



A U.S. Marine Corps intelligence scout escorts a North Vietnamese Army (NVA) soldier to the unit command post for interrogation. The NVA soldier surrendered to the Marines during operations close to An Hoa Combat Base in 1969. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Marine Corps)

It's an Image Problem

How Vietnamization Affected the PSYOP Mission

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As the American people reeled from the surprising 1968 Tet Offensive launched by the communists in Vietnam, they took to the ballots in the contentious 1968 U.S. presidential election. During

this tumultuous time, Richard Nixon won the presidency. With the transition from President Lyndon Johnson to Nixon, the concept and plans for the American war in Vietnam changed as well. Due to the consequences of the

Tet Offensive in 1968, then President Johnson moved Gen. William Westmoreland from commander of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) to Army chief of staff. After Westmoreland moved from MACV command, his deputy, Gen. Creighton Abrams, took over command of the American war effort in South Vietnam. These changes marked a decided turn toward

Not only did the process of Vietnamization negatively impact the conventional units in the field, it also negatively impacted the psychological operations (PSYOP) mission. The PSYOP mission sought to influence the enemy not to fight and to convince the population through propaganda to not support the enemy but instead work with U.S. and GVN forces.² PSYOP is one of the most

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withdrawal from Vietnam and increased pressure on the government of the Republic of Vietnam (GVN) to take over military operations.

Nixon gained his presidency running on a campaign of “peace with honor” in Vietnam to achieve the desired end goals. Nixon pushed for changes in the conduct of the war. One of the major changes to facilitate the conduct of the war was that the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) forces took on more of the combat operations. This was commonly known as *Vietnamization*. Vietnamization was a process that took place to preserve American credibility while disengaging from direct combat, shifting the workload to the ARVN forces.¹ The plan for Vietnamization was that as American forces pulled out of South Vietnam, the ARVN would gain more training from American advisors and more material support in equipment.

There was no plan, however, on how to help sustain the ARVN after the United States fully left South Vietnam. The ARVN had become disastrously reliant on American firepower and maneuverability, things that the ARVN could not maintain on its own in the face of a coordinated enemy. Nixon accelerated the process of Vietnamization, and Abrams received the job of managing the transition and withdrawal. Abrams was faced with both trying to preserve any gains achieved through the first half of the American war in Vietnam and decreasing his conventional combat forces in the field. This affected all levels of warfare, from the strategic planning of major operations to tactical-level firefights. The changing U.S. mission in Vietnam meant changing the major concepts of how to fight.

important tools in the repertoire of a counterinsurgency fighter and for the conventional warfighter. It influences an enemy to quit without the need for continued force by pacifying the enemy and degrading its will to fight. As often happens, the racism among the American military commanders devalued the lives of the Vietnamese—both combatants and civilians.³

U.S. PSYOP and conventional military commanders failed to understand the moral implications of the fight. PSYOP was used to influence the civilian population to support the side of the PSYOP operator; in this case, that meant supporting the U.S. mission in South Vietnam and the GVN in its fight against communism. PSYOP was employed at all levels of command, from tactical- and operational-level support of quick-reaction messages from enemy forces who had surrendered, to the strategic-level general messages of support for the GVN.

PSYOP effectiveness is extremely hard to measure because there are multiple indicators of effectiveness that can mean different things. One of the major field manuals for PSYOP, Field Manual 33-5, *Psychological Operations: Techniques and Procedures*, states that measurement of effectiveness is difficult and can easily misapply metrics.⁴ This makes the job of understanding the true effectiveness of PSYOP difficult.⁵ This article explores a way to examine the effectiveness; however, it must be understood that the true effectiveness of PSYOP on the civilian population is extremely difficult to quantify. Its effectiveness must be assessed in other ways.

This article examines the effects of Vietnamization on the PSYOP mission from 1969 until the departure of 7th PSYOP Battalion of the 4th PSYOP Group, the

last operational Army PSYOP battalion in Vietnam, in 1971.⁶ An examination of the effects of Vietnamization on PSYOP, Vietnamization itself, and a declared withdrawal made the PSYOP mission exceedingly difficult. As combat commanders drew down their resources, they gave even less to PSYOP units and operators. While examining the decline in PSYOP, there was no

Daddis's arguments in the exploration of PSYOP and its degradation in effectiveness as Vietnamization took away more resources and its produced few results.

This work also comes into conversation with Lewis Sorley and his book *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam*. In *A Better War*, Sorley argues that Abrams

“The reality on the ground was that the MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] and ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] forces were not effective in pacification. In the end, PSYOP was never able to produce the results that combat commanders wished.”

