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Modernizing Repression: Police Training, Political Violence, and Nation-Building in the “American Century”

Our police training program is a vital part of our effort to help less developed countries achieve internal security, which is essential if economic development is to help create viable free nations.

—*Agency of International Development Public Relations Guide, 1962*¹

For the first three days, the police beat me continuously. When I regained consciousness they beat me again.

—*South Vietnamese student, 1973*²

I hope we teach these guys more than just how to direct traffic.

—*Robert Kennedy, Special Group on Counter-Insurgency, 1963*³

During the 2004 presidential election campaign, Vice President Richard Cheney called for the “Salvador option” in Iraq, implying the training of local paramilitary and police forces to “pacify” the insurgency and restore public order.⁴ As in El Salvador in the 1980s, where the CIA was implicated in the training of death squads, the results so far have been catastrophic. American-trained police have been infiltrated by insurgents and found responsible for a litany of human rights abuses, including participation in sectarian warfare, torture, and revenge killings. They have only added to the nation’s growing anarchy and the suffering of its people, but further tarnished America’s

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1. Memo for the Special Group, Information on the International Police Academy, June 18, 1963, box 332, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda, JFK Library, Boston, MA (hereafter NSC).

2. Holmes Brown and Don Luce, *Hostages of War: Saigon’s Political Prisoners* (Indochina Mobile Project, 1973), 32.

3. In Adolph Saenz, *The OPS Story: A True Story of Tupamaro, Terrorists, Assassinations, Kidnappings in Colombia and Communist Subversion and Insurgency* (San Francisco, 2002), 71.

4. Greg Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop: Latin America, the United States and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York, 2006), 1; Michael Hirsh and John Barry, “The Salvadoran Option,” *Newsweek*, January 08, 2005, <http://www.newsweek.com>.

reputation.⁵ Though neglected in public debates and commentary, American strategy in Iraq—and its pitfalls—represents a stark continuity from the Cold War and imperial eras when the United States provided technical aid to local police and built up the penal apparatus of client regimes in order to promote social stability and export Western administrative systems.⁶ Presented to the public as humanitarian initiatives to strengthen democratic development, these programs fulfilled a less explicit agenda in securing the power base of local elites amenable to U.S. economic and political interests and contributed to extensive human rights violations. They also often backfired politically, breeding animosity and resistance and fuelling vicious cycles of violence.

This article seeks to analyze the implementation of and paradoxes surrounding the police training programs, demonstrating how they were conceived as mechanisms for advancing American strategic interests and why they resulted in the spread of political repression and violence. With remarkable continuity, police aid was used not just to target criminals but to develop elaborate intelligence networks oriented towards internal defense, which allowed the suppression of dissident groups to take place on a wider scale and in a more surgical and often brutal way. In effect, the United States helped to modernize intelligence gathering and political policing operations, thus magnifying the impact of these activities.⁷ The programs further helped to militarize the police and provided them with a new-found perception of power, while schooling them in a hard-line anticommunism that fostered the dehumanization of political adversaries and bred suspicion about grass-roots mobilization.⁸ These trends were most marked in Vietnam, where the democratic ideal of the police as public servants became difficult to uphold amidst the backdrop of a counterrevolutionary war in which they were an integral component. Although the United States was not always in control of the forces that it empowered and did not always condone their acts, human rights violations were not by accident or the product of rogue forces betraying American principles, as some

5. See A. K. Gupta, "Iraq: Militias and Civil War: The Pentagon Is Using Militias in Sectarian Battles," *Z Magazine*, December 2006; Amit R. Paley, "Heralded Iraq Police Academy a Disaster," *Washington Post*, September 28, 2006, A1; Spencer Ackerman, "Training Iraq's Death Squads: The U.S. Army is Professionalizing the Police—Which Are Infiltrated with Militias," *The Nation*, June 4, 2007, 20; Marilyn B. Young, "Counterinsurgency, Now and Forever," in *Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam, or, How Not to Learn From the Past*, ed. Lloyd C. Gardner and Marilyn B. Young (New York, 2007), 220; Ahmed S. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq* (Ithaca, NY, 2006).

