

Agrovilles & Strategic Hamlets: Prescription for Afghanistan?

Some three years ago now, I had an opportunity to discuss, at some length, the issue of protecting the Afghan populace from the Taliban insurgents and related al-Qaeda terror. Of particular importance was the fact that this discussion took place with one of my students who was with US Special Forces in Afghanistan and he was directly involved with the local application of efforts to achieve security for the populace. Our discussion focussed, primarily, on the fact that there was an historic tool that had permitted security to be established in past counter-insurgency campaigns and this, of course, was none other than the strategic hamlet. This SF operator informed me that he and his unit were financing a single local quasi-strategic hamlet basically from out of their own discretionary funds. He further noted that most people in the theatre did not even know what a strategic hamlet was – let alone how they should be implemented. Of course, I had some sympathy for his frustration as I was well aware of how all discussions or even mention of strategic hamlets had been buried or sent down the Orwellian ‘memory hole’, after being declared as next to useless by the ‘orthodox’ school of Vietnam War history.¹

It is with this concern in mind that I thought the discussion needed to be brought into the public domain wherein other counter-insurgency scholars and students may review what the essentials were of this COIN war-winning tool. Indeed, it seems to me that there was rather extraordinary lack of awareness of

such COIN techniques amongst NATO forces in Afghanistan – right from the very outset of the conflict – stretching back at least seven years now. This lack of information can be laid squarely on the shoulders of America's newspaper men of the early Vietnam War era who later formed up the bulk of the so-called 'orthodox' school of Vietnam War historiography. From David Halberstam through to Neil Sheehan there existed ideological venom directed against the very concepts that greatly assisted British Counter-Insurgency victories in both Kenya and Malaya: i.e. the strategic hamlet. Was it their own self-admitted loathing of the Ngo Dinh Diem government, as they were responsible for its implementation in South Vietnam, or was it something more intellectually frivolous such as having their left-wing sensibilities tormented by the horror of having non-socialist organizations, such as the US Army and the Vietnamese Government, actually enact these sorts of quasi- social engineering techniques that only Communist governments should be permitted to do? After all, they let every American reader of the New York Times and Washington Post know about every perceived and manufactured error concerning the strategic hamlets while studiously ignoring the earlier outright mass-murder programs conducted in North Vietnam against the peasantry, by Ho Chi Minh's government, in the form of 'land reform;' one the more venerable institutions of Communist governments everywhere that have always resulted in an appalling loss of life.

Suffice it is to say, that the dearth of information available to those people who have been tasked to assist the Afghans in securing their country has been pronounced. A nice relaxed governmental pace at re-inventing some of the most

robust 'wheels' of counter-insurgency, such as strategic hamlet programs, is not an option that time will now permit in Afghanistan as the insurgency is so deep set. Indeed, it is anyone's wager at this point in time if the Taliban can be thwarted from re-acquiring the lion's share of power and influence in that country. As such, even before the horrors of the ANP (Afghan National Police) can be sorted out and effectively dealt with – protecting the people must come first; and this is something that NATO, including another 30,000 US 'surge' troops simply do not have the capacity to do. The way forward, it can be argued, is with some version of strategic hamlets modified for the peculiar specifics of Afghanistan and her peoples. Accordingly, the following brief over-arching political history on the subject, drawn from the Vietnamese experience, has utility in this context (military/tactical specifics are better illustrated in separate articles and publications [one of the best and most straight-forward being written by a former British police officer who fought the Mau Mau in Kenyaⁱⁱ]).