“better war” and that the “one war” strategy of Abrams was flawed and inoperable.⁷ Proponents of the “better war” philosophy argue that Abrams’s “one war” strategy was revolutionary and refocused the U.S. mission in South Vietnam—and that the war only failed due to lack of political resolution at home. However, Abrams never fully enacted a more comprehensive plan, and the reality on the ground was that the MACV and ARVN forces were not effective in pacification. In the end, PSYOP was never able to produce the results that combat commanders wished, and the “better war” was never a reality on the ground. Though there are some marked times where the Army integrated PSYOP into the last full-scale operations in 1969–1970, the PSYOP mission and objectives suffered greatly overall.

In broadly exploring the effects of Vietnamization, this article has a foundation in the work of Andrew Krepinevich in *The Army and Vietnam*.⁸ In this work, Krepinevich explores the folly of the U.S. war in Vietnam, pointing to poor policy decisions and mirror imaging problems. Krepinevich discusses the impact of Vietnamization and the problem of some combat commanders not fully developing or understanding the change in fighting functions. Gregory Daddis’s *Withdrawal: Reassessing America's Final Years in Vietnam* examines the “better war” myth centered on Abrams’s change in strategy.⁹ Daddis explains that by 1968, the war was at a stalemate, and with the declared withdrawal and drawdown, Abrams could not change the tide of the war and that there was no “better war.” This article supports

fought a better war and that the war was lost due to political insatiability in America.¹⁰ This argument is false, as the examination of PSYOP under Abrams shows a rapid decline in its effectiveness and mission. The newest work on pacification in Vietnam, *Clear, Hold, and Destroy: Pacification in Phú Yên and the American War in Vietnam* by Robert Thompson III, explores attempts by U.S., Korean, and ARVN forces to pacify the countryside in a small province.¹¹ Thompson’s extensive microstudy of the province provides a fantastic example of the effects of Vietnamization on the war effort that this work uses to understand pacification more broadly and how PSYOP in particular fit into the concept of pacification.

In discussing PSYOP, I address Michael Barger’s Army Command and General Staff College thesis “Psychological Operations Supporting Counterinsurgency: 4th PSYOP Group in Vietnam.” In this thesis, Barger argues that PSYOP units suffered from a lack of understanding from combat arms commanders and doctrinal failures, which were exasperated toward the end of the war.¹² This article differs from Barger’s work in exploring the particular impact that Vietnamization has on the PSYOP mission and arguing that the measurement of PSYOP is complicated and was further complicated by the effects of Vietnamization. Another major work on PSYOP is *The Psychological War for Vietnam, 1960–1969* by Mervyn Roberts III.¹³ In his work, Roberts provides an exhaustive study of PSYOP leading up to the Tet Offensive. Roberts’s extensive research provides a springboard for this article to



A group of South Vietnamese Regional Forces attend a training session on 31 December 1965 before returning to help defend their villages. Regional militia from the country's forty-four provinces received thirteen weeks of training to lead the defense of their villages against the Viet Cong insurgents and North Vietnamese soldiers. This supported the Nixon administration's strategy of "Vietnamization" of the war, allowing American military to withdraw. (Photo courtesy of National Archives)

examine post-Tet usage and effectiveness of PSYOP as Vietnamization took hold of MACV command policies.

Vietnamization: An Outline

To understand the impact of Vietnamization on the PSYOP mission and units, one must understand the reasons for it and the course of action taken to achieve it. The 1968 presidential election, one of the most divisive elections in American history, came at the tail end of the deadly Tet Offensive launched by the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) and the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF). It seemed that the war and American prestige hung in the balance. Incumbent President Lyndon Johnson announced, following the launch of the Tet Offensive, that he would not seek reelection. What followed was a major split in the Democratic Party, a national protest of the war, and the election of Richard Nixon as president. Nixon ran on a "Peace with Honor" platform, vowing to disengage the United States from the war in Vietnam. Thus, Nixon pressured MACV

Commander Gen. Creighton Abrams to fight the war with fewer and fewer forces while attempting to prop up the poorly prepared ARVN.

