his own movement, the *Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique, Et Coopératif* or FUNCINPEC for short. Prince Sihanouk established the movement in February 1981 in France, and in March the same year, the FUNCINPEC absorbed three smaller movements in Cambodia which, hitherto, had always suffered from infighting.⁶⁶ The military arm of the FUNCINPEC was called the *Armée Nationale Sihanoukhiste* (Sihanoukist National Army) or ANS for short.

In spite of having a common and stronger enemy, the three resistance groups worked separately to fight against the Vietnamese forces and the PRK, but they sometimes attacked each other as well. However, in 1982, Prince Sihanouk finally gave in to pressure from the sponsoring countries and accepted the establishment of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) which combined the FUNCINPEC, the Khmer Rouge, and the KPNLF into one single political organization opposing the PRK and the Vietnamese. Prince Sihanouk explained his rational, yet excruciating decision:

In 1979, 1980, 1981, neither myself nor Mr. Son Sann wanted to enter into a coalition with the Khmer Rouge. But in June 1982, we had to do

so after all, because our followers, i.e. the patriotic and nationalist Khmers as a whole, who had decided to fight against the Vietnamese, in order to save our fatherland, would have received neither arms nor ammunition from China nor foodstuffs or any other humanitarian aid from friendly countries nor the support of the UNO [United Nations Organization], if we had remained simple 'rebels'. China and ASEAN gave us to understand that our two nationalist movements, our two national liberation fronts, would not have any future outside the lawful framework of the state of Democratic Kampuchea, a full member of the UNO.⁶⁷

In other words, the Khmer Rouge was the necessary evil because its government, the Democratic Kampuchea, still retained a seat at the United Nations. This put Vietnam squarely in the position of the aggressor fighting against a sovereign Cambodia as well as delegitimizing the PRK. Such is the complexity of the civil war in Cambodia, the last war of the Third Indochina Conflict.

Such was the complicated political context of the Cambodian Civil War. One does not envy those who have to decide which version to believe. For the survivors of the Pol Pot regime, fighting against the return of the Khmer Rouge was the prime objective. For those who did not know about the genocide, however, the Vietnamese presence was the main threat. For many people who did not want to see any more war and instability, Prince Sihanouk was believed to be the solution to all problems. But for others, however, it all boiled down to personal security at the present time, rather than the past or the future. As both sides could be said to be tied when it comes to political program, organization might make a difference. The next chapter will discuss the military organization of the guerrillas and the counterinsurgent.

¹ Martin, *Cambodia: A Shattered Society*, 30.

² This issue is controversial and politically charged. However, the perception of many Cambodians during the war was that the land belongs to Cambodia and its loss was simply another example of Vietnamese expansionism. On the bitter relations between Vietnam and Cambodia prior to the 1970s.

see Martin, *Cambodia: A Shattered Society*; David Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History*, and Charles Meyer, *Derrière le Sourire Khmer* (Paris: Plon, 1971), 68.

³ Mark W. McLeod, "Indigenous Peoples," 355.

⁴ Dmitry Mosyakov, "Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese Communists: A History of Their Relations as Told in the Soviet Archives," *Searching for the Truth*, May 2001.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Kenton Clymer, "The Perils of Neutrality," *Searching for the Truth*, January 2000.

⁷ Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History*, 49.

⁸ Prince Norodom Sihanouk, and Wilfred Burchett, *My War with the CIA: The Memoirs of Prince Norodom Sihanouk* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1973), 175-180.

⁹ Clymer, "The Perils of Neutrality." Clymer speculated that the delay between the time of the failed coup attempt (1959) and the cessation of the diplomatic relations (1965) was perhaps due to the reliance of the Cambodian economy on the inflow of American dollar. This factor, according to Clymer, explained Prince Sihanouk's hesitation.

¹⁰ Nhem, *The Khmer Rouge*, 9. Ironically, this insistence ran against the Vietnamese concept of "đấu tranh" (Vietnamese for "the struggle") which blended political and military actions as well as combining guerrilla warfare with conventional warfare. For a detail description, see chapter 9 of Douglas Pike, *The PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1986), 212-232. The fact that the Vietnamese communists applied *đấu tranh* in Vietnam but told their Cambodian comrades not to do the same in Cambodia was perhaps evidence that the Vietnamese communists did not want their Cambodian comrade to win.

¹¹ Dmitry Mosyakov claimed that as a direct result of this defection, the KPRP party secretary disappeared and was presumed dead. See Mosyakov, "Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese Communists."

¹² David Chandler, "Revising the Past in Democratic Kampuchea: When was the Birthday of the Party? Notes and comments," *Pacific Affairs* 56, no. 2 (1983): 288-300. Mosyakov, on the other hand, concurred on the new charter but did not mention the name.

¹³ Mosyakov, "Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese Communists."

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Interviews with Nuon Chea in 2005, presented as Annex in ជ័យ សុផាល់ [Diep, Sophal], ព្រឹត្តិបត្រកម្ពុជា [Cambodia's Tragedy: Political Ideology, Social Revolution, and Bloody War] (ព្រះព្រហ្មវិហារ ព្រះបណ្ឌិតជ័យ ភ័ក្ត្រ [Phnom Penh: Tchouk Jey Publishing, 2008]).

¹⁶ Martin, *Cambodia: A Shattered Society*, 113.

¹⁷ Ibid., 114.

¹⁸ Meyer, *Derrière le Sourire Khmer*, 58.

¹⁹ Ibid., 57. According to Meyer, just like the revolt in Samlot, other revolts in many parts of the country were genuine farmers' revolts against local officials. But the communists once again claimed they had led the revolts.

²⁰ Nhem, *The Khmer Rouge*, 13.

²¹ Ibid., 15.

²² The operation was dubbed "Operation TEST VC/NVA." Its objective was to test the strength of the Vietnamese communists along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border and, if necessary, to destroy them. See Sak Sutsakhan, *The Khmer Republic at War*, 63-66.

²³ Map created by author.

²⁴ Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History*, 187.

²⁵ Mosyakov, "Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese Communists."

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Martin, *Shattered Society*, 124.

²⁸ Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, 65-67.

²⁹ Chandler, *Brother Number One*, 103-105.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Dy Khamboly, *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2007), 19.

³² Ibid.

³³ Martin, *Cambodia: A Shattered Society*, 185-189.

³⁴ Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, 43. Nayan Chanda wrote that Mao Tse-tung understood that when Pol Pot took power, he would no longer need Prince Sihanouk and perhaps might even try to harm the Prince. Fearing this eventuality, the ailing Mao struggled with his failing health to speak to the sister-in-law of Pol Pot and told her not to send Prince Sihanouk and his wife to the cooperative (i.e. hard labor). This proved to be a lifesaver for the Prince and his family.

³⁵ By 1975, most of the arable land had been ravaged by bombing and unexploded ordnance, as well as landmines. Moreover, the ones who had to work to achieve the goals of the Four Year Plan were former

city residents with little to no experience with agricultural labor. The Khmer Rouge distinguished between the "Old People" or "Base/Local People" and the "New People," or "17 April People." The former were considered as the owners of the country, while the latter were considered as "latecomers" to the revolution. This latter group were "sub-people" and could only obtain the status of full-fledged citizens by way of forced labor.

³⁶ Three main reasons could explain why this Four Year Plan failed. First, the people who were sent to the cooperative came from the cities and were not accustomed to either hard labor or even agricultural practices in general. Second, because the Khmer Rouge did not have any machinery to help with the cultivation, the productivity was dismal. Third, most arable land was ravaged by war and unexploded ordnance and landmines prevented a large-scale cultivation. See Nhem, *The Khmer Rouge*, 53.

³⁷ Sok Vannak, "Koh Tral Under the Khmer Rouge Regime," *Rasmei Kampuchea Daily*, 26 August 2012.

³⁸ A Khmer Rouge's radio broadcast in 1978. Documentation Center of Cambodia's collections, quoted in Nhem, *The Khmer Rouge*, 91.

³⁹ Stephen Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia: Political, Culture and the Causes of War* (Stanford University Press, 1999), 75-77.

⁴⁰ Andrew Mertha, "Surrealpolitik: The experience of Chinese experts in Democratic Kampuchea, 1975-1979," *Cross-Current: East Asian History and Culture Review*, No. 4 (September 2012). Accessed: 15 October 2013, <https://cross-currents.berkeley.edu/e-journal/issue-4/Mertha>.

⁴¹ Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, 99.

⁴² "Telegram 07," 23rd December 1977 (19:30), Document number: D01975. Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam).

⁴³ The term "yuon" was a Khmer term denoting Vietnamese. In the 1960s, however, with the rise of the Khmer Rouge, this term began to contain racial pejorative. When this term is used today, it tends to have a heavy derogatory meaning. See "Telegram 06," 23rd December 1977 (19:45), Document number: D01972, DC-Cam. This telegram was sent later than the previous one but was received by Office 870 one day earlier. That is the reason why this one was marked "Telegram 06."

⁴⁴ "Telegram 08. Dear respected and beloved Office 870. from Phourng," 24th December 1977, Document number: D01974. DC-Cam.

⁴⁵ According to Stephen Morris, the reason that Vietnam did not follow through with its campaign was that it saw no exit strategy, i.e. no political solution after the military action. See Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*.

⁴⁶ Harish and Julie Mehta, *Hun Sen: Strongman of Cambodia* (Singapore: Graham Brash, 1999), 209-210.

⁴⁷ For one man to seek support from a country to attack another country was indeed a very ambitious plan. However, Hun Sen speculated that the intensity of the war and the severity of Khmer Rouge's atrocities made such plan possible. Moreover, Hun Sen was among the very first Cambodian refugees

who escaped to Vietnam. These people were the only source of information from which Vietnam learnt about the general situation and the genocide inside Cambodia. Consequently, the first group of refugees had close contacts with the Vietnamese. They were, therefore, in a good position to request support from Vietnam. The claim was made in *Speech of the Prime Minister*. "Commemoration ceremony of fallen veterans and the inauguration of the historical Memory Statue at the former location of Unit 125 [Dong Nai province, Vietnam], the source of the armed forces of Cambodia under the command of comrade Hun Sen," aired on 2 January 2012 on the National Television of Kampuchea (TVK).

⁴⁸ Ibid. Dung was the commander of the PAVN that defeated the ARVN in the Spring Offensive of 1975.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Editorial staff, "Le Cambodge aurait lancé une offensive dans la province vietnamienne de Tay Ninh," *Le Monde*, 26-27 February 1978. The newspaper mentioned that the number was given by a "reliable source" to a representative of AFP.

⁵¹ Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, 208-210.

⁵² Speech of Samdech Techo Prime Minister Hun Sen, "Commemoration Ceremony of Fallen Veterans."

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Speech of Samdech Techo Prime Minister Hun Sen, "Commemoration ceremony of fallen veterans." The peculiarity of this case was that the army was established before the political movement. Thus, the Kampuchean Solidarity "Armed Forces" for National Salvation was born before the Kampuchean Solidarity "Front" for National Salvation.

⁵⁵ Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, 339.

⁵⁶ Sihanouk, *Prisonniers des Khmers Rouges*, 331-332.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 356.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 357.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 358-59.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, 299. According to Chanda, one team of Vietnamese special forces was sent in after the Prince had already been evacuated out of the country by the Khmer Rouge. Chanda claimed the team was decimated. However, the author's conversation with a relative of a Vietnamese soldier involved in the operation revealed that before the combat team went in, a forward, light, reconnaissance team had already went in to scout the approach. This team survived but lacked the capabilities to change the situation.

⁶² This is a conservative estimate. See note 40 on page 96 of this dissertation.

⁶³ Nguyễn Văn Hồng (colonel), *Cuộc chiến tranh bắt buộc [The Obligated War]* (Hanoi: Nhà xuất bản Quân Đội Nhân Dân, 2008 [Hanoi, Socialist Republic of Vietnam: People's Army publishing house, 2008]). The author of this book was a retired colonel who had served under Front 479. The author would like to thank Captain Tran Duc Huong (of the People's Army of Vietnam), the author's classmate at the US Army Command and General Staff College for assisting with parts of the translation of the book.

⁶⁴ For instance, as part of the effort, Democratic Kampuchea's infamous S-21 prison was preserved and turned into a genocidal museum. Here too, Pol Pot's policy of secrecy kept the workers in the prison in the dark until the last days of the regime. When the Vietnamese came in, the workers had no time to destroy the evidence and they largely remained intact.

⁶⁵ This was the title of a publication of a historical-demographic book in the 1960s by a right-wing scholar. The book's major prediction was that as the Vietnamese expansionism reached the sea after it controlled Cochinchina, Vietnam had no choice but to expand westward, i.e. into Cambodia.

⁶⁶ Nhek Bun Chhay, *A Luck in Thousand Dangers* (Phnom Penh: [unknown publisher], 1998), 15.

⁶⁷ Schier, Peter, "An Interview with Prince Norodom Sihanouk, 1st December, 1983," *SUDOSTASIEN aktuell*, (January, 1984), 84-90.

Chapter 5

THE CAMBODIAN CIVIL WAR: MILITARY ORGANIZATIONS, CONCEPTS OF OPERATIONS, AND STRATEGIES

Khieu Samphan: “We [Democratic Kampuchea] have shown our understanding to let the ‘Puppet’ [People’s Republic of Kampuchea] to join the SNC [Supreme National Council of Cambodia]”

Hun Sen: “I am so ‘thankful’ for the understanding from the ‘Murderers’”

-Hun Sen’s reminiscence of a session during the SNC meeting.¹

In the Cambodian Civil War, the sitting government, the PRK, fought against an exiled government, the CGDK, which was composed of three groups: the Khmer Rouge, the *Armée Nationale Sihanoukhiste* (ANKI), and the Kampuchean People’s National Liberation Army (KPNLAF). This chapter discusses the military organization of all four parties to the Cambodian conflict, with emphasis on the KPRA.

5.1 The Khmer Rouge: From Guerrillas to Regulars, from Regulars to Guerrillas

The Khmer Rouge started as outlawed guerrillas. The 1970 coup saw the Khmer Rouge becoming the liberation army that claimed to fight in order to put Prince Sihanouk back in power. Members of the Khmer Rouge came into the hamlets and villages and started recruiting the peasants who supported Prince Sihanouk.² The organization was designed and based on Chinese and Vietnamese guerilla units. They

were organized as “armed propaganda units,” meaning that they had a dual mission—to indoctrinate people about their cause while retaining the ability to fight, should the situation demand it. These “educators” required little training, as their mission was comprised of going from village to village, singing the revolutionary songs and spreading propaganda in order to help recruit the local population.³

After the Khmer Rouge’s victory in April 1975, the Kampuchea Revolutionary Army was established in Phnom Penh on 22 July 1975.⁴ This army had three layers. The first layer was the conventional units that were directly controlled by the Central Committee. In March 1977, this army had nine divisions: 703, 310, 450, 170, 290, 502, 801, 920, and 164.⁵ A division had between 4000 and 6000 soldiers. Each of these divisions had a unique three-digit numerical designation which distinguished them as troops of the Central Committee.⁶

The second layer of military power of Democratic Kampuchea was the regional level. Both the Region (province) and Zone (several provinces) had their own military units. The Zone can organize only one division or brigade to carry out operations in its area of responsibility. The Region typically had one regiment.⁷

The third layer was the village militia. The total number of both the regional troops and militias was not clear because the archives are incomplete. Moreover, after sensing an impending purge, some units in the East Zone were upgraded beyond the standard allowance.⁸ Only the total number of the troops under the nine divisions was clear. In sum, a shadow of this three-echelon force more or less perpetuated after 1979, albeit on a smaller scale.

The post-1979 reorganization: Cambodia has seen almost all types of political and military organizations. The military organization of all sides were typical of

modern armies. A unit was usually composed of three maneuver units (i.e. the fighting units) of smaller echelon. Thus, typically, a corps (usually called "Front") controlled three divisions; one division controlled three regiments, one regiment controlled three battalions, and one battalion controlled three companies. Sometimes, a special unit, the brigade, was established and functioned like a regiment, but the brigade normally had more strength and capabilities. Heavy support weapons units usually appeared at the regimental level and above.

The number of troops in one particular unit varied from one army to another. The Vietnamese units in Cambodia had the largest number of troops compared to units of the same echelon from other parties. A typical Vietnamese division had around 10,000 troops, while the KPRA division only had 5,000 troops on average.

The Khmer Rouge divisions, on the other hand, were very different from those of the other factions. The Khmer Rouge adhered to the "People's War" concept of war and cemented their military organization with the local population, either through selective intimidation or ideology or both. Thus, while the Khmer Rouge divisions might have had a substantially smaller number of troops than those of other factions, all of them were maneuver units, while logistics and sustainment support were conducted by the local civilian population. The units of the other factions would include the support elements (logistics and sustainment) in their order of battle. Officially, the Khmer Rouge army was known as the National Army of Democratic Kampuchea (NADK), a symbol of Democratic Kampuchea, which still held a seat at the UN. Yet, the soldiers in the field shied away from using this name, which was associated with the murderous period between 1975 and 1979. Surprisingly, this army

functioned without official name or rank. Perhaps, their hatred of the Vietnamese transcended these basic ancillaries.

In the post-1979 reorganization, each Khmer Rouge division had between three or four regiments but had no heavy (long-range) artillery. Each regiment had three or four battalions. Each battalion, however, controlled only two to three squads.⁹ Thus, each Khmer Rouge battalion would have had only between 30 and 40 soldiers, each regiment between 70 and 80 soldiers, and each division between 300 and 400 soldiers. In other words, a Khmer Rouge division functioned as an equivalent of a KPRA's battalion-plus. During the war, whenever the Khmer Rouge mobilized to attack a large objective, it almost never committed less than one division. The inflated organization gave the Khmer Rouge more than forty nominal divisions.¹⁰

Table 6. Unit Size Conversion

| KPRA's Echelons (Average number of personnel) | Khmer Rouge | KPNLAF | ANS/ANKI |
|--|--|----------|----------|
| Battalion (200-300) | Regiment | Regiment | Regiment |
| Regiment (300-500) | Division (except some special divisions) | Brigade | Brigade |
| Brigade (1500-2000) | Special regiments | OMZ | Division |
| Division (3000-4000) | 980th, 920th, 450th, and 415th Divisions | | |
| Division-plus (7000) or Corps | Front | | |

There were a few exceptions to this rule. Benefiting from the sanctuaries along the Cambodian-Thai border and the ability to retreat to Thailand in times of duress, most divisions that operated around the Khmer Rouge's border headquarters were full and heavy divisions. Four divisions were the most prominent. The 4th division¹⁵,

operating around Route 10 near Pailin in Battambang, and the 4th division⁵⁰, operating in Malai, the border between Battambang and Banteay Meanchey, each had a strength similar to that of a KPRA division.¹¹ Unlike most Khmer Rouge divisions, which were primarily infantry divisions, these two divisions were heavy divisions, i.e. they had organic heavy artillery. Division 980 and 912 in Siem Reap-Ouddar Meanchey also had a similar strength.¹² None of them had tanks until late 1989, when they captured a few of them from the KPRA in Pailin; in 1990 the Khmer Rouge received a number of tanks from China.¹³ Nevertheless, there was no notable event where they had used tanks decisively. Pol Pot seemed to prefer holding them back to protect the headquarters.

The Khmer Rouge divided their areas of operations into three (please refer to Map 5.1): the first area in the Tonle Sap Lake (because of its economic potential), the second area along the Cambodian-Thai border (due to its infiltration potential), and the third area covered the rest of the country (to fix the KPRA forces).

In the northwestern provinces, the Khmer Rouge organized two Fronts, Front 909, which operated in the Battambang-Pursat border, and Front 250 which operated south of Sisophon (provincial capital of Banteay Meanchey), i.e. along the border between Battambang and Banteay Meanchey provinces.¹⁴ These organizations were mainly used for command and control. The Khmer Rouge still had no capabilities to mass and fight as a conventional army.

Front 909 oversaw the operations of nine divisions, while Front 250 controlled four heavy divisions and four special (augmented) regiments. By Cambodian standards, therefore, both were corps-size formations, at least based on their strength.¹⁵ In addition, the Khmer Rouge did not rely solely on refugee camps for

sanctuaries or manpower. Unlike the non-communist resistance, which we will examine next, the Khmer Rouge relied more on their underground networks in the villages all over the country.



Figure 4. Khmer Rouge's Areas of Operations¹⁶

The Khmer Rouge's concept of operations was based on guerrilla warfare. Former KPRA soldiers spoke of their fear of the Khmer Rouge's ambushes and anti-infantry tactics.¹⁷ Major roads were almost always ambushed. Small squads relied on generous use of rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), which were devastating against infantry, vehicles, and lightly armored units. On major roads, the Khmer Rouge used recoilless rifles to destroy heavy trucks. They also used anti-personnel and anti-tank

mines in conjunctions with improvised traps, which included even the primitive bamboo-stick pits. According to a former KPRA officer in Battambang, the Khmer Rouge had an undying love for ambush. Even when their position was destroyed by the KPRA's surprise attack, they still prepared ambush positions to counterattack as the KPRA left the scene. "We don't know what they did, but whatever they did there was always an ambush, even when they had only a few people left," former KPRA soldiers noted in their official unit's history.¹⁸

Secondly, the Khmer Rouge sought to build a cohesive fighting unit. In all of their battles, the Khmer Rouge always fought to retrieve the bodies of their fallen comrades. In some cases, the attack to retrieve the bodies could even be more intense than the original attack itself, especially because the KPRA units did not expect such attacks.¹⁹ According to a former chief of staff of the KPRA's Kampong Thom provincial military command (PMC), the Khmer Rouge never left more than five bodies on the battlefield unless they completely exhausted their resources to recover them.²⁰ In fact, this tradition was observed since the time they fought as guerrilla units in the 1970s. For the Khmer Rouge soldiers, their cause was not material gains but ideology. A former non-communist resistance officer duly noted: "the Khmer Rouge did not eat rice, they ate ideology."²¹

5.2 The Non-Communist Resistance (NCR)

Also fighting against the Vietnamese and the PRK was a collection of armed groups that were organized in 1979 and controlled the refugee camps that straddled the Cambodia-Thai border. These small bands of fighters were either remnants of the FANK or former royalists who continued to fight even after the fall of Phnom Penh in 1975. In 1979, as refugees poured to the border, many of these groups became

involved in black marketeering, smuggling, as well as preying on the helpless refugees. Many of their leaders were known by the infamous prefix “warlords.”²²

Eventually, they gravitated towards two major movements. Thailand sought to organize a resistance group to curb the Vietnamese advance, and Prince Sihanouk also looked to organize his own movement so that he would not have to rely on the Khmer Rouge. The Royal Thai Army spearheaded the establishment of the Khmer People’s National Liberation Front (KPNLF) and the-then colonel Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, future premier of Thailand, gathered many former FANK officers from abroad and took them to Thailand to lead the KPNLF.²³

The KPNLF was established on 9 October 1979. It was to be governed by an “Executive Committee” (EXCO) made up of seven delegates and one president. Son Sann, a former premier under Prince Sihanouk’s government in the 1960s, held the latter post. In conjunction with the United States’ Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Thai Army organized a military unit called Task Force 838 to advise and train the KPNLF army, the Khmer People’s National Liberation Armed Forces (KPNLAF).²⁴ In 1984, Son Sann asked the EXCO to grant him consolidated power over the KPNLF (meaning he would have veto power over the EXCO), but the proposal was rejected by the military, most notably Dien Del, the EXCO delegate for military affairs, and Sak Sutsakhan, the chief of staff of the KPNLAF.²⁵

The rift between the Son Sann loyalists and the Dien Del/Sak Sutsakhan loyalists was never resolved until the end of the war. To a certain extent, the rift did not totally debilitate the military operations, as Son Sann and his faction were mostly in charge of the diplomatic affairs, while the military faction took care of the military

matters in the field. Task Force 838 and the CIA were usually the mediators between the two factions.²⁶

Starting in 1987, the KPNLAF reorganized into conventional units in anticipation of the offensive that would follow the Vietnamese withdrawal. The KPNLAF created “military regions,” planning, perhaps, for the eventual control of a liberated Cambodia.²⁷ Needless to say, all of the military regions remained at the border even though they were supposed to control provinces throughout Cambodia. In early 1987, the KPNLAF reduced the number of military region from nine to seven and then changed the name of the units to Operational Military Zone (OMZ).²⁸ An OMZ controlled a number of battalions, each of which mustered around three hundred fighters. There was also a disparity between the OMZs, with some, for example, OMZ4, controlling two battalions, while others, such as OMZ6, controlled four battalions.²⁹

In addition to all of these OMZs, one more unit, a Special OMZ, was created and was put under the control of the KPNLAF’s general staff headquarters. It had two regiments, special regiment 801 and 806. The 801, perhaps the most courageous of all, originated from a former Khmer Rouge unit, which may explain its battlefield prowess.³⁰ In total, the KPNLAF had seven OMZs.

The second non-communist force was Prince Sihanouk’s FUNCINPEC. The organization of its armed wing, the *Armée Nationale Sihanoukhiste* (ANS), paralleled the KPNLAF in many ways. The majority of its forces were raised from the border camps, and the organization of the military regions of both sides also paralleled each other (each had seven military regions). In fact, in 1988, the KPNLAF re-designated its battalions as regiments although the personnel remained the same.³¹ Some claimed

that the KPNLAF general staff made this move so it could promote its officers to the same rank as those of the ANS who controlled the regiments, which were, in fact, battalion-size units by KPRA's standards.³²

Just like the KPNLAF, the ANS was born out of several armed groups that controlled the camps along the Cambodian-Thai border. The ANS established two divisions, each based on a former movement that had combined force.³³ In 1984, the Vietnamese and the KPRA launched a major dry season offensive which razed all of the border camps. The three resistance factions had to take refuge in Thailand. But in 1985 and 1986, they returned and sent small teams to established underground networks inside Cambodia. In 1987, Prince Sihanouk decided to present himself as the neutral (read: transcendent) party in the eventual political negotiation, and changed the name of the ANS to *Armée Nationale du Kampuchea Indépendant* (ANKI) so that FUNCINPEC's army no longer bore his name.³⁴

In fact, the Prince had already met with Hun Sen, the PRK's premier, in December that year. The meeting marked the first time the two major players had met, to the chagrin of other two factions (the Khmer Rouge and KPNLF), absent from the meeting. Ultimately, the sponsoring countries had pressured the Prince to negotiate as a group instead, perhaps as they wanted to bring the Khmer Rouge's military might to bear.³⁵ By the time of the 1989 offensive, the ANKI had established five divisions: division 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6.³⁶ Using the KPRA's unit as the base, the ANKI had an equivalent of five brigades.

One notable event was in 1985, when both non-communist forces agreed to pool their military resources and created a Joint Military Command (JMC). A KPNLAF officer was appointed as the commander of the JMC, and the deputy

commander came from the then ANS. The ANS held the post of the chief of staff, while a KPNLAF officer was the deputy chief of staff. The great irony of this attempt was the fact that throughout the war, the impact of the JMC was hardly decisive, and the ANKI eventually found itself cooperating more with the Khmer Rouge than with the KPNLAF.³⁷

In retrospect, the establishment of the CGDK and the JMC, while not without contradictions, indeed represented progress for the two groups. First and foremost, it prevented the communist and non-communist rebel forces from attacking each other. Many Khmer Rouge soldiers considered the Serei Ka (Khmer for “freedom fighters,” as the KPNLAF called themselves) and the Para (from the word “paratroopers,” a name given to the ANKI based on the woodland camouflaged uniform they wore) as bandits who used to intimidate the local population as much as they fought against the Vietnamese.³⁸ The Khmer Rouge often attacked the NCR, and only the establishment of the CGDK had mitigated some of that risk.

The main problem for the NCR was that only the Khmer Rouge could maintain an expansive network among the population, while the KPNLAF and the ANKI had much less success. Without the Khmer Rouge’s acquiescence, it would be next to impossible for the NCR to infiltrate Cambodia in large formation. The CGDK mechanism also helped alleviate some of these problems. To be fair, not all of the NCR fighters were opportunists. But many of them did originate from the armed groups who profited from the lawless period that reigned over the refugee camps before the political establishment of the resistance movement.

Finally, another problem came from the sponsoring countries. Many sponsors such as the Thai Army’s Task Force 838 inadvertently exacerbated the problem when

they decided to offer financial rewards for success, leading many non-communist rebel forces to fight for money instead of a political ideology. One American advisor noted that many, if not all, NCR camps' leaders ruled as warlords and cared little about the people inside, while the Khmer Rouge elected the camp leaders.³⁹ A last point related to the financing of the NCR fighters was the multi-layered corruption reportedly perpetuated by the advisors themselves. Some estimated that one third of the CIA money and about half of the Chinese money were lost under the management of the Thai Army.⁴⁰

5.3 The Vietnamese Volunteer Army (VVA)

The Vietnamese maintained a structure more or less similar to the PAVN units that operated during the Vietnam War. A typical division would have on average 10,000 men with organic armor and artillery support. When it came into Cambodia, however, the PAVN called itself the Vietnamese Volunteer Army (VVA) in order to justify its intervention. This paper will use the term VVA throughout, even though as a matter of fact, all its units were provided by the PAVN's military regions.

The VVA fielded two types of divisions. The first type was the typical divisions which had one, two, or three-digit numerical designation. For a lack of better terms and for the sake of simplicity, this dissertation shall call these units "VVA mobile divisions." The second type of divisions can be tentatively called "local-governance military expert group" (*quân sự địa phương như đoàn*) which was identified by a four-digit numerical designation.⁴¹ This was a military formation the size of a division, but their task was exclusively nation-building.⁴²

These latter units never moved outside of the province like the mobile divisions, and they typically had a battalion at each district and a company at each

village; the size of the garrisoned unit varied depending on the different size of the districts and villages). In Cambodia, unit 7701 stationed in Kampong Thom province (also responsible for Preah Vihear province), unit 7704 stationed in Battambang-Banteay Meanchey province, and unit 7705 stationed in Siem Reap-Ouddar Meanchey province.⁴³

5.4 The Kampuchea People's Revolutionary Army (KPRIA)

When the Kampuchean People's Solidarity and National Salvation Armed Forces liberated Phnom Penh on 7 January 1979, the new state, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), was established. The state was controlled by the resurrected Kampuchea People's Revolutionary Party—its official establishment date was set to be 1951—and had an army, the Kampuchea People's Revolutionary Army (KPRIA). The KPRIA had three main echelons.

The first echelon was the mobile division, called the "sharp troop" (a transliteration from the Khmer term "toap srouch"). The KPRIA general staff headquarters in Phnom Penh maintained control of these units. The second echelon was the territorial troops, controlled by Regions, which were later transformed into Military Regions (MR), of which there were five in 1989. The MR controlled several provincial military commands (PMC), which managed operations in their respective provinces. The PMCs were organized as conventional formations, but they did not have organic artillery or armor and fought primarily as infantry units. The MR controlled intervention units as well as armor units and heavy artillery. The third echelon of the KPRIA was the paramilitary units consisting of office militias (protecting government offices), fishing lot militias (in the Tonle Sap Lake area), the defense militias (protecting the key infrastructure such as railroad lines and bridges),

the village militias, and the hamlet militias.⁴⁴ An estimate of the total forces in 1987 is showed in Table 4 (chapter 2, page 81 of this dissertation).

5.4.1 Mobilization and Concept of Operations

5.4.1.1 Political Concept and Ideology

Following the communist tradition, there was a tendency of the party to control every aspect of military life. The ministry of homeland defense controlled all military matters, while the general staff headquarters was in charge of operational matters. The general staff was under the ministry, and the chief of staff concurrently held the position of first deputy minister of homeland defense. In a manner not different from the Khmer Rouge forces, the KPRA officer did not have formal ranks, and the officers were usually known by their positions, such as “comrade battalion commander.” The second communist influence was the role of the political officer or political commissar. In each unit, there is a position called “political commander” who was in charge of the political direction in the unit. Despite having the same rank as the operational commander, the political commander usually did not involve himself in operational matters, but he was the bearer of the party’s message, maintained unit discipline, rallied the troops and the populations, and countered enemy infiltration.

The KPRA functioned around a concept called “*pror-long pror-naing*” which can literally be translated as “friendly competition.” In this concept, promotions and rewards were based on the friendly competitions among different units as well as within unit.⁴⁵ The political commander and the commander of the higher unit were the record keepers. The friendly competition centered on three interrelated areas: fighting the enemy, building the unit, and political and ethical integrity.⁴⁶

Just like any other units, fighting the enemy, either through ambushes, defense, deliberate attacks and rallying of the bystanders all counted in this category. Secondly, and related to rallying, the unit was expected to maintain its integrity, morale, as well as self-sufficiency through good rapport with the population. Thirdly, within the unit itself, the soldiers and officers were vetted by the political officer as to their personal characters and ethical principles, especially their conduct towards the local population. This concept did not only apply to the regular units but also the territorial troops as well as the militias forces.

Within the KPRA, in many instances of extraordinary individual heroism, the officer or soldier would receive the highest distinction of all, the “hero” (*virak tchunn*) designation. Throughout the war, many people would receive this distinction, including many militia troops who outnumbered the award recipients from the conventional units. In expectation of the rebel offensive to come, the KPRA published in the People’s Army newspaper the names of ten soldiers who had received the highest distinction, the “Hero medal.” At least five of them came from the militias, and most eventually switched service to the conventional divisions.⁴⁷ In many cases, the Army newspaper struggled with insufficient means to produce comic strip images to recount the episodes.

As a former KPRA officer noted, after the Khmer Rouge regime, everyone had almost nothing in their possession, and as a result, they worried less about financial rewards, unlike the non-communist factions of the CGDK.⁴⁸ Moreover, the KPRA officers were faced with an existential threat, which was the Khmer Rouge and that was a great motivation for them to fight. One of the reason why the PRK could succeed in building a strong state was its ability to blend the anti-Khmer Rouge

propaganda with the friendly competition concept to build a strong army, at least in the early period of the war.

5.4.1.2 The Armed Propaganda Units and the Dual-Duty Companies

The party's tendency to assume control of everything to the lowest organizational level possible fits perfectly with the concept of "People's War," which calls for general mobilization of the population. As the KPRA used to teach the soldiers, officers, and political cadres, "a villager is a soldier, a policeman, a propagandist, a producer, and an intelligence agent."⁴⁹ The KPRA's policy also integrated all military and paramilitary forces under one umbrella.

With the support of Vietnamese local-governance military expert groups, around 1980, the central committee of the KPRP sent small teams called the "armed propaganda units," a direct copy of the Viet Minh's unit by the same name, to each province to build similar teams. The main mission was to spread the party's propaganda as well as building local government structure at the village level and above. The Vietnamese mobile divisions also assisted the PMCs in launching many operations (usually identified with the prefix "C" such as C80 in Siem Reap province) to extend the PRK's influence beyond the provincial capital. They organized elections in order to build the local governments. The armed propaganda units then recruited people to defend the hamlets and villages.

Between 1984 and 1985, the armed propaganda units recruited enough people to upgrade themselves into larger units. Thus, the armed propaganda units became the "dual-duty companies" (in Khmer, "*koor pi pheara-kej*").⁵⁰ As the name implied, the latter was set up as a company at the district level and conducted two main missions:

fighting and spreading propaganda; in essence, the reproduction and augmentation of the armed propaganda units at the district level.

An official unit's history of the KPRA explained the choice: at the hamlet and village level, the forces were paramilitary in nature and therefore could not be expected to sustain long-term operations which required the ability to fight during their mission of spreading the propaganda.⁵¹ At the province, however, the KPRA has battalions, which were too cumbersome to move to different places. Consequently, the district's company was a good compromise. The company could fight as a conventional unit, yet it was small enough to move around for its propaganda missions. In most cases, a district would have had more than one company because one of them was expected to be a dual-duty company. In cases where the district population could not support more than one company, one of the platoons in that company would become the dual-duty platoon.

By continuing to adhere to the "5-in-1 person" slogan (a villager is a soldier, a policeman, a propagandist, a producer, and an intelligence agent), the dual-duty companies continued to sustain their propaganda and recruited more people to serve in the provincial battalions. As soon as a battalion was raised, the province was expected to contribute it to the mobile divisions as required. The mobile divisions received most of their reinforcements from the PMCs this way, as a conscription law did not exist until 1988. The PMCs contributed a lot of troops to the mobile divisions but still retained a far more substantial force in its order of battle. Provinces in the eastern part of the country such as Kampong Cham, Svay Rieng, and Prey Veng had more people but less Khmer Rouge threat, and in 1989 these provinces contributed many battalions and regiments to the western provinces.