In order to discern whether or not a policy, program, grand tactic or strategy is having any real effect – the best litmus test is always one's foe: i.e., what are they saying? What is affecting them in a way that they would rather not be affected? As such, here we have a clear-cut statement by the adversary being directly affected by strategic hamlets:

"In Hanoi, in July 1963, the Communist general Nguyen Chi Thanh called the idea of establishing strategic hamlets in order to isolate the Viet Cong "... a relatively clearheaded conclusion...Unfortunately for them [the Americans], they are beginning to be assailed by serious misgivings about the correctness of the plan."ⁱⁱⁱ

There was a Vietnamese predecessor to the British inspired Strategic Hamlets program that was known as *Agroville pacification*. The main purpose of this earlier concept was to strengthen the government's ties with the rural population. President Diem initiated the agroville program in 1959. Like the later Strategic Hamlet program, agrovilles involved moving the rural peasants into stronger rural settlements where they could be physically protected from guerrilla coercion, propaganda, and terror. The agrovilles were to have facilities such as schools, medical centres, electricity, and other basic social services plus education and training in new agricultural techniques. It was Diem's hope that they would "stabilize the government's authority in the face of increasing incidents of assassination and kidnapping of rural officials."^{iv} While the United States government supplied nearly 60 percent of the funding for the agrovilles, through non-defence budgetary expenditures, it had hardly any control of the program. This fact alone would weigh substantially in future American involvement with counter-insurgency in South Vietnam, as Washington would demand more control of program direction and expenditures. For their part, the Viet Cong recognised a potential threat in the agrovilles and thus "mounted some small raids on the new settlements but most often employed terrorism and threats against government officials to intimidate people and impede work."^v The agroville program failed but for reasons more complex than allowed by the standard version of their history, which cited poor planning and mismanagement.^{vi} William Colby best illuminated this difficult issue in a detailed explanation he gave to Ted Gittinger of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Colby noted that the agroville program had potential but developed problems in implementation. His recollection was that Diem had observed how people were stretched out along the canals in the Delta area in such manner that there could be no central amenities for them to share as a homogenous

community.^{vii} His plan to change this began in 1959, and it incorporated the concept of moving people closer together so that schools and hospitals could be accessed. This was one of his main thrusts in modernizing and organizing rural South Vietnam. Diem wanted all Vietnamese to be aware of and have access to better schools and medical facilities and thus encourage in them a modern sense of community which, up until that point, simply had not existed.^{viii}

As the families were drawn closer together in the agrovilles they became distanced from their rice-fields but by no great space, as Colby observed. The real problem occurred with defending the area where the families actually lived. Diem had to allow the agrovilles to incorporate a plot of land with each family dwelling for growing vegetables and maintaining family livestock. These plots of land extended the distance between dwellings to the point that, on average, there were ten family dwellings per square kilometre. This was still closer than they had been when they were stretched out along the canals, and it certainly permitted them to access new schools and hospitals. Had there been no insurgency going on the agrovilles probably would have worked, but violent reality dictated otherwise and, as such, they could not be defended owing to the large areas that the guerrillas could freely infiltrate through. Setting up a defended perimeter around several families spread out over a few square kilometres was beyond the resources of the GVN.

The agroville program was launched in mid-1959, which was approximately the same time that Hanoi made the decision to resume a policy of violent insurrection in the South. Viet Cong patrols were able to walk right through the agrovilles. In other words, they were wide-open to penetration, intimidation, and propaganda teams. Colby saw the issue of moving ancestral graves, a point often blown out of proportion by Diem's critics,^{ix} as a minor problem compared to the real difficulty of Viet Cong penetration.^x In other words,

the agrovillage program failed because the communists for the purposes of political and physical disruption specifically targeted them and, consequently, they were effectively destabilized by the actions of Viet Cong operatives.

With the foundering of the agrovilles, Diem began to listen to what Sir Robert Thompson had to say about the necessity of protecting the South Vietnamese rural population from a communist-orchestrated campaign of coercion, intimidation, and terror. Both Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, recognized the political potential of what Thompson was expounding. Indeed, other Vietnamese leaders testified to this potential:

The strategic hamlet remained a judicious national policy, a true antidote to Communist subversive and total warfare. Its chief merit lay in the fact that it had been comprehensively designed to improve the people's living standards through socio-economic developments at the rice-roots level. It was a sound strategic concept whose objective was to neutralize and counter balance the effects of a war without front lines by transforming the countryside into a system of mutually-supporting fortifications. It sought to build and consolidate the spirit of self-assurance, self-reliance, and voluntary participation which would sustain the nation's efforts in a protracted war of attrition.^{xi}