The limitation of U.S. combat forces was front and center for Nixon's policy goals. As early as 26 September 1969, about nine months into his first term, Nixon lowered the troop level from 594,500 to 484,000.¹⁴ This decrease of 65,000 personnel at the beginning of the Vietnamization campaign does not show how much of a strain was put on combat commanders attempting to fight the war with already understrength units. This first dip produced an urgency in half-baked attempts to achieve some sort of upper hand before handing operations over to the ARVN. Operations like the widely publicized Operation Apache Snow, one of the largest operations during the Vietnamization period, showcased how U.S. military commanders worked against an internal clock to gain as much ground before leaving the ARVN on their own.¹⁵ Decreases in manpower continued in incremental chunks, and by 1 May

1971 the troop levels dropped to 284,000—or by about 66 percent of the original manpower at the beginning of the troop reductions.¹⁶ Line infantry units were already severely understrength before the start of the withdrawal in 1969, and as the drawdown continued, U.S. forces began to stay closer and closer to main bases and attempted to push the ARVN to patrol the coun-

PSYOP Group were poorly structured and individualistic. It must be understood that the discussions of the complications included in the PSYOP command and MACV headquarters are limited in argument due to the nature of this project.¹⁸ The State Department had created its own wing of PSYOP with the Joint United States Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO) created in 1965.

“The complications within the bureaucracy and convolution of the PSYOP messages plagued PSYOP operators from the very beginning of the war.”

tryside. This reduction in combat operations directly affected the PSYOP mission's effectiveness.

One of the best examples of the impact that the drawdown and move toward Vietnamization had on the war effort comes from Thompson's *Clear, Hold, and Destroy*. The last four chapters illustrate the gradual decrease in control by the GVN in its rural hamlets. As the American forces began to diminish their presence in Phú Yên, the PLAF/PAVN forces were able to exert more control over the countryside. While the Hamlet Evaluation System slowly caught up with the gains made by PLAF/PAVN forces, ARVN forces drew inward and stopped patrolling the countryside at night altogether.¹⁷ With the reduction of U.S. troops and the turning over of command to the ARVN, the “hearts-and-minds” of the countryside were lost. The dynamics in this one province happened all over South Vietnam. American conventional forces had to pull back as troop reductions continued and Vietnamization sped up. There was no “better war” on the ground in Phú Yên or in any other major province in South Vietnam. Not only did Vietnamization have an overall effect on U.S. capabilities to fight conventionally, but it also hampered the effects and operations of PSYOP units in South Vietnam.

Making a Hard Job Harder: PSYOP and Vietnamization

The PSYOP mission and its practitioners had always suffered to some degree in ambiguity and lack of cohesive understanding. The Army did not have a unified PSYOP group in Vietnam until 1967, and many of the PSYOP units prior to the creation of the 4th

The JUSPAO was an outgrowth of the United States Information Agency (USIA), a State Department branch that “sold” America to the world—and at times became directly involved itself in Vietnam. The JUSPAO not only helped control the strategic-level PSYOP missions, but it was also in charge of briefing the media pool for the MACV mission.¹⁹

The Army had, in the MACV, the 4th PSYOP group. The 4th PSYOP group was beholden to both JUSPAO and MACV military staff. It was created very late in the war in 1967, four years after direct U.S. military intervention.²⁰ Prior to this there was no combined command for PSYOP companies, and each operated in its own style, complicating the mission early in the war. The 4th PSYOP Group was to report to the MACV J-3 (operations officer) and to the JUSPAO. This broke down further as each PSYOP battalion was connected to a corps-level command and had to report to both the 4th PSYOP Group and its corps commander.²¹ At each corps or division command, there was a different standard operating procedure for where the PSYOP teams were to report. Some reported to the S-5 (Public Affairs), S-2 (Intelligence), or S-3 (Operations), all depending on the commander of that conventional unit. At the corps level, PSYOP reported in I Corps to the G-3, II Corps and IV Corps reported to the deputy director of the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support, and III Corps reported to the G-3.²²

The complications within the bureaucracy and convolution of the PSYOP messages plagued PSYOP operators from the very beginning of the war. As the war moved on, the U.S. Army PSYOP was overloaded

with attempts to complete missions for its corps/division commanders with curated messages for its geographic area while also supporting the major strategic messages directed by the JUSPAO and MACV headquarters. Forty percent of the PSYOP officers in 1969 indicated that there was a duplication of efforts due to a lack of coordination and centralized control.²³ PSYOP suffered under a heavy weight prior to the drawdown of manpower and equipment during Vietnamization, and Vietnamization just made their hard job even harder.