5.4.1.3 Indoctrination

One major difference between the ARVN and the KPRA was the degree of indoctrination and the systematic implementation of indoctrination programs. Perhaps as a Socialist military, the KPRA's penchant towards indoctrination was very strong. Indoctrination of the KPRA was applied at three main levels.

The first level was the special program prepared by the central committee of the KPRK for the newly appointed commanders. The program was not regular in that it depended on the number of new commanders who would assume responsibility.

The second level of indoctrination was embedded with the specialized schools for the armed forces. The ministry of homeland defense maintained a series of specialized schools such as infantry, artillery, armor, etc. Within each school, there was always a special section for the political study. The *People's Army* often made references to this kind of indoctrination. The existence of such a course was first recorded in the first issue of the *People's Army* on October 1979 (Phnom Penh was liberated in January 1979).⁵² But the newspaper mentioned that the October course was already a second session and was taught to officers in the general staff headquarters, division commanders, provincial military commanders, and battalion commanders.⁵³ The course was held at the ministry of homeland defense's infantry school.

The third level of indoctrination occurred at the local level. In the preceding section, we have seen the development of the dual-duty companies which were later upgraded into battalions and regiments. The units' main role was propaganda, among itself and the people. In addition to these units, each KPRA unit also had a position called "political commanders." The official history of the Siem Reap provincial military command, for example, described that the command structure of the

provincial units consisted of at least three officers: the commander, first deputy commander (concurrently the chief of staff), and the second deputy commander (concurrently the political commander).⁵⁴ The political commander did not participate in the operational matters and only dealt with political affairs such as indoctrination and morale-building.⁵⁵ Because indoctrination was his only job, one can certainly expect this political commander to carry out his indoctrination program on a regular basis.⁵⁶ That is what all bureaucrats who are concerned with maintaining their relevance would do.

Therefore, because of this institution of the “political commander,” one can expect indoctrination to occur systematically and on a regular basis. The official history of the Siem Reap provincial military command mentioned that political commander existed at the company level while the platoon had a “political assistant.”⁵⁷ Official history of the Battambang-Banteay Meanchey provincial military command corroborated this view.⁵⁸

5.4.1.4 Indoctrination in Action

There are indeed two major challenges regarding the study of the political program, namely the actual implementation of the political program (and indoctrination) and issues about effectiveness. First of all, while the programs described in the preceding section were the largest indoctrination programs that the KPRA had conducted, a question arises as to whether or not such programs were carried out by units in the field, or by the officers once they left the school. Unfortunately, there are no comprehensive statistics available regarding this issue. In fact, even books by Western scholars, such as Slocomb’s *The People’s Republic of Kampuchea* did not include even anecdotes concerning the propaganda efforts of the

KPRA. However, such information does exist in the *People's Army* newspaper, although perhaps due to the language barrier, this information has never been examined.

This dissertation will therefore examine this primary data available in the *People's Army* newspaper. Although instead of examining all articles, which would generate many similar stories and data, this dissertation will analyze this newspaper during three crucial periods: 1980, 1985, and 1989. In 1980, the KPRA had just begun to liberate the country from the Pol Pot regime, and its main mission was popular mobilization, i.e. indoctrination, fighting the enemy, and saving the people from hunger.⁵⁹ Thus, 1980 is a test as to whether the army had really performed these non-military missions of indoctrination and rescuing the people from hunger. In 1985, the VVA and the KPRA had just launched the 14-camp dry season offensive which pushed major CGDK units into Thailand. This period is marked by a relative increase in conventional military operations which could be expected to eclipse the political work of the KPRA. Thus, this is a second test as to whether the KPRA remained faithful to its political missions at a time when the conventional military operations were more demanding. Lastly, the year 1989 (and 1990 and 1991) was the final year of the PRK, and the question is whether the PRK had achieved anything from its political work throughout the years in preparation for its guerrilla offensive.

The next question is the effectiveness question. How do we know if those propaganda and indoctrination programs worked? How do we know if the non-military population changed its mind? And if so, do we know why the population changed its mind? These "effectiveness" questions are about assessing people's opinions. And even in recent events where the data is available, determining the

dynamic of people's opinion is a difficult issue. Thus, the major challenge that faces this dissertation is to answer these questions from a time when data is scarce, if not unavailable altogether.

Fortunately, the *People's Army* newspaper did make assessments of political programs, and these provide many clues as to the effectiveness of the political approach to fighting revolutionary war. In the subsequent section, this dissertation will attempt to describe simultaneously both what the KPRA achieved in terms of indoctrination, and also the results of these achievements.

In 1980, Cambodian society was just slowly emerging from genocide and famine on a large scale. As evidenced by countless articles in the *People's Army* newspaper, the KPRA then was ordered to help the people whenever it could, in addition to pure military tasks. The military was also in charge of building and protecting the local authority in places where, in 1980, such a structure did not exist due to the fact that the Khmer Rouge had destroyed the local government when it was in power.⁶⁰ Elections did occur, even though there was no opposition to the PRK's candidates who would run against each other.⁶¹ The KPRA's official unit history noted that in many rural villages, elections were not possible due to the Khmer Rouge threat and the KPRA and the VVA had to launch low-intensity operations to maintain security for the election to occur.⁶² According to Slocomb, the local officials were people indigenous to the villages and did not necessarily have any relations to the Vietnamese or connections with officials in Phnom Penh.⁶³

In one particular village north of the Pursat provincial capital, for example, the army claimed that improved security has allowed more people to move into the villages, and that the population increased from 23 to 363 households in less than one

year.⁶⁴ Since July 1979, each soldier in almost every unit nationwide had allocated at least one kilogram of rice out of his or her individual allowance (approximately 5% of the total, individual allowance) to give to the local population every month.⁶⁵ In some places such as Saeb village in Kampong Trolech district (Kampong Chhnang province), the 3rd company of the 6th battalion of the KPRA had spent 15 days to help the people with agricultural work.⁶⁶ Similarly, the 19th battalion in Kampong Thom helped the people with the harvest as well as sharing its food with the people.⁶⁷ The unit also ordered its soldiers to maintain good relations with the local government and the militias.

In some cases, the description was meticulous. For example, the 33rd battalion in Kampong Cham province reported that it had helped the people with the harvest, and also with the repair of people's houses.⁶⁸ The *People's Army* reported that even a conventional unit, such as the 4th division, had shared its food with approximately four thousand people who lived within the unit's area of operations.⁶⁹ Similarly, the newspaper reported that Takeo PMC had helped the people in the cultivation and harvest of around 100 hectares of land, while maintaining its conventional operations against the enemy and enhancing indoctrination.⁷⁰ The Ministry of Homeland Defense bestowed upon the PMC many medals for such achievements.

The participation of conventional units in these non-military tasks was not strange. The 'E' armored unit shared with the people 1,300 kilograms of vegetables that it had grown in the first nine months of 1980, while also repairing 19 of the people's houses, and constructing 8,000 meters of road for the community.⁷¹ The 2nd battalion in Kampong Speu and the 18th battalion in Battambang both allocated rice for poor people as well as helping them with the harvest of their crops without

charging them any money.⁷² As division 'S' (a code name which, based on the description, might have meant the 4th division) moved from Kampong Chhnang to the border between Battambang and Pursat, it had performed three main tasks: rice allocation for poor people, assistance for the people's agricultural work, and conducting indoctrination lessons for the local militias.⁷³ The 7th and 9th battalions of the 1st brigade (which later became the 196th division) had helped to harvest 20 hectares of the people's land in November, and allocated 250 kilograms of rice to 100 poor families who could not support themselves.⁷⁴ After this assistance, the units also conducted indoctrination sessions.

These are summaries of what the KPRA units did in terms of popular mobilization in 1980. Later in the year, the *People's Army* did not give any specific data on the effectiveness of these actions, but it did note that soldier recruitment surpassed the targets in Kampong Speu, Koh Kong, and Kampong Thom. The newspaper attributed these successes, based on interviews with the local military units, to political programs and popular mobilization.⁷⁵

Also in 1980, the KPRA began to implement an amnesty program for defectors. The first instance of such action was mentioned when the *People's Army* described the activities of the 7th battalion, which also included monthly political works within the unit, including lectures, self-criticism sessions, and lessons-learned sessions.⁷⁶ But the unit also conducted work related to those known as the "Lost," i.e. those who had lost their way and joined the CGDK.⁷⁷ These political works, according to the *People's Army*, allowed the unit to convince an unspecified number of the "Lost" to return to live in society and the reception of the Lost was conducted in a

formal ceremony.⁷⁸ In 1980, the policy regarding the “Lost” was in its infancy, but during 1984 and 1985, this policy became a major political strategy.

The *People's Army* newspaper frequently ran individual stories of defectors, the “Lost’s” story. These articles typically gave a brief version of the defector’s biography and then recounted how he or she joined the guerrilla organizations, and then what prompted him or her to return. What was special when the *People's Army* used the term “Lost,” was the meaning that these people had defected without a fight. Sometimes, such defections occurred right at the end of the indoctrination sessions. Sometimes, it was their families who had joined the indoctrination lessons and then convinced the “Lost” to return from jungle bases. The *People's Army* distinguished this group from those who “surrendered on the battlefield,” meaning post-battle defection.⁷⁹ This dissertation does not count such post-battle defections, because such behavior might have been influenced by the outcome of the battle, rather than the result of propaganda. Only the defectors in the “Lost” category will give a better measurement of the effects of propaganda and indoctrination.

One article, in particular, recounts a curious chain of events that is significant from the standpoint of this dissertation. In March 1985, the *People's Army* ran an article about the defection of two former guerrillas named Keth Chhum and Buth Ven.⁸⁰ Both joined the guerrillas because of three CGDK propaganda messages: anti-Vietnamese invasion, the claim that the Vietnamese would kill all Cambodians who did not run away, and there was treasure (i.e. materialistic attraction) in the jungle.⁸¹ When they joined, however, there was a severe lack of food, and the guerrillas seemed to be more interested in looting than in achieving any higher ideological goal. Both men cited these problems as the reasons why they defected.⁸²

What is perhaps more interesting is how the article explained the causal effects of propaganda. The article started by describing the PRK's propaganda messages, which included good people-army relations, anti-Pol Pot regime, as well as indoctrination of the "Marxist-Leninist ideology."⁸³ However, when it explained why the two men defected to the KPRA, the two men cited the uneasiness with "Pol Pot's soldiers," KPRA's good conduct towards the people, and the fact that previous defectors were not harmed or even arrested by the KPRA.⁸⁴ Curiously, the indoctrination of Marxist-Leninist ideology, which was a significant ideological message, was not counted among the reasons why the two men defected. The anti-Pol Pot ideology and the good people-army relations seemed to be the only reasons for defection. Stories like this are prone to manipulation and biases. However, this discrepancy might actually suggest that the interview with the two men was genuine and that the staff somehow failed to fabricate the story by including the Marxist-Leninist ideological indoctrination in the list of effective propaganda tools. Many other stories in the *People's Army* bear resemblance to this story.

Another of the *People's Army* articles in 1985 recounted a story of a man who had conducted business with the guerrillas and later joined them out of fear of revenge from the KPRA.⁸⁵ However, the man decided to defect when they learned about the KPRA's leniency towards defectors as well as hearing the word "Pol Pot" in his first meeting with the guerrillas: these guerrillas turned out to be the Khmer Rouge (which implied that his fear of Pol Pot led him to defect).⁸⁶ Similarly, in another defector's article, the *People's Army* reported on the relationship between the wife and the husband as the reason for defection.⁸⁷ In that story, the husband decided to defect because the conditions of life in the guerrilla's jungle camp were bad while he was

separated from his wife and newborn baby who lived in the village under PRK control.⁸⁸ In this case, it seems, the propaganda focused more on things that the individuals could relate to, rather than some abstract ideology.

The amnesty program was not the only program that flourished in 1985. The PRK also expanded its political indoctrination programs. At the national level, in order to make sure that the anti-Pol Pot propaganda persisted in people's minds and the collective memory, the PRK had organized an annual event to condemn the Khmer Rouge regime. The event was held annually on the twentieth day of May, the anniversary of the establishment of the "cooperatives" by the Khmer Rouge regime (20 May 1976), commonly understood to be the main cause of famine and mass killing.⁸⁹ The first time such an event was described in meticulous detail was in a *People's Army* article in May 1985.

The event was called "*Ti Vea Jorng Kom Heung*" or "Vengeful Remembrance Day," or "Day of Hatred," or more literally, "The Day to Remain Tied to Hatred," during which time the state officials prepared religious ceremonies and made political speeches, and more importantly the participants recounted their stories under the Khmer Rouge regime.⁹⁰ On the other hand, the story-telling by the victims and their relatives eventually led participants to remember their relatives and family members who were killed during the Khmer Rouge regime, which inevitably brought about a strong emotional reaction. Then the state would explain that the people's struggle was required to stop the return of the genocidal Pol Pot regime.⁹¹ The speeches of the officials typically called the people to join the PRK in preventing the return of the Khmer Rouge.⁹²

The PRK dictated that the event must be held at all levels down to the hamlets, and the best places to conduct the event should be the former Khmer Rouge prisons, sites of mass graves, or former kitchen halls (which symbolized the cooperatives).⁹³ During the event, the people not only brought propaganda placards but also took the liberty to arm themselves with scythes, big knives, axes, or clubs to express their anger.⁹⁴ In Phnom Penh, the major sites where the event was typically held were the Toul Sleng Genocide Museum (former S-21 prison) and the Choeung Ek memorial which was a former mass grave site.⁹⁵

The *People's Army* article which appeared on 23 May 1985 was quite comprehensive in its explanation of the relationship between political messages and the struggle that was required from the people. The article listed interviews with people from various social classes such as monks, intellectuals, factory workers, soldiers, and minority groups.⁹⁶ In all of these short interviews, there is a common theme, namely that the reason why people followed and served the state (PRK) was their hatred of the Khmer Rouge, the fear of its return, and the desire to avenge loved ones who had died under the Khmer Rouge regime.⁹⁷ Unlike opinion columns which always alluded to the Marxist-Leninist ideology as the cause for the struggle against the Khmer Rouge (considered to be "fake revolutionaries"), the interviews listed in the 23 May article never mentioned this abstract aspect, but rather described the emotional responses of the interviewees: fear, revenge, and hatred.⁹⁸

Curiously, even though the event was dropped from the list of national official events after the new government came to power in 1993 (as a result of the UN-sponsored election), today people still gather in the thousands in organized religious ceremonies for the victims of the Khmer Rouge regime.⁹⁹ However, the gathering

places were restricted to mainly the Toul Sleng Genocide Museum and the Choeung Ek Memorial which were considered national landmarks.¹⁰⁰

At the local level, all types of military units were expected to conduct internal indoctrination as well as popular indoctrination. Previously, the soldiers came to the political schools and then taught what they had learned to other soldiers or the people. To try to advance this effort one step further, in April 1985, the KPRA began to train the first batch of political instructors, numbering a total of 106, and these political instructors were then assigned to various units nationwide.¹⁰¹ Regardless, the political indoctrination program continued with or without instructors. Furthermore, just like the propaganda at the local level, the propaganda lessons for the local units have always contained the sessions about using the prevention of the return of the Khmer Rouge and Pol Pot as the reasons why people should join the KPRA as well as maintaining good relations with the people.¹⁰²

In addition to political indoctrination, the army continued undertaking social works and civic actions in order to maintain good relations with the people. What is revealed in the 1980 articles of the *People's Army* was an army that saved the people from hunger and famine. Rice allocation and sharing was a norm. In 1985, however, the people seemed to have become self-sufficient because the PRK no longer shared its rice with the people but rather encouraged the people to sell rice surpluses to the state. Rice surpluses are an indication that perhaps the people's living standards had improved from 1980 to 1985. Many articles (examined below) praised the people for selling rice to the state, thereby denying those resources to the revolutionaries. Indoctrination, civic actions, and fighting the enemy had to go hand in hand, at least based on examination of the reports in the *People's Army*. It seems that all units have

maintained these credos even though the *People's Army* started to increasingly provide news about conventional battles on the Cambodian-Thai border.

This dissertation observes that in addition to its coverage of military matters, the *People's Army* assessed the effectiveness of political activities by reporting on four metrics: the number of indoctrination sessions, the number of people attending, the number of defectors in the "Lost" category, and the number of people who volunteered to serve in the army.

In 1984, Kampong Thom PMC conducted 799 indoctrination sessions and 181,503 people participated in these sessions.¹⁰³ Although the scale of these sessions remained comparatively small, the PMC noted that they motivated people to help the KPRA in identifying underground guerrilla networks, and in some cases led the KPRA units to attack guerrilla bases.¹⁰⁴ In December 1984, farmers in Kratie province sold 337 tons of rice surplus to the state, in accordance with the slogan "selling rice to the state is nationalism."¹⁰⁵ The article also noted that the army and local officials helped with the rice cultivation and harvest at no charge to the farmers, allowing the farmers to sell their surplus to the state, rather than to the guerrillas.¹⁰⁶ Up to February 1985, Kratie had sold a total of 2,150 tons of rice surplus to the state, while Battambang had sold 6,000 tons.¹⁰⁷

The trading relations between the people and the army was even closer in other provinces such as Pursat. In 1984, the province reported that the PMC had sold 35 pigs per month to the people, while the people sold 2,245 tons of rice surplus and 551 pigs to the state in the same year.¹⁰⁸ During this trade, the army also conducted 188 indoctrination lessons with 10,638 people participating, and as a result of this, a total of 188 underground agents decided to defect after participating in these sessions.¹⁰⁹

In other cases, the indoctrination sessions did not necessarily accompany commercial relations between the army and the people. Due to the dual nature of the KPRA duties, the indoctrination, social works, and combat planning went hand in hand. The *People's Army* sometimes described an operation where the militias had conducted social work in the morning (repairing people's houses) and then planned military operations in the afternoon, after receiving tips from the local population.¹¹⁰ On another occasion, the *People's Army* described a women's company of a district military in Svay Rieng province which, after successful operations against a Khmer Rouge infiltration team, had returned to the district and performed the following tasks: participated in a 15-day indoctrination session, spent five days giving political lectures to the people, and helping the people with harvesting.¹¹¹

During the first two months of 1985, the Bakan district military of Pursat PMC taught a 26-lesson course to its soldiers, including 11 days of political studies.¹¹² The unit also ran 56 indoctrination sessions in the last trimester of 1984, reaching 4,758 people.¹¹³ The unit also participated in indoctrination sessions run by local officials 14 times, including 115 participants, and the target audience of these indoctrination sessions was the families of men who had joined the guerrillas.¹¹⁴ While the guerrillas stayed outside of the village, their relatives typically stayed in the village. As a result, the propaganda was aimed at getting these relatives to convince the guerrillas to defect. The *People's Army* noted that these sessions were effective in that they attracted 196 defectors and 159 new recruits in the same period.¹¹⁵ Perhaps as an assurance to those who had left the guerrilla organization, the Bakan district military also constructed 9,200 meters of "strategic fences" and erected 4,000 meters of trenches in various villages.¹¹⁶

In the first trimester of 1985, Kampong Speu PMC conducted various indoctrination sessions for 1,100 people, after which 164 underground guerrillas decided to defect to the KPRA.¹¹⁷ In the same period, Kampong Thom province attracted 61 defectors, including a commander of the Khmer Rouge's 103rd intelligence battalion, and the PMC subsequently received 234 defectors.¹¹⁸ In late April 1985, the Kampong Speu, Kampong Chhnang, Kampot, Pursat, Takeo, and Kandal PMCs had conducted indoctrination sessions which were attended by a total of 287, 263 people.¹¹⁹ Among them, the main targets of the indoctrination sessions were the relatives and families of the guerrillas, amounting to 325 families.¹²⁰ In other words, even though the KPRA knew whose family members were in the guerrillas, they decided to avoid violence and focused instead on propaganda efforts.

The 5th company of a Kampong Som district military also conducted 5,634 indoctrination sessions and helped build villages (building houses, repairing houses, building roads, and assisting with the harvest).¹²¹ As a result of these actions, the company claimed that 764 people volunteered to serve along the Cambodian-Thai border, and the local people also donated the money to build a barrack for the company.¹²² The Svay Rieng PMC, in the first six months of 1985, conducted indoctrination sessions for 10,479 soldiers and 77,935 civilians in addition to 17 cultural performances, which drew 199,258 attendants.¹²³ The PMC also helped the people harvest their crops over 1,124 hectares and demined 88 hectares to transfer these lands to civilian ownership at no charge.¹²⁴ The article also mentioned that the Svay Rieng PMC had given language classes to illiterate people in order to save them from the "illiteracy disaster."¹²⁵ The PMC concluded that these measures were very effective because it was able to recruit 1,709 to serve in its army, attracting 110

defectors as well as detaining, based on local informants, a total of 217 strangers who wandered into the province.¹²⁶

Krobav village in Prey Veng province sold 232 tons of rice to the state in the first six months of 1985.¹²⁷ In the same period, the PMC attracted 1,141 defectors and recruited 150 militiamen province-wide.¹²⁸ These were not unique cases, however. The SPK reported that in August and September of 1985, a total of 53 defectors had decided to surrender to the Kampong Chhnang PMC, including one company commander and one battalion commander.¹²⁹

During major events such as the party's congress, the military units were also encouraged to hold celebrations to involve the people. The year 1985 was the party's fifth congress and the *People's Army* published many articles about units acting in celebration of the event. In October, the 1st company of Sutra Nikum district military (Siem Reap – Ouddar Meanchey province) helped the people harvest crops from 25 hectares, repaired two houses and dug two wells.¹³⁰ The company also conducted 25 indoctrination sessions for 2,450 people, as well as indoctrination sessions for its own soldiers (500 participants).¹³¹ Out of a total of eighteen training sessions, eight were technical military training, five were political training, and the other five were lesson-learned sessions.¹³² In Kampong Thom, the PMC organized internal indoctrination sessions in celebration of the party's fifth congress.¹³³ After the sessions, the soldiers dispersed to different villages to help the people with the harvest, to help repair irrigation works, build roads, and recruit people into the militias.¹³⁴

Indoctrination was also the duty of the militias. One special characteristic of the KPRA was its dependence on the local militias and the maintenance of cooperation between the conventional units and the militias. The *People's Army* frequently

described the welfare policy towards the militias and considered this as the main reason for success. In a village called Ta Tchets in Kampong Chhnang, the militias said they served because of their fear that the Khmer Rouge might return, but at the same time, they also received many benefits such as pensions and land distribution.¹³⁵ Their main task was to help the people build and repair houses, and then the people would return the favor by providing intelligence to the militias regarding guerrilla infiltration.¹³⁶ In the “L” village (codename) in Kampong Chhnang province, the rate of enemy infiltration was very low because the militias frequently intercepted guerrilla movements.¹³⁷ Village “L” was also among a few villages which had sold the highest amount of rice surplus to the state.¹³⁸ According to the *People's Army*, each militia family received 2.5 hectares of land (approximately 6 acres) to cultivate and an allocation of 300 kilograms of palm sugar in 1984.¹³⁹

In some cases, the effectiveness of the indoctrination program and the policy of close relations with the people extended beyond mere rice-selling schemes and participation in the armed forces. In many instances, the KPRA's political programs directly translated into battlefield success. One article in the *People's Army* described a battle where militiamen in a village fought against a 200-strong Khmer Rouge battalion.¹⁴⁰ Village militias in 1985 could typically muster only one platoon which consisted of no more than 50 fighters. In March 1985, Prey Svay village in Moung Roessey district, Battambang province, was attacked by a Khmer Rouge battalion (around 200 fighters) but the militiamen held strong and defeated the Khmer Rouge attack.¹⁴¹ When interviewed by the *People's Army*, the militiamen said that the reason they joined the militias was because of both their hatred and fear of the Khmer Rouge and because the Khmer Rouge had killed their relatives and families.¹⁴² During their

patrols, these militiamen had often intercepted the Khmer Rouge infiltration. Perhaps as revenge, the Khmer Rouge encircled the village, but the militias' familiarity with the terrain and their determination allowed them to defend the village long enough for the district military to intervene and relieve the siege.¹⁴³

In April 1985, the 1st company of the Chongkal district in the Siem Reap – Ouddar Meanchey province had received high distinction from the Ministry of Homeland Defense for the highest rate of successful small operations that denied infiltration by the guerrillas into its operational area.¹⁴⁴ The unit cited its close relations with the people as the key to success: liberating the people and helping to build the village.¹⁴⁵

In some provinces such as the Siem Reap – Ouddar Meanchey province, which was one of the hubs of guerrilla activities, the militias were instrumental in hindering fierce guerrilla attacks. The Siem Reap – Ouddar Meanchey province was home to the VVA's Front 479 which later gave birth to the KPRA's Region 4 and MR4. The province, therefore, had to support the 286th division, which operated in the province's area of operation. To do this, the PMC had to secure the road at the Kulen mountain pass, which it did successfully. The *People's Army* considered the local militias to be the key to this success. In one village called Sangke Leak, the militia platoon was effective in intercepting the guerrilla's infiltration and protecting the mountain pass, thus allowing constant resupply of the 286th division.¹⁴⁶ In an interview with the *People's Army*, the militias described the good relations between the military unit and the people as being the key to success.¹⁴⁷

Later in the year, the number of attacks on militia platoons by the Khmer Rouge began to rise and in November 1985, the PMC decided to dispatch one of its

battalions, the 23rd battalion to help the militias defending the pass.¹⁴⁸ This addition only increased the number of soldiers defending the mountain pass while the tactics remained unchanged. What the 23rd battalion did when they arrived was essentially the same as what the village militias had done: indoctrination, strengthening local militias, and helping the local people whenever possible.¹⁴⁹

In Siem Reap – Ouddar Meanchey province, late 1985 saw increased enemy attacks. This was the probably reason why a battalion needed to be dispatched to help the militias in the Kulen pass. While the units of militia were strong, their small number meant that there was a limit as to what they could achieve. Even the bravest militias could run out of ammunition and be overwhelmed. What is significant in this case, however, is the close cooperation between the militias and the conventional battalion.

In another case in the same province, the *People's Army* reported that the 20th battalion of the Siem Reap – Ouddar Meanchey PMC that had been dispatched to Pouk district (south of the Kulen mountain pass) a month earlier, had fended off an attack by a regiment-size enemy unit.¹⁵⁰ The newspaper attributed this success to the indoctrination work that the battalion had conducted which allowed them to build close relations with the people.¹⁵¹

Sometimes the people-army bond was manifested by the people's self-mobilization to help the army. Earlier, we have seen a case where the people built a barrack for the district military.¹⁵² The *People's Army* cited a case in Svay Rieng province where the army had helped the people in harvesting the crop as well as allocating their rice allowance to help the people in 1980 and in 1985.¹⁵³ This enabled

the people to become self-sufficient enough to return the favor by building an office for the border guard.¹⁵⁴

Another important metric for success used by the KPRA was the number of defectors in the “Lost” category. Many military organizations have a tendency to use body counts as one metric of success, but the KPRA also seemed to pay attention to the defectors. While the program had existed since 1980, it was only in 1984 and 1985 that the program began to produce notable results. In 1984, the Siem Reap – Ouddar Meanchey PMC had killed 337 guerrillas, wounded 302 others, and brought in 302 defectors.¹⁵⁵ These operations were still linked with the support from the people.¹⁵⁶ In some cases, the causal link was direct. In a district in Svay Rieng province, the district military had helped the people in the harvest of crops, had repaired roads, had repaired people’s houses, and had built a hospital to provide medical care for the people.¹⁵⁷ The district noted that these actions were rewarded in the first six months of 1985, by the contribution of 212 soldiers to the KPRA, of which 52 volunteered to go and serve along the Cambodian-Thai border.¹⁵⁸

Kampong Thom province used Kampong Svay district as an example of good political works, especially in attracting the defectors. The district’s dual-duty company and militias received land allocation from the state, and their job was to provide indoctrination lessons, help the people harvest crops, and undertake social works such as repairing people’s houses or digging wells.¹⁵⁹ The article cited these factors as being a morale-booster for the units.¹⁶⁰ The district military unit, the 4th company, also conducted internal indoctrination training. Out of the 84 days allocated for training in 1984, 23 days were political sessions.¹⁶¹ The Kampong Thom PMC

considered this unit to be the most exemplary unit, because it attracted 2,117 defectors in the period between October 1984 and March 1985.¹⁶²

Takeo PMC boasted that it had successfully completed three major tasks: fighting the enemy and attracting defectors, completing social work (assisting the people with harvesting rice and repairing houses), and conducting indoctrination sessions.¹⁶³ The PMC considered these as keys to its success in mobilizing the population: from 1980 to 1985, the Takeo PMC received 16,416 people who volunteered to serve in the army.¹⁶⁴

In August 1985, Kampong Thom received 69 defectors and 28 rifles while Battambang received 232 defectors and 103 rifles.¹⁶⁵ During the same month, the Siem Reap – Ouddar Meanchey PMC carried out 43 operations outside of the province and received 170 defectors.¹⁶⁶ The militias also carried out psychological operations and indoctrination missions in order to root out underground agents. For the first six months in 1985, the militia units, in conjunction with the Battambang PMC, were responsible for receiving 300 defectors as well as the recruitment of 30 hamlet militiamen and 467 village militiamen.¹⁶⁷

In 1985, the number of defections was the highest in the war. In 1984, the KPRA launched a major dry season offensive, and assertive indoctrination programs, that combined to produce the highest number of defections. It is important to note that the numbers listed below are those that belong to the “Lost” category and do not include the post-battle defection or those who surrendered during battle.

During the first six months of 1985, the PRK received a total of 2,000 defectors, of which 1,063 were former Khmer Rouge soldiers, 540 were former KPNLF soldiers, and 82 came from the ANKI.¹⁶⁸ But this number increased

drastically towards the end of the year. In the first nine months of 1985, there was a drastic increase in the number of defectors that Battambang received. From January to September 1985, Battambang PMC alone received a total of 3,566 defectors (with 2,100 units of all types of weapons), which was a 250% increase compared to the number of defectors in the same period in 1984.¹⁶⁹ There were a total of 116 collective defections (i.e. the enemies defected in units instead of individually) which was a five-fold increase in the same period in 1984 and the highest rank of the defectors was the regimental commander.¹⁷⁰ Its neighboring province, Siem Reap – Ouddar Meanchey, also noted a similar increase. In the first nine months of 1985, the Siem Reap – Ouddar Meanchey PMC received a total of 2,300 defectors and 774 weapons of all types.¹⁷¹

The nature of the defection is telling. Because the defections did not occur in the immediate aftermath of the battle (the dry season offensive concluded in early 1985), military action alone might not be able to explain the high number of defections. It is true that the military operations might have worsened living conditions in the revolutionary camps, thus leading the revolutionaries to cease guerrilla activities and defect. Even if correct, such difficult conditions were also made possible by the strength of the KPRA conventional units and militias whose close relations with the people were the key to success. As demonstrated in the previous paragraphs, sometimes, the link between indoctrination and defection was direct. Moreover, defections continued to occur even in the absence of major military operations. The military operations only intensified, not created, these defections. This dissertation concludes that the military operations and political indoctrination worked in tandem to produce an unusually high number of defectors.

While the *People's Army* used many metrics to show the effectiveness of its political strategy, the *People's Army* also admitted problems, even though they were usually cases of problems that had already been solved. An example was the case of the Svay Rieng PMC, that the *People's Army* noted, had never met the required target for popular recruitment into the army.¹⁷² The paper admitted that the PMC was faced with various problems: the level of indoctrination was not sufficient, most people did not understand the importance of the indoctrination sessions and consequently did not attend, and finally, the instructors were not experienced enough to attract audiences.¹⁷³ The problem was exacerbated by smuggling activities along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border, where people were more occupied by lucrative trading opportunities, than attending indoctrination sessions.¹⁷⁴

In 1985, however, after a series of improvements made to the indoctrination process, the PMC improved on its propaganda performance. In the first nine months of 1985, the PMC had conducted 67 indoctrination sessions that were attended by 23,379 people.¹⁷⁵ The rate of volunteers also steadily increased. In the first semester of 1984, the PMC had recruited 51 new soldiers (past the 40-men target) and it had recruited 75 new soldiers during the second semester of 1984 (past the 45-men target).¹⁷⁶ During the first six months of 1985, the PMC had recruited 72 new soldiers (past the 30-men target).¹⁷⁷

Towards 1989, we see a different dynamic. The number of defectors returned to its 1980 rate while Hun Sen, the PRK's premier, concluded that the defections decreased because the revolutionaries wanted to take a gamble to defeat the PRK after the VVA withdrew that year.¹⁷⁸ Hun Sen said that these revolutionaries will not put down their weapons before launching a major offensive, otherwise, they will lose the

potential positions in the new government if they succeeded.¹⁷⁹ There also seemed to be less news on the political indoctrination and the *People's Army* started to talk about recruitment to the PMC and mobile divisions instead. Unfortunately, perhaps due to the secrecy requirement, most articles did not contain meaningful data. The exact number of recruitment that each PMC had achieved was instead published 23 years later in the official unit history that was published by the Institute of Military History. Subsequent sections in this chapter will analyze the new data.

It suffices here to ask whether the wave of recruitment that the KPRA received in 1989 was due to its efforts in carrying out political programs and indoctrinations in the past. A close examination of the official unit history reveals some clues as to the everlasting effects of propaganda. After the election in 1993, Cambodia has decided to relinquish its communist ideology. Propaganda, let alone the 1980s propaganda, is no longer required in the official publications. Yet, all of the official unit history publications always started with the mentioning of the propaganda messages of the 1980s. At the beginning of the official history of the MR4 and MR5, for example, the authors noted that the unit's main missions was to fight in order to prevent the return of the Khmer Rouge regime, to protect the people from famine, and to build the country.¹⁸⁰ All other official unit history publications mentioned the same things.¹⁸¹ This is significant because the authors were former KPRA soldiers who continued to serve 23 years later and who, despite the fact that it is not required, still mentioned the political and indoctrination programs, good army-people relations, and civic actions as the main causes for success. The KPRA's political program, indoctrination, and propaganda, it seems, could linger after 1989 and maintain an army until 2012 and beyond.

5.4.2 Lenient Strategy in Cambodia and Vietnam: A Comparison

Two major comparisons between the Vietnamese case and Cambodian case are noteworthy here: the indoctrination to attract defectors and the conduct of the local officials and soldiers.

First of all, a comparison between the RVN's Chieu Hoi and Third Party Inducement programs and the PRK's amnesty for the "Lost" people is also instructive. A crucial question that arises from the comparison between the RVN and the PRK amnesty and reward programs, is the reason why a revolutionary chose to abandon his or her revolutionary organization and join the government instead. There are two candidate explanations: financial rewards and indoctrination and propaganda. In Vietnam, according to Lewy, the ralliers, and those who induced the revolutionaries to return to RVN control, received a handsome amount of money which increased with the importance and rank of the ralliers.¹⁸² Lewy notes that such rallying was mainly due to financial rewards, and in the end, the programs were not effective anyway, because they induced corruption rather than causing the attrition of the revolutionary's manpower pool.¹⁸³

The situation was different in Cambodia. While the RVN programs consisted of "amnesty" and "rewards," it seems that the PRK program consisted mostly of "amnesty." Perhaps due to fact that the PRK did not have sufficient resources, the *People's Army* never mentioned any systematic rewards scheme for the defectors in the "Lost" category. In the *People's Army*, it seems, amnesty was at the heart of the PRK "Lost" program, while the offering of rewards seemed to depend on the local officials themselves. In some cases, defection actually imposed a material cost to the defectors. In a defection case, in October 1984, a division in Battambang – Banteay Meanchey province (which, based on the description, seems to be the 179th division)

received a total of 144 defectors who brought in 114 guns, six canoes, and three bikes.¹⁸⁴ The defectors were then received in a formal ceremony and then the authority helped resettle them to their province of birth, while the canoes and the bikes were not re-claimed by the defectors since they had given up those things to the state in the form of “goodwill.”¹⁸⁵ The reception ceremony and the resettlement seemed to be the only things that the defectors could be sure to receive from the PRK. One could never be sure of material reward from the PRK.

