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Clear, Hold, and Destroy: Pacification in Phú Yên and the American War in Vietnam. Robert J. Thompson III. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2021. 330 pp. \$39.95 hardback. ISBN 978-0-8061-6869-2.

In *Clear, Hold, and Destroy*, Thompson focuses on one province in South Vietnam, Phú Yên, from 1965 to 1973 to argue that pacification was central to US efforts throughout the Vietnam War. He outlines competing definitions for pacification and proposes a delineation between a 'deconstruction phase' and a 'construction phase' (p.214) to make the case that 'clear and hold' and 'search and destroy' were not in opposition but complementary steps in pacification more broadly defined. In addition to his contribution to scholarship that seeks to relabel US efforts in Vietnam, Thompson highlights often understudied aspects of the Vietnam War, especially the role of allied forces. Perhaps his greater contribution, however, is a cumulative one: together with Kevin Boylan and others, Thompson's exploration of a specific province lays to rest scholars such as Lewis Sorley's claim that the United States had pacified South Vietnam as it prepared to leave.

Because Thompson's focus is on the local level, he pays less attention to the value of defining pacification in a narrower sense from the vantage point of decision-makers in Washington. For them, pacification was defined as much by what it *was* as what it *was not*. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and his colleagues' disillusionment with the bombing program and escalating troop requests explains their enthusiasm for the creation of the Office of Civil Operations and Rural Support (CORDS) in 1967, which was designed to coordinate civilian and military programs under one bureaucratic umbrella.

Pacification was, as McNamara's principal deputy for Vietnam John McNaughton put it, 'a theory that will limit our role.' Robert Komer, the first head of CORDS and a recurring figure in the book, was an outspoken critic of the Department of Defense's absorption of counterinsurgency programs in the 1962-63 period and the resulting militarization of US policy. This push-and-pull of agencies in Washington is the context for Komer's argument, quoted in the book, that he only used the terminology of an "other war" ... to compete more effectively with the US and ARVN military.' (p.38)

Moreover, 'limiting' a role was about preparing the South Vietnamese to ensure their own security. The Nixon administration's emphasis on Vietnamization was not new, as the book implies; it returned to earlier objectives. As Thompson shows, however, the United States never came close to preparing the South Vietnamese to do the job or to creating responsive political structures. Having escalated and taken on an offensive military role, the United States instead created a security situation that depended on US firepower.

As Thompson's focus begins in 1965, he excludes what came before where a pacification program less reliant on conventional tools, and focused instead on policing and local governance, was central. Although Thompson quotes several international counterinsurgency theorists, he could equally have looked to Roger Hilsman, a State Department official in the John F. Kennedy administration, whose *Strategic Concept* drew inspiration from the author's namesake—Sir Robert G.K. Thompson—whose work was central to thinking in the pre-1965 period. Like Komer, Hilsman bemoaned the military's reliance on its usual infantry operations. Contrary to Thompson's assertion that US officials failed to appreciate that the war would be won at the village level—that this 'insight never affected the decisions made by higher echelons of American leadership' (p.231)—Hilsman warned, in his *Strategic Concept* and elsewhere, that '[t]he struggle for South Vietnam, in sum, is essentially a battle for control of the villages.'

Ultimately, as Andrew Krepinevich and others have explained, conventional warfare did not 'dictate' (p.247) pacification, it overtook it. Thompson's book is intriguing in showing how what was branded as 'pacification' looked like in the field, in operational terms, from 1965 and from the military point of view. It also provides a clear view into how hybrid conventional and guerrilla strategies cohabited on both sides of the conflict. It would have been interesting to complete this military view, hearing more from South Vietnamese allies or US State Department and other civilian partners. Notwithstanding its limited scope, the book documents in granular detail the US experience in a key province and at a key time, which will no doubt be of interest to military historians of the war.