Oddly enough, Roger Hilsman, who was no fan of Diem's, agreed with the Vietnamese President over what Thompson was advocating. Hilsman saw great merit in Thompson's "Delta Pacification Plan." He wished to see a reduction of the emphasis for traditional military answers in favour of more political pacification programs. "To Hilsman, Thompson's notion offered not simply a tool with which one fought insurgents, but a 'strategic concept based upon a true understanding of the nature of internal war'."^{xii}

William Colby, who was in Vietnam at the time of the inauguration of the strategic hamlet program and had a great deal of contact with Ngo Dinh Nhu with regard to this effort, claimed that, indeed, strategic hamlets worked. Colby's assertions on this were not based upon a false or unrealistic understanding of

some of the failures and difficulties associated with the program but, in fact, upon the recognition of the weaknesses and the program's abundant strengths even given its flaws. He recalled that both he and Diem were aware of the stories of hamlets being fortified when the reality was otherwise. In fact, Diem had internal reports coming to him which indicated that there was maladministration and corruption in the creation of some strategic hamlets. He had sent out inspectors whose purpose it was to uncover these very sorts of problems and then to report them back to him. Even when his officials were not forthcoming with such evidence, he had other channels that relayed what was really going on. Diem's attitude was that these problems were bound to come up during the implementation of such a massive program and that they could be dealt with and fixed along the way. Both Colby and Diem understood that the program was a war-winning one. It would have to be corrected during and after full implementation.^{xiii}

Colby went on to relate how Ngo Dinh Nhu perceived something much more positive in the strategic hamlets than even effective protection of the Vietnamese people. He discerned that they were much more than merely wrapping barbed wire around people, for they engendered a sense of community. They became practical politics in action and thus gave the people a sense of accomplishment and pride in what they were doing. This greater sense of community was new to the people of South Vietnam, and it was absolutely necessary if the people were to withstand the onslaught of communist politics.^{xiv}

The concept of the strategic hamlet in South Vietnam was not as intrusive as some of its detractors have tried to suggest. Indeed, French and Vietnamese scholars most familiar with the history of Vietnamese settlement in Cochin China have argued that the settlement patterns that were in place at the time of the introduction of the strategic hamlets were, in fact, of recent date.^{xv} Further to this,

it was noted, “As the Vietnamese advanced into the southern areas, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they made use of settlement techniques which sound an echo of fortified hamlets of more recent years.”^{xvi}

Strategic hamlets, as envisioned by both Diem and Nhu, held out the promise of overcoming an historical political flaw in South Vietnam’s rural political culture. Milton Osborne explains:

*But while it seems likely that in the early period of Vietnamese settlement the colonists grouped together in the traditional close pattern of settlement, this did not remain the norm. Villages in the Mekong Delta area of Viet-Nam spread out along the rivers, canals [- as noted earlier in this discussion on agrovilles by William Colby] and paths in a long, extended fashion with each farmer living close to his land. Hickey in his study [G.C. Hickey, “Problems of Social Change in Viet-Nam,” in *Bulletin de la Societe des Etudes Indochinoises*, n. ser., Tome XXXIII, No. 4, 1958, p. 413] of southern villages maintains that the relatively recent establishment of these villages has lessened the attachment to old Confucian ideals and forms of behaviour. One may need, therefore, to qualify the comments made by Paul Mus [a leading French scholar on the history of Indochina] on the Vietnamese village as a close-knit entity when one considers the south, since there is some suggestion that the sense of cohesiveness was not so great.... Mus’ picture of the peasant within the village as isolated from the central authority of his country seems true for the south, as do his comments on the peasants’ view of the ‘mandate of heaven (see Paul Mus, *Viet-Nam, Sociologie d’une guerre*, [Paris, 1952], pp. 23-32).’ In the case of this concept, it seems clear that the peasants’ estimation of the Government’s authority and desirability would hinge on the effectiveness of the administration. If the Government proved unable to protect him and his family, then it was, presumably, no longer blessed by the ‘mandate.’^{xvii}*

Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, understood perfectly well the Confucian concept of the “mandate of heaven,” as they had been raised with such principles by their father, who had been a traditional Confucian mandarin in the Emperor’s court in the city of Hue. The brothers accepted the fact that before the Western academic constructs of “democracy” could be even looked at, it was paramount that protection be granted the rural Vietnamese. Strategic hamlets fit

well to the necessity of Diem's political legitimacy in South Vietnam. Indeed, there was even an historic precedent for the strategic hamlets in South Vietnam, though, for the most part, this Vietnamese imperative seemed to escape the analysis of the Americans. Excluding William Colby, Ambassador Nolting, and a few others, Washington would continue to "pound-the-table" about enacting democratic freedoms while Diem would continue to implore that such luxuries could only come later after he had been shown to have the "mandate of heaven." To the Vietnamese way of thinking, and this was certainly the way that Diem thought, the peasants had to be protected first, then given a sense of community. The strategic hamlet program offered the GVN just this.

While the North had an actual tradition of fortifying villages, the first modern effort under the Diem government actually took place in 1960 directed by the province chief of Ninh Thuan, Colonel Khanh.^{xviii} Khanh had gained experience assisting the French in fortifying villages in North Vietnam's Red River Delta and was able to transfer this knowledge to the South wherein he had several villages set-up with volunteer militia and fences. Another early experimental defended village took place in Darlac province, in the village of Trung Hoa, under the direction of a Catholic priest. It was Ngo Dinh Nhu who managed to weld all the former Vietnamese experiences with defended villages or hamlets together with the British advice. Hence he "created the conceptual framework for the plan and set its pace for completion."^{xix}

The best overview and summary available in the documents, which are concerned with strategic hamlets and Ngo Dinh Nhu's attempts to bond them into an ideological/ strategic whole, is found in William Colby's recollections on the subject. For Colby, quite correctly, placed the concept of strategic hamlets in the context of a variety of counter-insurgency ideas that were being reviewed, not

only by the American mission in Vietnam but also by the British in concert with Diem and Nhu.

As Colby pointed out, the initial American response to the escalating insurgent effort was entirely predictable and formed up the backbone of the Taylor report and recommendations. This was, in effect, a ruse that Taylor had thought up to get an American combat unit deployed into the Delta region of South Vietnam's Mekong River under the pretence that it would be engaged in "flood relief."^{xx} Colby noted that the Pentagon also wanted to counter the proposals of the British Advisory Mission by stressing that the real focus for fighting the insurgents had to be a military one and not the police approach which Thompson had raised with Diem. General Lyman Lemnitzer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was particularly adamant on this issue and would not countenance the idea of police replacing the military even for local force work.^{xxi} The American military was not happy with the British ideas and resented Diem's gravitation toward the non-military police approach advocated by Thompson.^{xxii} Ngo Dinh Nhu, however, was far ahead of everyone else in thinking of counter-insurgency and political legitimacy as they pertained to the particular nuances of South Vietnam, as Colby recalled.

Nhu met on a weekly basis with William Colby when the two men would discuss the strengths and organization of the communist insurgents and then attempt to come up with viable alternatives for rural South Vietnam. Clearly, Nhu was impressed with the communists' ability to recruit and organize the rural population from small guerrilla units to main force battalions. Nhu admitted to Colby that it was obvious that the ARVN could not stop the organizational juggernaut that the communists had put into action. He also realized that infinite detailed planning in Saigon, in the various Ministries, translated into little in the

countryside and that the political depths of his own Can Lao Party were insubstantial compared to the communists' political apparatus.^{xxiii}

With the recognition that the GVN was failing to motivate the rural peasants in a cohesive manner, Colby and Nhu began to explore the various means through which such inspiration could come. They realised that the rural communities had to be stimulated to defend themselves from the nocturnal infiltration and raids that the Viet Cong were so masterfully carrying out. Even a few armed villagers would be able to prevent the communist agit-prop teams from assembling villagers for night-time political harangues and recruiting. Most important of all, these armed villagers would be able to prevent the collection of taxes by the Viet Cong.^{xxiv}