That said, it does not mean that the PRK had never given out material rewards. In some cases where the local government was relatively well-off, the defectors were able to receive some material assistance. Perhaps the case of the highest reward reported by the *People's Army* was the defection in village “K” [codename] in Pursat province in 1984. In November 1984, a woman succeeded in convincing her husband to return to the PRK control.¹⁸⁶ The couple went to the village office together and turned in an AK assault rifle with a full magazine and a hand grenade. After the official reception event, the village authority solicited other people in the village who collectively donated to the couple 50 kilograms of rice, four meters of cloth, 10 kilograms of salt, and some pocket money (which, in the Khmer tradition, can be taken to mean a token amount of money).¹⁸⁷ No other defection event reported in the *People's Army* received such handsome rewards. In fact, there was not much reward provided at all.

Accordingly, in both cases, what was the motivation for defection? In the Vietnam case, it was clear that money was one major factor, and wherever there was money, there was greed. In the Cambodian case, however, the post-battle defectors were not counted in the “Lost” category, so we can rule out battlefield results as the

inducement for defection. Moreover, because there was no systematic rewards scheme for defection, the defectors could never be sure about the financial benefit of defection. This dissertation, therefore, concludes that indoctrination and propaganda programs, as well as social works and civic actions carried out by the KPRA, were the main reasons why people rallied to the PRK control. It was also no surprise that the defections in the Cambodian case came in small numbers, although in steady streams, unlike in the Vietnamese case, where the numbers were very high and then decreased sharply once the financial rewards program was terminated.

Indeed, one may argue that a defector to the government today might return to the revolutionary tomorrow. Unfortunately, there was no data to prove or disprove this hypothesis. This dissertation does not discount the possibility of this “backsliding” behaviors. However, this dissertation will submit that a large stream of defectors will certainly disrupt the revolutionary’s military activities as well as exposing the revolutionary’s underground networks. Moreover, if the defectors also became volunteers in the KPRA, then it might be the case that they have built an esprit de corps with the new organization and might be less likely to return to the guerrillas.

The second comparison relates to the relations between the soldiers and local officials and the army. In the Vietnamese case, social works by the soldiers seemed to take a back seat. MACV was concerned primarily with body counts, that is, killing as many of the enemy as possible.¹⁸⁸ In the Cambodian case, however, the KPRA paid more attention to building close ties between the soldiers and the people by carrying out social works. One may indeed make a case that the RVN and MACV were less successful than the KPRA because the former were actually facing a greater threat, that of the PAVN intervention, whose infiltration reached 101,263 in 1967.¹⁸⁹

Nevertheless, the presence of the conventional troops in a revolutionary war does not necessarily preclude the effectiveness of lenient policy toward the population. In fact, one may argue that the RVN and MACV could have counterfactually attracted the people to serve in the local militias and disrupt the PAVN infiltration. In reality, however, the PAVN operated with strong local support. The US Intelligence Board in 1966 went so far as to conclude that given the attrition rate inflicted on the revolutionaries, the revolutionaries could replace those losses by drawing from their manpower pool solely in the RVN if necessary.¹⁹⁰ This means that in some cases, popular support could translate directly into military advantage and vice versa.

It was true that the PAVN consisted of battle-seasoned soldiers, but what made them stronger was the popular support they enjoyed in the RVN. Without local support, it is questionable if the PAVN could effectively operate as they did. For example, while the PAVN infiltration was rampant in the RVN, there were indeed cases of the “dogs that did not bark,” that is, a few localities where the PAVN simply could not infiltrate. Lewy noted at least two places in Vietnam where the ARVN and allied troops did not need to operate because of the good security situation. The first was An Giang province, the home of the Hoa Hao sect, which was located only 30 kilometers from the Cambodian-Vietnamese border.¹⁹¹ While the Hoa Hao area was a prime target for infiltration due to its location, the religious minority living there organized locally to maintain the security of the province.¹⁹² Similarly, several villages in Long An province also organized along similar lines, mainly because the Christian minority fought to protect its faith and was almost perfectly immune from the PAVN infiltration.¹⁹³ These two examples bear an eerie resemblance to the way

people were indoctrinated and then were recruited to serve in the local militias in Cambodia.

To some extent, whether a counterinsurgent chooses kinetic strategy or population-based strategy is a matter of strategic choices and preference. What we do see is that the KPRA was relatively more successful than the ARVN, the presence of the PAVN notwithstanding.

5.4.3 The KPRA's Provincial Military Commands

This section provides a brief history of the main PMCs that this dissertation will examine: Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, and Kampong Thom. The examination is important because it will focus on how all of them built their local forces and then how much the mobile division depended on these commands for manpower. Instead of relying on forced conscription, the PRK rather depended on the provinces to build their own units and then transfer them to the divisions—which should benefit from the esprit de corps resulting from shared values in the local community. In all of the PMCs, the main goal of the unit-building was always support for the conventional divisions.

5.4.3.1 History of the Battambang PMC

In 1980, Battambang-Banteay Meanchey had seven district companies. In 1984, from these companies, the province established three infantry battalions, which were combined to create an infantry regiment that was transferred to MR5. In 1988, because the province was too big for one command to control, and because the threat varied (the KPRLF was active only in the Banteay Meanchey part of the province, while the Khmer Rouge and ANKI were active in Battambang), the province was

divided into two parts: Battambang and Banteay Meanchey. In total, after the split with Banteay Meanchey, Battambang had eight infantry battalions under its direct command. In 1988, three of these battalions were combined to create another independent regiment, again transferred to MR5.¹⁹⁴

In 1989, the 196th division was lacking manpower, and Battambang contributed five battalions to replenish it. The recruitment accelerated as 1989 approached. During the CGDK offensive in 1989, the Battambang PMC had a total of thirteen infantry battalions under its command after its contribution to the mobile divisions. In other words, Battambang constantly raised its forces and frequently contributed those forces to the regular units.¹⁹⁵

In addition, three of the six KPRA mobile divisions stationed in this province. The 196th division defended Pailin, the 4th division defended Samlot, and the 6th division defended Malai. Before the split of the province, another mobile division, the 179th division stationed in the Banteay Meanchey part of the province. There was a reason why Battambang had this enormous formation: the Khmer Rouge's main force operating in this area had two Fronts and two full divisions. In the areas around Malai, a town on the junction of Cambodian-Thai border and the border between Battambang and Banteay Meanchey, stood the Khmer Rouge's 450th division, which was a full division. To the southwest, in Battambang proper, i.e. south of Sisophon, the provincial capital of Banteay Meanchey, the Khmer Rouge's headquarters put Front 250 in charge. Front 250 operated from the Cambodian-Thai border across Battambang and extended into the Tonle Sap area. It consisted of four upgraded divisions and four special regiments. Further south, the Khmer Rouge's 415th division (which was also a full division) operated in the Pailin area. Another important

formation, Front 909, sought to divide Battambang and Pursat by operating along the border of the two provinces. Front 909 controlled nine divisions.¹⁹⁶

5.4.3.2 History of Banteay Meanchey PMC

Before 1988, this northwest province was part of Battambang-Banteay Meanchey. The 179th division (established in January 1979) was responsible for the Sisophon area and the northeast of the province. The geography and population distribution of Battambang-Banteay Meanchey was so complicated and so vast that the PRK decided to divide the province in two. On 7 January 1988, Banteay Meanchey province was formally inaugurated. It received five districts from the former province and created a new district and a provincial capital. Banteay Meanchey also inherited the service of the 179th division.¹⁹⁷

The 179th division had three regiments: regiment 9 stationed at Preah Netr Preah district, regiment 10 stationed at Phnom Srok district north of regiment 9, and regiment 11 stationed further north of regiment 10. Banteay Meanchey had five attachment units coming from outside: a contingent from Prey Veng PMC (battalion-plus), an independent armor regiment 69 (MR4), artillery regiment 12 (MR4), regiment 42 (MR4), and infantry regiment 71 (MR4, which originated in Kampong Thom province).¹⁹⁸

The structure of the new PMC was much heavier than that in Battambang due to its small size and disproportionate threat. Banteay Meanchey faced the bulk of the KPNI.F's forces. As a result, each district had at least two companies, and the provincial capital had six companies. Because Banteay Meanchey was a new province, it had combat companies instead of dual-duty companies. Nevertheless, these companies originated from the dual-duty companies when the province was still part

of Battambang. In total, the province had 20 district companies and two battalions (52nd and 53rd). In 1989, the province upgraded all companies to battalions in anticipation of the KPNLAF offensive. Banteay Meanchey had a staggering 22 battalions on the eve of the KPNLAF offensive. But such hasty upgrade produced a shortage of manpower. Each battalion was only a battalion-minus, having between 250 and 370 soldiers each, which were somewhat commensurate with the KPNLAF's regiments in 1989.

5.4.3.3 History of Kampong Thom PMC

Battalion 19, an all-Cambodian battalion from Long Giao, was used as the basis for the creation of the Kampong Thom PMC. In 1981, the province had recruited one infantry battalion (the 30th battalion), six district companies and thirteen dual-duty companies. In 1983, the province recruited five more dual-duty companies, and in 1984, it was able to create the 71st regiment. Just as the regiments in Battambang, this regiment was transferred to MR4. The following year, the province created two more battalions. One was 55th riverine infantry battalion, which was in charge of security along the Steung Sen Tributary connecting the provincial capital to the Tonle Sap Lake. Another unit, battalion 36A, was created for the purpose of defending the provincial capital. In 1986, the province created another district to the northeast with three companies. At the same time, it relinquished command of battalion 36A which was augmented to establish the 72nd regiment, once again transferred to MR4.¹⁹⁹

In 1988, the province began to accelerate its recruitment, as it expected heavy operations to come after the withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops. Battalion 36B was formed to replace the transferred 36A. Another riverine infantry battalion, the 15th battalion, was created in September 1988 but was again transferred to the Naval

Directorate of the Ministry of Homeland Defense. In 1989, the province reached the highest point of its build-up with the following combat units: the 20th infantry regiment (two battalions), the 3rdm 30th, and 36B infantry battalions, the 55th riverine infantry battalion, thirty companies (in eight districts), one artillery battery, one armor company and one reconnaissance troop.²⁰⁰

The CGDK units operating in this area consisted of elements of the Khmer Rouge divisions and only one ANKI division. The Khmer Rouge had seven divisions operating in the area. Only three, the 616th division, 802nd division, and 607th division were indigenous to Kampong Thom. The 417th division operated on the border of Kampong Thom, Kampong Cham, and Kratie. The Khmer Rouge's 920th division operated between this province and Kampong Cham, and the 980th division operated in the area near Siem Reap's southern border. The 785th division, in particular, was a transportation/special force division with forces stationed in Kampong Cham, Kampong Thom, and Siem Reap. According to the former chief of staff of Siem Reap PMC, this unit was primarily a logistics unit but was also used to spearhead the attack in places where the normal units could not get through.²⁰¹

The ANKI had one division operating in Kampong Thom province, the 15th division. The total number of the combined CGDK regular troops permanently fighting in Kampong Thom was estimated to be between 1400-1800 soldiers.²⁰² However, the Khmer Rouge could easily mobilize other units to concentrate in this province as required.²⁰³

5.4.4 Region 4, Military Region 4 and 5

The second echelon of territorial units were the Regions and Military Regions (MR), which were the higher headquarters of several provinces in the same areas. This

higher headquarters had its own battalions and regiments, but its strength rested upon their mobility, armor, and heavy artillery which it can mobilize to intervene in any provinces that were threatened by the CGDK. The Region and MR were the successors of the Vietnamese units that stepped up to assume the responsibility of the departing VVA. Therefore, we need to examine the organization of the latter.

The highest command headquarters of the VVA units were organized into "Front." The VVA had four Fronts under the command of a supreme headquarters known as *Front 719 based in Phnom Penh. Front 579 was supported by the PAVN military region 5* (meaning, the military region back in Vietnam) and controlled operations in Steung Treng, Ratanak Kiri, Mondul Kiri, parts of Kratie, and Preah Vihear. The front headquarters was in Steung Treng province. *Front 979 was supported by Vietnam's military region 9* and controlled operations in Takeo, Kompot, Kampong Som, Koh Kong, Kampong Speu, Kampong Chhnang, Pursat, and parts of Battambang (from the town of Samlot to the south). The front headquarters was on the outskirts of Phnom Penh, at the head of national road 3, which led to Takeo-Kompot area. *Front 797 was supported by Vietnam's military region 7* and controlled operations in Kratie, Kampong Cham, Prey Veng, and Svay Rieng. The front headquarters was in Kampong Cham.²⁰⁴

Finally, Vietnam's military region 7 supported another front, *Front 479*, based in Siem Reap's provincial capital and controlling operations in Battambang-Banteay Meanchey and Siem-Reap-Ouddar Meanchey. While this front controlled only two provinces, the situation, population, and geography were very complicated, mainly because the area bordered with Thailand which made it relatively easy for infiltration.

In late 1984, these four Fronts made way for the Cambodian military regions to take shape by shadowing their boundaries and responsibilities. At the beginning, the Cambodian military regions were known as “Regions.” Thus, Region 1 replaced Front 579, Region 2 replaced Front 797, Region 3 replaced Front 979, and Region 4 replaced Front 479. This dissertation will focus only on Region 4 because the decisive operations between the PRK and the CGDK were fought in this area from 1989 to 1991.

In August 1984, Region 4 was formally inaugurated. The headquarters was in Siem Reap provincial capital, and then it gradually moved to replace the headquarters of Front 479 in front of Angkor Wat temple, less than ten kilometers from the provincial capital. About one kilometer from Angkor Wat temple was another temple complex, Angkor Thom, controlled by the Khmer Rouge. Region 4 controlled forces in three very large provinces: Battambang-Banteay Meanchey, Siem Reap-Ouddar Meanchey, and Pursat. All of the divisions operating in the area immediately fell under tactical control of Region 4 (technically, the general staff headquarters controlled the divisions, but the MR could coordinate with the divisions as required).²⁰⁵

Region 4 had seven organic units: three maneuver regiments (41st, 42nd, and 43rd), the 69th regiment (armor), the 12th regiment (artillery), 75A regiment (protection), and 75B regiment (combat engineer). The Ouddar Meanchey part of the Siem Reap-Ouddar Meanchey province was isolated, but the Samraong district was densely populated and it acted almost as a PMC in its own right. Regiment 43 of Region 4 and the 286th division stationed in the district.²⁰⁶

A few months after the PRK split Battambang and Banteay Meanchey, on 28 June 1988, Region 4 was also split into Military Region 4 (MR4) and Military Region 5 (MR5). MR5 controlled Battambang, Pursat, and Kampong Chhnang provinces while MR4 controlled Siem Reap-Ouddar Meanchey and Banteay Meanchey. Thus, MR4 maintained control of the 286th division, the 179th division, and the PMCs in its area of operations while MR5 controlled the 4th, 6th, and the 196th divisions and the PMCs in its area of operations.²⁰⁷

5.5 Territorial-Based Versus Population-Based Strategy

The last echelon of the KPRA was that of the mobile divisions. One cannot talk about the COIN strategy of the PRK and VVA without talking about these units, and vice versa. These units were under the control of the general staff headquarters and were used to achieve objectives of highest importance. As a result, they would move around the country to where they were needed most. We shall examine the KPRA's strategy in the first half of this section and the second half of the section will consider the impacts of the strategy on the mobile divisions.

The Vietnamese grand strategy in the Cambodian conflict was one of "building the Cambodian force so that it can defend itself."²⁰⁸ As a country that had fought a war based on the "People's War" concept, this was not surprising. Nonetheless, the Vietnamese strategy in Cambodia was torn between a territorial-based strategy and a population-based one. During the Vietnam War, the PAVN and the NLF adhered to a population-based strategy, which was expedient given the superior American firepower. As the PAVN moved into Cambodia, however, it was the side that possessed superior firepower. The Vietnamese were thus torn. This dissertation characterizes three phases of Vietnamese strategy in Cambodia.

The first phase of the Vietnamese strategy was the building of local governance, which was almost non-existent after the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime. In fact, when the Khmer Rouge came to power in 1975, they fiercely hunted down all local officials or anyone who had any relations with the old regime. Building local governance from zero was a monumental task for the PRK and Vietnam. Because the task required lengthy commitment, the first one to manage those duties was the armed forces. Thus, the VVA assigned military expert units (the units with four-digit numerical designation) to work hand in hand with the Cambodian units. Concurrently, the central committee of the KPRK also sent armed propaganda units to build the dual-duty units, the provincial battalions, and then regiments. In short, phase 1 was undeniably a population-centric strategy.

In phase 2, the VVA launched major operations along the border into to clear the refugee camps from which the rebels launched the raids into the interior. On 5 April 1984, elements from the Vietnamese 95th regiment and the 6th division formed the first axis of advance while elements from the 201st regiment and the 302nd division formed the second axis and both launched the attack into Thailand.²⁰⁹ In a surprise move, the Vietnamese forces captured many high grounds in Thai territory. In retaliation to this attack, the Chinese restarted their shelling into Vietnamese territory to retaliate against what China thought was once again a Vietnamese expansion in Indochina.²¹⁰

Twelve days later, the Thai 6th division counterattacked and recaptured the lost territories. The battle was ferocious, with both sides throwing in tanks and heavy artillery.²¹¹ While many commentators at the time feared an escalation of the conflict that might engulf continental Southeast Asia, there was one peculiarity about the

Vietnamese operations. The attack occurred in an area known as the “Triangle Area,” the intersection of the border among Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand, further away from the threatened Battambang-Banteay Meanchey province. For the KPRA’s officers on the ground, however, the attack was rather a feint and Vietnam was clever enough not to fight both Thailand and China at the same time.²¹² There was an assumption that Thailand will support the rebels in the event the Vietnamese attacked the border camps.²¹³ As a result, the VVA attacked in the area to draw the RTA away from the real objective to the west.

The ploy worked. In late 1984, a far larger VVA formation commanded by Front 479 launched a major dry-season offensive on the border camps along the Cambodian-Thai border in Battambang-Banteay Meanchey province. The campaign was aptly dubbed “14-camps Campaign.”²¹⁴ On Christmas day 1984, the Vietnamese captured the first camp belonging to the KPNLF.²¹⁵ On 7 January 1985, the anniversary of the KPSFNS’ liberation of Phnom Penh, the KPNLF’s headquarters fell.²¹⁶ In early 1985, most of the border camps were cleared, and all factions within the CGDK had to move their base of operations into Thailand.

With the completion of this phase, the VVA launched phase 3 of their strategy which was perhaps the longest phase. The strategy then decidedly moved from population-centric to territory-centric. Just before the dry season offensive of 1984, the central committee of the KPRP and the Vietnamese had planned a controversial strategy known as the “K-5” belt strategy.²¹⁷ Conceived as a five-year plan, this strategy literally called for the construction of a “wall” along the Cambodian-Thai border. According to Régaud, this wall was to be upgraded with the generous use of landmines, anti-infantry obstacles, tank ditches, and interior-line road networks.²¹⁸

Laborers were sent from the interior to construct the wall in the dense, malaria-infested jungle, while the mobile divisions would move up to staff the outposts in the isolated areas along the border to protect the wall.²¹⁹

The strategy was never published in any official documents, but the Army newspaper made numerous comments related to the strategy throughout the years. It was certainly not easy to comprehend how the Vietnamese, who were one of the masters of "People's War," could come up with such a territory-centric strategy at the expense of a population-centric one. To be fair, the strategy of using conventional units in remote areas to interdict the rebels' infiltration was adopted by the US during the Vietnam War. But its effectiveness was highly questionable.²²⁰

As the years went on, both the KPRA and the VVA realized that closing off a 500-plus kilometers border was no simple task. Even Premier Hun Sen, who had come to power in late 1984, had already disowned the strategy. Nevertheless, the central committee of the KPRK never totally abandoned the strategy, and while the wall and the anti-infantry obstacles were never totally constructed, an enduring legacy of the K-5 belt strategy still cast a shadow on the mobile divisions. And that was crucial. Thus, after the VVA raided the border camps in 1984 and 1985, it began its gradual withdrawal to the rear, while the KPRA mobile divisions assumed positions to the front: the 4th division in Samlot, the 196th division in Pailin, the 6th division in Malai, the 179th division in Banteay Meanchey, the 286th division in Ouddar Meanchey, and even a sizeable number of territorial units also had to leave their provinces to move to the border. The irony of this episode was that the Vietnamese, who had defeated the American strategy of bringing the fight away from the population centers, found

themselves implementing the very same strategy in Cambodia. The CGDK intended to give the Vietnamese a taste of their own medicine.

5.6 Impacts of the Territory-Centric Strategy on the KPRA Mobile Divisions

From the start, the K-5 belt strategy had many flaws and problems. First of all, the laborers who were recruited for the construction project were discontented by the hardship. Second, deploying the mobile divisions and territorial units far away from the population center for an extended period of time had a large negative effect on morale of the troops.²²¹ Third, this strategy effectively pushed all units into isolated positions, and firepower became the only thing that prevented the rebels from overrunning the positions. Finally, the KPRA had to adhere to a six-month stockpile logistics system because the positions were too far away to maintain continuous re-supply.

Similar to the territorial forces, the KPRA's regular units were also born out of the all-Cambodian battalions that came from Long Giao province in 1979. Initially, each province, except Phnom Penh and Kampong Cham, was allocated one battalion. But instead of becoming *the* genesis battalion that gave birth to the territorial troops in each province, some battalions combined to create brigades and then divisions. In the beginning, there were four divisions: 4th, 179th, 196th, and 286th. After the dry season offensive of 1984-85, a new division, the 6th division was created. These five divisions will be the focus of this dissertation. These divisions were stationed in the area where the decisive operations between the PRK and the CGDK occurred. Many other divisions that the KPRA created after 1989 will not be discussed here as they did not have the extensive battlefield activities as the former five divisions.

To the northwest of Battambang-Banteay Meanchey was the frontier town of Pailin, well known for its gemstone quarry. The 196th division was the unit that defended this town. The 196th division was formally inaugurated on 19 June 1981 and had three regiments: 1st, 2nd, and 3rd regiments.

To the south of Pailin was another frontier town, Samlot, which was the site of the 1968 farmer's rebellion. This area was under the control of the 4th division. Just like the 196th division, the 4th division traced its origin to the all-Cambodian battalions from Long Giao. The original mission of this unit was to cover NR4, which linked the capital to the sea port at Kampong Som (Sihanouk Ville). But the area was more secure thanks to the geography. To the west, along the Cambodian-Thai border, was the steepest summit of the Cardamom Mountain. To cross from the Thai province of Trat into the interior of Cambodia would take at least a week's march through rugged terrain. The general staff headquarters had determined that the avenue of approach would be very difficult for the Khmer Rouge to sustain large-scale infiltration. In effect, the PMC would be enough to deal with the threat and the brigade would be much more useful elsewhere.

Similarly, the 4th division was born out of the Cambodian battalions which moved out of Long Giao province in 1979. These battalions were first combined to create the 2nd brigade. Between 1981 and 1982, the brigade moved to Pursat to guard Route 56, in the Veal Veng area. Around 1983, it fought with the VVA's 339th division, which defended the border between Pursat and Battambang-Banteay Meanchey. In April 1983, in anticipation for the 1984 dry season offensive, the brigade became the 4th division, but it would constantly raise its forces to become a full division. The 4th division had three maneuver regiments: 13th, 14th, and 15th as

well as nine functional battalions. In 1987, as the VVA withdrew, the 4th division was pushed northward to defend the southern part of Battambang. Later, its 14th Regiment was detached and augmented to become the 94th brigade, which then defended NR5 at the border between Pursat and Banteay Meanchey. The 13th Regiment also had to stay behind to help cover the rear position of the new brigade. So when the 4th division was pushed to Samlot, it had only one maneuver regiment (15th regiment), a headquarters unit, as well as the nine functional battalions. In short, the 4th division (and its former units) arrayed its forces to cover the Cambodian-Thai border from Pursat to Samlot in Battambang.²²²

Pailin and Samlot were almost like twin-cities. If one traveled from the Battambang provincial capital via Route 10 through Ratanak Mondul district, the road would fork at Treng, where the northern route would lead to Pailin, and the southern route to Samlot. The 196th division and the 4th division had to support each other. Should either one fail or should the Khmer Rouge capture the crossroad at Ratanak Mondul district and Treng, the other unit would be isolated and risk annihilation.

The third division that stationed in Battambang-Banteay Meanchey was the 179th division. Just like other conventional divisions, this unit was also born out of the Long Giau battalions. These battalions were combined to create the 4th brigade. Just before the 1984-85 dry season offensive, the 4th brigade was augmented to become the 179th division. The division had three regiments: 9th, 10th, and 11th. On 5 December 1984, the 9th and 10th regiments fought alongside the VVA in the campaign that destroyed all major KPNLF's camps along the Cambodian-Thai border in the vicinity of Banteay Meanchey area. The 179th division arrayed its forces to

protect the eastern flank of Banteay Meanchey province when the province was inaugurated in 1988.²²³

Lastly, to the east, the province of Siem Ream-Ouddar Meanchey had only one division but it was a heavy, mechanized division. The 286th division was born out of the Long Giao battalions that followed the PAVN to Siem Reap. On 19 November 1979, these battalions combined to create the 3rd brigade. On 28 June 1980, the brigade was augmented to become the 286th division. The main mission of the 286th division was to defend Siem Reap-Ouddar Meanchey province as well as its border with Thailand.

Due to the geography that divided the province into two parts and because the territorial troops were able to maintain security in the areas surrounding the provincial capital, the 286th division was pushed north past the Kulen Mountain. The area was the Ouddar Meanchey part of the province, where terrain was flat, making it relatively easy for tanks and other armored vehicles to move around. The 286th division had three combined arms regiments (i.e. a combination of armor and infantry units), one artillery regiment, and nine functional battalions. One of its regiments, the 44th regiment had four battalions, all of which were raised from the Prey Veng PMC.²²⁴

Due to the importance of the Samraong and Chong Kal district, the 286th division was not deployed to protect the border. It stayed behind to protect the two districts. MR4 also dispatched the 43rd regiment to help shore up the defense of the two districts. Perhaps still true to its K-5 belt strategy, MR4 also deployed the 41st regiment to defend the isolated village of Anlong Veng. The unit was completely isolated.²²⁵

5.7 To War... Along the Border!

In 1985, after the 14-Camps Campaign, as the VVA prepared to move away from the frontline, the KPRA established another new unit, the 6th division. The origin of this division was different from those of the previous four. The latter were born out of the all-Cambodian battalions from Long Giao. These battalions were not the only Cambodian units who fought in 1979, however. As the PAVN moved into Cambodia in 1979, it also raised new units from the refugees encountered along the way. These forces were embedded into Vietnamese units. For example, in one mixed battalion, there could be three Vietnamese companies and one Cambodian company.

The 6th division was born out of the Cambodian units embedded to the VVA's division 8 of Front 979, which was stationed in Kompot province. One of its regiments, the 23rd regiment was formerly the 43rd regiment of the Battambang-Banteay Meanchey provincial troops (not to be confused with MR4's regiment 43). The mission of the 6th division was to guard the border wall and fill in the gap between the 179th division and the 196th division as well as to protect the border between Battambang and Banteay Meanchey.

The 6th division had an interesting history. Deployed to the remote area called Malai, it was perhaps the most isolated unit of all the divisions. Yet, its situation was representative of all the divisions. If travelled by foot from the nearest population center to the division headquarter, the journey took at least one week, and the road was practically unusable during the rainy season.²²⁶ Khmer Rouge ambush along this road was a certainty. The division had the highest commander casualty rate of all the divisions. The area was infested with malaria, and the water source had a high calcium concentration that severely affected the soldiers' urinary tracts. Apart from enemy actions, disease and sanitation problems ranked second in generating casualties among

soldiers of the 6th division. The 6th division was stationed at the junction of the Cambodian-Thai border and the border between Battambang and Banteay Meanchey province. In the "stockpile" concept of logistics, during the entire dry season period, the transportation corps would struggle to supply the division for six months, covering the whole rainy season. All other units encountered similar problems.

However, this division made up for these problems by having two advantages: numbers and good commanders. The division had around 7,000 soldiers on average, which was one of the biggest among the regular units, which generally could muster only around 5,000. The commander was a graduate of the M.V. Frunze Military Academy in the former Soviet Union, and his deputy commander was also a product of a Soviet military academy. Even today, the former commander claimed that he had never lost a battle in which he personally had commanded troops.²²⁷ Nevertheless, a good division must have both good commanders and committed soldiers. The KPRA would discover this the hard way in the 1989 CGDK Combined Offensive.

5.8 Summary and Theoretical Discussions: A War of Numbers

Due to a lack of resources, it seemed that the KPRA had to rely on ideology and manpower. *Its military system was essentially built to meet this challenge.* The KPRA had no air force or navy. To be fair, it started to buy some MiG fighters from the Soviet Union and sent many pilots there for training, but it almost never used the planes in its operations. The reason was simple: a simple strafing run could easily take the plane across the Cambodian-Thai border. The KPRA did have patrol boats and a Naval Directorate, but once again, the priority was terrestrial warfare. By 1989, the result of this priority was clear. With a combined manpower of about 20,000 soldiers, the mobile divisions struggled to defend the long border without air support. In

addition, the combined territorial troops in Battambang and Banteay Meanchey amounted to thirty five battalions in 1989, excluding the militias and units that were sent to replenish the mobile divisions. In other words, the total number of mobile divisions and the territorial troops in these two provinces was equal to the total number of the Khmer Rouge forces operating in the entire country.²²⁸

As we count the reinforcement from MR2, MR4, MR5, Siem Reap-Ouddar Meanchey PMC, Pursat PMC, and of the 286th division, as well as the militias in MR4 and MR5, the KPRA simply outnumbered all three CGDK factions. Once we count also the strategic reserve, which might have consisted of the combat police, the newly established the 5th and 7th divisions, and the Kampong Thom and Preah Vihear PMC, the CGDK seemed to have a problem. In addition to the numbers, all mobile divisions received reinforcements from the local troops, and the local troops themselves were considered to be part of a comprehensive defense system. These people not only outnumbered the rebels, they did so on their own turf. The KPRA's ability to mobilize the people and integrate them into a comprehensive defense system made life hard for the rebels.²²⁹

In the Cambodian Civil War, therefore, the KPRA's numerical superiority was clear. What caused this disparity? This dissertation concludes that this must have been the result of high morale. First of all, there was no conscription law until 1989. The PRK could easily pass such a law, but it did not, which leads this dissertation to conclude that the PRK did not need a law to recruit people into the army.²³⁰ In addition, financial rewards also did not seem to be the only reason people served because almost two thirds of the KPRA forces were territorial forces and they received only meager revenue from serving.²³¹ Finally, unlike in Vietnam, we can safely

assume that there was no ghost soldier or ornamental soldier in the rank (at least not in an alarming number), otherwise the scandal would be exposed when those units were transferred to the mobile divisions in the late 1980s.

The next logical question is, where did the high morale, if it existed, come from? First of all, the PRK had a clear political program, namely the prevention of the Khmer Rouge's return. Second, this program was implemented by the armed propaganda units which were later upgraded into dual-duty companies. The military organization was inextricably linked to propaganda and the implementation of the political program. Using the prevention of the Khmer Rouge's genocidal regime as a cause, the dual-duty companies later recruited more people to serve in the provincial battalions and regiments.

Based on the current state of the documents and the archive, there was no evidence to support an alternative explanation of the high level of morale other than indoctrination and the military organization which facilitated such activities. In other words, we observed strong indoctrination program and strong message and these correlated with the high morale. The current archive and documents did not offer any other alternative explanation. The existing evidence was also anecdotal in nature. In one example, as the Vietnamese troops prepared for the withdrawal in 1989, the PRK's local officials had showed their concerns that the Khmer Rouge might have returned and suggested they have served to prevent such an eventuality.²³² That official was the governor of Banteay Meanchey province who, as we will see in the next chapter, refused to abandon the province in the face of CGDK attack. Fear for the Khmer Rouge seemed to be one of the main reasons why people served in the KPRA, and the PRK's indoctrination programs reinforced that commitment.

According to the hypothesis proposed in this dissertation, the PRK should be successful in the war. However, the PRK and the RVN also shared some similarities, especially in terms of the military strategy. Being the strongest party, the PRK also had its shortcomings. The strongest party tended to think that everything is possible, and that was perhaps the genesis of the K-5 belt strategy. Numerical and morale superiority notwithstanding, by pushing many units to the isolated border areas, the KPRA essentially gave up three main advantages. Firstly, their force became stretched out and consequently, the CGDK could mass its combat power to overwhelm and defeat each one in turn. Secondly, while the KPRA's territorial units knew the terrain, once they moved to the jungle, that advantage was lost. Thirdly, as the mobile division absorbed the PMC reinforcements, the morale of the latter started to dip as they fought further away from their homes. With the K-5 belt strategy, the KPRA's advantage boiled down to only one: numerical superiority.

Thus, while the KPRA started with an excellent population-centric strategy, it drifted to territory-centric strategy as it became the strongest army on the battlefield. The PRK came to the 1989 CGDK Combined Offensive with an army that was spread all along the border. Perhaps it was true that the side with disproportionate resources could not fight a COIN warfare appropriately because it focused on material resources, while the more austere side focused more on what really matters, the population. It seems this rule applies to anyone, even the one that had previously fought a successful "People's War." Perhaps a mastery of revolutionary warfare does not guarantee a mastery of counterinsurgency.

¹ *Speech of the Prime Minister*, "Comments at the graduation in Vanda Institute." 22 December 2008.

² Nhem, *The Khmer Rouge*, 23.

³ Ibid., 29.

⁴ Vannak and Wynne, *The Khmer Rouge Division 703*, 15.

⁵ “Statistics of total forces”, Document number: L00065, DC-Cam.

⁶ Dy, *A History of Democratic Kampuchea*, 35.

⁷ Nhem, *The Khmer Rouge*, 60.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តព្រះវិហារ [History of Preah Vihear Provincial Military Command] (ភ្នំពេញ, កម្ពុជា: អគ្គនាយកដ្ឋាននយោបាយនិងកិច្ចការបរទេស, ក្រសួងការពារជាតិ, ឆ្នាំ ២០១២ [Phnom Penh, Cambodia: General Department of Policy and Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Defense, 2012]), 5.

¹⁰ Nem Sowath, *Civil War Termination and the Source of Total Peace in Cambodia: Win-Win Policy of Samdech Techo Hun Sen in International Context* (Phnom Penh: Reahoo, 2012), 140-144.

¹¹ These areas were in the northwestern corner of Cambodia.

¹² វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តសៀមរាប [History of Siem Reap Provincial Military Command] (ភ្នំពេញ, កម្ពុជា: អគ្គនាយកដ្ឋាននយោបាយនិងកិច្ចការបរទេស, ក្រសួងការពារជាតិ, ឆ្នាំ ២០១២ [Phnom Penh, Cambodia: General Department of Policy and Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Defense, 2012]), 8.

¹³ Conboy, *The Cambodian Wars*, 300.

¹⁴ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តបាត់ដំបង [History of Battambang Provincial Military Command] (ភ្នំពេញ, កម្ពុជា: អគ្គនាយកដ្ឋាននយោបាយនិងកិច្ចការបរទេស, ក្រសួងការពារជាតិ, ឆ្នាំ ២០១២ [Phnom Penh, Cambodia: General Department of Policy and Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Defense, 2012]), 9.

¹⁵ “Front” in the Socialist military organization was the largest formation. It was equivalent to the German and American “Army Groups” during World War II that had approximately one to one and a half million troops. Because the Khmer Rouge had inflated the notional strength of their unit, a Front was equal only to a corps.

¹⁶ Map created by author.

¹⁷ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តបាត់ដំបង [History of Battambang Provincial Military Command], 11.

¹⁸ Ibid., 12.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តកំពង់ធំ [History of Kampong Thom Provincial Military Command] (ភ្នំពេញ, កម្ពុជា: អគ្គនាយកដ្ឋាននយោបាយនិងកិច្ចការបរទេស, ក្រសួងការពារជាតិ, ឆ្នាំ ២០១២ [Phnom Penh, Cambodia: General Department of Policy and Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Defense, 2012]), 5.

²¹ A quote by a former high-ranking ANKI commander. See Conboy, *The Cambodian Wars*, 274.

²² Ibid. Conboy usually called most of the KPNI.F's camp leaders "warlords."

