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Gregory A. Daddis, *No Sure Victory: Measuring U.S. Army Effectiveness and Progress in the Vietnam War*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011. Pp. xiv, 334. ISBN 978-0-19-974687-3.

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Evaluating unit performance and operational progress was a vexing organizational and strategic challenge facing the US Army during the Vietnam War. Acknowledging that enemy body counts were a poor indicator of success, Army commanders and Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) struggled to devise effective tactical missions and strategies that took into account the complex military, political, economic, and social conditions in theater. How exactly were American officers and soldiers to know whether they were making progress over time? Gregory Daddis, an Army Colonel and professor of history (West Point), asks just this question in *No Sure Victory*.

Daddis concentrates on the US Army's organizational limitations and their concomitant effects on operations and strategy. His Introduction identifies how "officers and soldiers defined and evaluated their effectiveness in counterinsurgency operations during their time in Vietnam" (14): he isolates the "metrics of mission success, metrics of mission failures, and metrics of organizational effectiveness" (15-16) and argues that their inadequacy to the task "goes far in explaining the final outcome of the war in Vietnam" (18).

Chapter 1, "Of Questions Not Asked: Measuring Effectiveness in the Counterinsurgency Era," focuses on the considerable counterinsurgency literature available prior to American involvement in Vietnam: this included various Army Field Manuals, notably FM 31-20: *Operations against Guerrilla Forces* and FM 31-21: *Guerrilla Warfare*, as well as the work of Roger Trinquier,¹ David Galula,² and Bernard Fall.³ But despite such research and doctrine, as Daddis shows, officer professional education failed to examine the relevance of such factors as political allegiance, population security, and ideological commitment. He highlights these elements through comparisons with post-WWII French and British experiences in Algeria, Indochina, and Malaya. Though their importance was recognized, such aspects of revolutionary warfare resisted quantitative measurement. This posed dire problems for the Systems Analysis Office and, consequently, in terms of Daddis's metric of mission failure, augured ill for any future attempts to determine progress or operational effectiveness.

Though open to learning about unconventional warfare, officers too often read generic summaries filled with imprecise, if not misleading, terminology. Their training and education was no different. Advice to remain aggressive against insurgents offered little meaningful insights when doctrine admitted the primacy of political action in revolutionary war. Perhaps most importantly, none of the army's field manuals or professional journals provided counsel on how to gauge success in a war without fronts.... In a real sense, the army was unprepared intellectually to consider the problems of measuring progress and effectiveness in a counterinsurgency environment. Though resisted by higher-ranking officers in the early days of the Kennedy administration, system analysis techniques quickly would fill this intellectual void in Vietnam. (37-38)

The inability of policy-makers and military leaders to clarify the nature of a war against both conventional (North Vietnamese Army [NVA]) and unconventional (Vietcong [VC]) adversaries plagued both American and Vietnamese government planning during the US advisory phase that led full-scale intervention in 1965. In chapter 2, "Measurements without Objectives: America Goes to War in Southeast Asia," Daddis describes the contentious debate over the definition of the type of conflict the United States was engaging in. He perceptively articulates complex dilemmas of the war, drawing on a broad range of primary

1. *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* [1961], tr. D. Lee (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006).

2. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (1964; rpt. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006).

3. *The Two Viet-Nams: A Political and Military Analysis* (NY: Praeger, 1963).

and secondary sources.⁴ There is a distinct poignancy about Daddis's analysis because the army, he contends, actually possessed the tools to conduct the war effectively, but was thwarted by the lack of clearly defined, measurable objectives, both military and political. Further, "recognizing counterinsurgency as more than just a military problem was easy. Effectively coordinating political and economic reform with pacification and security efforts in an attempt to mobilize the civilian population against the insurgents, all in a culturally alien country, proved much more difficult" (47).