Nhu, according to Colby, was looking beyond static defence in the strategic hamlets. He began to envision them as a strategic political weapon of the offensive.^{xxv} He recognized that they held a more realistic potential for nation-building than had the ill-fated agrovilles. More than this, he believed that the strategic hamlets could constitute the foundation for a new social and political order. This new polity would find its roots in rural South Vietnam and would replace the spoiled decadent elite in Saigon that had become a spectre of French colonial days. Nevertheless, Nhu had some concerns that if the Americans had too large a hand in the strategic hamlets they would undo the necessary desire within the South Vietnamese for self-reliance. Douglas Pike recalled (much later, in 1966) that Nhu was very strident about this point.^{xxvi} He was worried that the sheer bounty and wealth of American economic aid programs would spoil the nation-building spirit that he had come to observe in the strategic hamlet program. For his part, Colby was not as concerned about the "spoiling" effects of American largesse as he was excited over the fact that Nhu had grasped a plan that held the necessary political elements for defeating the communists.^{xxvii}

Colby was able to convince Nhu that he should get out into the rural areas of South Vietnam and witness the inception of strategic hamlets. Nhu listened and became convinced that it was indeed the right approach to defeating the communists while building a nation. With his combined theoretical knowledge and subsequent practical understanding of strategic hamlets, Nhu was able to convince Diem to make the program a major national undertaking.^{xxviii} Diem's past experience as an exemplary village and district chief predisposed him to the pragmatic benefits of the strategic hamlet program.^{xxix}

The American Ambassador to South Vietnam, Fritz Nolting, was caught on the horns of a dilemma made in Washington. For, on the one hand, he greatly admired President Diem, Sir Robert Thompson, CIA Saigon Station Chief Bill Colby, and their plans for countering the Communists with the strategic hamlets program; yet, on the other side of the equation, he was duty-bound to make certain Washington's policies were acted on and carried out in South Vietnam. As such, throughout the process of negotiating a counter-insurgency plan with GVN, Ambassador Nolting had followed Washington's instructions. With regard to Sir Robert Thompson's alternate counter-insurgency proposals to Diem, Nolting had been absolutely scrupulous, above-board, and cordially blunt. The American ambassador had liked much of what he had heard in the British ideas, but he had also openly and frankly objected to the procedural and substantive problems with these ideas which permitted the Vietnamese to circumvent American controls on their own Counter-Insurgency Plan. In other words, throughout the process of formulating the CIP for South Vietnam, Nolting had been faithful to the United States government's directions. There is nothing in the historical record that could even remotely validate the claims of Nolting's detractors with regard to a supposed lack of objectivity in his ambassadorial role, swayed by the Ngo Dinh.^{xxx} The greatest of ironies here being that

Washington's policies were what undid a sound COIN/strategic hamlets program in Vietnam, ultimately, with support thrown in behind a coup and the murder of Diem and Nhu. The Karzai's of this modern era be forewarned: – history is not on your side, especially, when Washington's plans begin to come unravelled!

The problem remains, even to this day in 2009, that the United States see's the military as owning the primary role in its counter-insurgency campaigns when, in fact, it should be kept out of the way as much as practically possible. This is a 'gum-shoe's' war wherein the central role rightfully belongs to the local police; in Afghanistan's case, the ANP. Right next to the policeman's role – is the role of the average Afghan who must be protected from insurgents by his own means (as much as possible) and this can only be affected by strategic hamlets or something similar to that concept. The Afghan Army and particularly the foreign troops of the NATO forces, must be held in abeyance and used only as a 'fire-brigade' in support of the strategic hamlets and police when all else fails.^{xxxi} If the ANP cannot be made thoroughly reliable and trusted by the Afghan locals and if these same locals have no way of affecting their own security – then the writing is on the wall for the future of Afghanistan and it will not be a happy chapter.