²³ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តបន្ទាយមានជ័យ [History of Banteay Meanchey Provincial Military Command] (ភ្នំពេញ, កម្ពុជា: អគ្គនាយកដ្ឋាននយោបាយនិងកិច្ចការបរទេស, ក្រសួងការពារជាតិ, ឆ្នាំ ២០១២ [Phnom Penh, Cambodia: General Department of Policy and Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Defense, 2012]), 12.

²⁴ Conboy, *The Cambodian Wars*, 130.

²⁵ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តបន្ទាយមានជ័យ [History of Banteay Meanchey Provincial Military Command], 12.

²⁶ Conboy, *The Cambodian Wars*, 236.

²⁷ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តបន្ទាយមានជ័យ [History of Banteay Meanchey Provincial Military Command], 15.

²⁸ Ibid., 16.

²⁹ Conboy, *The Cambodian Wars*, 245.

³⁰ Ibid., 264.

³¹ Ibid., 245-246.

³² វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តបន្ទាយមានជ័យ [History of Banteay Meanchey Provincial Military Command], 14.

³³ Nhek, *A Luck in Thousand Dangers*, 35.

³⁴ Ibid., 37.

³⁵ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តបន្ទាយមានជ័យ [History of Banteay Meanchey Provincial Military Command], 35. This was a speculation by the PRK. It was not far-fetched, however, given the preceding events.

³⁶ Nhek, *A Luck in Thousand Dangers*, 28.

³⁷ Conboy, *The Cambodian Wars*, 295.

³⁸ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តបាត់ដំបង [History of Battambang Provincial Military Command], 3.

³⁹ Conboy, *The Cambodian Wars*, 248.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 251-252.

⁴¹ Nguyễn Văn Hồng, *Cuộc chiến tranh bắt buộc* [The Obligated War] (Hanoi: Nhà xuất bản Quân Đội Nhân Dân, 2008 [Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 2008]). The author of this book was a retired colonel who had served under Front 479. I would like to thank my classmate at the US Army Command and General Staff College, Captain Tran Duc Huong (of the People's Army of Vietnam) for assisting me with parts of the translation of the book.

⁴² Conboy claimed it was the size of a brigade, but the Vietnamese sources and the KPRA's sources suggested it was division-size. See វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាតំបន់ ៤ [History of Military Region 4] (ភ្នំពេញ, កម្ពុជា: អគ្គនាយកដ្ឋានយោធាយុទ្ធសាស្ត្រកិច្ចការបរទេស, ក្រសួងការពារជាតិ, ឆ្នាំ ២០១៣ [Phnom Penh, Cambodia: General Department of Policy and Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Defense, 2013]), 15. The official history of MR5 also corroborated this view.

⁴³ Other provinces in the eastern part of the country also received some of these units. On this issue, see Nguyễn Văn Hồng, *Cuộc chiến tranh bắt buộc* [The Obligated War], 68.

⁴⁴ In Cambodia, a hamlet is a single settlement. The number of families and houses may vary from one hamlet to another, but the hamlet is a single unit. Several hamlets combine to create a village. Several villages combine to create a district. The districts then combine to create province. In the civilian administration system, province is the highest territorial administration. In the military system, several provincial military commands combine to create military region.

⁴⁵ This was a Soviet practice known as "Socialist competition." As it moved to other socialist countries, especially in Cambodia, not much changed. See វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាតំបន់ ៥ [History of Military Region 5].

⁴⁶ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តសៀមរាប [History of Siem Reap Provincial Military Command], 26.

⁴⁷ See Editorial staffs, "10-year achievements showed our KPRA's commitments to the party, the motherland, and the people which is fitting to be the cutting edge instrument which protects the power of the party, the power of the administration, and the power of the people," *People's Army*, 25 January 1989.

⁴⁸ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តបន្ទាយមានជ័យ [History of Banteay Meanchey Provincial Military Command], 23.

⁴⁹ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តសៀមរាប [History of Siem Reap Provincial Military Command], 30.

⁵⁰ The KPRA's official newspaper, the *People's Army*, mentioned this unit on a regular basis after its creation in 1984.

⁵¹ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តបន្ទាយមានជ័យ [History of Banteay Meanchey Provincial Military Command], 35.

⁵² Editorial staff, "The Course at the Military School is a Success. Both for the Students and the Teachers," *People's Army*, December 1979.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តសៀមរាប [History of Siem Reap Provincial Military Command], 53.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Whether the political commanders have done a good job in building morale will be examined in the chapter on operations during the Cambodian civil war where some units routed while others did not.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 54.

⁵⁸ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តបាត់ដំបង [History of Battambang Provincial Military Command], 51.

⁵⁹ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាតំបន់ ៥ [History of Military Region 5], 1.

⁶⁰ Slocomb, *The People's Republic of Kampuchea*, 62.

⁶¹ Ibid., 62-65.

⁶² វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តសៀមរាប [History of Siem Reap Provincial Military Command], 35. The operations were codenamed "C-80."

⁶³ Slocomb, *The People's Republic of Kampuchea*, 63. The Vietnamese troops never got involved in the bureaucratic business of the PRK's local officials.

⁶⁴ Editorial staff, "The 1st Battalion Mobilized the People for Cultivation on New Land," *People's Army*, January 1980.

⁶⁵ Editorial staff, "The People's Revolutionary Army [i.e. PMC] in Kampong Chhnang Worked Tirelessly to Harvest Agricultural Products and Support the People's Agricultural Harvests," *People's Army*, February 1980.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Editorial staff, "The 19th Battalion in Kampong Thom Prepared for the Upcoming Harvest," *People's Army*, June 1980.

⁶⁸ Sin Seda, "The 33rd Battalion Helped the People in PeamChileang Village to Harvest and Increase the Standard of Living," *People's Army*, June 1980.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Sorn Saramalay, "Takeo Province Received Many Distinctions," *People's Army*, August 1980.

⁷¹ Editorial staff, "The 'E' Armored Unit Studied, Trained, and Built Its Ranks and Files," *People's Army*, September 1980.

⁷² Editorial staff, "News in the Armed Forces," *People's Army*, November 1980.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Editorial staff, "News in the Armed Forces," *People's Army*, December 1980.

⁷⁵ Editorial staff, "The 6th Battalion Built Up Its Core Members," *People's Army*, August 1980.

⁷⁶ Dam Dararith, "The 7th Battalion Built Up Its Core Members," *People's Army*, March 1980.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ An example of this distinction can be found in many articles in the *People's Army*. For an example, see Kim Ratana, "News in the Armed Forces," *People's Army*, 6 October 1985.

⁸⁰ Hang Tchoeun, "New Happiness of Brother Keth Chhum and Brother Buth Ven," *People's Army*, 7 March 1985.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Prach Sareth, "Honey Trap," *People's Army*, 25 April 1985.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

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- ⁸⁷ Hun Sitha, "The Night of Disillusionment," *People's Army*, 2 May 1985.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid.
- ⁸⁹ Rachel Hughes, "The Day of Hatred," *Searching for the Truth*, December 2000.
- ⁹⁰ Prach Sareth and Long Sarun, "Various Commitment Speeches of the People and the Army Regarding the Condemnation of the Genocide During the Pol Pot – Ieng Sary – Khieu Samphan Regime," *People's Army*, 23 May 1985.
- ⁹¹ Ibid.
- ⁹² Ibid.
- ⁹³ Hughes, "The Day of Hatred."
- ⁹⁴ Ibid.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid.
- ⁹⁶ Prach Sareth and Long Sarun, "Various Commitment Speeches."
- ⁹⁷ Ibid.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid. For an example of the opinion column, see Editorial staff, "Further Strengthening the Implementation of the Policy Toward the Lost Who Had Decided to Return to the Revolution," *People's Army*, 9 May 1985.
- ⁹⁹ Hughes, "The Day of Hatred."
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid.
- ¹⁰¹ Chan Manith, "First Batch of Political Instructors," *People's Army*, 25 April 1985.
- ¹⁰² Ibid.
- ¹⁰³ Lim Leang Ser, "Kampong Thom, the Strategic Location," *People's Army*, 17 January 1985.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁵ Editorial staff, "Our Farmers Is Harvesting at Great Speed," *People's Army*, 17 January 1985.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid.
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¹³⁰ Editorial staff. "The 1st Company of Sutra Nikum District Completed Its Objectives in Celebration of the Party's 5th Congress." *People's Army*, 10 October 1985.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Pich Meng, "Youth League of Kampong Thom PMC Acted in Celebration of the Party's 5th Congress," *People's Army*, 6 October 1985.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Editorial staff, "Why Do the Ta Tchets Village Militias Have High Morale in Combat?" *People's Army*, 4 July 1985.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Kim Sopheak, "The Strong Militias of Village 'L' [codename]," *People's Army*, 14 March 1985.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Y Maro, "Transforming Pain into Bravery," *People's Army*, 21 March 1985.

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¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Dy Pontara, "The 1st Company of Chongkal District Has Achieved Great Things for the People," *People's Army*, 11 April 1985.

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¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Dy Pontara, "The Bravery of the 20th Battalion," *People's Army*, 4 December 1985.

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- 151 Ibid.
- 152 Prach, "The 5th Company of Kampong Som."
- 153 Prach Sareth, "Building People-Army Solidarity," *People's Army*, 28 March 1985.
- 154 Ibid.
- 155 Editorial staff, "News in the Armed Forces," *People's Army*, 2 May 1985.
- 156 Ibid.
- 157 Editorial staff, "Achievements of Svay Teap District Military in Building and Protecting the Villages and Hamlets," *People's Army*, 9 May 1985.
- 158 Ibid.
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- 163 Kim Sopheak, "Three Achievements of Takeo Youths," *People's Army*, 30 May 1985.
- 164 Ibid.
- 165 Editorial staff, "News in the Armed Forces," *People's Army*, 3 October 1985.
- 166 Ibid.
- 167 Ibid.
- 168 SPK, "The 'Lost' Have Returned to the Revolutionary Government," *People's Army*, 11 July 1985.
- 169 SPK, "Thousands of the 'Lost' Have Returned to the Revolution," *People's Army*, 30 October 1985.
- 170 Ibid.
- 171 SPK, "2,300 'Lost' Soldiers Returned to Live with the People," *People's Army*, 13 November 1985. While the number was aggregated at the province level, the district military and the militias were also actively involved in attracting the defectors. The Banteay Ampil district in Battambang province, for

example, received 130 defectors and 71 weapons in July 1985. See Dy Pontara and Kim Ratana, “News in the Armed Forces,” *People’s Army*, 20 November 1985.

172 Yin Saren, “Why Did the Svay Rieng PMC Succeed in Recruiting New Soldiers?” *People’s Army*, 6 October 1985.

173 Ibid.

174 Ibid.

175 Ibid.

176 Ibid.

177 Ibid.

178 ឌឺប សុផល [Diep. Sophal], *សាធារណរដ្ឋប្រជាមានិតកម្ពុជា និង រដ្ឋកម្ពុជា* [The People’s Republic of Kampuchea and the State of Kampuchea] (ព្រះពុទ្ធនៅភ្នំពេញ រោងពុម្ពផ្សាយជាតិ ឆ្នាំ ២០១៣ [Phnom Penh: Tchouk Jey Publishing, 2013]), 232.

179 Ibid., 233

180 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], *ប្រវត្តិយោធាតំបន់ ៤* [History of Military Region 4], 1, and វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], *ប្រវត្តិយោធាតំបន់ ៥* [History of Military Region 5], 1.

181 As a person who was deeply involved with the establishment of the Institute of Military History, the author of this dissertation could confirm that these authors only received format guidelines from the Institute and the Institute did not control the contents. Yet, the contents were very similar when it comes to propaganda messages.

182 Yin Saren, “Why Did the Svay Rieng PMC Succeed.”

183 Ibid.

184 Editorial Staff, “News in the Armed Forces,” *People’s Army*, 15 November 1984.

185 Ibid.

186 Prach Sareth, “Return As Promised.” *People’s Army*, 22 November 1984.

187 Ibid.

188 Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 78-82.

189 Ibid., 66.

190 Ibid., 84.

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- 191 Lewy. *America in Vietnam*, 94.
- 192 Ibid.
- 193 Ibid.
- 194 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តបាត់ដំបង [History of Battambang Provincial Military Command], 40.
- 195 Ibid., 41.
- 196 Ibid., 5.
- 197 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាតំបន់៤ [History of Military Region 4], 26.
- 198 Ibid., 30.
- 199 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តកំពង់ធំ [History of Kampong Thom Provincial Military Command], 27.
- 200 Ibid., 28.
- 201 Ibid., 5.
- 202 Ibid., 6.
- 203 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាតំបន់៤ [History of Military Region 4], 8.
- 204 Nguyễn Văn Hồng, *Cuộc chiến tranh bắt buộc* [The Obligated War], 39.
- 205 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាតំបន់៥ [History of Military Region 5], 44.
- 206 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាតំបន់៤ [History of Military Region 4], 38.
- 207 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាតំបន់៤ [History of Military Region 4], 41 and វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាតំបន់៥ [History of Military Region 5], 53.
- 208 Nguyễn Văn Hồng, *Cuộc chiến tranh bắt buộc* [The Obligated War], 5.
- 209 John McBeth. "Raid into Thailand: The Thai military recaptures a strategically important hill, 12 days after it was occupied by Vietnamese forces." *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 19 April 1984.
- 210 Ibid. In the same volume, see Paul Quinn-Judge, "Peking's tit for tat: China strikes out at Vietnam in retaliation for an incursion into Thailand."

211 Ibid. See Section “Intelligence.”

212 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រតំបន់វិហារ [History of Preah Vihear Provincial Military Command], 8.

213 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of Kampuchea, *Undeclared War Against the People’s Republic of Kampuchea*. Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of Kampuchea Department of journalism and information, 1986.

214 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រលេខាធិការ ២ [History of the 2nd Infantry Division] (ភ្នំពេញ, កម្ពុជា: អគ្គនាយកដ្ឋានយោធាយើងកិច្ចការបរទេស, ក្រសួងការពារជាតិ, ឆ្នាំ ២០១៣ [Phnom Penh, Cambodia: General Department of Policy and Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Defense, 2013]), 19.

215 See Paul Quinn-Judge, “Christmas Assault: Hanoi Launches an Early Dry-Season Offensive Along the Thai-Cambodian Border But Worries About Andropov’s Peking Visit,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 1 January 1985.

216 John McBeth and Paul Quinn-Judge, “Vietnamese Forces Overrun a Key Guerrilla Headquarters: The Fall of Ampil,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 7 January 1985.

217 “K-5” is a transliteration from the Khmer version of the abbreviation, which uses the Khmer “k’orr” and the number 5. There are conflicting accounts as to the origin of this strategy. One account claims that K-5 came from five Khmer words, all starting with “k’orr,” which can be tentatively translated as: Construction Work for the Defense of Cambodia Homeland. Another account claims that the number 5 is both about the number of “k’orr” in the abbreviation as well as the fact that it was a five-year plan. The literature on this issue is sketchy. Perhaps the best book on the subject is Margaret Slocomb, *The People’s Republic of Kampuchea, 1979-1989: The Revolution after Pol Pot* (Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2004). Nevertheless, while the book gave a good introduction of the K-5 belt strategy, it did not contain any discussions on military strategy, which was at the heart of the K-5 belt strategy.

218 Régnaud, *Cambodge dans la Tourmente*, 126-128.

219 Slocomb, *The People’s Republic of Kampuchea*, 229-235.

220 For the debate on the so-called “McNamara Line,” see Long, *On “Other War,”* 49.

221 In chapter 6, we shall see how units that fought well in the interior had routed when they were deployed to the jungle along the Cambodian-Thai border. If we use wholesale desertion as a measurement of morale, then the morale of these units were extremely low when serving along the border.

222 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រតំបន់បាត់ដំបង [History of Battambang Provincial Military Command], 25.

223 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រតំបន់ ៥ [History of Military Region 5], 13.

224 Ibid., 37.

225 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], *ប្រវត្តិយោធាតំបន់ ៤* [History of Military Region 4], 65.

226 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], *ប្រវត្តិសង្គ្រាមលេខ ១១* [History of the 11th Brigade] (ភ្នំពេញ, កម្ពុជា: អគ្គនាយកដ្ឋាននយោបាយនិងកិច្ចការបរទេស, ក្រសួងការពារជាតិ, ឆ្នាំ ២០១៣. [Phnom Penh, Cambodia: General Department of Policy and Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Defense, 2013]), 3.

227 There is no way to authenticate such a claim, given the current state of documentation. However, it was true that the 6th never routed. See វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], *ប្រវត្តិសង្គ្រាមលេខ ៥១* [History of the 51st Brigade] (ភ្នំពេញ, កម្ពុជា: អគ្គនាយកដ្ឋាននយោបាយនិងកិច្ចការបរទេស, ក្រសួងការពារជាតិ, ឆ្នាំ ២០១៣ [Phnom Penh, Cambodia: General Department of Policy and Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Defense, 2013]), 2. After the war, units of the 6th division were later broken up and then augmented to combine with the 196th division, the KPNLAF, and the ANKI elements in order to create new units like the 51st, 52nd, and 53rd intervention infantry brigades. That is the reason why the history of the 6th division as well as other divisions were contained in the history of the intervention infantry brigades. This dissertation collected parts and parcels of the stories from many official unit's histories and combined them to reconstruct the history of the 6th and 196th divisions.

228 Please refer to the discussions in this dissertation, Section 2.1.7 Variable 7 in chapter 2, page 79-82.

229 See Section 6.2.2. Banteay Meanchey in chapter 6 of this dissertation.

230 One may argue that a law is not required to raise an army. The PRK, however, adopted a conscription law in 1989. If it had forced people into the army without a law before 1989, then why did it need one in 1989? This dissertation speculates that before 1989, the PRK did not have any problem recruiting its soldiers while after 1989, it tried to force a conscription in order to overwhelm the CGDK after the Vietnamese left. A lack of confidence might also explain the existence of the conscription law in 1989.

231 Please refer to Table 4 on page 81 of this dissertation.

232 Murray Hiebert, "Phnom Penh Prepares for Vietnamese Withdrawal: Standing Alone," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 29 June 1989. Even the CGDK's sponsors started to be wary of a possible Khmer Rouge's victory, to the point where the US Department of State declared that the US may no longer support the CGDK seating at the UN if it included the Khmer Rouge. See Nayan Chanda, "US Policy Shifts Reflect Domestic Concern Over Khmer Rouge Victory, For Reasons of State," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 2 August 1990.

Chapter 6

THE OPERATIONAL GRADUATION

This chapter analyzes the CGDK's operations in 1989 immediately after the last Vietnamese unit left Cambodia. Not all Cambodian provinces were hit equally, and only the Western provinces were hit the hardest. And among these Western provinces, only Battambang and Banteay Meanchey bore the brunt of the attack. Kampong Thom was an atypical province in that it was far away from the border but was still attacked by a large CGDK formation. In terms of data, this dissertation will only examine cases where the engagement involved at least one brigade. First, this is for simplicity (so that we do not have to document every single small-unit action); and second, any engagement less than that size might not have any chance of being decisive.

In summary, the KPRA's total mobilization strategy made it hard for the CGDK to capitalize on its graduation to the conventional level. In order to defeat a numerically superior KPRA, the CGDK must "fix" some forces while massing to attack others. But in the end, the KPRA's territorial units proved too much for the CGDK.¹

6.1 Prelude to the 1989 CGDK's Combined Offensive

To alleviate international pressure, and incidentally to boast of the PRK's progress, the ministers of foreign affairs from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam met in 1982 to announce the beginning of the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from

Cambodia. Vietnam was true to its promise, and in July 1982, a small contingent left Cambodia.² In May 1983, the 6th division left Cambodia. The following five years, the VVA continued to withdraw in three more steady streams (June 1984, May 1985, and May 1986) although these withdrawals only included small units or units that were deployed in strategically insignificant areas.

In November 1987, the VVA began the largest withdrawal to that date. Two divisions and other units, totaling 20,000 men, bid farewell in their last parade in Phnom Penh, while the PRK invited an international press corps to witness the event. In fact, by this time, the frail Vietnamese economy had started to crack, and a new leader had come to power in the Soviet Union. On 28 July 1986, Mikhail Gorbachev made a historic speech at Vladivostok, outlining his foreign policy. He announced an overall reduction of Soviet troops in Mongolia, along the border with China, in Southeast Asia, and in the Warsaw Pact states.³ One significant point in the Vladivostok speech was Gorbachev's reference to the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, which he said could be used as the model for the withdrawal of the VVA from Cambodia.

This first, large-scale withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia in 1987 was aimed at opening way for two of the most important parties to meet. On 2 December 1987, Premier Hun Sen met with Prince Sihanouk at Fère-En-Tardenois, France. *The meeting did not produce any solution to the conflict, perhaps because the parties to the conflict did not want to see a political solution before their military might could be tested on the battlefield.* Nevertheless, the meeting was important for the PRK because, for the first time, Prince Sihanouk, the symbol of Cambodian

sovereignty, did not exclude the PRK from negotiation. The last obstacle to the Prince's full acquiescence was the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia.

On 15 May 1988, Gorbachev made the first official visit by the Soviet leader to Beijing since 1959, and during this meeting, Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping agreed that there should be a political solution to the Cambodian conflict for the sake of the Cambodian people and the Southeast Asian region.⁴ On that very day, the Soviets started the large scale withdrawal from Afghanistan. A few days later, Hanoi announced the second large-scale withdrawal of troops from Cambodia.⁵ From June to December 1988, roughly 50,000 VVA troops as well as the VVA's general staff headquarters left Cambodia. From 15 to 21 December 1988, six divisions were withdrawn, leaving only one fourth of the original strength in Cambodia. Finally, on 26 September 1989, all Front headquarters left Cambodia.

It is important to note that by this time, the PRK started to make some cosmetic changes to the system. On 30 April 1989, the regime stopped calling itself the People's Republic of Kampuchea, changing its name to the more neutral-sounding "State of Cambodia." To strike a balance between simplicity and historical accuracy, this chapter will refer to the political leadership of the Phnom Penh government as "PRK/SOC" while referring to its military as simply KPRA. The PRK/SOC did change the name of the military as well as instituting a formal rank system. Nevertheless, the soldiers still called themselves the KPRA and still did not really employ the new ranks that had just been bestowed. Perhaps, they were more interested in the reasons why they fought than the ancillaries.

6.2 The 1989 CGDK Combined Offensive

The CGDK had prepared its ammunitions caches for a war that would erupt simultaneously along the 500-plus kilometers border between Cambodia and Thailand. Less than a week after the last Vietnamese troops departed Cambodia, the CGDK launched the long-awaited combined offensive on all fronts. Despite the large areas covered in the guerrillas' operational concept, however, two provinces would bear the brunt of the offensive: Battambang and Banteay Meanchey.

6.2.1 Battambang Province: Easy Picking, Hard Swallowing

Due to its huge size, the PRK divided the province and created the new province of Banteay Meanchey in early 1988. Still, Battambang retained three of the six mobile divisions: the 4th, 6th, and 196th divisions. But these three divisions would still find it hard to cover the entire Cambodian-Thai border in Battambang. Rugged terrain, mountains, and dense jungle further complicated any attempts to close off the border.

The 196th division was garrisoned in the town of Pailin. Unlike the positions of 4th and 6th divisions which were in the middle of the jungle, Pailin was an old town. The gemstone quarry, perhaps the largest in Cambodia, had made this frontier village a booming town since the French colonial era. The 196th division put its headquarters in a towering three-story house in the middle of the town.⁶ The regiments and the independent brigades put their outposts in fortified positions around the town and on higher ground. The division also had tanks, armored personnel carriers, heavy troop carriers (which can tow heavy artillery), anti-aircraft guns, and heavy artillery.⁷

Several reasons combined to weaken the 196th division. First, to fill the gaps after the VVA left, the division detached one regiment to create the 92nd brigade, and

another one to create the 95th brigade. Thus, when the brigades were created, Pailin had only one regiment remaining, and even though more troops were supposed to be augmented to replace the other two detached regiments, there was not enough time to build a cohesive unit. Moreover, the division was too far away from the 92nd and 95th brigades to be able to contact or intervene to help each other in hard times (please refer to Figure 5 below).⁸

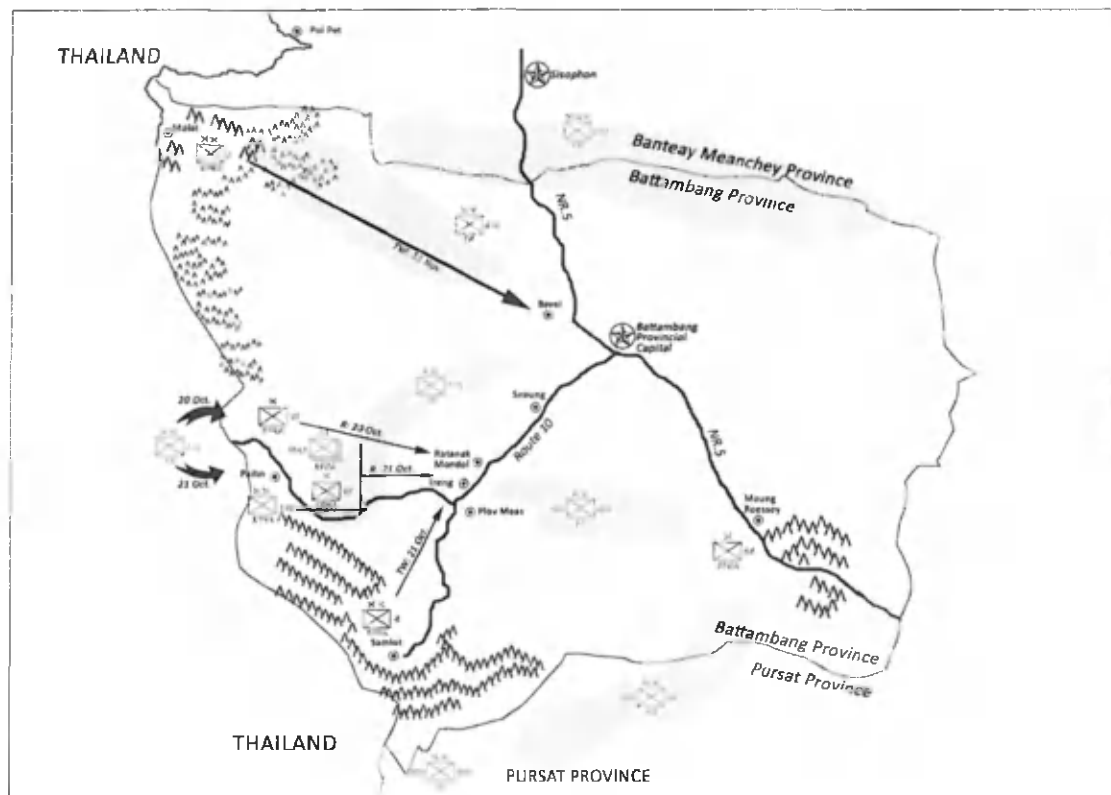


Figure 5. Operations in Battambang Province (1989)⁹

The second weakness related to the exploitation of the gemstones. As soon as the KPRA controlled the area, private companies (established after the PRK reformed

its economy in 1987) already lined up for a piece of the potential profit. To some extent, the KPRA allowed private companies to exploit the resources. It would not be a surprise if the Khmer Rouge, as a guerilla army, had spies working as gemstone laborers, who certainly would have observed the military situation in the town.

The third problem was attrition due to the elements, disease, and enemy actions. Pailin was a remote town, and to travel there from the Battambang provincial capital required large trucks that could traverse the road rigged with countless potholes resulting from landmines. If they survived the landmines, then they had to meet the Khmer Rouge's ambushes. Moreover, any casualties would have to be evacuated to the provincial capital. In 1989, morale was quite low for those who were stationed in the jungle along the Cambodian-Thai border. Many soldiers who traveled to the rear never returned. When the Khmer Rouge stepped up its attacks in September 1989, the KPRA had to send units from MR2 and the Battambang PMC to reinforce the positions.¹⁰

Observing these weaknesses, the Khmer Rouge did not launch a frontal attack on Pailin but decided to destroy the 196th division by attrition. The first objective was to suppress and isolate the 196th division and the surrounding brigades with constant artillery and mortar fires so that they could not mobilize to relieve each other. Secondly, the Khmer Rouge pushed the ambushes to the limit by putting maximum effort at interdicting any effort by the KPRA to send relief units from the provincial capital. According to a former Khmer Rouge commander, Route 10 was interdicted twenty four hours a day and seven days a week.¹¹ At any time and any suitable place along the road, there were always ambush squads waiting for the KPRA's reinforcement column.¹²

The first wave of Khmer Rouge's attack centered on the 95th brigade, which was stationed to the northwest of Pailin. Constant shelling further worsened the KPRA's already low morale. As one former Khmer Rouge commander noted, "the 60mm mortar was so effective against the entrenched troops on the high ground."¹³ On 20 October 1989, a regiment of Khmer Rouge special forces dislodged the 95th brigade from all the mountains and hills, which were devoid of almost all vegetation due to constant shelling. As the 95th brigade was in retreat, it left the rear of the 196th division wide open.¹⁴

While some elements of Khmer Rouge's 415th division still could not advance from the front because KPRA 196th division was strongly fortified, the Khmer Rouge's 17th special force regiment penetrated from the rear, which had been left open by the retreat of the KPRA's 95th brigade. In the morning of 21 October, the 17th regiment overran the artillery positions of the 196th division and pushed to the divisional headquarters. Twenty six days after the last Vietnamese units left Cambodia, Pailin fell.¹⁵

The rout of the 196th division and the 95th brigade isolated the 92nd brigade, which saw no point in staying behind. And then the reinforcements from MR2 and Battambang retreated in a disorderly manner to Ratanak Mondul district, a dozen kilometers to the east. These units also left behind all of their heavy equipment as well as warehouses full of ammunitions of all types.¹⁶

In a video taken by the Khmer Rouge after they captured the town, the following could be counted as the minimum of the equipment that fell under the Khmer Rouge's control: three T-54 tanks, three bulldozers, ten heavy trucks, ten 120mm "D30" artillery pieces, two 85mm artillery pieces, four 37mm anti-aircraft

guns with double-barreled variants (which can be used to defend against infantry and lightly armored vehicles), two 130mm towed artillery pieces, a large number of heavy machine guns, recoilless guns, RGPs, light machine guns, and a division's warehouse full of ammunitions. A former Khmer Rouge's special force regimental commander claimed that it took one month to transport all of the ammunitions out of the warehouse.¹⁷ In line with the KPRA's logistics concept, these resources were expected to support one full division for an entire rainy season.¹⁸

In a sense, when the 196th division was routed, not only did it create a gap between the 4th and 6th divisions, but it also gave the Khmer Rouge a massive amount of firepower. In the same video, one can observe that, during the siege, when the 196th division was about to collapse, the KPRA had sent at least two tanks to relieve the besieged troops.¹⁹ One of the tanks made it to the outskirts of Pailin but was immobilized and put out of action. The second tank hit a mine, which ripped out its right side; right track was scattered more than ten meters from the tank.

When the 196th division collapsed, the PRK was shocked and finally revised its strategy. According to some accounts, the PRK shifted its strategy from defending the border to defending the population centers.²⁰ Consequently, the 4th division received an emergency telegram from the central committee (which, in the socialist system, controls the general staff headquarters) on the night of 21 October, instructing the division to withdraw within no more than twenty four hours to Treng, west of Battambang, which commanded the junction of the roads leading to both Pailin and Samlot.²¹ The telegram stressed that the division must transport all heavy equipment possible but had to destroy on site any equipment that it they could not bring along.

On 22 October, the Khmer Rouge marched into Samlot unopposed, although western media wrongly reported, based on Khmer Rouge propaganda, that they had fought to seize Samlot from the 4th division, just like what they did to the 196th division in Pailin.²² Likewise, the 6th division withdrew to consolidate its forces in Bavel district, north of Battambang provincial capital on 11 November. “The general staff said that we must withdraw to Bavel and even then they did not think we will be able to hold out; they were prepared to lose Bavel as well, but we fought to defend our position successfully,” the former commander of the 6th division claimed.²³

The 4th division defended Treng in the district of Ratanak Mondul with difficulties but it held on.²⁴ Both sides pushed back and forth to try to capture more territories, but neither succeeded. The Khmer Rouge tried to use its population network to attack the 4th division and the reinforcements at Ratanak Mondul district, but as it moved towards the provincial capital, its network weakened. The Khmer Rouge’s attempt to cut the road between Ratanak Mondul and the provincial capital did not succeed. On the other hand, the KPRA also counterattacked to capture Pailin, despite the revised strategy. But it made little headway as the Khmer Rouge put up a staunch resistance. Eventually, the front stabilized around Treng in Ratanak Mondul district. The greatest irony from this episode was that the KPRA had actually created the Pailin PMC, which remained a military command that did not control any territory until the government finally captured Pailin in 1996.

6.2.2 Banteay Meanchey: The Locals Who Dared Say No to the Central

Banteay Meanchey province was the eastern part of Battambang. Sisophon district (present day Serei Sophorn) became the capital of the new province. The geography was quite complicated in terms of defense. Major district towns lined up

almost in a straight line from north (the Cambodian-Thai border) to south (the interior): Banteay Chhmar, Tmar Pouk, Treas, Svay Chek, Klaeng Por, M'kak, and the provincial capital Sisophon. Such geography posed unique defensive problem because of the long lines of communication that the CGDK could cut into pieces.

Banteay Meanchey was the hub of the KPNLF's activities. It controlled many camps along the border in this area, and its headquarters was located right at the border crossing. The KPNLF, not surprisingly, committed the bulk of its forces in the province: OMZ2, OMZ3, OMZ5, OMZ6, OMZ7, and the 801st special regiment (later upgraded to become 1st brigade) of the Special OMZ. In other words, the KPNLF committed a total force of an equivalent of two KPRA divisions. It also received reinforcements from ANKI 2nd, 7th, and 11th brigades as well as the 2nd division (whose contribution remains debatable).²⁵

The operations in Banteay Meanchey can be divided into two stages. The first stage started with the CGDK offensive and continued until the capture of Svay Chek district. This phase lasted from September to December 1989. The operations transitioned to phase 2 when the CGDK's attack stalled after the capture of Svay Chek and after their debacle at Phnom Srok. Phase 2 was the KPRA's defense and counterattack.

6.2.2.1 Phase 1: The KPNLAF onslaught

The operational history in Banteay Meanchey was one of CGDK's rapid gains with few major force-on-force engagements. The NCR launched a two-pronged attack on Banteay Meanchey: one axis advanced from Thmar Pouk to Sisophon, and another one attacked from the Phnom Srok area. Bad tactics also played a part in the KPRA's early losses. While the KPRA had more soldiers, as late as 1989 it still adhered to the border defense strategy in which it tried to defend as much territory as possible. As a result, most outposts became undermanned and isolated. To compensate, the KPRA relied on its T-54 tanks, which it would dispatch to any outpost that was threatened. The tanks usually travelled alone with no infantry support in order to increase its mobility but also because the guerrillas had no effective anti-tank weapons. According to Conboy, by the time the KPNLF initiated its offensive, however, it had received modern anti-tank weapons from Singapore.²⁸ The two main systems were the Swedish-designed 84mm "Carl Gustav" recoilless rifles and the German-designed 67mm Ambrust "Crossbow," which were the "one-shot, one-kill" anti-tank weapons of the time that Singapore had purchased the license to produce. Singapore, Conboy claimed, had skirted the restrictions placed by the countries of origin not to export the weapons to a third country currently embroiled in conflict.²⁹

6.2.2.2 Phase 1, First Axis: Svay Chek

Two days after the last Vietnamese units left Cambodia, the KPNLF started its offensive by moving the forward headquarters deeper into the province. On 30 September, OMZ3 and OMZ7 moved along the first axis of advance to attack and occupy the deserted Banteay Chhmar village. The village had a twelfth century temple ruin, which was symbolic for both sides. After the capture of the village, the KPNLF published a leaflet boasting its success, but unfortunately, smugglers also moved in to loot the temple's artifacts.³⁰

Refusing to accept the village's loss, the KPRA forward headquarters in Banteay Meanchey predictably dispatched three T-54 tanks from Tmar Pouk district (south of Banteay Chhmar) to reinforce the position. In the Cambodian civil war, guerrillas generally fled when they saw tanks, but not that day. According to Conboy, the first tank fell victim to the Carl Gustav anti-tank recoilless rifle, which blew off its turret and exploded the magazines inside.³¹ The second tank hit a mine, which destroyed its track, immobilizing it. The crews deserted. The third tank was wedged in a pothole along the road, and the crews also deserted. As the KPNLAF moved into Thmar Pouk, the district town was already deserted.³²

With CIA support, the KPNLAF was also equipped with radio interception gear, and with that, it learned that the KPRA's units at Kondaol, yet another district town to the south of Thmar Pouk, were panicking.³³ The position was not well fortified because it was used primarily as an artillery fire base. The KPNLAF's 801st special regiment, which was one of the elite units, attacked the position, and on 3 October, it entered the town unopposed. Because of the success, the 801st special regiment was augmented with new recruits to become the 1st brigade, and the commander was promoted to brigadier general.³⁴

The KPNLAF then used Kondaol as its own fire base and started constant shelling on its next prize, the district town of Svay Chek. But, as the KPNLAF moved south, the towns were bigger and the defenses denser and better fortified. Svay Chek proved to be a tougher nut to crack. As October passed into November, Svay Chek still held strong even though the morale of the troops inside the bunkers was at its nadir.³⁵ OMZ3 and OMZ7 kept pressure on from the northwest, while OMZ6 interdicted the road between the provincial capital Sisophon and Svay Chek in order to isolate the latter.³⁶

For at least three weeks, the KPNLAF had been shelling Svay Chek, the position of the 11th regiment, a vanguard unit of the KPRA's 179th division, with as many as 1,000 rounds per day on average.³⁷ November passed into December, and the fortified position still held strong despite the low morale. But then, on 6 December, one fateful round from a 76.2 mm field gun destroyed the regimental command bunker and killed everyone in it.³⁸ The soldiers of the 11th regiment then hastily abandoned the position.