6. See Martha K. Huggins, *Political Policing: The United States in Latin America* (Durham, NC, 1998); Michael T. Klare and Cynthia Aronson, *Supplying Repression: U.S. Support for Authoritarian Regimes Abroad* (Washington, DC, 1981); A. J. Langueth, *Hidden Terrors: The Truth about U.S. Police Operations in Latin America* (New York, 1978), 120.

7. See Alfred W. McCoy, "Torture in the Crucible of Counterinsurgency," in *Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam, or, How Not to Learn from the Past*, 230–62.

8. See Lesley Gill, *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas* (Durham, NC, 2004) for a parallel.

have previously argued.⁹ They were rather institutionalized within the fabric of American policy and its coercive underpinnings.

Much recent scholarship in American diplomatic history has focused on modernization theory and anticommunist nation-building as the key motivating factors shaping U.S. foreign policy in the Cold War.¹⁰ The police training programs, I argue, were central to both processes. They served key political and ideological functions in providing the internal security and order deemed necessary for the implementation of liberal-capitalist development programs. They were crucial, further, in upgrading the surveillance capacity of developing world states, thus allowing for a more extensive carrying out of social control—the ultimate marker of modernity in the postenlightenment era.¹¹ Therein lay their dark side.

SUBTLE MECHANISMS OF CONTROL: IMPERIAL ERA THROUGH THE EARLY COLD WAR

America's training of foreign police was modeled after European colonial practices. Promoting a divide-and-rule strategy, colonial administrators relied on indigenous police to control unrest and promote law and order. They provided them with modern equipment and training, which resulted in an intensification of state repression, as in British Kenya and French Indochina.¹² In 1898, the United States entered the great "imperial game" through its colonization of the Philippines, where occupation forces assisted in the creation of a local constabulary—or police force organized along military lines. Its main functions were to restore order in the cities, enforce conscripted labor programs designed

9. See for example, Mark Moyer, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: The CIA's Secret Campaign to Destroy the Viet Cong* (Annapolis, MD, 1997); William Colby, *Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA* (New York, 1978); John L. Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York, 2005). Jeremi Suri in *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge, MA, 2007) accepts Kissinger's claim that he was upset by and not responsible for the human rights abuses and violence perpetrated by U.S.-backed leaders.

10. See Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and 'Nation-Building' in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000); David C. Engerman et al., *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development and the Global Cold War* (Amherst, MA, 2003); Nils Gilman, *Mandarin of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore, 2003).

11. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York, 1995 [1975]); Thomas G. Blomberg, *American Penology: A History of Control* (New York, 2000); David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*, rev. ed. (Boston, 1990), ix.

12. See David M. Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (New York, 2005); *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority and Control, 1830–1940*, ed. David M. Anderson and David Killingray (Manchester, England, 1991); Samuel N. Chipungu, "African Leadership Under Indirect Rule in Colonial Zambia," in *Guardians in Their Time: Experiences of Zambians Under Colonial Rule, 1890–1964*, ed. Samuel Chipungu (London, 1992), 64. For another comparison, see Ching-chi Chen, "Police and Community Control Systems in the Empire," in *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895–1945*, ed. Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie (Princeton, NJ, 1984), 213–39.

to build-up the country's infrastructure, and bolster ongoing pacification efforts, particularly in the rebellious Moros provinces.¹³

From the 1910s through the 1930s, occupation officials trained police to fulfill a similar purpose in Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic, where they sought to impart new professional standards to enhance social control, including a reliance on uniformed officers, scientific modes of detection such as fingerprinting and mug shots, and expanded communications. They also introduced penal reforms, including modern cell structures, trade schools, and improved sanitation, which were rendered negligible by the political context and poor relations with local officials.¹⁴ Terrible abuses occurred in Haiti, where racism towards the indigenous population and exploitative economic practices tarnished the credibility of American occupying forces. As popular resistance developed, the United States created a police gendarmerie to oversee the forced roping together of native chain gangs, who worked to modernize the country's infrastructure under Corvée labor laws remnant from French colonialism. According to Brigadier-General Smedley Butler and Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander S. Williamson who headed the police force, local officers were intoxicated by their new-found authority and given to excessive drinking of native liquor (taffia), resulting in "unnecessarily harsh and brutal" conduct, echoing later developments in the Cold War.¹⁵ A missionary observer, L. Ton Evans, further testified before Congress that they served alongside the U.S. Marines as "an instrument of oppression and torture" in enforcing the "barbaric" marching of men "like a pack of slaves" under the Corvée system, as the Belgians had done in Africa. He added that political prisoners who avoided execution were regularly beaten and deprived of food, causing them to faint, and that dead bodies covered with vermin remained exposed in the prison yards.¹⁶