ⁱ The 'orthodox' school being lead by the illustrious David Halberstam, Neil Sheehan, Stanley Karnow, et al.

ⁱⁱ Hedger Wallace had served in the British Army in Cyprus, Egypt and Malaya before being posted to Kenya on a two year police contract in 1953. His fictional novel, **The Outpost**, was based directly on his experiences in that African nation during the Mau Mau terror. As such, it remains one of the clearest pieces of work concerned with the necessities of reliable intelligence garnered from the locals, self-supporting and inter-supporting protected posts and villages, along with the practical issues of how to pursue guerrilla/terrs in deep bush and heavy terrain. Owing to the exemplary skills he developed in these critical areas, Wallace, later became the Public Relations officer for the Kenya Police and a Chief Inspector in charge of an entire district. Please see Hedger Wallace's **The Outpost**, London: William Kimber & Co., Ltd. 1959.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hammer, Ellen J. **A Death in November: America in Vietnam, 1963**. New York, (NY): E.P. Dutton, 1987. Page: 41.

^{iv} Richard A. Hunt, **Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds** (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 20.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Karnow, Stanley. **Vietnam: A History**. New York, (NY): Viking Press, 1983, 231.

^{vii} According to Dennis Duncanson, an acknowledged authority on the political history of South Vietnam, the agrovilles, or Khu Tru Mat – Closer Settlement Areas,” were not initially directed for bringing all rural South Vietnamese closer together. Instead, Duncanson argues, they were to bring “unreliable families” together in order to divorce them from the sway of the Viet Cong. Duncanson points out that these families were never secure from the communists’ pressures and actions. Duncanson, Dennis J. *Government and Revolution In Vietnam*. London: Oxford University Press - Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1969, pages, 261–62.

^{viii} “The agrovillage program was one of these theoretical programs, which might have worked, in a different circumstance. It came about because of the nature of South Vietnam and the Delta area, which is a whole series of canals and the people live sort of one-by-one along the canals and stretch out for miles. In 1958 and 1959 when Diem was in this program of developing schools, aid and marketplaces, just the general social and economic structure for the country, it was obvious that this was really a tough thing to handle. How do you handle a school, and particularly a high school, if people are scattered all over the place? So he had a thought that if he could move people closer together to make them into agrovilles, still agriculturally based but in a kind of a city rather than a village or hamlet structure, that that would give population base for a hospital, a decent administration, a school system, not only primary but high school system and so forth. And this looked fine. Move the people together and then give them these amenities, these steps toward modernization and organizing and so forth.” William Colby, “William Colby on Vietnam, Interview I.” Recorded interview by Ted Gittinger, June 2, 1981 (at Mr. Colby’s office in Washington, [DC]), pp. 15 – 16, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Oral History Program.

^{ix} Stanley Karnow made the classic complaint with regard to the agrovillage program: “For one thing, peasants assigned to the agrovillage had been uprooted from their native villages and ancestral graves, and their traditional social pattern disrupted, for reasons they could not fathom.” Karnow, *Vietnam*, 231. Gabriel Kolko was one of these critics who, nevertheless, remained sufficiently vague in his criticism of the agrovillage program. He merely tells the reader that it was detested by the South Vietnamese and that they did not co-operate with the program but he gives no details or facts. Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 96, 103 and 131.

^x William Colby, “William Colby on Vietnam, Interview I.” Recorded interview by Ted Gittinger, June 2, 1981 (at Mr. Colby’s office in Washington, [DC]), pp. 15 – 16, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Oral History Program.

^{xi} General Cao Van Vien and Lt. General Dong Van Khuyen, *Reflections on the Vietnam War (Indochina Monographs), Vietnamese Conflict 1961-1975* (Washington, DC: United States Army Center For Military History, 1980), 9.

^{xii} Cable, Larry E. *Conflict of Myths: The Development of American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and the Vietnam War*. New York, (NY): New York University Press, 1986., 197.