In 1969, the Army released a study that included interviews and compiled data from the PSYOP units working throughout South Vietnam. The study revealed many shocking problems, even as Nixon ordered the drawdown, and PSYOP suffered. This study showed that the 4th PSYOP Group was already undermanned by thirty-one soldiers and ninety-seven civilian staffers in March 1969.²⁴ There was a lack of language-skilled PSYOP officers, and 70 percent of respondents indicated that PSYOP school-trained officers were inadequately prepared for their jobs once in country. The study also discussed that many commanders saw the need to have better training for their enlisted PSYOP operators, and twenty-four out of the fifty PSYOP commanders interviewed noted that they had inadequate equipment to complete the missions.²⁵

Along with training and equipment issues, PSYOP operators had to battle the prevailing obsession of conventional units' commanders with obtaining a high body count, something that was supposed to have been diminished in importance under Abrams. Most telling in discussing this issue comes from a 1969 Army Concept Team in Vietnam study that discusses the care combat arms commanders had for PSYOP missions:

The majority of PSYOP field personnel indicated that some tactical commanders were more interested in high body counts during combat operations than in integrating PSYOP as part of the tactical operation ... The body count and kill attitude was manifested in the remark of a unit commander who boasted that his Chieu Hoi program consisted of two 105mm howitzers—one of which was marked Chieu and the other Hoi.²⁶

This illustration of contempt for the PSYOP mission helps to explain one facet of the problems faced by

PSYOP operators. Combat commanders at the operational and tactical level failed to understand or fully incorporate their PSYOP assets into their mission planning. This had a direct impact on PSYOP effectiveness—as commanders had less manpower and time to fight the war, they cared less about their PSYOP assets and more about trying to maintain security.

As the ramp up to Vietnamization gathered speed, the PSYOP mission faced a diverse set of issues. From the Chieu Hoi program (or “open arms,” a program aimed at getting PLAF/PAVN combatants to lay down their arms and rally to the GVN) to tactical use of PSYOP such as targeted leaflet drops on enemy units who had just met U.S. or ARVN forces, there were issues before the full effects of Vietnamization were felt.²⁷

Despite the challenges discussed above, 1969 was a peak of Chieu Hoi rallier numbers. Most of the ralliers who came from the PLAF were exhausted from the Tet Offensive, poorly paid, and poorly trained. Ralliers, in this sense, are PAVN or PLAF combatants that defected to the side of the Government of South Vietnam. After 1969, however, the number of ralliers to the GVN through the Chieu Hoi program declined sharply. According to a RAND report, the total number of ralliers fell from 47,023 in 1969 to 32,703 in 1970—a decrease of almost 30 percent.²⁸ What caused this decline in rallier numbers? Some reports indicated that the Cambodian incursion and other major offensives in the western provinces in South Vietnam along with the introduction of more hardened PAVN forces explain the lower numbers.²⁹ While this can be given some credence, overall, the “one war” concepts of Abrams failed to convince operational- and tactical-level commanders of the viability of PSYOP in their pacification efforts. Commanders of conventional units did not include PSYOP operators in their mission planning. In many operations orders and after action reports, there is a dearth of comments about the PSYOP mission,

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indicating that the PSYOP teams were not part of the planning process or taken into much consideration by the combat arms commanders and their staff.

When interviewed, most Chieu Hoi ralliers noted that a major cause for their defection was not a major change in trust for the GVN; they rallied for food and to see their families again. Not only that, but there

war and ralliers during the Cambodian incursion, many did not indicate a drop in morale or in belief in their eventual victory over the GVN. A study conducted pre- and post-incursion into Cambodia show a significant amount of determination among the PLAF/PAVN forces. For example, before the Cambodian incursion, 54 percent of prisoners in this study indicated that the

“ PAVN [People's Army of Vietnam] and PLAF [People's Liberation Armed Forces] forces saw themselves as continuing a decolonization struggle that they had fought for many years. ”

was a significant decrease in budget for the Chieu Hoi program between 1969 and 1970. In 1969, the budget for Chieu Hoi was at \$28.5 million (\$222.3 million in 2022), and in 1970, it decreased to \$12.9 million (\$95.6 million in 2022), an overall 45.3 percent decrease in budget.³⁰ This budgetary decrease shows not only the goal of withdrawal from South Vietnam on the part of the Americans, but it also indicates that PSYOP and the Chieu Hoi program—already low on the priority list for MACV—fell to the wayside of concern.

While there was a sharp decrease in funding for Chieu Hoi in 1970, by September only nineteen of the twenty-six positions for advising on Chieu Hoi were filled by direct hires from America, and in November of that year advisors were no longer recruited to fill positions within the program.³¹ PSYOP may have offered support to the pacification mission of the “one war” strategy, but the imposed draw down on manpower restricted it. As stated earlier, PSYOP is an important tool for the counterinsurgent warfighter if properly used. Along with this, the antiwar effort in America was widely publicized and counter propaganda from communist cadre emphasized the splintering of the American public's opinion.