On 7 December, the KPNLAF moved into Svay Chek. The loss of Svay Chek effectively isolated Treas, where many units, including one whole reinforcement battalion from the Kandal PMC on a morale-building mission, were routed without a single shot fired. The KPNLAF commandos who were interdicting Route 69 from Svay Chek to Sisophon captured the battalion's political commander of the Kandal PMC and sent him the border.³⁹ Three KPRA's tanks were also captured by the KPNLAF. According to a former regimental commander of the 179th division, the political officer from the Banteay Meanchey PMC tried to rally the troops using

loudspeakers mounted on a BTR-60 armored personnel carrier. But he was fired upon by his own troops, although no one was injured from the incident.⁴⁰

6.2.2.3 Phase 1, Second Axis: Phnom Srok

While the first axis achieved significant successes, the second axis was a story of gross tactical failure. The risk inherent in the KPNLAF's operations was that they could be outflanked by the KPRA from both the east and the west of the Thmar Pouk-Sisophon axis of advance. To the east, the risk was somewhat mitigated by the ANKI and OMZ5, which jointly attacked in the Phnom Srok and Preah Netr Preah areas. To the west, the KPNLF could reasonably expect the Khmer Rouge to pin down most of Battambang PMC's troops and the KPRA's mobile divisions in the province. As the war progressed, both risks exacerbated.

In September 1989, the regiments of 179th division and other three provincial battalions defended Phnom Srok. While the KPNLF was in charge of the battlefield on the west side of Banteay Meanchey, the ANKI and, to a certain extent, the Khmer Rouge, fought on the east side. As the KPNLAF attacked Banteay Chhmar in late September, the ANKI also attacked Phnom Srok. The latter routed the KPRA units in the town, but the result came as such a surprise for them that they did not attempt to occupy the town and instead set the houses of local officials ablaze, looted the local market, and then withdrew.⁴¹

In mid-October, the KPRA mobilized the 42nd regiment (belonging to MR4), which had just been upgraded with armor and heavy artillery, from Poipet to defend the Phnom Srok district. The 5th regiment of the 286th division in the nearby Ouddar Meanchey also moved in to reinforce the town. The KPRA knew that the ANKI would certainly return for more loot and that the rebels might also attempt to occupy the

town. The former prepared a trap to lure the ANKI to move in and then surround it. On 21 October 1989, while the KPNLAF was still besieging Svay Chek, the ANKI committed the 7th and 11th brigades to a second attack on Phnom Srok. But this army was not the Khmer Rouge army, i.e. not a "People's Army." Without local intelligence network, the two brigades walked right into the traps. Against an enemy who was surrounded and lacked accurate intelligence, the 5th regiment (286th division) and the 42nd regiment made short work of the two ANKI brigades.⁴²

The next day, the KPRA broadcasted the story of their success, showing that it had detained hundreds of prisoners. The KPRA claimed to have put five hundred ANKI soldiers out of action, among which three hundred were taken prisoner and one hundred killed.⁴³ The majority of the modern Ambrust anti-tank weapons as well as a large number of rockets were also seized during the operation. In just one night, the ANKI lost the majority of its combat power in Banteay Meanchey. It could still attack as small units, but it could no longer engage in large-unit actions. The episode showed how bad tactical choices and a lack of popular support at the local level effectively ended the ANKI's operations prematurely in the first phase of the operation in Banteay Meanchey.

At roughly the same time, units of the 179th division and the 42nd regiment in the vicinity of Phnom Srok started to harass the KPNLAF's OMZ5, which had threatened Sisophon from the northeast but which was now isolated after the defeat of the ANKI brigades.⁴⁴ The 42nd regiment finally pushed OMZ5 out of the area on 23 October.⁴⁵ As the latter attempted to flee east, it ran into an interconnected militias' defensive system made up of three districts of Siem Reap-Ouddar Meanchey province.⁴⁶ The militias killed one of OMZ5's regimental commanders and badly

weakened the remaining regiments, thus effectively disaggregating OMZ5.⁴⁷ Just like the ANKI brigades, OMZ5 ceased to exist as a conventional unit.

So ended the first phase of the operations in Banteay Meanchey. The future was bleak for the CGDK. With the two ANKI brigades and OMZ5 out of action, the KPNLAF's eastern flank was under threat despite the gains in the first axis of advance. The KPNLAF could rely on the Khmer Rouge, but despite the mutual understanding, perhaps the best thing it could hope for was only that the Khmer Rouge did not attack its troops. A direct combat support from the Khmer Rouge was perhaps too high of a hope. The operations had entered its second phase. The transition point occurred when the KPRA made a key operational decision to deal with the CGDK after Svay Chek fell.

6.2.2.4 Phase 2: “My home, my war” – The KPRA’s Counteroffensive

On the KPNLAF's side, after the capture of Svay Chek, the general staff wanted to consolidate the gains and push further to Sisophon, thus totally liberating the province. Conboy noted that the commander of the 1st brigade, however, was concerned that his troops who had been fighting constantly since March were exhausted and could not move further. He requested a two-day break, which the chief of staff reluctantly granted.⁴⁸ The troops returned to the border camps to spend time with their friends and families. Then, Conboy lamented, most of them did not return, and worst of all, the communication team intercepted the message from the KPRA in Sisophon, which had panicked and would have abandoned the provincial capital had there been another attack. This was how Conboy explained the missed opportunity and the end of the KPNLAF's operations in Banteay Meanchey which were its major activities in the war.⁴⁹

Conboy's account on this point is puzzling. The 1st brigade (formerly the 801st special regiment), OMZ2, OMZ3, OMZ6, and OMZ7 all participated in the operations; one can also count the ANKI brigades and OMZ5. To claim that the KPNLAF did not have enough troops to fight after a string of easy victories is unclear. He did not explain how soldiers the size of two divisions simply vanished after the capture of Svay Chek. Surely the 1st brigade did not return, and OMZ5 suffered defeat, but the KPNLAF still had four OMZs left. He also did not provide any reason as to why the men of the 1st brigade did not return. Did one whole brigade simply vanish into thin air? Even if that was the case, what happened to the other OMZs?

When the author of this dissertation talked to former KPRA officers, however, they provided one main reason, or rather speculation, as to why the KPNLAF's offensive fell apart. They argued that the KPNLAF functioned based on financial rewards for successful operations (as Conboy would concur, especially the financial incentives provided by the Thai liaison officers). Consequently, the financial gains became more important than the larger political objective. When the KPNLAF captured Svay Chek, they came upon a large pile of abandoned equipment and materiel: three 122mm artilleries, two 85mm field guns, one BTR-60 armored personnel carrier, two T-54 tanks (of which the ANKI 2nd division later claimed one), one hundred mortars and light weapons, four Zil transport trucks, one UAZ command jeep, and four thousand cases of ammunitions.⁵⁰ In a raging war, there was no shortage of buyers. The former KPRA officers speculated that the reasons why the men of the 1st brigade as well as other units did not return was because they were busy trading these war spoils when they took their leave to the border.⁵¹

On the KPRA's side, there was a very important development. Just like what the KPNLAF had intercepted, after the fall of Svay Chek, the PRK/SOC did indeed panic despite the success in Phnom Srok: it still lost almost half of the province.⁵² With the KPNLAF now stalling down from Svay Chek, some sixteen kilometers from Sisophon, the PRK/SOC knew it was in a dire situation. According to some accounts, the central committee started to contemplate abandoning the provincial capital, thus surrendering the whole province.⁵³

While this proposition considered Banteay Meanchey to be a lost cause at that point, it was not a defeatist proposition, however. As the story went, the KPRA general staff headquarters began to assess the options, and one prominent suggestion was to lure the KPNLF and the FUNCINPEC to move in and establish their headquarters in the provincial capital, which they would have surely done for propaganda purposes. Then, the KPRA would level the city with all the artillery in its arsenal. Given the town's small surface area, which was surrounded by hills, the artillery bombardment would have destroyed the entire non-communist resistance's leadership.⁵⁴ While the idea sounded good, it ignored countless assumptions that would have to hold true for the strategy to work. The central committee was torn between defending the province and abandoning it. As the central committee debated about what to do next, the local officials learnt about the "lost cause" proposition. In an unprecedented move, the local party officials in the province vehemently opposed any plan to abandon the province, and they vowed to defend the province to the bitter end.⁵⁵ Perhaps impressed with the determination of the local officials, the central committee decided to defend the province. The chief of staff came to Sisophon to take command of the operations, while the minister of homeland defense maintained

supervision and paid numerous visits to the areas.⁵⁶ MR4, MR2, and the KPRA general staff all deployed their forward headquarters to Sisophon. The KPRA also deployed the newly acquired multiple-rocket launcher system, the dreaded BM-21, to the province. In the meantime, units from Siem Reap and even those from the besieged Battambang province were rushed in to counter the KPNLAF's offensive while units from MR2 and the local units maintained defensive positions north of Sisophon. Thus, the operations in Banteay Meanchey entered what we can characterize as the second phase of the operations.

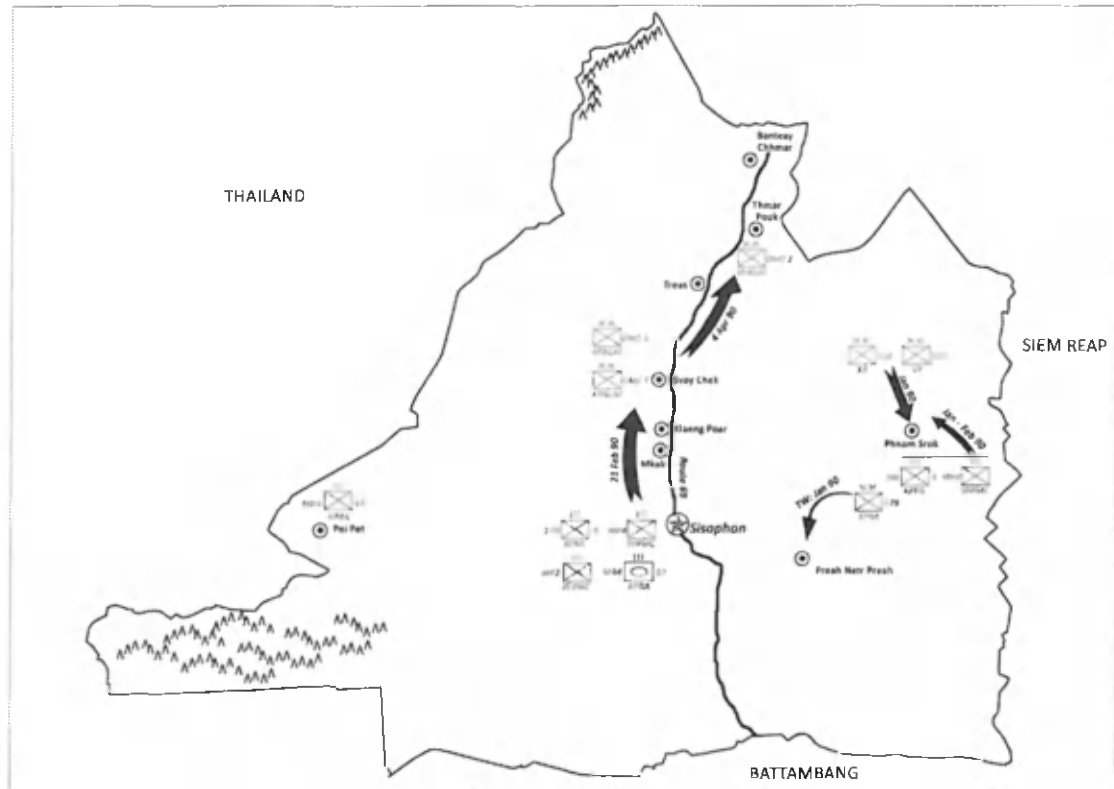


Figure 7. Operation in Banteay Meanchey Province, Phase 2 (1990)⁵⁷

While the defense of Sisophon was upgraded significantly, Phnom Srok and Preah Netr Preah were still threatened. The Khmer Rouge became active in the second stage. It is not entirely clear why the Khmer Rouge did not join the attack with OMZ5 and the ANKI brigades in the debacle in October 1989, but ideology might be one of the reasons. After the ANKI and the KPRLF were suppressed, the Khmer Rouge threw in its forces, led primarily by divisions 518 and 519 (each was an equivalent of a KPRA's regiment) in early January 1990. With the KPFLAF (or what left of it) still controlling Svay Chek and stalling down on Sisophon, the capture of Phnom Srok could potentially wrestle control of the province from the PRK/SOC. The KPRA then called upon a regiment from the Siem Reap-Ouddar Meanchey PMC to coordinate with the 5th regiment of the 286th division in order to relieve Phnom Srok.⁵⁸

The battlefield was in disarray, but Siem Reap regiment "fought 21 operations in 20 days" in January 1990 in order to relieve the units of the 179th division.⁵⁹ According to a former commander of the task force, his unit fought against the Khmer Rouge every day for twenty days. In one of those days, according to the former commander, his unit seized the objective in the morning and transferred it to one of the 179th division's units. The latter unit then lost it in the afternoon on the same day, which prompted the regiment to launch its twenty first attack. In late January, the Khmer Rouge's 912th division attacked Varin district in Siem Reap, forcing the regiment to withdraw. But it was too late for the Khmer Rouge, as the latter had already achieved what it was ordered to do in Banteay Meanchey.⁶⁰

When the regiment withdrew back to Siem Reap, the soldiers claimed they encountered an event which characterized the KPRA's conduct during the war. They came across a village where a water buffalo charged at the soldiers. Unable to stop the

buffalo by peaceful means, the commander ordered the buffalo shot. The owner of the buffalo was then contacted, and the regiment paid the owner 100,000 riels, and in exchange, the soldiers took the dead buffalo. There is no way to substantiate this claim. But the fact that the KPRA was able to trap the ANKI brigades and then moved a unit from one province across treacherous terrain to relieve the mobile division in another province perhaps does tell us something about the relations between the KPRA and the population.

The destruction of the two ANKI brigades, the disaggregation of OMZ5, and the suppression of the Khmer Rouge division 518 and 519 began to unravel the KPNLF's design on Banteay Meanchey. Compounding this problem was the men of the 1st brigade, who did not return from the border after the capture of Svay Chek. This left OMZ3 and OMZ7 as the only two units capable of functioning as conventional units. But now they were greatly outnumbered.

Even the besieged Battambang had sent its task force to relieve Banteay Meanchey. Immediately after the fall of Banteay Chhmar in September, Battambang contributed a hastily assembled, battalion-size task force to fight with other units to prevent any attempt of the KPNLAF to attack Sisophon. It did not stay long, however, due to its own problems at home. Part of the task force came from the 92nd brigade, which was stationed in Pailin. It was at this time, when the task force was still fighting in Banteay Meanchey, that the understrength 92nd brigade and 196th division were routed from Pailin (see previous section).

To avoid a similar problem, the KPRA turned to the 6th division. In the second stage of the operations, a regiment-size task force from the 6th division led by the divisional commander himself, a fresh graduate from the Mikhail Frunze military

academy in the Soviet Union, was sent to reinforce Banteay Meanchey. The main objective was to eliminate the KPNLAF units that held the high ground near Sisophon in order to suppress their artillery.⁶¹ After the 6th division's task force achieved its objective, the forward field headquarters of the KPRA general staff in Sisophon then unleashed its firepower from the dreaded BM-21 "Grad" multiple rocket launcher system, which devastated the remaining forces of OMZ3 and OMZ7. A former officer of the general staff claimed that after the war, when he queried about what happened, the former KPNLAF officers in the unit admitted that in some places, the BM-21 salvo virtually destroyed a whole battalion.⁶²

In February 1990, a KPRA joint task force started to counterattack to destroy KPNLAF's remnants in the province. On 21 February, the KPRA recaptured Svay Chek. At 0930 on the morning of 4 April 1990, a joint task force composed of the 9th regiment (belonging to the 179th division), a Svay Rieng regiment, a Kampong Cham regiment, and MR4's 69th armor regiment pushed their mechanized forces into Thmar Pouk district. Men of the KPNLAF's OMZ2 ran away after a brief firefight, leaving behind hundreds of 80mm mortar shells, mines, and a few Carl Gustav anti-tank recoilless rifles. The KPRA wasted no time in hauling them onto their trucks and continued the journey. On the same day, they tore down a KPNLF banner that read: "Thmar Pouk sub-provincial office."⁶³ The KPNLF had enjoyed having its own capital city for only six months.

Thus ended the best attempt by the non-communist forces in the war. While they could manage to occupy parts of the province with their victories in the early phase of the operations, they were more occupied with creating a liberated city and with amassing the spoils of war than with the long-term strategy. Conboy lamented

that when they created the sub-province of Thmar Pouk, the KPNLF and the FUNCINPEC had disagreed about who would be the new governor.⁶⁴ Moreover, a lack of popular support and the failure of the CGDK factions to cooperate with each other were probably the causes that led the operations in Banteay Meanchey to fizzle away.

6.2.3 Kampong Thom Province: “If I flee, where do you suggest I go?”

6.2.3.1 The Political Context

The KPRA’s victory over the non-communist resistance in Banteay Meanchey was perhaps its most important achievement. Perhaps it did not grasp that point at the beginning of the operations, but the non-communist army was the center of gravity for the CGDK: its loss threatened the unity among the CGDK itself. By mid-1990, the non-communist resistance had already lost the majority of its combat power. That dented any hope of Prince Sihanouk to force a political solution through military means. Fearing the Khmer Rouge’s further dominance of the CGDK, Prince Sihanouk agreed to meet with Prime Minister Hun Sen in a Japanese-hosted summit in Tokyo in June 1990 without the presence of the other two CGDK factions.⁶⁵

The meeting was not the first time the factions had come to the table, however. One can trace the first meeting back to 1987, when bilateral talks had taken place. Yet, in all of those meetings, nothing concrete was agreed upon. Because military power had not yet been tested on the battlefield, no one would expect any faction to agree to anything. Indonesia, in particular, was very active in creating a series of dialogues known as the Jakarta Informal Meeting (JIM). But the Indonesian foreign minister often found himself lonely at the meetings, as factions often boycotted the

proceedings.⁶⁶ But it was a different story in Tokyo. The Tokyo summit was a breakthrough because Premier Hun Sen and Prince Sihanouk agreed to the concept of a UN-sponsored election and the establishment of a supreme body made up of representatives from all conflicting parties that would rule the country in the transition period. Prince Sihanouk's action in this case was not surprising, however, given the past intrigue between the Khmer Rouge and the Prince. Also not surprising were the reactions of the Khmer Rouge, the KPNLF, and the countries that sponsored the CGDK. None of them wanted to lose Prince Sihanouk, whose change of side would spell the end of the CGDK. Thus, the Khmer Rouge and the KPNLAF—its OMZ4 remained unscathed—needed to carry out a military operation to make a point. Kampong Thom province was the target.

Interestingly, the ANKI had one of the toughest and locally-based divisions in this area, the 15th division. Unlike the ANKI units along the Cambodian-Thai border, the 15th division was not yet significantly weakened. But in this operation, it remained idle after it had captured some villages in the fringes of Kampong Thom. It seemed that the ANKI's 15th division had adhered to the political stance of the FUNCINPEC and consequently did not get itself involved with the other two factions.

6.2.3.2 Military Operations

Kampong Thom was a pivotal town at the heart of the country. Firstly, National Road 6 (NR6) ran through the provincial capital. It then continued to Siem Reap-Ouddar Meanchey, the headquarters of the KPRA's MR4. Secondly, also at Kampong Thom was Route 12, which was the only access to the besieged Preah Vihear province. Should the Khmer Rouge capture the provincial capital, they would be able to cut the lines of communication between the capital city and MR4 as well as

isolating Preah Vihear province. Kampong Thom itself was more or less isolated: NR6 was the only viable road into the provincial capital, and any attempt to attack from Steung Treng or Kratie would require the KPRA to travel off-road into the Khmer Rouge's guerrilla country.⁶⁷

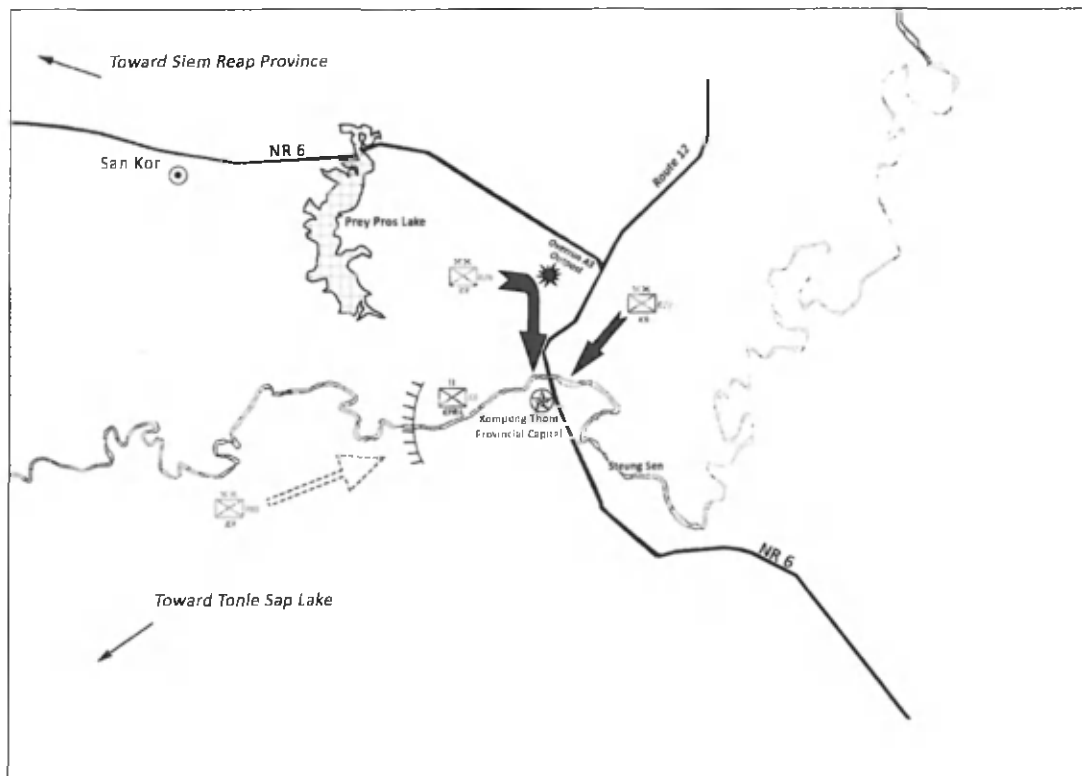


Figure 8. Operations in Kampong Thom Province (1990)⁶⁸

To the northwest of the province was a district called Staung, which sat on NR6 on the road to Siem Reap-Ouddar Meanchey. It was a trouble spot, as the CGDK made repeated raids on the district, and the PRK/SOC frequently lost control. After the Tokyo Summit, the PRK/SOC sent a large task force to defend the town: the 5th

division task force (from Preah Vihear), a naval infantry battalion, the 9th division task force (a unit composed of cadets), the 7th division task force, MR4 task force, and a task force from MR2.⁶⁹ Some of Kampong Thom's provincial battalions also participated in the defense of Staung. The KPRA general staff headquarters issued a clear order: any lost territory must be swiftly recaptured.⁷⁰

To make sure all these distinct units could work together, the ministry of homeland defense assigned the chief of the political directorate from Phnom Penh to oversee the operations. The new commander did not have any prior experience in combat operations: he was the political officer who oversaw all political matters on behalf of the ministry. Perhaps the KPRA thought that the position itself would command respect from all units. But once he got to the battlefield, he did two things. First, he did not prepare any integrated defensive plans in order to coordinate the actions of these different units who had never worked with each other before. Second, and perhaps the most crucial, he positioned his tactical headquarters right at the frontline, perhaps to observe the battlefield clearly even though the troops that he commanded had already reached almost corps level by Cambodian standards.⁷¹

The Khmer Rouge's new attack on Staung came only a few days after the Tokyo Summit. It attacked one battalion that occupied the flank of the 5th division task force, which, in turn, occupied the flank of the entire formation. The battalion was routed, and then, seeing that, the division began to falter. No command would come from the headquarters, which was under heavy shelling by the Khmer Rouge, a direct result of positioning the headquarters too close to the frontlines. As the headquarters could not issue any command, the 5th division began to flee like its battalion, and then

the entire formation followed. They all retreated to the vicinity of San Kor village, a dozen kilometers north of the provincial capital.⁷²

The collapse was so quick that even the Khmer Rouge was surprised that the first attack could do so much damage, so much so that they had not prepared any occupying force.⁷³ According to a former chief of staff of the Kampong Thom PMC, when the formation was routed, a local unit, the 30th battalion, which was stationed north of Staung, rushed to the scene, but when it arrived at the district, it did not see anyone, neither the KPRA units nor the Khmer Rouge. The battalion commander then radioed his superior at the provincial capital, but no one believed him. His superior thought the battalion commander must have been captured by the Khmer Rouge, which had forced him to relay false information to lure the KPRA into a trap.⁷⁴ The 30th battalion was then ordered to withdraw to the provincial capital. Despite having a lot of soldiers in and around the provincial capital, however, no one beside the provincial battalions was in any condition to fight. The KPNLAF's forces then moved into the district and started setting up their administrative offices.⁷⁵

At this time, the KPRA then dispatched an officer from the operations section of the general staff headquarters as well as a deputy chief of staff, both of whom had ample combat experience, to stabilize the situation. When the deputy chief of staff arrived, however, the province's party secretary had already prepared the counterattack. The former claimed that he was against the plan because the task force was too small; seventy soldiers and three amphibious, medium tanks, the Soviet-made PT-76.⁷⁶ The provincial party secretary argued that the party's intent was to swiftly recapture lost territory. The deputy chief of staff then argued that while that was true, not enough troops were in any condition to carry out the counterattack. Moreover, two

lightly armored platoons would stand no chance against a force that had routed a corps-size force. The attack would only give away the tanks to the CGDK. After a heated debate, the provincial party secretary yielded, and both agreed to strengthen the defense of the provincial capital before carrying out the counter-offensive.

Considering what happened next, that proved to be a fateful decision.

On the night of 15 June 1990, three Khmer Rouge divisions jointly attacked the provincial capital. According to a former chief of staff of the Kampong Thom PMC, and based on interviews with former Khmer Rouge soldiers, three Khmer Rouge units participated in the operations: the 802nd division, the 616th division and the elite transportation unit, the 785th division.⁷⁷ The former two were indigenous to Kampong Thom while the third was a roving division which operated along the Tonle Sap Lake.

A few hours after midnight, the 616th division infiltrated from the northwest, overrunning an "A3" combat police outpost. It then attacked into the provincial capital along NR6. The 802nd division was supposed to attack from the east but, according to the former chief of staff of the Kampong Thom PMC, it radioed the 616th that it had already reached its objective in the provincial capital when in fact it had not.⁷⁸ He speculated that the 802nd division was not as strong as the 616th, and the former had only previously attacked lightly defended positions or areas far away from the urban centers. Perhaps the 802nd division wanted to wait until the 616th had cleared out the KPRA main forces so that the 802nd would not have had to fight as hard as it would have done otherwise.

Believing what the commander of the 802nd division had said, the 616th rushed into town. But it had to cross a tributary where a bridge over which NR6 ran

bottlenecked the attack (Photo 6.1). To make matters worse, less than a hundred meters from the bridge was a water tower that stood at about 30 meters high and in which the Kampong Thom PMC had put a 12.7 mm heavy machine gun and a 75 mm “DK-75” recoilless rifle (Photo 6.2). At the time that the 616th division tried to force its way into the provincial capital, a squad of provincial militia was manning the emplacement and mowed down the Khmer Rouge soldiers who tried to cross the bridge.⁷⁹

Along the third axis, the 785th division, which many considered an elite unit, was supposed to infiltrate the provincial capital using a route south of the Steung Sen tributary, which, had it done so, would have outflanked the water tower emplacement. But observing that the 616th was in trouble and that the 802nd did not seem to move, the 785th division also decided to avoid this fight in order to preserve its forces. Moreover, the 55th riverine battalion of the Kampong Thom PMC was maintaining defensive positions along the tributary at the time.⁸⁰ By sunrise the next day, the Kampong Thom PMC had effectively disaggregated the 616th division.

Ultimately, Kampong Thom was always under threat, but when the Khmer Rouge had to attack big targets, it failed as a conventional force. Unlike the forces in Battambang, which had benefited from the organization of Front 250 and 909, the Khmer Rouge divisions in this areas had rarely worked together in large formation, which was typical of guerrilla units. Unlike in the provinces along the Cambodian-Thai border, the attack on the Kampong Thom provincial capital was ill-coordinated.

The attack also showed the strength of the KPRA’s local forces. Had there been another attack on the retreating formation of the KPRA’s regular forces, they could have always retreated either further to Siem Reap or to Kampong Cham. As a

former officer of the Kampong Thom PMC noted, the forces that had been routed from Staung district to San Kor village were ready for a second rout, and any explosive sound could have potentially triggered their flight.⁸¹ But the Kampong Thom provincial units had nowhere else to go, and so they had no choice but to stand and fight to protect their homes, just as the party officials in Banteay Meanchey had done. It was their home, hence their war. The regular forces became the supporting effort, and the PMC became the main effort. One month later, the 101st regiment from the Siem Reap-Ouddar Meanchey PMC led an attack that fully liberated Staung.⁸² They breached the Khmer Rouge's and KPNLAF's regimental defenses and marched to meet the troops from Kampong Thom PMC in Staung on 15 July 1990.

6.3 Forgotten Victories: The PRK/SOC's Pre-Emption and Counteroffensive

Among the provinces potentially vulnerable to the CGDK's offensive, two provinces remained relatively dormant between 1989 and 1991. Because the operations in these provinces never reached brigade level (around 3,000 personnel), Pursat and Siem Reap-Ouddar Meanchey provinces did not figure in the analysis in the previous section. Consequently, an examination of the situation in these two provinces could shed some light on the inability of the guerrillas to mass for large-scale offensive. In colloquial terminology, they fit the description of the proverbial "dogs that did not bark."

6.3.1 Pursat Province

One of the dormant provinces during the 1989 Combined CGDK Offensive was Pursat. Located to the west of Tonle Sap Lake, Pursat was the mirror image of Kampong Thom. Kampong Thom was located to the rear of the battleground

provinces, and Siem Reap-Ouddar Meanchey essentially shielded this province from the besieged Banteay Meanchey. Kampong Thom was badly hit nonetheless. Pursat, on the other hand, was relatively calm despite its geographical vulnerability.

Pursat was surrounded by three major guerrilla hot spots on its border. To the east was the Tonle Sap Lake, where the guerrillas were active due to sources of food in the Lake area, and to the north was the border with Battambang province, which was interdicted by Front 909. To the west was the Cardamom Mountain range, which was perhaps the most complicated geography in the province. The majority of the population in the province lived along NR5, which ran parallel to the Tonle Sap Lake, but the road westward, in the direction of the Cambodian-Thai border, was almost non-existent. The best way to move around was via creeks and tributaries running down from the Cardamom Mountain, making them very vulnerable to flash floods during rainy seasons. Throughout most of the war, the PRK/SOC's influence scarcely extended to this area.

While Phnom Penh was liberated on 7 January 1979, a date considered to be the national liberation day, the PRK, in fact, still did not control the entirety of Pursat and had to continue fighting for the best part of that year to secure NR5. Perhaps because of this complex environment, only a week after the national liberation, Pursat had already established one battalion, the 1st battalion, created from three hastily assembled district companies. In May 1979, the 2nd battalion was established. In other words, the Pursat battalions were created before the dual-duty companies due to its vulnerabilities.⁸³

The armed propaganda units arrived in Pursat belatedly on 25 November 1980. They were later augmented to create seven dual-duty companies, distributed in five

districts including the provincial capital. The militias were created later that year. In 1981, the 2nd battalion was deployed to defend the Cambodian-Thai border, and the 37th battalion was created to replace it. The province later established four more battalions: the 7th battalion (1987), the 5th battalion (1988), the 6th battalion (1989), and 3rd battalion (1990). In 1990, the province had built a regiment, the 89th regiment.⁸⁴

In summary, the history of the Pursat PMC did not mention any large-scale operations from the beginning of the CGDK's offensive until the time the Paris Peace Accords were signed in 1991. This fact was puzzling, considering the nature of the province. It would have been easier for the Khmer Rouge to seize Pursat's urban centers than those of Kampong Thom. Yet, they attacked Kampong Thom instead. This relative calm in Pursat was also puzzling because Battambang to the north was badly hit.

In 2013, the author had a chance to interview a former commander of the Pursat PMC as part of the Institute of Military History's oral history project. The biography was later published in the official unit history of the Pursat Provincial Military Command.⁸⁵ A brief study of his biography could help explain why Pursat could remain dormant during the offensive. In the 1960s, "the former commander" finished his pedagogical training and became a schoolteacher but was later forced by events to serve in the military in 1979 as a soldier of the 1st battalion. After having commanded several units and because of his relatively high educational level—the Khmer Rouge had decimated the intellectual population—he was appointed as the chief of staff of the Pursat PMC in 1981. As a former mathematics teacher, he found little difficulties with number-crunching associated with headquarters staff duties,

especially logistics. His planning skill was quite useful in the planning of the operations in the province. In the Cambodian Civil War, the operational tempo followed seasonal cycles. The KPRA often intensified the attack during the dry season (November to April) when it could bring superior firepower and mechanized force to bear. The dry season was also the time for bringing supplies to the isolated units. During the rainy season (May to October), however, daily downpours restricted the KPRA's movements, allowing the Khmer Rouge to intensify the attack.

He observed that the Khmer Rouge normally massed their combat power by mobilizing troops from many villages before launching major operations on strategically significant objectives. However, even before such operations could be launched, the Khmer Rouge also had to marshal their logistics to distribute ammunition and other supplies to pre-positioned caches along their lines of operations. The former commander of Pursat PMC had determined that the best time to attack, therefore, was just before the end of the dry season until the very early weeks of the rainy season. During that time, the Khmer Rouge's logistics stock had not yet reached critical level, and therefore they would not be able to maintain any strong defense nor were they able to attack.⁸⁶

As a result, he always planned a series of preemptive attacks on the Khmer Rouge's key logistics nodes, thus disaggregating their logistics early on, and then sustained a series of smaller efforts throughout the rainy season. He also planned for similar operations just before the start of the dry season. Even though these operations could not totally eliminate the Khmer Rouge's forces, they probably did enough to disrupt the Khmer Rouge's preparations and prevented them from launching major operations as a conventional army.