13. "History of the Office of Public Safety," 1969, box 4, Records of the Agency of International Development, Office of Public Safety, Programs, Surveys and Evaluations, National Archives, College Park, MD (hereafter OPS); Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006), 145–50; W. Cameron Forbes, *The Philippine Islands* (Boston, 1928), 214.

14. Inquiry into Occupation and Administration of Haiti and Santo Domingo, Hearings Before a Select Committee on Haiti and Santo Domingo, U.S. Senate, 77th Cong., 1st and 2d sess., vol. 1 (Washington, DC, 1922), 539–70. On transformations in U.S. policing practice in the Progressive era, see Simon Cole, *Suspect Identities: A History of Fingerprinting and Criminal Identification* (Cambridge, MA, 2001). On similar initiatives in Cuba, see Merle Curti and Kendall Birr, *Prelude to Point Four: American Technical Missions Overseas, 1838–1938* (Madison, WI, 1954), 193–94.

15. Inquiry into Occupation and Administration of Haiti and Santo Domingo, Hearings Before a Select Committee on Haiti and Santo Domingo, U.S. Senate, 77th Cong., 1st and 2d sess., vol. 1, 517, 556. Butler would later become a fierce critic of U.S. imperialism, perhaps because of the abuses that he oversaw in Haiti, characterizing himself as a "racketeer for big business and capitalism." See Smedley Butler, *War Is a Racket: The Antiwar Classic by America's Most Decorated General* (New York, 2003).

16. Inquiry into Occupation and Administration of Haiti and Santo Domingo, U.S. Senate, 77th Cong., 1st and 2d sess., vol. 1, 163–69; *Occupied Haiti*, ed. Emily Balch (New York, 1927), 125. For the general brutality of the U.S. occupation, see Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1916–1934* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1971). While supporting U.S. efforts to

These conditions were not unique to Haiti, but also prevalent in the Dominican Republic and the U.S. South, where prisons were notorious for racial discrimination, violence, and brutal labor regimens and considered to be worse than slave plantations.¹⁷ The harsh reality cuts deep into myths of national exceptionalism and virtue embraced by those who sought to remake countries like Haiti in the American image.¹⁸ Over the long-term, the police constabulary evolved into the political instrument of dictator François “Papa Doc” Duvalier, much like with Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic and Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua who emerged from their ranks.¹⁹

Police operations grew in scope in the aftermath of the Second World War and accorded well with America’s Cold War “mission” to export Western-style institutions and improve governing efficiency in a postcolonial environment.²⁰ They were central to U.S. occupational efforts in South Korea and Japan, where the main aim was to promote public security, while quelling radical protest, labor strikes, and anti-occupation resistance.²¹ In Japan, police decentralization, reform, and constitutional provisions for the protection of civil liberties led to the curbing of the most egregious abuses of the fascist regime, thus helping to legitimize U.S. political authority.²² When communist influence was deemed to be threatening, nevertheless, even liberal New Dealers supported acts of police repression.²³ In South Korea, where unrest from below was more

“Christianize” the “backwards” Haitians, Evans argued that the atrocities committed by U.S. forces and their proxies belied the missionary spirit of the church and warranted the removal of the U.S. presence from the country.

17. David Oshinsky, *Worse than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York, 1996). Abhorrent conditions remained endemic throughout the United States in spite of reform. See *Kate O’Hare’s Prison Letters* (Girard, KS, 1919), 3–6. On Dominican prisons, where outbreaks of beriberi were reported under U.S. occupation, see Bruce J. Calder, *The Impact of Intervention: The Dominican Republic During the U.S. Occupation of 1916–1924* (Austin, TX, 1984), 87.

18. See Walter Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy: National Identity and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT, 2008).