As indicated above in the 1969 ACTIV study, combat arms commanders were still more interested in body counts than in using their PSYOP assets in an effective way. Early on in Abrams's command of MACV, operational and tactical commanders did not buy into his pacification stance and continued to do similar operations as those conducted under Westmoreland.³² Conversely, in interviews of PAVN/PLAF prisoners of

GVN/United States was weaker than the National Liberation Front (NLF, or PLAF), but after the incursion, 72 percent saw the GVN/United States as weaker—an 18 percent increase. When asked if the NLF can win the war even if the United States maintains its support of the GVN, 82 percent believed the NLF would win before the incursion and after the incursion, 94 percent believed that the NLF was winning the war.³³

The indication of the prisoners to still decide that the NLF was still going win to despite the Cambodian incursion had a lasting impact on the arguments of the “better war” proponents. These interviews indicate that the despite all the rhetoric of the war being fought more prudently, there were no lasting effects on the ground. Despite that some have argued that the expansion of the war into Cambodia bought time for pacification to take a better hold, these interviews of PLAF and PAVN prisoners of war indicate that the only thing that the Cambodia incursion accomplished was to fortify the resolve of the PLAF and PAVN forces. This shows that the major military operations conducted by the ARVN did not convince the PAVN and PLAF forces of their eminent demise.³⁴ PAVN and PLAF forces saw themselves as continuing a decolonization struggle that they had fought for many years. Their resolve was the byproduct of the fight against decolonization passed down to them ancestors that fought the French colonial government, along with the indoctrination and propaganda given to them by their cadres.

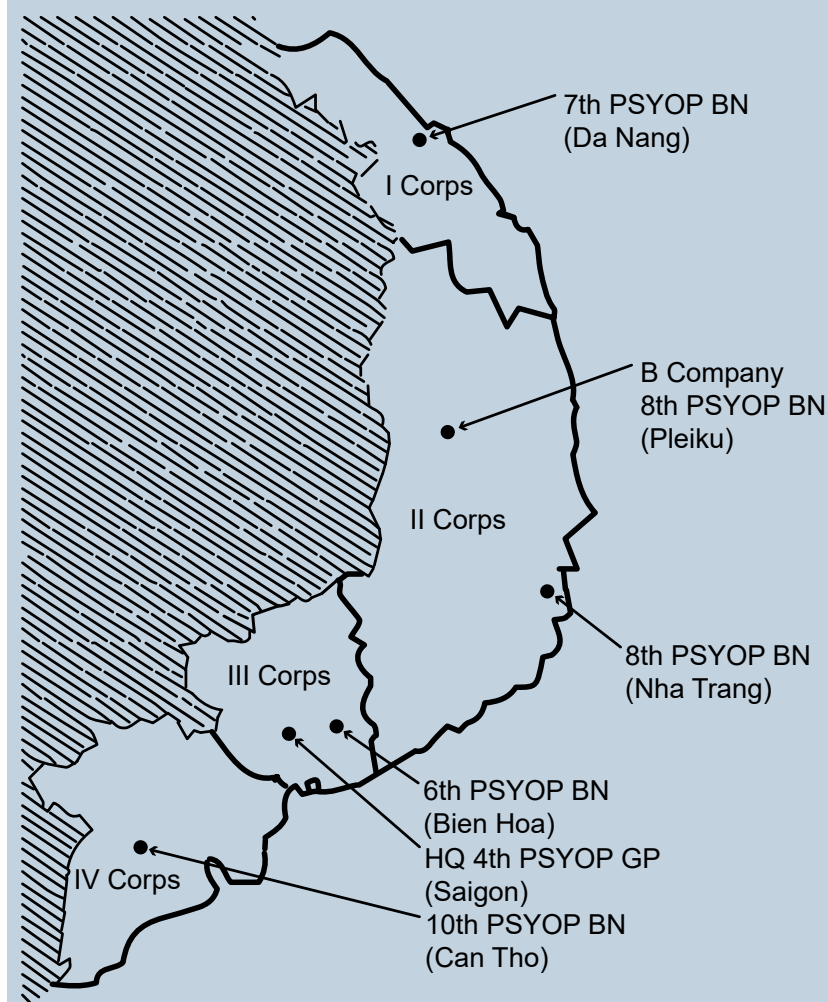
A study conducted in 1970/1971 attempted to find a way to measure the effectiveness of the PSYOP mission toward the end of the war. In doing so, researchers

conducting this study—"The Final Technical Report: Psychological Operations Studies-Vietnam"—interviewed one hundred PAVN force ralliers, one hundred PLAF ralliers, one hundred PLAF prisoners of war, and one hundred PAVN prisoners of war.³⁵ Of the ralliers, those who willingly came to the GVN, most indicated that their cadres had cracked down on reading U.S. PSYOP leaflets and material. However, despite the crackdown by their superiors, 86 percent of the PLAF ralliers indicated that they still saw and read the PSYOP leaflets calling for their defection.³⁶ These ralliers indicated that they already had major issues regarding their service and treatment. One must take into consideration that by 1970–1971, when this study was conducted, rallier rates dropped significantly. Thus, those surveyed are smaller in number and cannot fully account for the major attitudes of all PLAF and PAVN forces. The drop in the rates shown are due to the hardened resolve of the PLAF and PAVN forces as Nixon negotiated his peace with honor in Paris.