^{xiii} “It’s my contention that the strategic hamlet program basically worked the first time. And I know I’m a little contentious about this, and I know the stories about the fake barbed wire and all that sort of thing, and sure, so did Diem. We had some internal reports given to him by some inspectors that he sent out, which were reporting to him the fact that some provinces were cheating on the figures and that there was abuse of the peasantry and all the rest of it. This wasn’t a surprise to him, that his machinery was keeping secrets from him, because he had those reports, we know of it. Those are the problems you have when you take on a major program and try to make it work. In some places it doesn’t work and you go out and tinker with it and fix it. That’s the purpose of having that kind of independent inspection and reporting and so forth about the vulnerabilities and the abuses and the wrong things that happened, so that you can correct them. That’s the whole idea of the thing. And the fact that you get these reports doesn’t mean that the program is no good. If you just let it go, yes, then the program is no good. But if you then fix it, and fire somebody or change the program in some area to match the problem or whatever, which he was gradually doing....” William Colby, “William Colby on Vietnam, Interview I.” Recorded interview by Ted Gittinger, June 2, 1981 (at Mr. Colby’s office in Washington, [DC]), pp. 17 – 18, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Oral History Program.

^{xiv} Ibid.

^{xv} Milton E. Osborne, *Strategic Hamlets in South Vietnam: A Survey and a Comparison*, Data Paper No. 55, Southeast Asia Program-Department of Asian Studies (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1965), 20.

^{xvi} *Ibid.*

^{xvii} Osborne, *Strategic Hamlets in South Vietnam*, 20.

^{xviii} William A. Nighswonger, *Rural Pacification in Vietnam* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), 54.

^{xix} *Ibid.*, 55.

^{xx} Colby, *Lost Victory*, 98.

^{xxi} *Ibid.*, 98-99.

^{xxii} “The JCS was far from happy with the shift toward the Malaya-inspired Strategic Hamlet system. The Chiefs had not embraced the notion joyously, but had accepted it as a necessary expedient. The fear was that the Hamlet approach was not only essentially one of a defensive nature, but one more suitable for a police than a military force. In the estimate of many, the situation in Vietnam had degenerated to a level which police mechanisms could not deal with effectively.” Cable, *Conflict of Myths*, 191.

^{xxiii} Colby, William E. *Lost Victory: A Firsthand Account of America’s Sixteen-Year Involvement in Vietnam*. Chicago: Contemporary Books, Inc., 1989; pages: 98-100.

^{xxiv} *Ibid.*

^{xxv} Colby was not the only one to realize what Nhu had envisioned in the strategic hamlet program. Dennis J. Duncanson had also drawn attention to this revelation of Nhu’s: “Nhu soon came to the conclusion that the regime would have to forge itself a new weapon if it was to survive. It took him a whole year to work out what the weapon would be – it was in fact the ‘strategic hamlet’.” Duncanson, *Government and Revolution in Vietnam*, 271.

^{xxvi} Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1967), 66–67.

^{xxvii} Colby, *Lost Victory*, 98-100.

^{xxviii} *Ibid.*

^{xxix} Anne Miller, *And One For The People: The Life Story of President Ngo Dinh Diem*; Volume II; Unpublished Manuscript, dated July 30, 1955. (Provided by Douglas Pike to author in 1995); 337–346. Copies of this manuscript are available through the Indochina Archive at the Vietnam Center, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas.

^{xxx} These detractors would have to include the subtle Karnow, *Vietnam*, 262–63. The reader can also count on the not so subtle Fitzgerald, *Fire In The Lake*, 169. With regard to studying the works of those writers who acted upon the belief that there is no such thing as objectivity, one can peruse the not-subtle-at-all Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire*, 208–09.

^{xxxi} But ‘fire-brigade’ should not be misinterpreted as ‘free-fire force’ with the indiscriminate use of heavy support weapons such as airstrikes as Hamid Karzai continues to plead, cajole, even threaten NATO over this very issue. Dead Afghans, caught as ‘collateral damage,’ are one of the better recruiting tools the Taliban has; but this is another debate.