19. Robert H. Holden, *Armies Without Nations: Public Violence and State Formation in Central America, 1821–1960* (New York, 2004), 89; Marvin Goldwert, *The Constabulary in the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua: Progeny and Legacy of United States Intervention* (Gainesville, FL, 1962).

20. The term “American mission” is borrowed from David Foglesong, *The American Mission and the ‘Evil Empire’: The Crusade for a ‘Free Russia’ since 1881* (New York, 2007). In China, Office of Strategic Services (OSS) operatives provided technical support to the Guomindang secret police, which evolved into a “Chinese Gestapo.” See Michael Schaller, *The U.S. Crusade in China, 1938–1945* (New York, 1979), 247; Milton Miles, *A Different Kind of War* (New York, 1967), 434, 474–75.

21. Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and The Emergence of Separate Regimes* (Princeton, NJ, 1981), 160–61.

22. John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York, 1999), 547; Shuichi Sugai, “The Japanese Police System,” in *Five Studies in Japanese Politics*, ed. Robert E. Ward (Ann Arbor, MI, 1957); Political Reorientation of Japan, Report of the Government Section, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, September 1945–September 1948 (Washington, DC, 1948).

23. Christopher Aldous, *The Police in Occupation Japan: Control, Corruption and Resistance to Reform* (New York, 1997); Robert Textor, *Failure in Japan* (Westport, CT, 1951), 105. Aldous’s work shows that the Japanese police committed many human rights violations, often behind

protracted, police trained at an American-built National Academy developed an especially poor human rights record, owing in part to the repressive anticommunism of President Syngman Rhee and his lack of nationalist legitimacy. They were described in one top secret State Department report as the “hated instrument of an autocratic government.”²⁴ Consisting of many Japanese colonial collaborators, the police detained over 17,000 political prisoners, including newspaper editors responsible for printing “inflammatory articles.”²⁵ They also assisted the military in “pacifying” nationalist uprisings, including one on the southern island of Cheju, where tens of thousands of civilians were massacred prior to the official outbreak of the Korean War in 1950.²⁶

According to Information Officer John Caldwell who was ardently anti-communist and pro-Rhee, U.S. police advisers operated under the premise that “the ‘gooks’ only understood force,” accounting in part for their embrace of repressive methods.²⁷ During the war itself and in its aftermath, historian Greg Brazinsky writes, police units were “especially brutal in exacting merciless punishment and revenge” on those who had cooperated with the North Korean military, “sometimes slaughtering them.” When the National Assembly tried to pass a measure urging greater prudence, Rhee objected, with American approval.²⁸ Until his death in 1960, Rhee continued to utilize the police to spy on political opponents and, according to the State Department, undertook “extralegal and violent tactics” against civilians, including murder.²⁹ Though publicly trying to distance themselves, U.S. policymakers were largely responsible in that they had provided extensive technical funding and training for a security apparatus that lived up to its original aim of protecting Rhee’s power base and preventing the spread of communism.

Together with Japan, South Korea would help crystallize the view among policy elites that a nation’s police force was the critical factor needed to provide

closed doors, and had connections to criminal syndicates. See also Theodore Cohen, *Remaking Japan: The American Occupation as New Deal* (New York, 1987).

24. Policy Research Study—Internal Warfare and the Security of the Underdeveloped States, Department of State, November 20, 1961, NSC, box 332; Department of State, “South Korea: A Police State?” February 16, 1948, box 3, General Records of the State Department, Division of Research for Far-East Reports, 1946–1952, National Archives, College Park, MD.

25. Summation of Non-Military Activities in Korea, Government Headquarters, September 1946 (Washington, DC, 1946), 17; Richard J. Johnston, “Political Jailings in Korea Denied: Authorities Say 17,867 Held Are Accused of Theft, Riot, Murder and Other Crimes,” *New York Times*, November 26, 1947, 8; James I. Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941–1950* (Honolulu, 1985), 93.

26. “State Sponsored Terrorism and the April 3rd Cheju Uprising from Women’s Perspective,” Kim Sung Rae: The 50th Anniversary—East Asia Peace and Human Rights Conference, August 21–24, 1998, Chejudo, Korea, <http://www.kimsoft.com/1997>.

27. Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945–1954* (New York, 1972), 288; John Caldwell with Lesley Frost, *The Korea Story* (Chicago, 1952), 8. Interestingly, the Koreans later argued that they acted in a brutal way because of the influence of the Americans.

28. Greg Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans and the Making of Democracy* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2007), 28. Brazinsky is nevertheless sympathetic to U.S. policy.

29. *Ibid.*, 30.

for its internal defense.³⁰ This emphasis shaped the orientation towards political policing and militarization, accounting for the high level of humanitarian abuse. In 1955, the State Department initiated its first police program in Indonesia through the International Cooperation Administration (ICA), where it developed a mobile brigade to serve as a counterweight to the military, which was loyal to President Achmed Sukarno. The Eisenhower administration opposed him because of his leadership in the nonaligned movement and legalization of the Communist party (PKI). The United States would go on to channel police aid, including thousands of carbines, guns, and tear gas bombs, to separatist leaders mounting a campaign of subversion against Sukarno.³¹ He was eventually dislodged in a 1965 coup led by General Suharto, who utilized lists created by American-sponsored police and intelligence organizations to liquidate the PKI, resulting in what internal reports characterized as “among the worst mass murders of the 20th century.”³² These events showed the dark potential of U.S. assistance programs, which led to the growth of powerful security networks that served the interests of local forces operating above the rule of law that could easily spiral out of control.

In Thailand, where the police became the most powerful entity in the country, the CIA cultivated close ties with Phao Sriyanon, the pro-Western chief, who was admired for his forceful leadership and administrative skills. Through police aid and a front corporation, Sea Supply, over 200 advisers provided him with armored vehicles, small arms, radio equipment and bazookas that greatly enhanced the police's intelligence-gathering capabilities and enabled him to mount a force totaling 48,000 men, including 10,000 in Bangkok.³³ Owing to the devolution of the state's monopoly on violence, Phao's

30. Interview, Jack Goin, December 9, 1975, and Byron Engle, January 27, 1976, in William D. Steeves Jr., “The U.S. Public Safety Program, its Evolution and Demise” (M.A. thesis, George Washington University, School of International Affairs, 1975), 9. On the application of police programs to assist in the Huk counterinsurgency in the Philippines, see Policy Research Study—Internal Warfare and the Security of the Underdeveloped States, Department of State, November 20, 1961, box 332, NSC.

31. Records of the 4th Meeting, Interagency Group, April 30, 1963, box 8, Records of the Agency of International Development, Office of Public Safety, IPS, National Archives, College Park, MD (hereafter IPS); Study Report of Police Assistance Projects in Indonesia, March 1963, *ibid.*; Bradley Simpson, “Modernizing Indonesia: United States Indonesian Relations, 1961–1967” (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 2003); Fred Nolting to Secretary for Mutual Security Affairs, “Indonesia Military Supply–Constabulary,” August 1952, box 3, folder 1, Central Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Records Related to Economic Aid, 1948–1958, National Archives, College Park, MD. On the subversion campaign, see George and Audrey Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy: The Secret Eisenhower–Dulles Debate in Indonesia* (New York, 1995).

32. At least 500,000 and possibly up to 2 million were killed. See Gabriel Kolko, *Confronting the Third World* (New York, 1989), 178; *The Indonesian Killings of 1965–1966: Studies from Java and Bali*, ed. Robert Cribb, Monash Papers on Southeast Asia, no. 21 (Clayton, Victoria, Australia, 1990); Geoffrey Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali* (Ithaca, NY, 1995).

33. See Daniel Fineman, *The Making of a Special Relationship: The U.S. and Thailand* (Honolulu, 2002), 134–36; Thomas Lobe, *U.S. National Security Policy and Aid to the Thailand Police* (Denver, 1977), 23–24.

men engaged in the “disappearance” of political rivals, including four members of Parliament. They also took control over the regional opiate trade, which was made more profitable by modern transportation capabilities (in another unintended consequence of the police programs).³⁴ Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN) chief Harry J. Anslinger wrote in a 1959 internal memo that the Thai police were so corrupt it “came out of their ears,” while a 1972 State Department report conceded that Phao deserved his “poor reputation as a result of his involvement in nefarious activities.”³⁵