The former commander claimed that the largest stocks of ammunition, several medium-sized artillery pieces, recoilless rifles, mortars, various types of mines, and even several armored personnel carriers were seized in an operation at the beginning of the rainy season in 1989 (i.e. mid-September).⁸⁷ Apparently, the Khmer Rouge's logistics units had not yet prepared any strong defenses around their staging base, and when the Pursat forces attacked, the Khmer Rouge hastily abandoned the ammunitions that they had just transported from the border. The former commander did not remember the exact amount, but he remembered that the ammunitions filled up the spaces at the four-story tall building of the PMC headquarters. The irony of this episode was that soon afterwards, as the Khmer Rouge forces began their attack on Pailin, some of the supplies that the Pursat PMC had seized were also sent to support the KPRA's operations in Pailin.⁸⁸

A few months later, in 1990, he was promoted to the position of commander of the Pursat PMC. The former commander pointed to another contribution of the Pursat PMC: protecting the lines of communications. As the Khmer Rouge pounded Pailin in late 1989, Pursat was relatively calm. But elements of Front 909 did try to operate along the border between Battambang and Pursat and constantly harassed the lines of communication, even destroying bridges, along NR5. A customary guerrilla tactic, attacking along the border of two counterinsurgent units benefits the guerrillas in the sense that the counterinsurgent units usually find it difficult to coordinate their actions.

For unknown reasons, one major bridge across a river, on which NR5 ran, sat right at the border of Battambang and Pursat. Battambang was initially in charge of protecting the bridge. But as the province was threatened by major Khmer Rouge forces along the Cambodian-Thai border, the bridge was repeatedly destroyed, and the

militias were unable to protect it. Around 1989, Battambang transferred *de facto* control of the bridge to Pursat, and the latter was able to protect the bridge during the crucial period of the CGDK's offensive.

The former commander proudly pointed to the map depicting the border between Battambang and Pursat, which ran like a zigzag line, something that was common for almost any map. But at one point, called the "Svay Don Keo bridge" (named after a district of Battambang, to which the bridge once belonged), the line became straight, as if to carve out the bridge for Pursat before continuing to assume its zigzag pattern. Even today, the extremely short straight line delineating the bridge for Pursat is still visible on the map. In 1994, one year after the UN-sponsored election, the former commander was promoted to deputy commander of MR5. When the war ended in 1999, he became commander of MR5. Perhaps his career progression does tell us something about how well he fought.

6.3.2 Siem Reap-Ouddar Meanchey, the 286th Division, and MR4

6.3.2.1 The Provincial Military Command

Siem Reap is a historic province. It is the site of the famous Angkor Wat temple, a temple that always appeared on Cambodian flags of all political regimes. Even with diverse ideologies, if there is one thing that all Cambodians of all political stripes could agree on and would unite around, that is Angkor Wat temple. Siem is the Khmer word for Siam while "Reap" means "flatten": the name means a place where the Siamese troops were flattened, a living legacy of the history of violence between Cambodia and Thailand. Many former veterans of the Siem Reap PMC always attributed their success to this tradition of their province.

Before 1991, the province was known as Siem Reap-Ouddar Meanchey, the latter name being a poetic Khmer term meaning “victorious north.” It bordered the Tonle Sap Lake to the west, Banteay Meanchey to the northwest, Preah Vihear province to the east, and Kampong Thom to the southeast. Its northern boundary extended to the Cambodian-Thai border, which ran along the Dangrek mountain range. But halfway north, the province was divided laterally from east to west by the Kulen Mountain. The road to the north had to pass through this area, which was highly contested. As a result, the Siem Reap provincial capital could benefit from this geographic buffer, while two highly-populated districts, Samraong and Chong Kal, were isolated north of this buffer. Perhaps because of this relative security, the PAVN put the field headquarters of the VVA’s Front 479 in front of Angkor Wat temple, less than five kilometers from the provincial capital.



Figure 9. Disposition of KPR Units in Siem Reap – Ouddar Meanchey Province⁸⁹

In the Ouddar Meanchey part of the province, the Samraong district military command acted almost like an independent PMC due to the difficulties in maintaining contact with the Siem Reap provincial capital. On the Kulen Mountain that divided this region from the provincial capital, the KPR could control only four villages, while the Khmer Rouge controlled the other four.⁹⁰ As a result, the Khmer Rouge constantly harassed the movement on the road along the mountain pass. The 286th division stationed in Ouddar Meanchey with the aim of stopping infiltration into the interior. It was one of the KPR's finest units and had substantial armored capabilities compared to other units due, to the flat terrain between Dangrek Mountain range and Kulen Mountain which this unit occupied.

The organization of the district military command was not different from other provinces, where the armed propaganda units transformed themselves into dual-duty units, then into battalions and regiments. In 1986, the total number soldiers in the province stood at 5,924 men.⁹¹ In addition to the headquarters and support unit troops, the province had seven battalions. In 1989, the total number of troops tripled, reaching a total of 15,078, excluding militia troops. The number of districts increased to 14 with the smallest district having at least 2 companies. The battalions increased to eight and were reorganized and renamed. In that year, the province had organized four regiments: 45th, 101st, 167th regiment, and a border regiment. In addition, the militias consisted of 3,087 self-defense militias (fixed outposts in key areas) and 5,389 hamlet and village militias, totaling 8,476 people.⁹²

Siem Reap's geographic advantage and the fact that it was the headquarters of Region 4 (the KPRA's immediate successor to the VVA's Front 479) were perhaps what explained the high number of troops. Because Siem Reap's threat was not proportionate to the large number of troops, the PMC organized a task force the size of a regiment to be used as reserve and reaction forces to help other provinces. Most of the time, the 101st regiment was in charge of this mission, but in some cases, a headquarters unit was augmented as an ad hoc task force. To confuse the enemy, the headquarters' task-force regiment was designated a division, and its name was changed constantly. Towards 1989, the task force would see operations in Preah Vihear, Banteay Meanchey, and Kampong Thom—essentially all the provinces around it.

6.3.2.2 The 286th division

The 286th division was deployed in a favorable position. Its area of responsibility had relatively less vegetation than other places, and the relatively flat terrain allowed the division to quickly dispatch its armored force to intervene in any place that was threatened by the guerrillas. Moreover, the area had only a few water sources, and all of them were controlled by the division. As a result, the ANKI divisions responsible for operations in this area made little headway. The Khmer Rouge did not fare better. Nevertheless, due to their population network in the villages, the latter could operate in the interior and threatened many districts. Because the CGDK could never mass one brigade (KPRA's standard) to attack, this province was precluded from the analysis in the previous section. From 1989 to 1991, the Khmer Rouge could sporadically attack some districts to force the Siem Reap task-force regiment to return to Siem Reap, thus relieving the pressure on the Khmer Rouge's units in other provinces.

Only a few cases of guerrillas operations in Siem Reap-Ouddar Meanchey were notable between 1989 and 1991. There were three notable military events in the province. The first event was guerrilla in nature. Since 1981, the Khmer Rouge was able to launch what we may call "humiliation attacks," which was a brief attack on the headquarters of the PMC and the military region. But the attacks typically started around midnight and then ended the same night.

The second notable event was the direct legacy of the VVA's flawed strategy. Just as the Vietnamese units withdrew, the KPRA's conventional units were pushed to the Cambodian-Thai border to replace the Vietnamese units. In Siem Reap, the 286th division could not do that due to the importance of Samraong district. True to its strategy, however, MR4 pushed one single regiment, the 41st regiment, to protect the

remote town of Anlong Veng. This regiment was completely isolated and, predictably, it collapsed at the first Khmer Rouge attack in 1989 and abandoned most of its equipment.⁹³ Its sibling unit, the 42nd regiment, had more successes in Banteay Meanchey, more specifically Phnom Srok district.

A third notable event was the collapse of some of the regiments of the 286th division. In fact, the ANKI and the Khmer Rouge could never do to the 286th division what they had done to the 196th division. The CGDK units operating in this area included: ANKI 2nd division, ANKI 3rd division, KPNLAF's OMZ5, the Khmer Rouge 519th and 912th divisions.⁹⁴ As a side note, it was this OMZ5 and the ANKI divisions that had moved west to attack Phnom Srok in 1989, only to be trapped by the KPRA 42nd regiment and the task force of the 286th division, mostly its 5th regiment. In an attempt to move back to its haven in Ouddar Meanchey, the remnants of OMZ5 ran into the militia's defensive positions and was put out of action.

Then the ANKI tried what the Chinese military philosopher, Sun Tzu, called "indirect method," i.e. winning without using frontal attack. As soon as the CGDK started its offensive in 1989, Ouddar Meanchey region was relatively calm, and the 286th division performed well. One regiment, in particular, the 7th regiment that operated in the western part of the province, directly on the border with Banteay Meanchey, had continuously pushed forward. As a result, a reinforcement battalion from Prey Veng was given to this regiment to sustain its success. The 5th regiment had also returned from its successful operation in Banteay Meanchey.

But not all regiments were successful. The division had found out that the 6th regiment to the north of the province seemed to have some irregularities with its handling of the logistics. It turned out that the regimental commander had already

defected to the ANKI and had deserted his house when the divisional inspector arrived. Later that night, the former regimental commander led an ANKI task force to attack the regimental headquarter. A quick intervention of the armored force of the 286th division narrowly prevented disaster.⁹⁵

At the same time, the 7th regiment began to push too far. For unexplained reasons, this regiment was extremely successful, pushing forward with little resistance from the ANKI. Then, also for unexplained reasons, the regiment lost all of its positions almost overnight. To make matters worse, several tanks, armored personnel carriers, as well as some medium and heavy artillery pieces were lost to the ANKI. As quickly as it advanced, the 7th regiment fell back. In the early 1990, the division found out that the regimental commander had actually defected to the ANKI, and the early easy successes were just a ploy to get the 286th division to assign more precious armored units to the regiment so that the ANKI could capture them later. The ploy worked. The greatest irony from this episode was that a former KPRA officer claimed that the former commander of the 7th regiment was actually considered for the highest decoration, the "Hero Award," before his ploy was uncovered.⁹⁶ After these two setbacks, the 286th division retreated and consolidated its grip around Samraong and Chong Kal districts in 1990. The front then stabilized afterwards.

6.4 Diplomacy Without an Army

The non-communist resistance started the 1989 offensive with high hopes and determination. But after several bad tactical decisions, they saw the bulk of their forces disaggregated and territories lost. With the Khmer Rouge becoming the only remaining party to still have a force cohesive enough to fight as regular units, the non-communist resistance as well as the sponsoring countries began to fear a return of the

Khmer Rouge. In early June 1990, Prince Sihanouk met bilaterally with Premier Hun Sen of the PRK/SOC in Tokyo and struck a deal without the participation of the other two parties. The Prince and the Premier agreed to an eventual cease fire, a UN-sponsored election, and the establishment of a Supreme National Council (SNC).

The SNC was supposed to be a political body that would guarantee Cambodian sovereignty during the transition period. But the conflicting parties always disagreed as to the composition of the SNC. The PRK/SOC feared that an equal distribution among all four parties would see the CGDK capturing three fourths of the positions.⁹⁷ The Tokyo meeting made a breakthrough, giving the PRK/SOC and the CGDK (or rather, the FUNCINPEC) and equal number of seats in the SNC.⁹⁸ One can only wonder if that concession was related to events on the battlefield.

The Japanese ministry of foreign affairs offered a rather simplistic reason for the absence of the other two parties—KPNLF and the Khmer Rouge—saying that it was difficult to contact them.⁹⁹ Needless to say, the KPNLF and the Khmer Rouge never agreed to the results of the summit. Against this backdrop, the KPNLAF moved into Staung in Kampong Thom, and the Khmer Rouge attacked the provincial capital days later. The failure of the offensive meant that KPNLAF lost more of their combat power, and the Khmer Rouge's activities in Kampong Thom were further curtailed by the attrition of its 616th division.

In late July and early August 1990, Mr. Son Sann, the president of the KPNLF, communicated with Premier Hun Sen of the PRK/SOC, calling for the cancellation of the results of the Tokyo meeting and replacing it with a new meeting in Paris. Fresh from victory in Kampong Thom, Premier Hun Sen of the PRK/SOC rejected the proposal.¹⁰⁰ Without an army, it seemed, one cannot impose one's terms in a

negotiation. Subsequent negotiations continued to follow the result of the Tokyo meeting. Thus, the PRK/SOC's overall success in Kampong Thom and Banteay Meanchey were crucial. As the KPRLF no longer had sufficient military capabilities to force any more concessions, it fell in line. The only remaining actor was the Khmer Rouge.

According to one source, it was near Malai, an isolated position along the Cambodian-Thai border which the KPRA's 6th division had just abandoned, that Son Sen, then Pol Pot's chief of staff, met with two representatives from the People's Republic of China on 18 August 1990.¹⁰¹ At that meeting, Son Sen lauded the glorious achievements of the Khmer Rouge, including many victories over the KPRA.¹⁰² Most of these cases, however, were simple, small-scale raids—not on the scale of Pailin. The realities on the ground did not escape the attention of the Chinese delegates. Also, unbeknownst to the Khmer Rouge leaders, the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council had already reached an agreement on the Cambodian conflict. The Chinese delegates politely listened to the presentation before stating their position:

You always told us you are winning, but this [office in the jungle] is what you always had since then. Soldiers are demoralized and they wanted freedom and free market [...] You simply can't use dictatorship for the second time [...] We do not intend to sell you out, but we want you to adhere to the non-violence principles and seek a political solution to the conflict, in accordance with the goodwill of the United Nations, the goodwill of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, and the desire of the Cambodian people [...] The sponsors to the Cambodian civil war agreed to cease their support and negotiate for peace in 1991. The People's Republic of China must completely stop the support. Our visit here today brought this message. We think that if the peace negotiation succeeds in 1991, all Cambodian people will unprecedentedly rejoice. You should take this as priority.¹⁰³

On 9 and 10 September 1990, all four parties to the Cambodian conflict met in Jakarta and agreed to a UN-sponsored election, with the SNC was to act as the ruling body in the transition period.¹⁰⁴ As the dominant party on the battlefield, Premier Hun Sen's PRK/SOC extracted an important concession: the SNC was composed of twelve members, six of which came from the PRK/SOC—essentially a direct implementation of the result of the Tokyo meeting.¹⁰⁵ Eventually, Prince Sihanouk and Premier Hun Sen became the co-chairs of the SNC, and its decisions would be based on the consensus principle. One should note that this was only an agreement “in principle” to accept the UN's role in the peaceful settlement of the Cambodian conflict, and no details whatsoever existed as to how to implement it. All four parties came to understand that there was not yet an explicit mention of a ceasefire. Thus, at least between that time and the time the details of the UN's role could be worked out, some land-grabbing operations would be possible. As the election became imminent, large territory and population control means more votes. The question was who still had any military capabilities left to do so.

On 17 January 1991, in the Middle East, the US-led international coalition launched ground operations to push the Iraqi army out of Kuwait. On that very same day, the KPRA launched the largest offensive operation since the VVA's 14-Camps Campaign in 1984 and 1985, called “Operation X-91,” which was intended to recapture as much territory as possible. The CGDK, despite its depleted military forces, also prepared its own, individual offensives, albeit on a smaller scale. The X-91 campaign centered in Kampong Thom and was aimed at clearing all enemy forces along the Tonle Sap Lake as well as clearing Route 12 to Preah Vihear province. Concurrently, the Siem Reap PMC and MR4 also launched operations along the

border with Preah Vihear and Kampong Thom. The CGDK retreated in the face of the large formation, only to return to attack in the rear. But on 23 January 1991, the KPRA task force found a large ammunition depot that was accumulated by the ANKI 15th division in Kampong Thom that, hitherto, had not been attacked. The Siem Reap PMC troops also found a trail constructed by the Khmer Rouge which ran from the Cambodian-Thai border across Siem Reap, to the border of Kampong Thom and Preah Vihear and continued to Steung Treng. As a result, the KPRA launched another campaign on the 23rd, called "X-3291 Campaign" to clear the trail and seize ammunition caches. The two campaigns preempted a second CGDK offensive in 1991. The KPRA also tried to counterattack many times to retake Pailin but failed to make any headway past their strong point at Ratanak Mundol district.

On 23 October 1991, details regarding the UN's supervision of the election in Cambodia were hammered out in the meeting in Paris, known as the Paris Peace Accord. The Accord dictated that all four parties were to cease hostilities immediately. That was the time all fighting truly ceased. On 10 November 1991, the soldiers of the United Nations Advance Mission in Cambodia (UNAMIC) arrived in Cambodia. On 14 November, Prince Sihanouk returned to Phnom Penh for the first time since 1979. The Prince then travelled with Premier Hun Sen in an open-roofed car to the newly refurbished Royal Palace, passing major roads where many people, including the author, spontaneously came out to greet the return of the Prince. In February 1992, the UNAMIC became the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), and it started preparing for the first election in Cambodia in decades. The four parties to the conflict were expected to demobilize 70% of their military forces and prepare to participate in the election. Finally, peace can prevail, at least for a time.

6.5 Theoretical Discussions: Morale is All About Location

In the hypothetical formulation of this dissertation, the level of morale is considered to be the result of indoctrination and the implementation of the political program. In chapter 5, we have established that because of indoctrination and the good implementation of the political program (partly through military organization), morale is high and the PRK was able to recruit many people to serve in its territorial units. These units were later transferred to the mobile divisions on the border. This was where the level of morale changed. In almost all of the cases presented in this chapter, the mobile divisions and the reinforcement units (both consisted of territorial troops) that were stationed along the border had been routed. The 196th division and reinforcement units route from Pailin, the 179th division and the units of the Banteay Meanchey PMC routed and allowed the KPNLF to threaten the provincial capital, and even the 286th division also saw some of its regiments withdraw to the rear. One puzzle arises: the territorial units all had high morale, but that morale vanished as soon as they were sent to the border.

However, the story did not end there. As soon as they were withdrawn toward the interior, the local units once again to fight perhaps even harder than the mobile divisions. Banteay Meanchey province was the prominent case where the local officials and military units refused to abandon the province. From this examination of the morale of the territorial units in three mini-cases (territorial units in the population center, territorial units in the jungle, and territorial units retreated to the population center) we can see that location seemed to have played a role in determining the morale of the territorial units. In short, the territorial units gained high morale when they served close to their homes. This finding is very intuitive: all units became braver when defending their homes than when they defended the jungle.

This contrasted with the Vietnam case where the RF-PF units were used as search-and-destroy units far away from their native villages. These units were not raised from the same village in the first place, and their cooperation with the ARVN was almost non-existent. The Cambodian case was similar when the territorial forces were deployed to the border. Nevertheless, these territorial units had already built their units based on the same locality, and the indoctrination was both systematic and regular as facilitated by the institution of the political commander. When these units routed or withdrew from the border, they still worked closely with the mobile divisions and were able to mount a strong defense because the units maintained their integrity. As the preceding section have shown, the militias in Siem Reap – Ouddar Meanchey province had even destroyed a KPRLF's OMZ.

In summary, this chapter revealed that the territorial units had played a very important role in preventing the collapse of the mobile divisions and, by extension, the PRK's collapse. The mobile divisions were known for their offensive power (due to the equipment and heavy weapons), but the territorial troops made up for the lack of matériels with the local knowledge, possibly high morale, and numbers. However, this chapter revealed that local knowledge and morale of the territorial troops also depended on the location of service. When they were deployed far from their homes, the KPRA's territorial units and the RVN's RF-PFs were not very different.

In short, morale is a combination of indoctrination and location of service. When territorial troops were withdrawn into the interior and worked well with the mobile divisions, they gave the PRK a military that was both big and had high morale, a key to success in revolutionary war.

¹ “Fix” is a military tactic in which an army does not necessarily try to destroy the enemy. Rather it tries to stop one element of the enemy from intervening to help other elements in the other area. This tactic is usually employed in a joint effort where another element of the enemy was being destroyed. Thus, the fixed enemy element will not be able to move to reinforce its other element that was being destroyed. If this “fix-and-mass” tactic was successful, then the target will be defeated in detail, one unit at a time.

² Editorial staff. “Chronology of the Withdrawal of the Vietnamese Volunteer Army from Cambodia,” *People’s Army*, 27 September 1989.

³ Hugh de Santis and Robert A. Manning, *Gorbachev’s Eurasian Strategy: The Danger of Success and Failure* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, August 1989), 17-18.

⁴ Editorial staff. “The Soviet-China Summit,” *People’s Army*, 24 May 1989.

⁵ Hugh de Santis and Robert A. Manning, *Gorbachev’s Eurasian Strategy*, 18.

⁶ The house was connected to a hero in Cambodian folklore who had lived in the town since the French colonial period.

⁷ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាតំបន់ ៥ [History of Military Region 5], 44.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁹ Map created by author.

¹⁰ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាតំបន់ប្រទេស [History of Pailin Provincial Military Command] (ភ្នំពេញ, កម្ពុជា: អគ្គនាយកដ្ឋានយោធាក្រៅប្រទេស, ក្រសួងការពារជាតិ, ឆ្នាំ ២០១២ [Phnom Penh, Cambodia: General Department of Policy and Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Defense, 2012]), 12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁴ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាតំបន់ ៥ [History of Military Region 5], 49.

¹⁵ Rodney Tasker. “Another Year Zero? International Concern Focuses on Khmer Rouge Strength,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 9 November 1989.

¹⁶ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាតំបន់ប្រទេស [History of Pailin Provincial Military Command], 30.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Khmer Rouge news crew, 1989, *Khmer Rouge Troops Captured Pailin*, Author's collections, MPEG video, 43:35. The author obtained this archival video from a former officer of Bureau 5, Operations, of the KPRA general staff headquarter. The video was taken when the Khmer Rouge captured the town in 1989. In the video, the crews interviewed the Khmer Rouge soldiers on the scene about the weapons that they had seized and displayed those weapons. The officer who gave the author the video said that he retrieved the video cassette during the brief recapture of Pailin in 1994 when the new coalition government made up of forces from other former guerrilla factions tried to defeat the Khmer Rouge, which did not participate in the election.

¹⁹ In the Cambodian Civil War, tanks were a precious commodity due to their scarcity as well as the absence of an effective anti-tank weapon system. RPGs were the weapon of choice to fight against the tank, but it was not very effective. So it was not surprising for the KPRA to send only two tanks to relieve a division.

²⁰ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធព្រទ្រព្វភាគ ៥ [History of Military Region 5], 51.

²¹ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិកងកម្លាំងទទ [History of the 11th Brigade], 31.

²² Rodney Tasker, "Another Year Zero?"

²³ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិកងកម្លាំងទទ [History of the 51st Brigade], 19.

²⁴ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិកងកម្លាំងទទ [History of the 11th Brigade], 31.

²⁵ Conboy, *The Cambodian Wars*, 310-315.

²⁶ Map created by author.

²⁷ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធព្រទ្រព្វភាគ ៤ [History of Military Region 4], 26.

²⁸ Conboy, *The Cambodian Wars*, 281.

²⁹ Ibid., 287.

³⁰ Ibid., 284.

³¹ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធព្រទ្រព្វប្រាសាទមេឃ [History of Banteay Meanchey Provincial Military Command], 40.

³² វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធព្រទ្រព្វភាគ ៤ [History of Military Region 4], 38.

³³ Ibid., 39.

34 Conboy, *The Cambodian Wars*, 290.

35 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រខេត្តបន្ទាយមានជ័យ [History of Banteay Meanchey Provincial Military Command], 42.

36 Conboy, *The Cambodian Wars*, 291.

37 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រ ៥១ [History of the 51st Brigade], 22.

38 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រខេត្តបន្ទាយមានជ័យ [History of Banteay Meanchey Provincial Military Command], 44.

39 Ibid., 45

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., 46.

42 Ibid., 47.

43 KPRA's Army Television, 1989-1990. *Banteay Meanchey's Defense System*, Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Institute of Military History. MPEG video, 1:55:27. The news also appeared in the *People's Army* newspaper, 1 November 1989, on page 7.

44 It was unclear why OMZ5 did not join force with the ANKI brigades. It was also possible that it also participated in the operations but was able to avoid the large-scale defeat. Nevertheless, it met the same fate as the ANKI brigades a few days later.

45 Editorial staff, "News from the Battlefields." *People's Army*, 1 November 1989.

46 The People's Army newspaper made frequent mention of this local tactic in which the hamlets, villages, and sometimes districts took the initiative and formed an interconnected system to counter the CGDK's infiltration. The term in Khmer is "sompoan sahak phum prayut" which can be literally translated as "union of inter-hamlet operations."

47 Ibid.

48 Conboy, *The Cambodian Wars*, 294.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid., 290-291.

51 Please note that this is only a speculation from a KPRA officer. It should be examined with caution. See វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រខេត្តបន្ទាយមានជ័យ [History of Banteay Meanchey Provincial Military Command], 54.

⁵² The KPMLAF actually claimed it controlled two thirds of the province at that time. See វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តបន្ទាយមានជ័យ [History of Banteay Meanchey Provincial Military Command], 49.

⁵³ Ibid., 50.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 51.

⁵⁵ This account was independently confirmed by a former deputy chief of staff (whose testimony appears in the history of Battambang PMC discussing the reinforcements that were sent from Battambang to Banteay Meanchey), a former commander of the Banteay Meanchey PMC (in the official history of the Banteay Meanchey PMC), and a former regimental commander of the 179th division (in the official history of the MR4).

⁵⁶ KPRA's Army Television, 1989-1990, *Minister Tea Banh's Visit to the Battlefield in MR4 and MR5*, Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Institute of Military History, MPEG video, 18:38.

⁵⁷ Map created by author.

⁵⁸ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តសៀមរាប [History of Siem Reap Provincial Military Command], 30.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 33.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 34.

⁶¹ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិកងកម្លាំងទី ៥១ [History of the 51st Brigade], 25.

⁶² វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តបាត់ដំបង [History of Battambang Provincial Military Command], 71. The former chief of staff was later attached to MR5 whose headquarter is in Battambang.

⁶³ KPRA's Army Television, 1990, *KPRA's Advance in Banteay Meanchey*, Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Institute of Military History, MPEG video, 48:47.

⁶⁴ Conboy, *The Cambodian Wars*, 289.

⁶⁵ Crocker Chester et al., eds., *Herding Cats: Multiparty Mediation in a Complex World* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1999), 302.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 304-315.

⁶⁷ Moreover, the KPRA had already mobilized most of its reserve, especially MR2, to fight in MR4 and MR5 further west.

⁶⁸ Map created by author.

69 There was not sufficient information to determine the size of each task force. However, it was customary for the KPRA to assign either a battalion-size or regiment-size unit as a task force.

70 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តកំពង់ធំ [History of Kampong Thom Provincial Military Command], 12.

71 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាតំបន់ទី៤ [History of Military Region 4], 49.

72 Ibid., 50.

73 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តកំពង់ធំ [History of Kampong Thom Provincial Military Command], 13.

74 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាតំបន់ទី៤ [History of Military Region 4], 51.

75 Ibid., 52.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid., 54.

78 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តកំពង់ធំ [History of Kampong Thom Provincial Military Command], 21.

79 Ibid., 22.

80 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាតំបន់ទី៤ [History of Military Region 4], 56.

81 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តកំពង់ធំ [History of Kampong Thom Provincial Military Command], 25.

82 KPRA's Army Television, 1990. *Staung Battlefield*. Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Institute of Military History. MPEG video, 1:04:51.

83 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តពោធិ៍សាត់ [History of Pursat Provincial Military Command] (ភ្នំពេញ, កម្ពុជា: អគ្គនាយកដ្ឋាន ឧបនាយកដ្ឋាន ឧបនាយកដ្ឋានយោធាកិច្ចការបរទេស, គ្រួសារការពារជាតិ, ឆ្នាំ ២០១៥ [Phnom Penh, Cambodia: General Department of Policy and Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Defense, 2012]), 3.

84 Ibid., 5.

85 See វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រយោធា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តពោធិ៍សាត់ [History of Pursat Provincial Military Command], 6.

86 Ibid., 13.

87 There is no alternative source to evaluate this claim. However, given the fact that the CGDK could not mount large-scale attack in the province perhaps lent some credence to this claim, given the current state of the documentation. The issue will be discussed further in the last chapter.

88 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្ររដ្ឋបាល [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តព្រះវិហារ [History of Pursat Provincial Military Command], 15.

89 Map created by author.

90 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្ររដ្ឋបាល [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាខេត្តសៀមរាប [History of Siem Reap Provincial Military Command], 32.

91 Ibid., 68.

92 Ibid., 70.

93 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្ររដ្ឋបាល [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិកងតំបន់ ២ [History of the 2nd Infantry Division], 24.

94 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្ររដ្ឋបាល [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិយោធាតំបន់ ៤ [History of Military Region 4], 71. The official history of the Siem Reap PMC essentially contains the same data.

95 វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្ររដ្ឋបាល [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិកងតំបន់ ២ [History of the 2nd Infantry Division], 25.

96 Ibid., 28.

97 Richard Sola, *Le Cambodge de Sihanouk: Espoir, Désillusions et Amertume, 1982-1993* (Paris: Sudestasie, 1994), 67.

98 Sar Pormeane Kampuchea (SPK), “The Hun Sen-Sihanouk Tokyo bilateral negotiation succeeded,” *People’s Army*, 6 June 1990.

99 Ibid.

100 Sar Pormeane Kampuchea (SPK), “Interview of SPK with Comrade Premier Hun Sen,” *People’s Army*, 1 August 1990. The section also contained an open letter from Premier Hun Sen to Mr. Son Sann.

101 ឌី មេត [Mey, Mak], ការស្រាវជ្រាវអំពីសង្គ្រាមឈ្នះឯសង្គ្រាមទ្វេភាពនៅប៉ៃលិន [Research into Guerilla Warfare and Peace in Pailin] (សាកលវិទ្យាល័យពហុបច្ចេកវិទ្យា ភ្នំ ឧបទ្វីប [Cambodia: Master Thesis. Cambodian University of Polytechniques, 2005]), 11.

102 Ibid., 13.

103 Ibid., 16.

¹⁰⁴ Rodney Tasker, "Grudging Unity: Big powers force factions towards UN settlement," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 20 September 1990.

¹⁰⁵ Editorial staff, "The SNC Cancelled the First Meeting Because the Other Party Had No Clear Position." *People's Army*, 19 September 1990.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION: THE PERSISTENCE OF REVOLUTIONARY WAR IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

The Viet Cong commando who attacked the US Embassy and other key places in downtown Saigon were ready and willing to die. They expected to die. In this war, a man willing to die is the most dangerous weapon. There is no way the Americans can mass-produce this weapon for their South Vietnamese ally, not with technology, not with money.

-Howard Tuckner, NBC reporter, described the Tet Offensive. In *The Frank McGee Report*, Special Edition, 10 March 1968.

This chapter summarizes the findings and identifies strengths and weaknesses of this dissertation. Several counterarguments will also be examined. This chapter discusses its contribution to the literature by analyzing the nature of revolutionary warfare and offers a new perspective to help enhance the understanding of this concept. The second half of this chapter will then apply insights from the study of revolutionary warfare in order to analyze the revolutionary warfare phenomenon in the contemporary world.

7.1 Summary of Findings

Finding 1: Good political program, effective implementation of that program, and the strength of military organization were three of the main reasons for the success of the PRK. The RVN had several decent political programs, but its inability to effectively implement those programs and the inability to build a strong military organization (mainly due to corruption) were the major reasons that led to its failure.¹

Finding 2: In both Cambodia and Vietnam, revolutionary success required an operational graduation from guerrilla army to conventional army, which was extremely difficult just like what Mao Tse-tung had assumed. In Vietnam, the

revolutionaries circumvented this graduation challenge by using an external support provided by the PAVN (see Finding 3 below).

Finding 3: Decisive external support (to both the government and the revolutionaries) in Cambodia and Vietnam came under two forms: direct combat support by an external, conventional military units and indirect combat support to organization, training, and financing. The counterinsurgent in Cambodia and the revolutionaries in Vietnam were victorious because they both achieved asymmetric advantage over their respective opponents in either or both of these two types of external support.

Finding 4: The most effective counterinsurgent military organization in Cambodia was a hybrid army which was predominantly composed of territorial forces. In Vietnam, the counterinsurgent failed because it relied too heavily on the conventional forces at the expense of territorial forces and was unable to fight the revolutionaries' hybrid army.²

Finding 5: In Cambodia, the KPRA's hybrid army (which was predominantly composed of territorial forces) was effective in a population-centric strategy, but its effect was negated in a territory-centric strategy.³ In Vietnam, the RVN failed because the main COIN strategy was territory-centric, and the ARVN's attempt to switch to a predominantly territorial forces was too late.

Summary of findings: In both Cambodia and Vietnam, securing the allegiance of the population was key to winning in revolutionary warfare, for the very pragmatic reason: the ability to build (or deny the enemy from building) a large, committed force, usually in the form of a hybrid army (predominantly composed of territorial-forces) and then employ this army in a population-centric strategy.

7.2 Analysis

7.2.1 Finding 1: Political program and military organization

In the hypothesis adopted in this dissertation, victory in revolutionary warfare depends on political program and military organization (cf. Figure 1, page 89). The revolutionaries often rely on the exploitation of popular grievances while the government seeks to redress political grievances. While popular grievances can confer an advantage to either the revolutionaries or the government, each protagonist must have a military organization which can transform this political advantage into military advantage. The findings in Vietnamese and Cambodian cases confirm this hypothesis.

In Vietnam, the confluence of land-related grievances, the corrupt local government, ethnic animosity, and the ineptitude of many elements of the ARVN worked jointly to degrade the RVN's ability to implement its political program. With an appealing ideology, good political program, and good organization, the NLF could attract hundreds of thousands of people to serve in its guerrillas units. Despite their inferior firepower, the PLAF and NLF offered many advantages to the PAVN. Firstly, these two organization subverted the RVN's local governments and further extended the revolutionary influence in the countryside.⁴

Secondly, these local guerrillas provided crucial intelligence to the much stronger regular units, the PAVN. In spite of its strength, without local knowledge, the PAVN would not have been able to operate as effectively as it did. Thirdly, revolutionary warfare is largely a contest to win over the uncommitted population. This is a zero-sum game where a person that one side can recruit directly means a potential loss of two persons for the other side: not only does the latter lose that one person, but now he has to fight against that extra person as well.

Thus, counterfactually, had the RVN been able to recruit the hundreds of thousands of peasants who joined the NLF and the PLAF, the revolutionaries would have lost not only their local combat power, but they also would have had to fight against those people. In this counterfactual scenario, this dissertation would argue that the PAVN would not have been able to operate as effectively as it did in reality.

The Vietnamese insurgents seemed to have grasped this RVN's reliance on American firepower as a vulnerability and in 1968 they tried to break the stalemate and force the US' forces out. To be fair, the Tet Offensive had a mixed objective. Ultimately, however, through that and the mini-Tet, Hanoi was able to convince the American public that the war was unwinnable or at least not at a cost which the American public was willing to accept. Because the RVN could not secure the support of the majority of its people, it had to rely on the support of a people from far away, the American public opinion. After the Tet Offensive, that support irreversibly wavered.

Eventually, it was the PAVN that defeated the ARVN and seized power for the revolutionaries. Yet, this did not invalidate the findings of this dissertation nor the arguments of the Winning-Heart-And-Mind (WHAM) school of COIN. While the NLF and the PLAF did not decisively defeat the ARVN on the conventional battlefield, these revolutionary organizations sapped the strength from the RVN, subverted the local government, and enabled the PAVN to launch major operations in the South. While the RVN did implement various political programs to try to address the popular grievances, corruption among the local governments and the ARVN greatly reduced the effectiveness of those programs.⁵

Grievance-wise, the case of the Vietnam War was clear-cut because one side (the government) could not solve the grievances while the other side (the revolutionaries) exploited them well. In this case, the WHAM would predict that the insurgent would win and the government would lose, which was the case in Vietnam. While the WHAM School could explain what happened in Vietnam, its prediction was rather ambivalent in the case of Cambodia when both the government and the insurgent had programs that were similarly appealing. Both sides were also quite effective in implementing their respective programs. Unlike in Vietnam, there is no way we can determine which ideology attracted more people in Cambodia. In this case, the WHAM School cannot predict the winner.

This is one weakness of the WHAM School. While it suggested that political issues were at the heart of all revolutionary wars, it did not tell us how an actor can capitalize on that advantage or how that political advantage could translate into military advantage. Military organization is a means by which a belligerent turns political advantage into military advantage. A study of the military organization, therefore, can fill the gap in the WHAM literature. In both Cambodia and Vietnam, the victors had effective political program and good military organization.