After a detailed account of assessments on Vietnam by Gen. Lionel C. McGarr, who headed Military Assistance and Advisory Group from 1960 to 1962, Gen. Edward Lansdale's "X-Factor" memorandum (July 1962), and the RAND Symposium on Counterinsurgency led by Stephen Hosmer (April 1962), the reader is left wondering what precisely went wrong when MACV was established in February 1962. Daddis cites the unpreparedness of MACV commander Gen. Paul D. Harkins for counterinsurgency operations as contributing to the Army's the failure to implement a doctrinally sound strategy.

Daddis also argues that the Vietnamese Government's political instability hampered US war planners' attempts to assess, develop, and implement military and political goals simultaneously. He construes the difficulty of measuring effectiveness in terms of bad US civil-military coordination and a poor grasp of Vietnamese politics. In short, the incompetence of American civil and military leaders in formulating policy doomed the army to fail in its efforts to gauge the efficacy of operations and progress toward goals.⁵ President Ngo Dinh Diem's repeated violations of the 1954 Geneva Accords and his fateful decision to replace elected village chiefs and councils with government appointees greatly complicated the political environment of the war in its early stages. However, considering his difficult subject matter, Daddis wisely maintains his focus on the military.

In chapter 3, "An 'Unprecedented Victory': America Goes to War in Southeast Asia," Daddis investigates how the Army's multitude of assessment and reporting mechanisms and negligible impact indicators obscured rather than shed light on the outcomes of counterinsurgency efforts. The Office of Systems Analysis, championed by Robert McNamara and relied on by MACV, figures largely here. Dubious statistics and an appetite for ever more data fed the deluded optimism of such high-level army leaders as Chief of Staff Gen. Harold K. Johnson and General Harkins at MACV, even when events on the ground contradicted the data collected. The controversial battle of Ap Bac in 1963 exemplifies the problem. The desire to use data as evidence of success only grew stronger when Gen. William Westmoreland took over at MACV.

Daddis provides an excellent example of the Army's infamous obsession with body counts as a measure of success in his analysis of Airmobility and the "victory" in the Ia Drang Valley in November 1965. He looks beyond what was touted as a success and examines how the Pleiku campaign, in sum, led the Army to a stress on military accomplishments that neglected more politically nuanced (and harder to measure) factors. This sets the tone for his overarching thesis that the Army was in reality devising measurement systems that would prove to be irrelevant. Thus, the over-attention to search-and-destroy mission sets, as in Operation Masher/White Fang in 1966, ignored critical political components of revolutionary warfare.

Perhaps inevitably, problems arose in using body counts as a measure of army effectiveness. Soldiers trained in conventional tactics, attracted by laurels won in defeating a battlefield enemy, concentrated on the military aspects of counterinsurgency. The political fight fell increasingly to the wayside. While army officers professed their commitment to the "other war" of pacification, they still felt a need to show tangible results in security operations by killing the enemy. Pressures to demonstrate progress created incentives for commanders to overestimate enemy kills. Worse, few officers in MACV related the body count metric to the larger goals of po-

4. Among many others, Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976* (Washington: US Army Ctr Mil Hist, 2006); Christopher K. Ives, *US Special Forces and Counterinsurgency in Vietnam: Military Innovation and Institutional Failure, 1961-63* (NY: Routledge, 2007); David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire: America and Vietnam during the Kennedy Era* [1965], rev. ed. (1988; rpt. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008); Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 2nd rev. ed. (NY: Penguin, 1997) and *Vietnam: The War Nobody Won* (NY: Foreign Policy Assoc, 1983).