The drastic position held by MACV and the PSYOP mission by 1971 became almost untenable. With a clear draw down of troops and an announced withdraw on the horizon, the PSYOP mission had to attempt to find a way to influence PAVN/PLAF troops and South Vietnamese civilians of GVN success. The frustrations with this concept can be seen in a letter from Abrams to Adm. John McCain Jr.:

It appears that achievement of any deception indicating a notional change in U.S./GVN policy in regard to NVN would require stronger action than the skillful insertion of dramatic information suggesting a turnabout in U.S. policy. Our present policy of Vietnamization and phased withdrawal from RVN has received

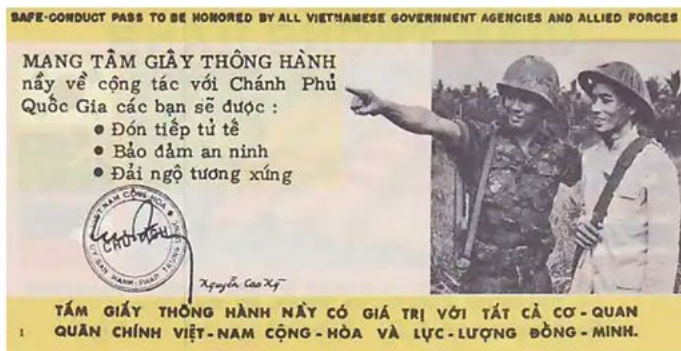
MAP OF PSYOP UNIT LOCATIONS



The location of principal U.S. psychological operations (PSYOP) units established in South Vietnam at various times from 1960 to 1971. (Map from "4th Psychological Operations Group, Republic of Vietnam" [Saigon, VN: 4th PSYOP Group, 1967], 3)

extensive international publicity. To bring about any marked reversal of NVA opinion, it would seem necessary to demonstrate such a policy change by dramatic combat actions.³⁷

This letter indicates a lack of faith by Abrams, and the uphill battle he and other leaders faced while attempting to bring some semblance of victory and buy time for ARVN forces. In 1971, the number of ralliers declined sharply from the 32,703 in 1970 to 20,557 in



A joint Vietnamese-American psychological operations loudspeaker team prepares to take off for leaflet drop and loudspeaker mission (circa 1970). Also shown, examples of leaflets encouraging North Vietnamese and Viet Cong defections. (Photos courtesy of Sgt. Maj. [Ret.] Herbert A. Friedman via Psywarrior)

1971—a 37 percent decrease in two years.³⁸ It is important to note that these figures are more than likely higher than actual ralliers numbers, as the same issues with double counting bodies for body counts were prevalent. Along with the ability of a rallier to leave the GVN to fight with the PLAF/PAVN again, many rallied more than once on order to receive medical attention or rest before returning to the PLAF/PAVN unit.

Much of the decrease in Chieu Hoi ralliers can be attributed to the obvious corruption of the GVN as Vietnamization took place; political instability during the elections did not foster a positive environment for PSYOP's effectivity against PLAF and PAVN forces. This can be seen that in the month prior to the elections; there were only a recorded 754 Chieu Hoi ralliers.³⁹ This combined with the knowledge that U.S. forces were limited in the South provided PLAF and PAVN soldiers with the resolve to hold out against the GVN.

After 1971, it became more difficult to determine the effort or effectiveness of PSYOP activities. On 21 December 1971 the last PSYOP battalion in Vietnam, the 7th PSYOP Battalion in I Corps, was redeployed to Fort Bragg, North Carolina.⁴⁰ This shutting down of the last operational level PSYOP unit struck a death cord for the PSYOP mission in South Vietnam. Instead of targeted PSYOP missions on local areas and combat operations by the ARVN supported by the overworked PSYOP units, only general/national messages were dropped into the jungles. Instead of multiple types of missions, including things like leaflet drops for specific areas and speaker calls for defection, all that remained to be conducted was high-altitude general leaflets drops, the effectiveness of which are questionable.⁴¹ As indicated by the 1971 study, *The Final Technical Report: Psychological Operations Studies-Vietnam*, PSYOP messages that are employed with a lack of rapid conventional operations

showed no indication of effectiveness in rallying PLAF or PAVN forces to the GVN.⁴²