In Vietnam, while the RVN had difficulties implementing its political programs, its military, the ARVN, was also in a very bad shape. Two main problems plagued the ARVN throughout the war: poor leadership (political factionalism and cronyism) and corruption.⁶ Without US support, the ARVN did not stand a chance against the PAVN nor was it able to suppress the NLF/PLAF subversion.

The NLF, PLAF, and the PAVN, on the other hand, had effective political programs and good military organization. First of all, the insurgents were very clever

in spreading their propaganda messages. They would not necessarily advance communist ideology if the local population was not receptive to the message.⁷ While Hanoi advocated the “national” character of the struggle in the South, not all insurgents in the South followed such concept.⁸ Last but not least, the NLF was also effective in mobilizing many of the indigenous groups against the RVN.⁹

These political advantages were turned into military advantage through an organizational concept called “đấu tranh,” Vietnamese for “the struggle.”¹⁰ According to Douglas Pike, this concept combined “armed đấu tranh” (which consisted of a hybrid application of guerrilla war and conventional war) and “political đấu tranh” (which includes armed political actions among friendly units, enemy units, and the population).¹¹ In other words, the concept blends political actions with military power. The Cambodian counterinsurgent more or less adopted this model.

In Cambodia, several factors influenced the organizational design of the counterinsurgent’s military. The most important factor was the communist system. This combined with a second factor, a legacy of the “People’s War” concept which was influenced by the Chinese army (in the 1970s) and the PAVN. The system produced a military that reached down to the hamlet level. In addition, the people at all levels were fully indoctrinated and were then recruited to serve in different echelons of the KPRA. They started as recruits by the armed propaganda units which later combined into dual-duty companies, provincial battalions, and regiments. Eventually, by the time the CGDK launched the offensive in 1989, the KPRA outnumbered the CGDK by a ratio of more than two to one.¹² Moreover, these were cohesive units.

In addition, in stark contrast to the revolutionaries in Vietnam, the CGDK was not unified. When the Khmer Rouge became the only force that still had offensive

combat power, the other two factions and the sponsoring countries pushed for a negotiated solution to the conflict to prevent the Khmer Rouge from further dominating the CGDK.

In summary, the first finding confirms the prediction of the WHAM School, namely that good political program was a very important reason for the success of the revolutionaries in Vietnam and the success of the counterinsurgent in Cambodia. The first finding complements the WHAM School by showing that having good political program is not enough. One also needs to translate that political success into military success.¹³ The WHAM School could predict the outcome in the Vietnam case but its prediction was ambivalent in the Cambodian case where both sides had good political programs. Implementation of those programs as well as good military organization were the two factors that made the difference in Cambodia.

7.2.2 Finding 2: Hybrid war and operational graduation

The second finding of this dissertation addressed the nature of revolutionary war as defined by Mao.¹⁴ By definition, the revolutionaries must use military power to achieve their political goal. In order to do this, Mao wrote that the revolutionaries must progress through three stages: strategic defensive, strategic stalemate, and strategic offensive.¹⁵

In essence, Mao made two related assumptions. First of all, due to their small number at the beginning, the revolutionaries must start as guerrillas and then they must make an operational graduation to become a conventional army and fight to seize power. Thus, revolutionary war is, by definition, a hybrid war. In both Cambodia and Vietnam, the winner was the actor who can best fight a hybrid war.

The second assumption that accompanied the first one was that successful revolutionaries must be capable of making the transformation from a guerrilla army to a conventional army. Mao cautioned that such transformation is never straightforward.¹⁶ Some provinces would be in stage 2 while other provinces are in stage 3. In other words, the progress in the country is almost never uniform. This dissertation confirms Mao's assertions. Nevertheless, the finding pointed to another problem that the revolutionaries have to overcome: military organizational transformation. As a general rule, as an army transitions from a guerrilla army to a conventional army, a lot of things have to change in order for this new army to function effectively, including but not limited to: doctrine, equipment, coordination, staff organization, communication, logistics, large-unit training, and commander's mindset.

A new look at the Vietnam case and an examination of the Cambodian case showed that the operational graduation failed militarily for the revolutionaries in both cases. In Vietnam, the PLAF's graduation during Tet was a disaster.¹⁷ Most units became disoriented when they came into the cities, and the planners did not seem to have any contingencies for a sustained operation anyway.¹⁸ Therefore, the Vietnamese insurgency had to recourse to external support (the PAVN) to compensate for this problem. Due to the close cooperation, if not unity, between these two forces, the Vietnamese insurgency eventually became a conventional army, albeit one that was supplied by the PAVN (both in terms of manpower and equipment). In other words, the Vietnamese insurgency circumvent the requirement by relying on external support (cf. Finding 3 below).

The conclusion of the Vietnamese case is complicated by the introduction of external support. In Cambodia, the case was much clearer. The inability of the revolutionaries to transform into a conventional army cost them the war. While the Khmer Rouge had organized two Fronts along the border in Battambang, it was unable to mass those forces to attack the KPRA. Likewise, in Kampong Thom, despite achieving surprise in the early hours of the operations, the three divisions failed to coordinate with each other. The KPNLAF did not fare better. As it attacked isolated outposts, it achieved astounding successes. But as it moved forward, it could neither mass its own forces nor cooperate with the other CGDK factions to attack. As soon as CGDK exhausted most of its resources, it had to concede to the negotiation on unfavorable ground. Unlike the Vietnamese insurgents, the CGDK did not have an external conventional army as a backup (Finding 3 on external support will be discussed next). In summary, operational graduation is a luxury few revolutionaries could afford to have.

In short, while Mao's description of the dynamics of revolutionary war was quite accurate, the finding in this dissertation complements this concept further by pointing out the importance of military organization. In addition to relative strength between the government and the revolutionaries, the latter must be able to transform itself from a guerrilla army to a conventional army. In cases where there is an external support in the form of a regular army (like the PAVN) or if the guerrillas had previously fought in large formation such as Mao's own army before the Long March, then the operational graduation might matter less. But in cases like the CGDK where most, if not all, of its armies had never fought in large formation, the operational graduation was not that easy. Specialized training, logistics, cadre of capable officers,

and mutual understanding between commanders are only some of the aspects a conventional army must master before it can fight effectively against the enemy's large army. In this respect, the CGDK had failed.

Most COIN literature, especially the Vietnam War debate usually overlooked the issue of hybrid war and how hard it was for a revolutionary movement to transform itself into a conventional army. As we have seen in earlier chapters, for example, the disagreement in the Vietnam War debate boiled down to the type of war that was being fought. While Krepinevich considered the war as a guerrilla war, Summers saw it as a conventional war.¹⁹ In some respect, they were both right but both were also wrong. The Vietnam War was neither guerrilla nor conventional war but it was both. In both Vietnam and Cambodia, it does not suffice to talk about guerrilla warfare or conventional warfare, but one has to talk about both wars and how guerrillas units interacted with the conventional units.

7.2.3 Finding 3: External support

The preceding section emphasized that the operational graduation in Cambodia and Vietnam was the main challenge for the revolutionaries in both cases. Successful graduation depends upon the ability of the guerrilla army to function as a conventional unit. This is where external support becomes important. The hypothesis advanced in this dissertation (please refer to Figure 1, page 89) was inadequate because external support was not included in the theoretical model. The examination of the Cambodia and Vietnam revealed that external support can play a vital role for both the government and the revolutionaries.

In the current literature on COIN, external support was mostly associated with the insurgents. In the debate on the Vietnam War, for example, external support was

usually equated with Hanoi's support to the NLF.²⁰ Even in earlier chapters, this dissertation largely followed the traditional view of external support and considered external support to the counterinsurgent as "third party intervener." The examination of the Vietnamese and Cambodian cases, however, revealed that the distinction between external support and third party intervention was superfluous. Both concepts have more similarities than differences.

Consequently, this dissertation views external support in a more expansive nature. In the case of Cambodia and Vietnam, the dissertation found that external supports that are decisive could come under two forms: direct combat support (regular units) and indirect combat support (organization, training, and financing). Organizational support is important because it could enable the revolutionaries to make a successful operational graduation. If that fails, like what happened in Vietnam, the external actor can also provide the conventional units for decisive battles to win the war. This treatment of external support has three theoretical consequences.

First of all, this expansive nature of external support applied to both the revolutionaries and the government and both protagonists could receive a varying degree of these two types of supports. In Vietnam, the NLF received both a regular army (the PAVN) and organizational support.²¹ The RVN also received both types of external supports. Fighting alongside the ARVN was the MACV which swelled to half a million soldiers by 1968. The American organizational support to the ARVN, however, was debatable.²² In the classic Krepinevich vs. Summers debate, both authors disagreed about the types of organization and concept of operations that the US military should have advised the ARVN.²³ But in the end, both agreed that the type of organization that the ARVN received was not suitable for the war. After 1972,

when the American troops left Vietnam, the NLF had both types of external support while the ARVN had none. The result was decisive revolutionary victory.

In the Cambodian Civil War, the revolutionaries (the CGDK) received very limited direct combat support from the Thai army. Nevertheless, the political establishment of the CGDK was perhaps one of the most important achievements of the sponsoring countries. But even in this indirect combat support, the training for large-scale conventional war was lacking. As a result, even though the CGDK, for the most part, did not lack ammunitions for its operations, the main problem was its inability to fight as a conventional army.

In contrast, the PRK received both types of external supports before 1989. The VVA acted as a security umbrella and bought time for the PRK to build its army. The second important contribution of the Vietnamese forces in Cambodia was the organization support that they provided to the PRK and the KPRA. If, ultimately, the KPRA succeeded because of its organization, then the VVA's contribution in this matter was decisive.

Nevertheless, in a matter similar to the counterinsurgent in Vietnam (the RVN), the counterinsurgent in Cambodia also saw its external supports eroded over the years. In 1989, the KPRA lost one type of external support, i.e. the Vietnamese regular units. However, the legacy of another external support, the KPRA's organization, lingered and it was better than the CGDK's. This finding also confirmed the importance of political program and military organization (finding 1).

Another consequence of adding external support into the conceptual model of this dissertation is the expansion of the possible set of strategies that the belligerent can employ. The revolutionaries do not necessarily have to destroy the external forces,

but it suffices to impose enough cost for the external power to withdraw. During the Tet Offensive in 1968, the revolutionaries failed to destroy the American forces, but they imposed enough cost that the American public stopped supporting the war. This finding thus confirms Gil Merom's argument discussed in chapter 1. Merom argued that in most democracies, small wars tend to impose more cost than benefit, which eventually leads the public opinion to become impatient and demand a premature end to the war.²⁴ Thus, in revolutionary war, eliminating external support is a very important strategy.

Finally, this third finding challenges another theory in the COIN literature: asymmetric warfare. As discussed in chapter 1, Ivan Arrenguin-Toft argued that asymmetric advantage does not always confer victory to the bigger side.²⁵ However, Toft defined asymmetry only in terms of force ratios. Ultimately, his arguments still rested upon the asymmetries in the strategies employed by the two sides.

The findings in this dissertation expanded this horizon of "asymmetries" to include intangible factors such as political program, organization, morale, force ratio, external support, and strategy. Using this expanded definition of asymmetries, the dissertation argues that one of the basic principles in warfare still applies to revolutionary war, namely that the victorious side would be the one that can obtain some types of asymmetrical advantage.

Indeed, the victors in both the Vietnam War and the Cambodian Civil War all had some asymmetrical advantages.²⁶ Thus, the NLF had an external, conventional units which became even more important than the organization support after the debacle in 1968. In Cambodia, after 1989, the KPRA clearly came out on top when it

came to morale and organization. The KPRA's switch to population-centric strategy was decisive as it amplified these two asymmetric advantages.

7.2.4 Finding 4 and 5: Territorial Forces, Strategy, and Morale

In the current COIN literature, there was less disagreement on how to conduct revolutionary war than on how to defeat it. Indeed, there were fewer disagreements on Mao's analysis of the dynamics of revolutionary war while the COIN schools were divided. In chapter 1, we have discussed the WHAM School, the Coercion School, and the Technical School. While each provided some insights into COIN, none of them explicitly analyzed revolutionary war as hybrid war. The Coercion School, in particular, offer a somewhat ubiquitous response to revolutionary war: conventional war can defeat anything, including the low-intensity, revolutionary warfare.

Dale Andrade, for example, claimed that General Westmoreland saw the war in Vietnam as a hybrid war and likened the RVN to a house that was threatened by both "termites" (a metaphor denoting the NLF/PLAF) and the "bully boys with crowbars" (i.e. the PAVN).²⁷ For Westmoreland, Andrade claimed, both can destroy the house, but the bully boys with the crowbars are going to destroy the house faster than the termites are. Hence, the conventional approach was chosen. Similarly, Trinquier advocated brutality as COIN tactics while Summers never believed Vietnam was a guerrilla war in the first place.²⁸

Contrary to the assumption of the Coercion School which focused only on conventional warfare as the best response to revolutionary war, this dissertation found that revolutionary war was a hybrid war which requires a different response. The best way to counter such hybrid war is to organize a counterinsurgent hybrid army which was predominantly composed of territorial forces. In Cambodia, the conventional units

and the territorial units were considered to be of almost equal importance. The territorial forces were most effective if used in the context of a population-centric strategy. Moreover, the territorial forces can handle the hybrid war situation very well if they were used in conjunction with conventional forces.²⁹ After a string of spectacular defeats on the border, the KPRA had to switch to population-centric strategy which eventually stalled the CGDK's offensive.

In a population-centric strategy, the territorial troops played a major role in defending the population centers because they fought to defend their homes. They also prevented further disintegration of the conventional forces who faltered due to the effects of the territory-centric strategy. The CGDK simply could not muster enough people to launch a "general offensive-general uprising" type of operation like what the PAVN and PLAF did in Vietnam in 1968. In short, the hybrid army gave the KPRA an advantage in strategic flexibility and morale.

Furthermore, one aspect that was lost in the current study was the role of the KPRA's militia forces. Since their operations never involved more than one brigade, this dissertation does not directly consider the role of the militias in Cambodia. In Cambodia, those who wanted to pursue a career in the armed forces would join the provincial battalion while those who wanted to work at their homes and did not want to move to the border usually chose to serve part-time in the militias. The KPRA commonly organized the militias in many surrounding districts to build an integrated defensive system. The system was called "*sompoun sahak phum prayut*" which can be literally translated as "union of inter-hamlet operations". The KPRA's "People's Army newspaper" made frequent mentioning of this local tactic which was aimed at preventing the CGDK's infiltration.

It is hard to analyze the effects of this defensive system without looking at each individual encounter. This dissertation precluded this from the study. We can certainly count the individual encounters in the *People's Army* newspaper, but it would still be incomplete. However, as we have seen in chapter 6, in late October 1989, this system disaggregated the KPNLAF's OMZ5. That was the only recorded evidence of the system destroying a large unit (brigade-size). The Siem Reap – Ouddar Meanchey PMC, in particular, boasted in its unit's official history that after the election in 1993 when the ANKI was integrated into the government, a former high-ranking commander of the ANKI admitted that he dreaded the militias who always disturbed the ANKI's infiltration.³⁰

It is hard to substantiate this claim given the current state of the documentation. However, we can look at what actually happened. With the exception of the areas along the border, the KPRA seemed to be able to move across provinces to reinforce its besieged units without encountering any catastrophic ambush from the CGDK. Someone must have covered its movement. Perhaps it was the militias, the unsung heroes of the KPRA. Moreover, while the Khmer Rouge had two Fronts organized in Pursat, Battambang, and Banteay Meanchey, those two Fronts could not mass to attack in large formation. That was understandable: if the Khmer Rouge was to attack as Front, logistics would be extremely demanding. Such operations could not be launched if the KPRA's militias were effective at observing and leading the main KPRA's units to destroy those logistics nodes prematurely.

Ultimately, the KPRA's victory was in part due to the increased role of the territorial forces towards the end of 1989 and early 1990. In Banteay Meanchey, the local forces refused to give up. In Kampong Thom, they were keys to the defense of

the provincial capital. In Pursat and Siem Reap – Ouddar Meanchey, they prevented the guerrilla graduation. Siem Reap, just like MR2, reinforced the Western provinces. MR5, the Battambang PMC, and the conventional divisions even tried to counterattack to recapture Pailin, in spite of the revised strategy.

Table 7. Summary of Contributions to the Literature

| COIN Schools of Thoughts | Main Arguments | Contributions of the Dissertation |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| Mao tse-Tung | -Revolutionary war is hybrid. -The revolutionaries have to make an operation graduation. | A major challenge for the revolutionary is how to transform a guerrilla army into a conventional one. |
| Coercion School | Conventional war and brutality is the solution to revolutionary war. | A hybrid army composed of territorial and regular forces, employed in population-centric strategy is effective in the context of revolutionary war. |
| WHAM School | Political program is at the heart of revolutionary war. | Political program requires effective implementation as well as an effective military organization that can translate political advantage into military advantage. |
| Technical School | General importance of building local forces | Territorial forces constitute an important reason for success in revolutionary war. |

7.2.5 Summary

The findings in this dissertation confirmed some aspects of both the WHAM School and the Coercion School. Political ideology and programs were needed to

ensure victory, but so did military forces. However, this dissertation supplements the WHAM School by arguing that strong and unified military organization is needed to operationalize the political ideology and programs. Moreover, this dissertation supplements the Coercion School by arguing that revolutionary war is hybrid in nature and that the solution is a counterinsurgent hybrid army. Unlike the Coercion School which advocated brutality and conventional forces, this dissertation found that the best solution is a hybrid army which was predominantly composed of territorial forces. In short, there is indeed an alternative to brutality. Finally, this dissertation supplements the Technical School by providing a specific way in which a victorious counterinsurgent built its hybrid army (the PRK in Cambodia). This is a much more nuanced examination of military organization than what the Technical School offers (such as the general recommendation about “strengthening host nation’s forces” found in FM 3-24).

The hypothesis advanced in chapter 2 was confirmed. However, it is not complete (Figure 10 below illustrates how the hypothesis changed after taking into account the findings). This dissertation found that the best way to holistically characterize revolutionary war is to think of it as a contest between two sides to achieve asymmetric advantage. Just like all wars, victory in revolutionary war is predicated on some type of asymmetric advantages. This dissertation would offer that the factors which can provide a protagonist in revolutionary war with asymmetrical advantages go beyond what Toft had argued (which was just about resources and ratio of force).

In chapter 2, this dissertation hypothesizes that two major factors are important: military organization and political program. The examination of the

Vietnamese and Cambodian cases revealed that the major factors include: political program, effective implementation of the political program, military organization (hybrid army), strategy (population-centric), and external combat support (direct and indirect). Ratio of force, morale, and unit cohesion are the intervening variables that translate the effects of these factors into the final war outcome. The following diagram illustrates this new finding.

In the Cambodian Civil War from 1979 to 1989, the PRK had several asymmetric advantages: a regular army (the VVA), organization (hybrid army), morale, and force ratio. The CGDK, on the other hand, did not really have any asymmetric advantage apart from the elusiveness of its guerrilla army. The CGDK itself did not even exist as an entity until 1982. Towards 1989, however, the PRK started to lose most of its asymmetric advantages, mostly due to its own actions.

After the 14-Camp Campaign in 1984 and 1985, the PRK and the VVA implemented the K-5 Belt strategy. Suddenly, the asymmetric advantage in morale and force ratio were gone. In 1989, all VVA units withdrew from Cambodia, thus sapping another asymmetric advantage from the PRK. By the time the CGDK launched its combined offensive in 1989, the PRK had only one asymmetric advantage: organization of the hybrid army. That was the reason why the CGDK could achieve many successes in the early part of the offensive.

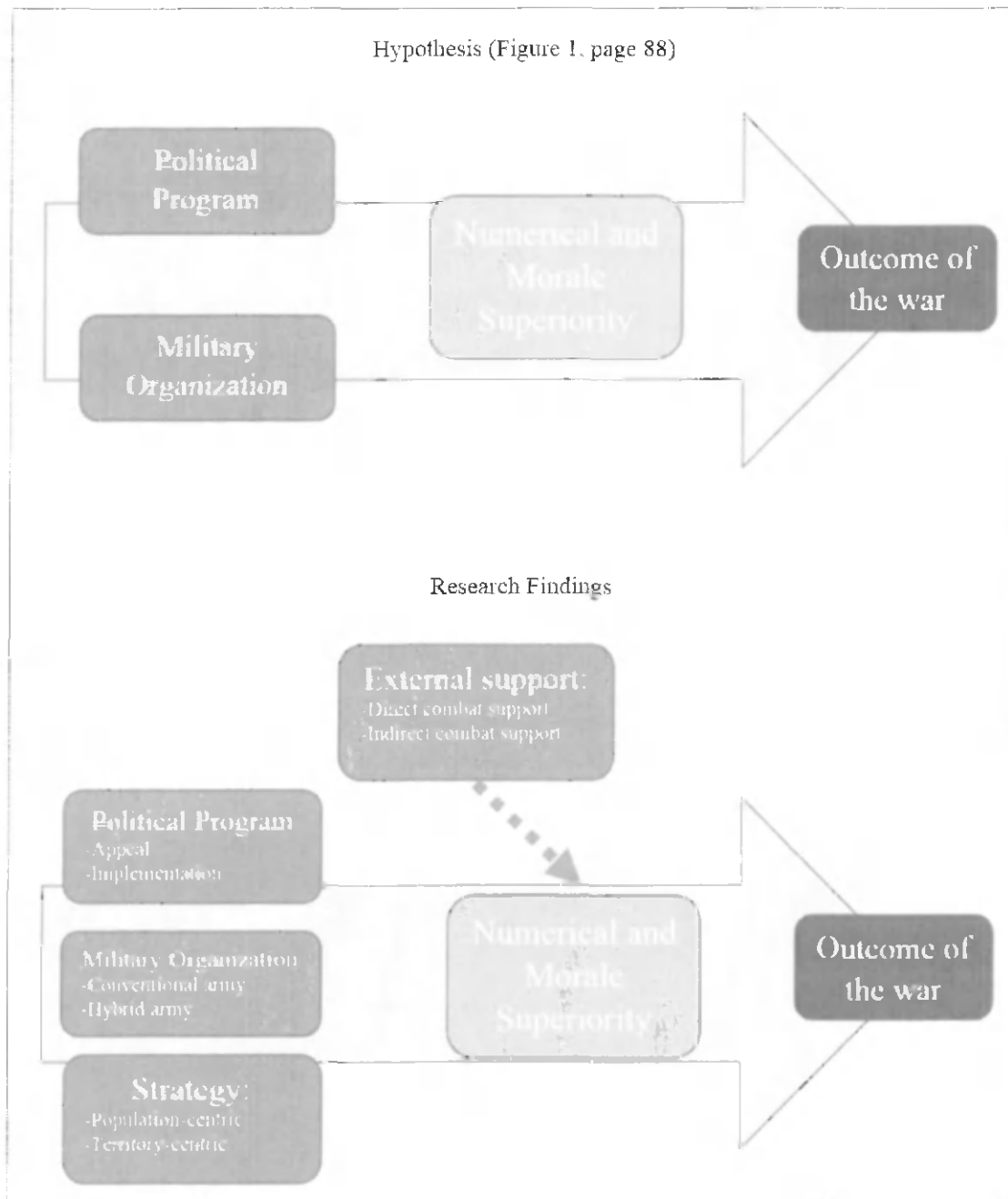


Figure 10. Upgraded Hypothesis

However, after the CGDK's capture of Svay Chek district in Banteay Meanchey province in December 1989, the PRK revised its strategy and switched to a population-centric strategy. All of the KPRA conventional divisions withdrew to defend the population centers. At this point, the territorial forces operated close to their hometown and in conjunction with the conventional divisions. In essence, after the strategic revision, the PRK regained its asymmetric advantages in organization, morale, and ultimately the ratio of force. The window of opportunity for the CGDK had closed by early 1990.

The case of the RVN, however, was poignant. In the 1960s, the RVN obviously had no asymmetric advantage while the NLF had plenty: effective implementation of the political program, a regular army (PAVN and the PLAF conventional forces), morale, and organization. The American escalation, however, brought down one of the NLF's asymmetric advantages: the regular army. As the war dragged on, the American forces also seemed to threaten the morale of the revolutionaries.³¹ After the Tet Offensive, the revolutionaries began to have problem with another asymmetric advantage, i.e. organization, as most of their PLAF units were devastated in the offensive and the operations that followed.

However, the second-order effect of the Tet Offensive was the irreversible change in the American public opinion. This change immediately eliminated one major asymmetric advantage of the RVN: the American troops. Without the assistance of the American troops, the NLF began to recover its asymmetric advantages while the RVN still could not produce any asymmetric advantage of its own. In 1975, the RVN collapsed under the weight of the PAVN's assault.

In summary, all five findings of this dissertation were factors which can combine to explain victory in revolutionary war. This dissertation would offer that the best way to understand these variables is to think of the conflict as a contest between two sides to find asymmetric advantages over the adversary. In both Vietnam and Cambodia, asymmetric advantages determined victory.

7.3 Counterarguments

Like most, if not all, historical cases, the Cambodian Civil War was not a clear-cut case. This section analyzes three potential counterarguments to the general findings of this dissertation: the differences (including ethnic components) between Cambodia and Vietnam, the nature of the dependent variable (theory of battle vs. theory of war), and the controversy related to the reported return of the PAVN's division 330 to Cambodia in 1989.

7.3.1 The wars were not the same: The PRK has an easier war

Argument: The ARVN had to fight both a regular army (PAVN) and a guerrilla army (PLAF), whereas the PRK did not have to fight a regular army as large as the PAVN. The NLF and PLAF was well-organized, but the CGDK was divided. Vietnam faced a hybrid threat, which complicated the design of a suitable strategy. In Cambodia, there was no conventional threat and that allowed the PRK to build a true counterinsurgency force. In sum, the PRK had everything going for them; they had an easier war.

This dissertation concedes that the two cases studies are different in that the counterinsurgent in Vietnam was facing a much more difficult war than what the Cambodian counterinsurgent encountered. However, the way both counterinsurgents

handled the war and the resulting outcomes did not invalidate the findings of this dissertation.

Firstly, the NLF in Vietnam was better organized than the CGDK in Cambodia. This point does not contradict the argument of this dissertation, namely that victory (for both sides) partly depends on the organization. If the CGDK was not unified, then it was no surprise that they lost the war. As a matter of fact, the NLF was not monolithic either. The NLF was actually made up of several indigenous resistance groups in the RVN, and it was Hanoi who gave these groups a more centralized organization. This point also validates the finding regarding external support. The difference between Cambodia and Vietnam was not the division among the resistance factions, but it was rather the effectiveness of the organizational support that the external actors provided to the resistance factions that differed in the two cases. That difference explained the divergent outcomes.

The second part of this counterargument is that the RVN had to fight both an insurgency and a regular army, which was not the case in Cambodia. In 1989, the CGDK tried to transform itself into a conventional army thus presenting the PRK with a hybrid threat but the effectiveness of the CGDK's conventional army still cannot be compared to that of the PAVN. Once again, while the Vietnamese case and the Cambodian case differed on this aspect, the difference confirms two findings of the dissertation: the difficulty of operational graduation and the important role of external support.

Both the NLF and the CGDK had difficulties transforming its forces into an effective conventional army in 1968 and 1989, respectively. The major problems were unfamiliarity with urban terrain and misunderstandings between junior commanders

leading to a lack of synchronization of efforts. What made the difference in Vietnam was that despite the defeat in 1968, the revolutionary still had external support which became increasingly important after 1968. In Cambodia, as soon as the CGDK exhausted its military resources, there was no external direct combat support and it had to accept the unfavorable political deal. These points do not invalidate the findings of this dissertation. Instead, this dissertation use these insights to build a more expansive conceptual model as illustrated in Figure 10. Upgraded Hypothesis (page 343).

7.3.2 This is a theory of battle

Argument: This is a theory of battle because it focuses on one battle or campaign and therefore could not use the final war outcome as the dependent variable.

This dissertation is indeed a study of a campaign rather than the whole war. Nevertheless, the dissertation would offer that the campaigns under study were decisive in significant ways. In the Vietnam War, one could count five major campaigns: the Tet Offensive (1968), the Cambodian Incursion (1970), Operation Lam Son 971 (1971), the Easter Offensive (1972) and the Spring Offensive (1975). Of course, we can also count major operations such as Operation Junction City in 1967 and the PLAF Main Force War prior to 1965.

Among these five major campaigns, three were launched by the revolutionaries at the conventional level (1968, 1972, 1975) while two were undertaken by the RVNAF and the US military (1970, 1971). This dissertation chose the Tet Offensive as the case study for the Vietnam War, for two reasons.

Firstly, the PAVN's participation notwithstanding, the Tet Offensive was the first time that the Vietnamese revolutionaries had transformed themselves into a

conventional army and launched the attack on almost all major urban centers.³² They had to fight alongside the PAVN, but according to the PAVN's official history, the PLAF did have an important role, namely the defeat of the ARVN and the attack on the cities while the PAVN fixed the American forces.³³ Secondly, the PLAF ultimately lost the majority of its combat power during the Tet Offensive, but in the end, victory was determined not by casualties, but by whether it was able to achieve its political objectives. After the Tet Offensive, the US public no longer supported the American involvement in Vietnam.

While the US would still be involved in Vietnam until 1972 and played a pivotal role in providing aerial support which prevented the collapse of the ARVN that year, its withdrawal policy was unchanged. Given the reliance of the ARVN on American financial support as well as combat power, the US was, to South Vietnam, what the German military theorist Clausewitz called "the center of gravity."³⁴ By taking the US out of the equation, the DRV more or less set the conditions for the eventual RVN defeat. Thus, the Tet Offensive in 1968 was arguably decisive.

In the Cambodian Civil War, there were three major campaigns that were multi-divisional: the 14-Camps campaign (1984-85), the 1989 combined CGDK offensive, and the pre-cease fire land-grab fight (1990-91). Among the three, it was clear that the 1989 combined CGDK offensive was the most significant one from a strategic perspective. It marked the only time that the CGDK had graduated to the conventional level. This dissertation, therefore, chose this campaign as the case study for the Cambodian Civil War.

In summary, the Tet Offensive and the 1989 CGDK combined offensive marked the time the revolutions in both cases had graduated on an unprecedented scale

and scope and both were arguably decisive campaigns. The two campaigns did not immediately end the war in their respective cases, but they both set the conditions for the final outcome.

While there are similarities, we must also point out the differences. During the Tet Offensive, both the revolutionaries and the counterinsurgent had direct combat support from external actors (PAVN for the NLF and MACV for the RVN). In Cambodia, however, there was no significant direct combat support from external actors.³⁵ This situation benefited the KPRA, which was the strongest actor on the battlefield.

These differences did not invalidate the findings of the dissertation. First of all, while the Vietnamese revolutionaries benefited from the PAVN's assistance, the former was also involved in exploiting the popular grievances and subverting the local government, thus sapping the RVN's strength. The RVN's inability to effectively implement its political program forced it to rely heavily on the American forces. The success of the Tet Offensive in 1968, if any, was its decisive effects on the American foreign policy in Vietnam. The PAVN's assistance was important, but as illustrated in 1972, the PAVN would not have been successful had the American forces remained in Vietnam. In other words, the failure of the RVN to redress popular grievances led to military problems and eventually cost the RVN the war.

In Cambodia, on the other hand, the counterinsurgent could implement its political program much more effectively than the revolutionaries could. The Cambodian counterinsurgent also had an effective military organization (courtesy of external support) which capitalized on its political advantages. In contrast, the CGDK

did not have direct combat support from external actors. Moreover, its organization was relatively weak and divisive. The factors explained why the CGDK failed.

7.3.3 Stealing the KPRA's Thunder: Pailin and the Return of the PAVN

Argument: In late 1989, after the loss of Pailin, one of the PAVN divisions which had previously served under the VVA in Pailin, had returned to fight and helped the PRK survive.

Throughout the CGDK's offensive period in 1989, there were two major events which the KPRA appeared to be in serious trouble. The first event was the fall of Pailin in October 1989, and the second event was the KPNI.LAF's push into Banteay Meanchey in the first stage (December 1989). After these two events, the CGDK's offensive stalled. *Why?* In 2013, using the official publication of the PAVN's unit history, Ken Conboy argued that the PAVN returned in 1989 and essentially destroyed the CGDK's armies and saved the PRK.³⁶ This argument is not entirely accurate, however, and this is where it becomes controversial.

According to a PAVN's official unit history, elements of the 330th division did return in October 1989 and stayed until December.³⁷ The unit's history specifically stated that the unit only operated in Battambang, but Conboy speculated, without substantiated proof, that the Vietnamese unit was also responsible for the defeat of the KPNI.LAF in Banteay Meanchey.

While the PAVN unit's official history was quite open about the return, meaning a breach in the withdrawal agreement, they only mentioned that they have operated in Battambang without providing any more details as to the size of the units deployed, the type of operations, or specific areas they had operated in. Even when one gets down to the history of the regiments and battalions, only Battambang was

mentioned.³⁸ Conboy's argument seemed to be skewed against the KPRA. He extrapolated that the PAVN must have had intervened in Banteay Meanchey; otherwise how can we explain the sudden collapse of the KPNLAF? In the previous chapters, this dissertation offered a competing account based on the KPRA's history.

During the research for this dissertation, the author did raise this issue during the interviews with former KPRA's officers. Unfortunately, the result was inconclusive. The publications of the KPRA's unit history also failed to give an accurate answer. Many officers agreed that the PAVN had returned, but in the form of a handful of advisors (fewer than ten) and were only embedded with the mobile divisions.³⁹ Battambang was not the only place the advisors had returned. Banteay Meanchey, Kampong Thom, and Ouddar Meanchey all received the advisors, and the advisors only worked with the mobile divisions in those provinces. What was puzzling was that these advisors were not entirely used for immediate combat operations. There were advisors for armor, artillery, as well as the newly acquired, multiple-rocket launcher system, the BM-21. Based on existing, publicly disclosed archives and research on the events that occurred, this dissertation offered three hypotheses as to the nature and effect of the return of the PAVN's 330th division.

Firstly, in the "panic hypothesis," the role of the 330th division was useful in the sense that it could help shore up the morale of the KPRA soldiers. Perhaps after the collapse of the 196th division at Pailin, the KPRA had actually panicked and called for reinforcement. But then they realized that most of the local units had successfully fought to defend the province to the point where they no longer needed the reinforcement. In other words, this situation was very similar to the Battle of Tannenberg in World War I when German Eight Army on the Eastern Front had

fought and destroyed the far larger Russian armies while the high command panicked and diverted reinforcement from the much needed Western Front. Thus, the role of the 330th division might not be decisive because ultimately it was the KPRA, most notably the territorial units, who did most of the fighting. Its expected morale-boosting effect was perhaps its only utility.

Secondly, in the “KPRA counteroffensive hypothesis”, the pertinent question is: what was the role of the 330th division? Was it used to prevent the collapse of the PRK, or was it used for the defeat of the CGDK? Logically, this 330th division could perform two classic functions: defense of Battambang or counterattack to recapture Pailin.

If the 330th division was used for defensive purposes, then it implied that Battambang was in danger of collapsing. But that conjecture was not supported by the evidence, at least based on the Khmer Rouge’s video archives. In that video, after the fall of Pailin, the KPRA never gave up and sent one task force after another to recapture the town. Route 10 was littered with destroyed tanks, trucks, and overturned armored personnel carriers as the KPRA tried to push through to Pailin in the period between the loss of the town and the arrival of the 330th division. If the KPRA could counterattack before the arrival of the 330th division, then Battambang was not collapsing or else the KPRA would not have taken the gamble.

Moreover, while the 196th division, 92nd and 95th brigades routed, Battambang still had the 4th and 6th divisions as well as the 94th brigade, the provincial battalions and support units of MR5. None of the latter were in any danger of failing. In addition, Battambang also sent task force reinforcements to shore up the defense in Banteay Meanchey. This means that Battambang must not have been in any

danger of falling. Thus, we can reject the notion that the 330th division was used to defend and prevent Battambang from collapsing.

In other words, after the collapse of Pailin, the Khmer Rouge was actually on the defensive. But then, in this “KPRA counteroffensive hypothesis,” if the 330th division was not used for defensive purposes, it must have been used for offensive purpose: the counterattack to recapture Pailin. In this case, the 330th division had failed in its mission because the Khmer Rouge had successfully fought to defend Pailin. In summary, the role of the 330th division was either superfluous (if it was used defensively) or ineffective (if it was used offensively).