5. Daddis relies heavily here on Fall's *The Two Viet-Nams* (note 3 above), but the same author's "Viet-Nam: The New Korea," *Current History* 50 (1966) 85-90, would have better supported his discussion of the Vietnamese government's weaknesses and the precarious position of the United States already during the advisory phase of its involvement in Vietnam.

litical stability and government control. In such a complex environment as South Vietnam, simple statistics of enemy dead were meaningless unless placed in some larger political-military context. (89)

Chapter 4, “Metrics in the Year of American Firepower,” elucidates the shortcomings of the attrition-based strategy the Army pursued through 1966. Daddis delves into the debate about MACV’s goal of achieving a “cross-over” point by destroying enemy forces faster than they could be replaced. In this context, he discusses the disputes surrounding the contentious “Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam” and “United States Army Combat Operations in Vietnam” studies, as well as material by Gen. James M. Gavin,⁶ Robert Thompson,⁷ John Paul Vann,⁸ among many others. He also includes the findings in such lesser-known sources as the field analyses of the Advanced Research Projects Agency’s “Project Agile.”

Moving along chronologically, chapter 5, “We Are Winning Slowly But Steadily,” tracks MACV’s 1967 reorganization of its pacification efforts through the introduction of Civil Operations Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS). While the importance of pacification was realized earlier in the war, it had been left mostly to South Vietnamese forces, while MACV conducted the “big war” against the NVA and VC. According to Daddis, this typified the inability of MACV to take a whole-of-government approach to the war in Vietnam until it was too late. For example, even the concept of “security” in the operational environment was never clearly defined. Even under the formidable leadership of Robert Komer, such CORDS programs as the Hamlet Evaluation System never integrated military and pacification efforts in a unified whole. Daddis again stresses that MACV instead relied almost exclusively on quantifiable measures of performance, always striving to assemble data that indicated progress. It could not or would not take account of such qualitative indices as popular attitudes that might have explained why South Vietnamese villagers did not support their government. It became evident that the Army and, by extension, the US Government did not welcome data that might discredit their rosy progress reports. Time and facts would, however, reveal a yawning credibility gap.

The Johnson administration’s efforts to sell the notion of progress in the war to the American people became especially problematic after the Tet Offensive of 1968, the subject of chapter 6, “The Year of Tet: Victory, Defeat, or Stalemate?” Despite the tactical destruction of significant numbers of Vietcong, a convincing case for progress toward eventual strategic victory remained elusive: “In a counter-insurgency, the objectives tend to be nebulous and more often than not they tend to be psychological or political in nature” (153). The Tet Offensive proved, Daddis writes, that the US Army and the MACV staff had been “collecting information for the sake of information” (154) and that they were unable to do otherwise.

Melvin Laird’s introduction of the “Vietnamization” program during the Nixon administration further complicated matters. How was MACV, which could not appraise its own progress meaningfully in the political environment of the war, to evaluate the efforts of its South Vietnamese counterparts to achieve American goals? The difficulties of “Vietnamization” and reaching an honorable peace rather than outright military victory are the subjects of chapters 7, “A Time for Testing,” and 8, “Soldiers’ Interlude: The Symptoms of Withdrawal.” Daddis writes that “In shifting more of the war’s burdens to the South Vietnamese, [Nixon] quietly was redefining success” (159). With no clear idea whether ARVN should be trained to deal with the insurgency in the south or to defeat conventional NVA forces, the US Army and MACV struggled in vain to show that Vietnamization was making any headway.

In chapter 9, “Staggering to the Finish,” and his Conclusion, Daddis zeroes in on the failure of US war planners to assess the South Vietnamese government and the intangibles affecting the Vietnamese people’s faith in that government. He also details problems—racial polarization, the draft, “fragging,” drug use, and bad media relations, among others—that crippled the Army as it simultaneously fought on and withdrew from Vietnam.

6. *Crisis Now* (NY: Random House, 1968), co-authored with Arthur T. Hadley.

7. *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam* (NY: Praeger, 1966).

8. See Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (1988; rpt. NY: Modern Library, 2009).

Throughout, Daddis retains the objectivity of a historian while evincing great empathy for those who fought in Vietnam. His new book offers valuable lessons to soldiers tasked with implementing policy amid the perils of combat but still more to those charged with developing successful policy.