The demand on the few U.S. troops left in South Vietnam made it so that security of bases became the only goal of MACV; by 1971, overall troop levels by 31 December were at 157,000 and dropped by 69 percent to 48,000 on 30 June 1972.⁴³ The decrease in troop

“better war.” PSYOP efforts suffered greatly from misuse and misunderstanding prior to the shift of focus to Vietnamization, but as MACV command searched for military answers toward the end of the mission, they gave PSYOP a smaller and smaller presence at the planning table. Studies indicated that there were fewer combat operations happening, and the PSYOP mission

“ Simple saturation of an area with leaflets about defecting did not have much of a draw on hardened PAVN forces without direct combat engagement by U.S. forces. ”

levels indicates that the PSYOP mission fell off the minimal priority chart that it was on. With the shutting down of the 7th PSYOP Battalion in December 1971, little progress was achieved through the mission. All the overall figures on ralliers mentioned in the above section can be broken down further in their regions. Most of the defectors from 1971 came from IV Corps, second most from III Corps, third most from II Corps, and the least amount of ralliers over that four-year period came from I Corps.⁴⁴ This indicates that geography and proximity to Saigon also played a part in rallier rates. However, ARVN units failed to gain control of any more territory throughout the south, and eventually started to slide back as the Americans negotiated their way out of the quagmire without looking to help their ally in South Vietnam.

Conclusion and Analysis

By 1973, all U.S. combat troops had left South Vietnam, leaving the ARVN and GVN to fend for themselves against a countryside almost completely controlled by PAVN/PLAF forces. Under an onslaught of direct military action from North Vietnam, the government of South Vietnam fell in 1975. The pyrrhic gains of the immediate post-Tet Offensive meant nothing when not backed up by American support. The “one war” strategy of Abrams was not a major change from the strategy of his predecessor, and it failed to gain any true foothold in the countryside as the pace of Vietnamization far outstripped the ability of pacification efforts taking place.

Considering the negative effect that Vietnamization had on PSYOP, it is hard to buy into the idea of the

had less effect. Simple saturation of an area with leaflets about defecting did not have much of a draw on hardened PAVN forces without direct combat engagement by U.S. forces. Not only did the U.S. PSYOP mission fail in supporting the GVN at the end, but the North Vietnamese also had their own propaganda machines working overtime to counter any U.S./GVN PSYOP missions. Mervyn Roberts gives a great explanation of the North Vietnamese PSYOP capabilities and action in *The Psychological War for Vietnam*, and the North Vietnamese continued their efforts throughout the Vietnamization period.⁴⁵

The effectiveness of PSYOP throughout the war in Vietnam has been continually in question. Indicators of effectiveness are as simple as the rallier numbers shown above and as complicated as determining the allegiance of a village after a PSYOP mission, or if a rallier would truly stay within the GVN. In 1969, in the immediate post-1968 Tet Offensive, rallier numbers skyrocketed. It can be argued that these numbers increased due to the heavy toll direct combat operations took on PLAF/PAVN. This can also be seen in other situations like Operation Round Up in the fall of 1970, which produced 1,400 ralliers when PSYOP was used in direct conjunction with conventional sweeps of villages in the Mekong Delta region.⁴⁶ However, U.S. forces conducted less combat operations as the effects of Vietnamization on manpower decimated the warfighting capabilities of conventional units. With this, as described above, PSYOP missions were conducted in a vacuum without support and with less manpower as well.

As ralliers decreased substantially toward the final deactivation of the 7th PSYOP Battalion, combat arms commanders focused on trying to “pacify” as much territory as possible. As shown above, the PSYOP mission suffered from the widely publicized Vietnamization and drawdown of troops, a lack of

funding, and a lack of understanding from combat commanders. No amount of bombing runs on the North or incursions into Cambodia could dissipate the ever-growing feeling in the PAVN and PLAF forces of victory. The PSYOP mission fell to the wayside as Nixon searched for peace with honor. ■