Thirdly, in the “footprint and logistics hypothesis,” this dissertation would submit that any consideration of the role of the 330th division must take into account the logistics and sustainment requirement of a modern division. How big was the contingent that was deployed? All discussion up until this point assumes that the 330th division was deployed in full force (i.e. around 10,000 personnel). That division was a heavy division, which means it had heavy artillery and perhaps armor as well. To mobilize one division as large as the 330th would require significant logistics supports, which, in turn, would expand the “footprint” of this division as well as the time needed for proper deployment. 10,000 soldiers had to eat, move, and fight, and the ammunitions and fuel required for the operations must be sustained.

Moreover, the PAVN contingent that returned must do so by land, meaning a travel of more than 400 kilometers from the Cambodian-Vietnamese border to the Cambodian-Thai border. They also had to use the national roads that had been severely damaged by the war as well as negotiating through the ambushes of the Khmer Rouge’s troops. As the footprint (i.e. size) of the returning Vietnamese

contingent became larger, so did logistics and sustainment operations. All of these required time. By examining the official history of the 330th division and its regiments, we can speculate three probable types of deployment: the division was not deployed in full force, it was deployed as regiments, or all units were primarily infantry units. On the other hand, if it was only a handful of advisors, logistics would not be a problem.

In addition to logistics, these units also needed artillery support in order to function effectively. On the conventional battlefield in 1989, the CGDK had already become a modern army with integrated artillery. The PAVN's experience notwithstanding, the infantry units of the 330th division would not have been able to defeat the CGDK forces on its own. In this third hypothesis, the logistics and artillery support must have been provided by the KPRA. In other words, the 330th division could not have independently decided the outcome.

Ultimately, whether the KPRA's officers refused to admit the helping hand of the PAVN's 330th division or if the PAVN exaggerated its contribution in 1989, we do not know. Pending further research and without the disclosure of detailed operational history of the 330th division, perhaps we will never know the truth. However, based on the three hypotheses outlined here and based on the current state of the documentation and archives, this dissertation would propose that the role of the 330th division might not be as decisive as some have claimed. The return could have been an advantage for the KPRA, but the size of the unit seemed too small to decide the outcome of the campaign on its own. Yet, the return of the 330th division did steal the thunder from the KPRA's victory.

7.4 Assessments and Contributions to the Literature: The Three Constants and the Three Variables of Revolutionary Warfare

One limitation of this dissertation is the differences between the Vietnam War and the Cambodian Civil War. However, that is to be expected. Indeed, no two revolutionary wars are exactly the same. Similarly, revolutionary warfare unavoidably exhibits some different aspects due to different local conditions and the adaptive human behaviors. Nevertheless, there are some characteristics of that revolutionary-war strain that never change.

Instead of rejecting the different aspects between the Cambodian and Vietnamese cases, this dissertation embraces both the similarities and differences. Based on the analysis of the similarities and differences between the two cases, the hypothesis testing in the preceding sections, and by taking into account the counterarguments, this dissertation offers a new theory of revolutionary war. Success in revolutionary war depends on effective implementation of a political program and strong military organization which focuses on building a strong territorial army. Based on this conclusion, this dissertation asserts that all revolutionary wars have three constants and three variables. Understanding these three constants and three variables is key to understanding revolutionary and how such a war will end. By using only two cases study, this dissertation does not claim that the theory is universally applicable to all other cases. However, the theory should form the basis for further investigation.

The preceding sections already examined how effective implementation of the political program and territorial military organization can contribute to success in revolutionary war. This section examines another finding of this dissertation, namely the three major unchanging characteristics of revolutionary war (grievance-based revolution, operational graduation, and the important role of the local/host

government) and the three major changing characteristics (ethnic or religious factors, external support, and geography).

Because revolutionary war, by definition, is a struggle to seize power to effect radical social and political changes in society, at the heart of this problem are the social and political grievances. For a revolution to have a chance to succeed, first and foremost a grievance must exist. Without a good political and social solution to the conflict, the government risks inviting more and more dissensions, thus more and more revolutionaries.⁴⁰ In some cases, brutality can suppress the rebellion for an extended period of time. However, as will be discussed below, if external support exists, then the grievance will be intensified in spite of brutality. This dissertation sees the outcome of revolutionary war as a confluence of many different factors. One isolated factor is unlikely to play any decisive role. But if other conditions also exist, then the outcome will be changed.

Likewise, social and political grievances are also important for the revolutionaries. At least for a pragmatic reason, this will allow them to recruit people for the cause. *If the grievance is strong enough and if the government could not or is not willing to solve it, the guerrillas will eventually be able to transform themselves into a regular army and fight a conventional war to seize power.* Despite the differences in the two cases, the Vietnam War and the Cambodian Civil War are quite the same along these lines. Social and political grievances were the main factors that pushed many people to take up arms for either side in both cases. At the tipping point, the revolutionaries will graduate their operations.

The examination of the Cambodian Civil War revealed the mechanism by which the political program exerts its effect: military organization and strategy.

Political program can only give one side the potential pool of recruit, but military organization allows him to take advantage of that and build an army. Ultimately, the competence of the government (including military organization and strategy) are keys to success in the context of revolutionary warfare. The third party intervener can indeed help, but ultimately the local or host government is the answer to what Lomperis called the "legitimacy crisis." These are the constants of revolutionary warfare.

While there are constants in revolutionary war, variables also exist. Because, in the end, war is a human endeavor, it bounds to be dynamic as both sides adapt to overcome and seek to win. First of all, revolutionary wars almost never happen in isolation. There is always external support to either the government, the revolutionaries, or both. Thus, in the Philippines Insurrection, the US supported the local government while the rebels had no external support. Malaya was a similar case where the British, to a certain extent, had the Malay-dominated government on its side. The *Malayan Communist Party*, on the other hand, received no support from China, in spite of similar ideology. In Algeria, we also see a similar situation. In Vietnam, however, the revolutionaries received tremendous support from the DRV: a regular army (the PAVN) and a political organization. The government, the RVN, received support from the US, both troops and equipment. In Cambodia, the revolutionaries did not receive a conventional army, but they received weapons, diplomatic, financial, and organizational support. The government (the PRK), on the other hand, received support from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

This variable (external support) is bound to appear again and again as other cases of revolutionary warfare breaks out. One can say with a high degree of certainty

that no two revolutionary wars will have the same kind of external support. Nevertheless, working in tandem with this variable is a constant: the role of the host/local government. By definition, revolutionary war is an internal war or at least will have some aspects of it. In such a case, the role of the local government will still be important. External support will enable one side to have some advantage over the other side, but ultimately, suppression of the revolution and a lasting peace still depend on the actions of the host/local government.

The second variable in revolutionary war is the nature of the grievances. This dissertation studies only the grievances that were predominantly political and ideological. This dissertation concedes that in many revolutionary wars, the grievances can also be predominantly ethnic or religious. In most cases, such as the Vietnam case, it was mixed. To what extent politics is different from ethnicity and how these two are different from religion are difficult to say. In fact, comparing the three is like comparing apples to oranges. Nonetheless, instead of dividing revolutionary wars into different categories based on different types of grievances, this dissertation would offer that all three are similar in that the local or host government can play a pivotal role in solving the problem.

This dissertation would argue that regardless of the nature of the grievance, the solution itself is primarily political. Power-sharing and fair representation have always been the most effective solution to deal with religious and ethnic problems. There is a long list of countries in which different ethnic and religious groups could live together based on a political compromise. Even the ethnic tensions in Vietnam during the war could be somewhat mitigated by a political agreement (for example, the agreement that followed the rebellion of the Montagnards in the special forces camps in 1965).

In other words, this dissertation would argue that the while religious, ethnic, and social grievances are not the same, the key issue is how well the government can solve them. This dissertation considers the problem-solution complex as a matter of policy: does the government have a good “political program” to redress the grievances, whatever nature they may be? The grievance might be ethnic, religious, political, economic, or social; but in the end, the capture of the political power is one of the surest ways, if not the only way, to redress those grievances. Conversely, the government can also prevent the struggle if it is willing to craft a political program that address the ethnic or religious issues.

The third variation in revolutionary warfare is the physical environment in which a particular war occurs. Thus, one may argue that the jungle facilitates external support. For example, in the Vietnam War, the PAVN made use of the dense jungle as well as sanctuaries in Cambodia to escape the devastating effects of American air power. Arguably, in Algeria, the guerrillas found it hard to fight in the desert but they had sanctuaries in the mountains. And the list of countries with different geographical features goes on. In Afghanistan, there were mountains. In Malaya, there was jungle but it was a peninsular. In the Philippines, it was an archipelago. If one is strict with this aspect, no two revolutionary wars can be compared because the geography will always be different.

Yet, according to Mao Tse-tung, the main sanctuary for the revolutionaries was neither geography nor a third country, but among the population. Hence, the often-quoted formulation: “the guerrillas must live among the people like the fishes live in the sea”, i.e. hiding in plain sight. This implies that the people must be willing to shelter the revolutionaries in the midst of the potential of government’s retaliation.

One way the revolutionaries can obtain this precious sanctuary depends on how well the government could solve the grievances. Thus, we return to the fundamental issue at the heart of all revolutionary warfare: grievances and political program. Just like external support, geography is an enabler for the revolutionaries' operations. Of course, the revolutionaries can hide among the people, but to graduate to the conventional level, they would need some kind of sanctuaries for the big units to prepare for the conventional offensive operations.

But ultimately, it all boils down to popular grievances. During the Cambodian Civil War, it is interesting to ask the following question: while all three factions had the jungle as their sanctuaries, why did the Khmer Rouge become the strongest faction? The answer lies not in the jungle itself but in the secret network among the population that the Khmer Rouge possessed. That advantage became more intense when it was combined with the existence of geographical sanctuaries.

In summary, this dissertation concedes that there are many different aspects between the Vietnam War and the Cambodian Civil War. Nonetheless, the comparison shows that there are indeed several constants that never change. This dissertation does not deny the importance of the *three variable aspects of revolutionary warfare*. Instead, this dissertation shall argue that these variables notwithstanding, the things that matters most are the fundamental issues common to all revolutionary warfare: grievances (and its flipside, the political program) and the role of the local or host government. These two factors will determine the nature and intensity of the revolution's operational graduation. In this war, politics is key. And to use the famous dictum in American politics, all politics are local.

7.5 Revolutionary Warfare in the Contemporary World: Iraq Part 2

As soon as the US left Iraq in 2012 and as the BCT concept began to lose appeal among the US military leaders, the situation in Iraq changed from bad to worse. The root of all problems was the Arab Spring which left Syria divided. The instability had weakened the central government to the point where an extremist group called the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) emerged along the Iraqi-Syrian border. ISIS was able to find safe haven and build its army in the midst of this power vacuum. Its strategy in Iraq appeared to be the intensification of the Sunni grievance vis-à-vis the Shi'a-dominated government.⁴¹ This effort was greatly enhanced by the decision of the former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to dismiss and ostracize the Sunni members of his cabinets.⁴²

In late 2013, ISIS began its advance deeper into Iraq, eventually capturing the city of Fallujah in January 2014.⁴³ In June, ISIS captured the city of Mosul and declared themselves an Islamic state, or rather a caliphate.⁴⁴ From then on, the situation went downhill, and a series of events pushed the US to intervene in September. How do we characterize this war? Is that a revolutionary war? Or is it something else? Can Iraq be compared to the Vietnam War and the Cambodian Civil War during the Cold War era?

Many names might be fitting to describe this conflict because it has the characteristics of many things. This dissertation would offer, though, that nomenclature notwithstanding, one can analyze the ISIS problem through the lenses of revolutionary warfare by looking at the aforementioned three constants and three variables. First of all, the conflict fits with the definition of revolutionary war because what ISIS wants to accomplish is by no means moderate. This is a group that even Al-Qaeda considered to be extreme.

ISIS began as guerrillas and then graduated to the conventional level. At the beginning, its army was largely composed of foreign fighters, but foreign fighters alone cannot explain ISIS' expansion to its current size as well as its easy victory in Northern Iraq. The graduation of ISIS from guerrillas to a conventional army was caused by at least two factors: the evaporation of the Iraqi and Syrian local government's power and the discontent of the Sunnis in Syria and especially in Iraq who felt marginalized politically and economically by the Maliki government.⁴⁵ Thus, this war is largely grievance-based.

With Iraq divided ethnically between the Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds, it was hard to believe that one side will completely prevail over the other by pure military power. Eventually, a solution that can guarantee a lasting peace can only come in the form of a political program that the local population can accept. The three constants of revolutionary warfare also tell us that as the revolutionaries can graduate to the conventional level, they can also regress back to the guerrilla level and then work its way up again as long as the grievances still exist. Thus, while ISIS is now a conventional army which makes it easy to be targeted, it is hard to believe that military power alone can totally annihilate the movement.

Looking from a revolutionary war lenses, strangely enough, ISIS itself was trying to function as a state in spite of its extreme ideology. Because of its extreme ideology, many people mocked a news clip in a satirical television show, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* in which an ISIS fighter struggled to direct traffic in Mosul after it captured the city. From the standpoint of revolutionary warfare, this was no joke; it was an attempt by ISIS to provide the basic service of governance to the local Sunni population. Furthermore, as it established itself in the city, one source of its

funding was not dissimilar to what the PLAF and NLF did in Vietnam: local tax collection. Anyone who did not pay would face severe consequences.⁴⁶ At the same time, ISIS had tried to avoid alienation with key Sunni tribal leaders who were keys to its success in northern Iraq. From the standpoint of the three constants of revolutionary warfare, this case is not so different from the Vietnam War and the Cambodian Civil War, at least in terms of the mechanics of war.

The conflict can also be described using the three variables of revolutionary warfare. Firstly, the external support was very different from Vietnam and Cambodia. ISIS received foreign fighters from abroad but they were not regular army, even though ISIS had tried to organize them as such. Among these are the fanatics who were often used as suicide bombers.⁴⁷ In addition, ISIS had its own oil refineries which it sold the produces through the black market to the surrounding countries. It also received financial support from "Gulf donors."⁴⁸

The geography is predominantly desert, which means that ISIS' conventional army is very vulnerable to military attack, especially the threat from the air. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to expect that when its conventional army is degraded, ISIS can choose to seek refuge among the population, thus complicating any military effort to completely destroy the group. Counterintuitively, as the US and allies intensified the aerial bombing campaign, a town called Kobane on the Syrian-Turkish border was poised to fall under ISIS' control.⁴⁹ One lesson is clear: political solution is key and military actions alone cannot solve problem.

Finally, ISIS was able to maintain footing in northern Iraq only because it received local support, or at least the acquiescence of the local Sunnis who were marginalized by their own government. This is a predominantly religious- and ethnic-

based grievance. Religious and ethnic issues sure play very important roles, but ultimately, it was the inability or unwillingness of Shi'a-dominated government to reach a political solution that led to the conflict we see today.

There is no doubt ISIS' ideology was extreme even by Al Qaeda's standard. But one still has to explain why such an extremist group could become so strong. Regardless of what we call ISIS or how we characterize the conflict, this dissertation would offer that a long-lasting solution can only be found by looking at the problem from the lenses of revolutionary warfare and using the three constants and three variables of revolutionary war.

Notwithstanding ISIS' gains and successes, the revolutionary military paradox was still there. As ISIS transitioned to the conventional level, its offensive stalled when the US-led coalition carried out a ferocious aerial campaign. Perhaps, was this the revolutionary paradox? One has to graduate to the conventional level to win, but at the risk of being spectacularly defeated by a larger, counterinsurgent's conventional army. It is always easier to fight from the shadow as guerrilla. But a conventional army has to fight in the open, and that makes it vulnerable. Moreover, we did not see Baghdad falling. Perhaps, was this caused by the Shi'a militias who predominantly control Baghdad and the nearby areas? Was this the case of territorial troops replacing the regular troops in defending the regime? To answer these questions, one has to conduct an in-depth study, which would be a research project in its own right. However, this dissertation is willing to speculate that the answers lie in the hypothetical formulation advanced by this dissertation as well as the three constants and three variables of revolutionary warfare.

This dissertation does not claim that the case of the Vietnam War and the Cambodian Civil War will offer ready-to-use lessons for the current conflict. History can hardly do that. However, the dissertation would offer that the insights from the two cases can certainly inform our judgment for future policy. To repeat the dictum of American politics: all politics are local. The solution to the problem is how the Iraqi and Syrian government solve what Lomperis called their “legitimacy crisis.” Military power can be effective only if it enables this condition. Politics, it seems, is still at the heart of the matter. Ultimately, politics is what gives meanings and directions to military activities.

¹ The issue of the RVN’s corruption was uncontested in the conventional literature. The issue of the PRK’s corruption, however, is ambiguous. The current literature said less about whether or not the PRK was corrupt. By giving the PRK the benefit of the doubt, one may postulate (pending the discovery of new evidence to the contrary) that the issue was not serious relative to what happened under the RVN. The author’s conversation with some former PRK officials revealed a strange reason as to why corruption was not a major issue for the PRK. Many people claimed that under the Pol Pot regime, people did not have any private property and there was no currency. They lived in a “prehistoric” society. When these people came to serve under the PRK, the country was still poor and the private economic activities were still restricted. To them, “it was almost impossible to practice corruption because there was nothing to take.”

² One may argue that the RVN was defeated by a conventional army (the PAVN). This argument does not contradict the finding because a hybrid army already included conventional threat. Failure to respond to a conventional threat is part of a larger failure to respond to the hybrid threat.

³ One should *not* confuse the term “territory” in both territory-centric strategy and the territorial forces. Territory-centric strategy refers to a strategy in which an actor seeks to defend all of the territories. Territorial forces, however, denote forces that are supposed to operate in a specific place instead of all over the country. Despite having the term “territory” in both terms, they are not necessarily connected.

⁴ It is clear that the NLF did practice terrorist tactics to coerce people to join their ranks. However, some scholars like David Hunt described how people, under some conditions, can move back and forth between the territories occupied by both sides. See Hunt, *Vietnam's Southern Revolution*, 136-152. As a result, desertion can and has occurred. Terror alone cannot keep people in the rank, at least not at low cost. By simply using terror, people can simply “vote with their feet” and leave a movement. This dissertation speculates that only combined with political ideology and indoctrination can coercion or a threat thereof be effective.

⁵ See Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 24-66, and the recent study by Vu, "Vietnamese Political Studies and Debates on Vietnamese Nationalism." One notable program was the "land to the tiller program" as the RVN tried to address the land issue (although this was the post-Tet program, which is outside the scope of this dissertation). Yet, local corruption significantly reduced the impact of such program. See Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 77-126, and Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 7-8. In some other issue like the ethnic relations, the CIDG program was an attempt by the US special forces to integrate the indigenous tribes into the ARVN. Yet, its transition into the ARVN was hampered by corruption and carelessness of the RVN's bureaucracy which prevented full cooperation and understanding between the general Vietnamese population and the indigenous tribes. See Kelly, *US Army Special Forces*, 42-44.

⁶ See Robert Brigham, *ARVN, Life and death in the South Vietnamese Army* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006). The book employed the memoirs of many ARVN soldiers in order to try to understand the underlying dynamics of the ARVN.

⁷ Hunt, *Vietnam's Southern Revolution*, 27-28.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

⁹ McLeod, "Indigenous Peoples," 368.

¹⁰ Pike, *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam*. Chapter 9 described the concept in detail.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹² Please refer to the discussions in this dissertation, Section 2.1.7 Variable 7 in chapter 2, page 79-82.

¹³ These two findings also confirm Lichbach's argument which stated that in addition to political ideology, the revolutionary movement also needs an organization to overcome collective actions problem. See Lichbach, "What Makes Rational Peasants Revolutionary," 386-388.

¹⁴ It is worth repeating from chapter 1 that this dissertation adopted a standard definition of revolutionary war as a violent struggle to seize power in order to effect radical social and political changes.

¹⁵ Mao, *Selected Works*, 135-151.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 151-153.

¹⁷ One can also argue that the PLAF's attacks prior to American escalation in 1965 were another episode where the guerrillas transform themselves into a conventional army. However, unlike Tet, the graduation prior to 1965 did not involve the majority of the insurgent's combat strength nor did it affect a large majority of the South Vietnamese provinces. In the conventional literature on the Vietnam War, this graduation before 1965 was known as "Viet Cong Main Force War." See, for example, Davidson, *Vietnam at War*, 333-368.

¹⁸ Willbanks, *The Tet Offensive*, 43-55.

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- ¹⁹ Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 262-270; and Summers, *On Strategy*, 74.
- ²⁰ Joseph Zasloff, *The Role of North Vietnam in the Southern Insurgency* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1964); and *The Role of Sanctuary in Insurgency: Communist China's Support to the Viet Minh, 1946-54* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1967) by the same author.
- ²¹ For the DRV's organizational involvement in the Vietnam War, see, for example, Duiker, *Sacred War*, 141-146.
- ²² For American efforts to advise the ARVN, see Cosmas, *MACV- Years of Escalation*.
- ²³ Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 164-172 and Summers, *On Strategy*, 17-18.
- ²⁴ Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars*, 44-46.
- ²⁵ Toft, "How the Weak Wins Wars," 96.
- ²⁶ This point will be elaborated in the summary section of this dissertation (7.2.5 Summary).
- ²⁷ Dale Andrade, "Westmoreland Was Right: Learning the Wrong Lessons from the Vietnam War," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 19, Issue: 2 (18 September 2008): 145-181.
- ²⁸ Trinquier, *Modern Warfare*, 16-25, and Summers, *On Strategy*, 46-57.
- ²⁹ The irony was that this organization was created almost totally by chance. The PRK did not design the KPRA that way because it knew that the organization was effective in a revolutionary war situation. Rather, there were two major reasons that explained the choice. First of all, the PRK lacked resources. Thus, manpower expansion was the only solution. Second, the PRK designed the KPRA that way simply because that was what all communist armies did. It just so happened that such an organization was effective in revolutionary war situation, at least in Cambodia.
- ³⁰ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រកម្ពុជា [Institute of Military History], ប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រកងកម្លាំងស៊ីមរាប [History of Siem Reap Provincial Military Command], 50.
- ³¹ Vietnam War scholars usually put the NLF's frustration with the stalemate as one of the main causes for the Tet Offensive. See for example, Hunt, *Vietnam's Southern Revolution*, 212, Duiker, *Sacred War*, 186-204, and Willbanks, *The Tet Offensive*, 9.
- ³² The PLAF Main Force War in 1964 and 1965 was perhaps the first time the revolutionaries had fought as a conventional army. However, at that time, the scope of the offensive was not as comprehensive as that of the Tet Offensive.
- ³³ Pribbenow, trans., *Victory in Vietnam*, 216.
- ³⁴ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, translated and edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 597.

³⁵ The only exception being the controversy regarding the return of the VVA which will be discussed in the third counterargument.

³⁶ Conboy, *The Cambodian Wars*, 297-298.

³⁷ Tran Ba Diem, ed., *Lịch sử Sư đoàn bộ binh 330, Quân khu 9 [History of the 330th infantry division, military region 9]* (Hanoi: Nhà xuất bản Quân Đội Nhân Dân, 2004 [Hanoi, Socialist Republic of Vietnam: People's Army Publishing House, 2004]), 237-238.

³⁸ Đảng ủy - Ban Chỉ huy Trung đoàn 3 [Party Committee – Committee for the 3rd Regiment], *Lịch sử Tiểu đoàn 7, Trung đoàn 3, Sư đoàn bộ binh 330, Quân khu 9 (1958-2008) – Đơn vị ba lần Anh hùng lực lượng vũ trang nhân dân [History of the 7th battalion, 3rd regiment, 330th infantry division, military region 9 (1958-2008) – Three times heroes of the People's Army]* (Hanoi: Nhà Xuất Bản Chính Trị Quốc Gia - Sự Thật, 2011 [Hanoi, Socialist Republic of Vietnam: National Political Publishing House – Truth Publishing House, 2011]), 156.

³⁹ វិទ្យាស្ថានប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រកម្ពុជា [Institute of Military History], *ប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រតំបន់* [History of Kampong Thom Provincial Military Command], 48.

⁴⁰ In some cases, brutality can suppress the rebellion for an extended period of time. However, as will be discussed below, if external support exists, then the grievance will be intensified in spite of brutality. This dissertation sees the outcome of revolutionary war as a confluence of many different factors. One isolated factor is unlikely to play any decisive role. But if other conditions also exist, then the outcome will be changed.

⁴¹ Tim Lister, "ISIS: The First Terror Group to Build an Islamic State?" *CNN World*, 12 June 2014. Accessed: 25 October 2014. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/06/12/world/meast/who-is-the-isis/>.

⁴² Ramadan, Ahmed; and Liz Sly, "Insurgents Seize Iraqi City of Mosul as Security Forces Flee." *The Washington Post*, 10 June 2014. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/insurgents-seize-iraqi-city-of-mosul-as-troops-flee/2014/06/10/21061e87-8fcd-4ed3-bc94-0e309af0a674_story.html.

⁴³ Sly, Liz, "Al-Qaeda Force Captures Fallujah Amid Rise in Violence in Iraq." *The Washington Post*, 3 January 2014. Accessed: 30 October 2014. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/al-qaeda-force-captures-fallujah-amid-rise-in-violence-in-iraq/2014/01/03/8abaeb2a-74aa-11e3-8def-a33011492df2_story.html.

⁴³ Ramadan and Sly, "Insurgents seize Iraqi city of Mosul."

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Lister, "ISIS: The First Terror Group."

⁴⁶ Raheem Salman, and Yara Bayoumy, with additional reporting by Ned Parker in Baghdad, Suleiman al-Khalidi in Amman, John Irish in Paris, Mahmoud Harby, David French and Ahmed Hagagy in Kuwait, "Oil, Extortion and Crime: Where ISIS Gets Its Money," NBC News, 11 September 2014. Accessed: 25 October 2014. <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/oil-extortion-crime-where-isis-gets-its-money-n200991>.

⁴⁷ Patrick Cockburn, "Battle to Establish Islamic State across Iraq and Syria," *The Independent*, 9 June 2014. Accessed: 22 October 2014. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/battle-to-establish-islamic-state-across-iraq-and-syria-9510044.html>.

⁴⁸ Salman et al., "Oil, Extortion, and Crime."

⁴⁹ Ralph Ellis, "ISIS Enters Kobani, City's Defenders See 'Last Chance to Leave,' Sources Say," *CNN*, 5 October 2014. Accessed: 25 October 2014. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/10/05/world/meast/isis-kobani/index.html>.

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Appendix A

CAMBODIA TIMELINE: CHRONOLOGY OF CONFLICT

- 1863-1953**: French Protectorate
- 1951**: The Indochina Communist Party (ICP) helped establish the communist movement in Cambodia, the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP).
- 1955**: General election in Cambodia. Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the hero of Cambodian independence, won the election in a landslide. The KPRP did not win any seats.
- 1959**: Failed coup attempt against Prince Sihanouk. Many right-wing politicians and military officers were implicated in the coup attempt. Prince Sihanouk suspected they received American support.
- 1962**: The second man in the KPRP defected to the Cambodian government and helped the government arrest many KPRP senior leaders. The KPRP party secretary disappeared and was presumed dead.
- 1963**: Surviving junior members of the KPRP created a new party and changed the name to Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) in an attempt to sever all ties with the Vietnamese communists.
- 1965**: Cambodia broke off diplomatic relations with the United States. The DRV enjoyed almost free access on the Cambodian side of the Cambodian-Vietnamese border.
- 1968**: Peasant revolt broke out in Samlot, Battambang province. The Cambodian communists (Khmer Rouge) claimed responsibility for the revolt. Prince Sihanouk began to suspect a communist conspiracy against his regime.
- June 1969**: Cambodia severed diplomatic relations with the DRV and reestablished diplomatic relations with the US. The Cambodian military conducted military operations against the PAVN along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border. The PAVN avoided the engagements.
- 18 March 1970**: Coup d'état against Prince Sihanouk. The Khmer Republic was proclaimed. Prince Sihanouk joined forces with the Khmer Rouge in order to fight to return to power.



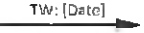
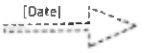





- 17 April 1975**: The Khmer Rouge captured the Cambodian capital city, Phnom Penh. A new, communist and totalitarian government, Democratic Kampuchea, was proclaimed. The Khmer Rouge turned against Prince Sihanouk and imprisoned the Prince in his own palace in Phnom Penh. The estimate of the number of people who perished under Democratic Kampuchea ranged from 700,000 to 3 million.
- 1977**: War broke out between Democratic Kampuchea and Vietnam.
- 7 January 1979**: The Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) supported a Cambodian resistance army and overthrew Democratic Kampuchea.
- 10 January 1979**: The Vietnamese-backed government, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) was proclaimed.
- 1980-1981**: Thailand spearheaded the establishment of a non-communist Cambodian resistance movement, the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF).
- 1981**: Prince Sihanouk established a royalist, non-communist resistance movement, the FUNCINPEC.
- 1982**: Under pressure from the sponsoring countries, the Khmer Rouge, the KPNLF, and the FUNCINPEC came together to establish a unified resistance movement, the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK). Prince Sihanouk became the President of the CGDK.
- 1984-85**: The Vietnamese forces in Cambodia launched the 14-Camp Campaign which pushed all CGDK camps deep into Thai territory. Vietnamese forces also clashed with Thai forces along the Cambodian-Thai border.
- 1985**: The Vietnamese forces and the PRK began implementing the K-5 Belt strategy.
- 1987**: Preliminary meeting between Hun Sen, Premier of the PRK, and Prince Sihanouk in France. Before the meeting, the Vietnam had withdrawn a large contingent of its forces from Cambodia.
- September 1989**: The last Vietnamese units left Cambodia. A few days after the departure of the Vietnamese troops, the CGDK launched the offensive on all fronts.

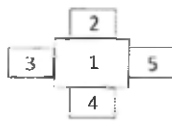
- Early 1990:** The CGDK offensive stalled on all fronts. The Khmer Rouge stalled after the victory in Pailin, Battambang province. The KPNLF lost the majority of its units in Banteay Meanchey province, and the FUNCINPEC could not advance in Siem Reap – Ouddar Meanchey province.
- March 1990:** Prince Sihanouk met bilaterally with Hun Sen of the PRK in Tokyo. The two leaders agreed on an eventual election to be sponsored by the United Nations.
- June 1990:** The KPNLF and the Khmer Rouge attacked Kampong Thom province in protest of their absence at the Tokyo meeting. The PRK successfully defended the province.
- 17 January 1991:** The PRK launched a general counter-offensive called “Operation X-91.” It was the largest offensive operation since the 14-Camps Campaign and was intended to recapture territories lost in 1989 and 1990.
- 23 October 1991:** All four factions to the Cambodian civil war met in Paris and agreed to a political deal which called for a cease-fire and a UN-sponsored election in Cambodia. Cambodia would be ruled in the transition period by an organization called the Supreme National Council of Cambodia (SNC). The PRK obtained two key concessions: half of the SNC members came from the PRK, and Premier Hun Sen co-chaired the SNC with Prince Sihanouk. The Khmer Rouge and the KPNLF had to fall in line.

Appendix B

MAP LEGEND

All dates are in 1989, unless otherwise noted.

| Symbols | Meaning |
|---|--|
|  | Axis of attack |
|  | Interdiction |
|  | Tactical withdrawal: The unit also withdrew due to enemy action but unlike a rout, the commander in this case could still maintain command and control of the unit. |
|  | Planned axis of advance but one that never materializes |
|  | Routed: The commander lost control. The unit was not necessarily destroyed, but it panicked and ran away. |
|  | Khmer Rouge area of influence: The shaded area denotes the area where the unit inside was active. If that area overlaps with a road, it means that the road was constantly ambushed. This is applicable only to the Khmer Rouge units. |
|  | Field headquarter |
|  | Mountain and jungle |
|  | Defensive positions |



This is a unit symbol.

Amplifier 1 is the type of unit (infantry, armor, mechanized infantry).

Amplifier 2 is the size of the unit (echelon).

Amplifier 3 is the immediate unit of higher echelon.

Amplifier 4 is the faction.

Amplifier 5 is the name or number of the current unit.

For amplifier 1, this thesis only uses three type of unit: infantry, armor, and

mechanized infantry. -Armor: , -Infantry: , and -Mechanized infantry: 

Amplifiers 2 is the “Echelon” which describes the separate levels of command.

| Echelon | Symbol |
|-----------|--------|
| Battalion | II |
| Regiment | III |
| Brigade | X |
| Division | X X |
| Corps | X X X |

For amplifier 4, the factions are as follows:

ANKI: Armée Nationales du Kampuchea Indépendant

KPNLAF: Khmer People’s National Liberation Armed Forces

KR: Khmer Rouge

KPRA: Kampuchean People’s Revolutionary Army.

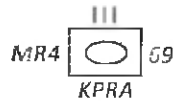
The following units belong to the KPRA: SVPMC: Svay Rieng PMC,

SRPMC: Siem Reap PMC, KTPMC: Kampong Thom PMC, KCPMC: Kampong

Cham PMC.

For amplifier 5, the abbreviation “TF” denotes an ad hoc task force. That task force has no name and was normally activated for a very short period of time.

Here are some examples of the symbols in use:



This is the 69th Armored Regiment which was under the command of Military Region 4 (MR4). The unit belongs to the KPRC.



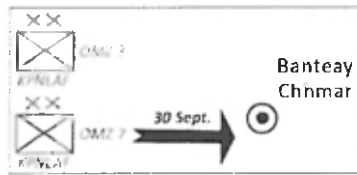
This is Front 250 (primarily infantry) belonging to the Khmer Rouge. Based on the way they fought, the gray area denotes the area of influence that the unit exerted.



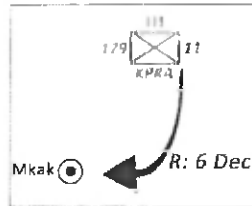
This is OMZ7 which belongs to the KPNLAF. It is a division-size unit. But because the KPNLAF called its division OMZ, the original term "OMZ" was preserved in the symbol.



This is the headquarters of Military Region 4 (MR4) of the KPRC.



OMZ3 and OMZ7 of the KPNLAF attacked on 30 September (1989) into Banteay Chhmar.

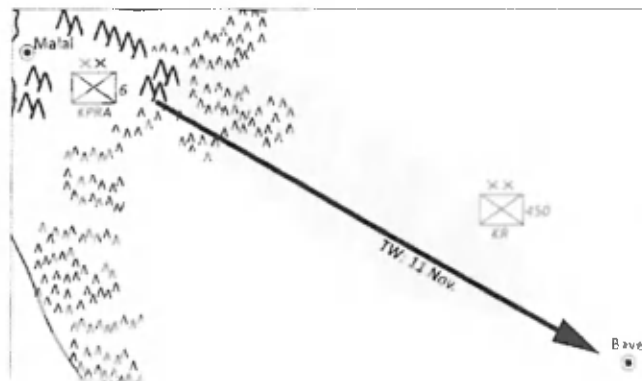


The 11th Infantry Regiment of the 179th Division belonging to the KPRR routed to M'kak on 6 December (1989). This means that the commander lost control of the unit and the soldiers ran in a disorderly manner to M'kak.



-The KPNLAF's OMZ5 attacked into Phnom Srok district in September (1989). On 23 October to Siem Reap, it attempted to conduct Tactical Withdrawal (TW). Contrary to a rout, the unit still maintained its integrity during the TW.

-In October 1989, the ANKI's 11th Brigade attacked into Phnom Srok.



-The 6th (Infantry) Division of the KPR was stationed in Malai which was surrounded by mountains and jungle. On 11 November (1989), it conducted a Tactical Withdrawal (TW) to Bavel district. The unit still maintained its cohesion during the TW.

-The KPR's 6th Division withdrew across the gray area which denotes the "area of influence" of the Khmer Rouge's 450th Division. This means that the KPR's 6th Division had to move through potential ambush sites along the way.



This is a snapshot of Sisophon, the provincial capital of Banteay Meanchey. National Road 5 (NR5), NR6, and Route 69 all converged at Sisophon. The town was home to the field headquarters of MR4 (codenamed "44") and of the KPR's general staff (codenamed "88"). "44" controlled a division-size force while "88" controlled a corps-size force. These two were called "Field Headquarters" because they were located outside of their normal headquarters (in Siem Reap and in Phnom Penh, respectively).