



National Archives and Records Administration

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Foreign Aid and Counterinsurgency in Vietnam

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other United States Foreign Assistance Agencies in Vietnam, 1950-1967

Founded in 1961 under the administration of John F. Kennedy (1960-1963), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) inherited a wide range of civilian assistance programs launched in Vietnam by other government entities, and a series of predecessor agencies that included the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA, 1948-1951), the Mutual Security Agency (MSA, 1951-1953); the Technical Cooperation Administration (TCA, 1950-1954); the Foreign Operations Administration (FOA, 1953-1955); and the International Cooperation Agency (ICA, 1951-1961).

American assistance to the Vietnamese began before 1954, when Communist forces ended over a century of French colonial dominance at the Siege of Điện Biên Phủ. The Americans then continued to support civil society in the South after 1955, when the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) declared its independence and elected Ngô Đình Diệm (1901-1963) as president. President Ngô remained head of state with American aid until his assassination on November 2, 1963, by a rival military faction.

Through trial and error over the next two decades, increasing tensions between South Vietnam and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (Communist North Vietnam), internal political conflict, and the emergence after 1958 of an armed insurgency under Communist leadership in the South collectively drove the American assistance agencies to improvise new approaches to the challenges of social instability, economic development, and expanding insurgency.

By 1967, President Lyndon Johnson sought to improve counterinsurgency operations in Vietnam by officially coordinating many of these civilian assistance programs with military operations under an unprecedented interagency organization known as CORDS, or “Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support.” President Richard M. Nixon (1969-1974) subsequently continued the interagency effort, referring to the acronym as “Civil Operations and Rural Development Support.”

Although Presidents Johnson and Nixon appointed the civilians Robert W. Komer (1967-1969) and William E. Colby (1969-1973) to run CORDS, most records of the civil-military operations specifically coordinated after May 1967 appear in Record Group 472 (Records of the U.S. Forces in Southeast Asia, 1950-1976). Additional records relating to foreign aid and counterinsurgency in Vietnam will be found among the records of the Department of State (RG 59) and of the embassy and consulates in Vietnam (RG 84).

However, records of the civilian programs implemented in Vietnam from before Điện Biên Phủ through the collapse of South Vietnam in 1975 do appear in RG 469 and RG 286. These records reflect the long evolution of American programs over two decades of armed conflict in Vietnam, as well as the interplay between established entities within USAID and CORDS after 1967. Records demonstrating the diversity of civilian initiatives to stabilize and develop civil society in the Republic of Vietnam include:

Civilian Assistance Before Điện Biên Phủ

Office of Far Eastern Operations; Indochina Subject Files, 1950-54.

RG 469 Entry UD-415
66 Containers

Civilian Assistance After Điện Biên Phủ

Office of Far Eastern Operations; Indochina Subject Files, 1955-61.

RG 469 Entry UD-430
66 Containers

U.S. Operations Mission to Vietnam; Program Office; Project Files, 1953-62.

RG 469 Entry UD-1442
52 Containers

U.S. Operations Mission to Vietnam; Program & Requirements Division; Subject Files, 1950-57.

RG 469 Entry UD-1446
33 Containers

U.S. Operations Mission to Vietnam; Program & Requirements Division; Classified Subject Files, 1950-58.

RG 469 Entry UD-1447
28 Containers

Community Development

U.S. Operations Mission to Vietnam; Community Development Division; Subject Files, 1954-57.

RG 469 Entry UD-1438
4 Containers

Land Reform

U.S. Operations Mission to Vietnam; Agriculture and Natural Resources Division; Subject files of J.P. Gittinger, Assistant Agrarian Reform Specialist, 1951-57.

RG 469 Entry UD-1437
5 Containers

Migration and Resettlement

U.S. Operations Mission to Vietnam; Resettlement and Rehabilitation Division; Subject Files, 1953-58.

RG 469 Entry UD-1452
33 Containers

U.S. Operations Mission to Vietnam; Resettlement and Rehabilitation Division; Classified Subject Files, 1954-58.

RG 469 Entry UD-1453
5 Containers

U.S. Operations Mission to Vietnam; Resettlement and Rehabilitation Division; Field Service; Subject Files, 1954-1958.

RG 469 Entry UD-1454
30 Containers

Public Health

U.S. Operations Mission to Vietnam. Health and Sanitation Division. Unclassified Subject Files.

RG 469 Entry P-403
6 Containers

U.S. Operations Mission to Vietnam. Unclassified Records Pertaining to Malaria Eradication.

RG 469 Entry P-404
9 Containers

U.S. Operations Mission to Vietnam: Health and Sanitation Division; Subject Files, 1951-57.

RG 469 Entry UD-1441
19 Containers

U.S. Operations Mission to Vietnam; Health and Sanitation Division; Hanoi Office; General Subject Files, 1951-54.

RG 469 Entry UD-1444
9 Containers

Public Safety

Office of Public Safety; Office of the Director; Numerical File, 1956-1974

RG 286 Entry A1-18
11 Containers

Office Of Public Safety; Technical Services Division; Geographic Files, 1961-70

RG 286 Entry A1-23
25 Containers

Office Of Public Safety; Technical Services Division; General Correspondence Relating To Geographic Areas, 1965-71

RG 286 Entry A1-25
13 Containers

Office of Public Safety; Operations Division; East Asia Branch Vietnam (11/03/1961 - 1975); Subject Files.

RG 286 Entry A1-31
79 Containers (boxes 217-296)

Office of Public Safety, Vietnam Division (11/03/1961 - 1975); Subject Files.

RG 286 Entry A1-32
119 Containers