Notes

1. Robert Thompson III, *Clear, Hold, and Destroy: Pacification in Phú Yên and the American War in Vietnam* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2021), 135.
2. PSYOPS Standard Operating Procedures; Annex F to Advisory Team 52 SOP; File 3590110001, n.d., box 01, folder 10; Gary Gillette Collection, Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University.
3. Heather Stur, *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 17–64.
4. FM 33-5 Psychological Operations Techniques and Procedures; File 1370520001, 20 October 1966, box 05, folder 20; United States Armed Forces Manuals Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed 2 December 2022, <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=1370520001>.
5. Volume 1 Final Technical Report Psychological Operations Studies -- Vietnam; File 2171501001, 25 May 1971, box 15, folder 01; Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 03 - Insurgency Warfare, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
6. Michael Barger, “Psychological Operations Supporting Counterinsurgency: 4th PSYOP Group in Vietnam” (master’s thesis, Army Command and General Staff College, 2007), 79–80.
7. See Gregory Daddis, *Withdrawal: Reassessing America’s Final Years in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). The concept of the “better war” is that after Gen. Creighton Abrams takes command of Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, the war is fought more efficiently. The “one war” strategy created by Abrams sought to combine the combat war with pacification, attempting to make them work together.
8. Andrew Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1998), 131–215.
9. Daddis, *Withdrawal*, 1–17.
10. Lewis Sorely, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America’s Last Years in Vietnam* (New York: Harcourt, 1999), xi–xv.
11. Thompson, *Clear, Hold, And Destroy*, 1–9.
12. Barger, “Psychological Operations Supporting Counterinsurgency,” 1–10.
13. Mervyn Edwin Roberts III, *The Psychological War for Vietnam, 1960–1968* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018), 1–12.
14. Special Report, No. 69-95, U.S. Information Service - A Statement by President Richard M. Nixon on U.S. Troop Reduction Moves in South Vietnam; File 2121406019, 16 September 1969, box 14, folder 06; Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 01 - Assessment and Strategy, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
15. Kyle Rable, “One to the Head, Two to the Heart’: Failure of Psychological Warfare Doctrine and Understanding in The Vietnam War” (master’s thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2021), 57–76, accessed 28 September 2022, https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_etd/send_file/send?accession=bgsu1616336908093754&disposition=inline.
16. Second Review of Phasedown of United States Military Activities in Vietnam; File 2131707008, 9 August 1971, box 17, folder 07; Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 02 - Military Operations, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
17. Thompson, *Clear, Hold, and Destroy*, 135–247.
18. Rable, “One to the Head, Two to the Heart,” 12–18.
19. Ibid.
20. Military Psychological Operations; File 2171303001, 7 January 1960, box 13, folder 03; Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 03 - Insurgency Warfare, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
21. Army Concept Team in Vietnam (ACTIV), *Employment of U.S. Psychological Operations Units in Vietnam* (San Francisco: ACTIV, 7 June 1969), II-9, accessed 29 September 2022, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD0855595.pdf>.
22. Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) was yet another institution created to help with pacification efforts. For more on CORDS, see Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, or Roberts, *The Psychological War for Vietnam*; ACTIV, *Employment of U.S. Psychological Operations Units in Vietnam*, II-4.
23. ACTIV, *Employment of U.S. Psychological Operations Units in Vietnam*, II-5.
24. Ibid., II-10.
25. Ibid., II-13–II-15.
26. Ibid., II-16.
27. The Chieu Hoi program was a major South Vietnam-wide project created to produce ralliers to the Government of the Vietnam Republic. There were many different types of PSYOP missions, some following combat operations, or targeted specific hamlets and villages.
28. Report R-1172-ARPA, Rand Corporation for Advanced Research Projects Agency - The Chieu Hoi Program in South Vietnam, 1963-1971 (U); File 20580523001, n.d., box 05, folder 23; Fred Walker Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
29. Ibid.
30. The Chieu Hoi Program in South Vietnam, 1963-1971; File 2171412002, January 1973, box 14, folder 12; Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 03 - Insurgency Warfare, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
31. Ibid.
32. See Daddis, *Withdrawal*.
33. Volume 1 Final Technical Report Psychological Operations Studies, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 03.

34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Message from Gen. Abrams to Adm. McCain - re: Psychological Warfare Concept Plan; File 24990709013, n.d., box 07, folder 09; Dale W. Andrade Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
38. Report R-1172-ARPA, n.d., Fred Walker Collection.
39. Chieu Hoi Program, January 1973, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 03.
40. Barger, "Psychological Operations Supporting Counterinsurgency," 79-80.
41. Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report #164 - Psychological Operations Against North Vietnam - July 1972 - January 1973; File F031100280816, 24 May 1974, box 0028, folder 0816; Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
42. Volume 1 Final Technical Report Psychological Operations Studies, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 03.
43. U.S. Force Levels in Vietnam, 1955-1972 - Table; File 2234403040, 1972, box 44, folder 03; Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 03 - Statistical Data, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
44. Chieu Hoi Program, January 1973, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 03.
45. See Roberts, *Psychological War for Vietnam*.
46. Colburn Lovett, "Effective Combat PSYOP in the Delta," in *The Art and Science of Psychological Operations: Case Studies of Military Application*, ed. Ronald De McLaurin et al., vol. 1 (Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research, 1976): 413-16.