In January 1959, in order to help facilitate anti-Communist nation-building and modernization after the military had consolidated power, the State Department sent James Bennett, Director of the American Bureau of Prisons and a former Warden at Lewisburg Penitentiary in Pennsylvania, to survey and develop a plan to overhaul the Thai prison system. Bennett found that most of the holding facilities were “overcrowded” and frequently held inmates for “considerable amounts of time without charge,” often confining them to “leg chains.”³⁶ In line with similar reforms being undertaken in U.S. prisons, he recommended expanding opportunities for education and prison works, speeding up court procedures, and establishing a probation system.³⁷ Because the priorities of an incipient counterinsurgency campaign against the underground activities of the Thai Communist party came to assume top priority, however, there is scant evidence that any of these initiatives were ever implemented. Foreign aid nevertheless contributed to the expansion of the nation’s penal apparatus, thus enhancing the scope of state repression.³⁸ Even if desiring to improve the human rights climate, American advisers could not ultimately control how the money and equipment was being used by local officials whom they were empowering and often did not care to, so long as American interests

34. Alfred W. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade* (New York, 1991), 191.

35. Harry J. Anslinger to Gilbert Yates, February 25, 1959, box 164, file Vietnam, Records of the Drug Enforcement Administration, Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, National Archives, College Park, MD (hereafter BNDD); U. Alexis Johnson, American Consulate to State Department, June 13, 1958, BNDD, box 164, file Vietnam; M. J. W. Wilkinson, “References to Thailand in Mr. McCoy’s book,” 1972, box 5, folder: Narcotics, State Department Records, Subject Files, Offices of Thai and Burma Affairs, 1963–1975, National Archives, College Park, MD. For charges against China, which FBN officers conceded only produced opium for internal medical needs, see Harry J. Anslinger, “The Red Chinese Dope Traffic,” *Saturday Evening Post*, September 17, 1960; Harry J. Anslinger and William F. Tompkins, *The Traffic in Narcotics* (New York, 1953), 95.

36. Report on the Prisons of Thailand, James V. Bennett, Director Federal Bureau of Prisons, U.S. Department of Justice, October 26, 1960, box 23, Thai Penology, folder 1, International Cooperation Administration, Washington, DC, Records of the Agency of International Development, Office of Public Safety, East Asia Branch, National Archives, College Park, MD (hereafter OPS East Asia).

37. On domestic prison reforms of this era and their limits, see Eric Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California’s Radical Prison Movement* (Palo Alto, CA, 1994).

38. “Ad Hoc Village Security Committee,” Jeter Williamson, Chief Public Safety Division to Tracey Park, September 1, 1965, box 211, folder 1; Special Police Problems, OPS East Asia; “Village Police Program,” December 21, 1965, box 211, OPS East Asia.

were ostensibly benefiting. Owing to the political climate of McCarthyism, voices of internal dissent were also largely muted.

“A MORE USEFUL COUNTERSUBVERSIVE INSTRUMENT THAN
THE MILITARY”: FLEXIBLE RESPONSE AND THE OFFICE OF
PUBLIC SAFETY

By the end of the Eisenhower era, American police programs employed 115 technical advisers in twenty-four countries at a budget of \$14.2 million.³⁹ The Kennedy administration escalated them to new heights. Contrary to the humanitarian image promoted in popular culture and in a series of fawning memoirs written by former aides, Kennedy was an ardent cold warrior who embraced violence as a means of upholding American hegemonic interests.⁴⁰ Opposed to Eisenhower's commitment to an arms build-up, Kennedy promoted a flexible response doctrine calling for new counterinsurgency strategies to counter radical nationalist movements in the developing world.⁴¹ He emphasized a strengthening of the military and policing capabilities of pro-Western regimes in order to provide them with the stability deemed necessary for economic development and modernization.⁴² In 1961, in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs debacle, Kennedy convened a Special Group on counterinsurgency (CI) headed by Robert Kennedy and four-star General Maxwell Taylor, who championed unconventional forces and the Green Berets.⁴³ They met each Thursday and embraced police training as a cost-effective means of promoting national security.⁴⁴

The driving figure behind this position was National Security Council Adviser Robert Komer, who later became the Director of Pacification in Vietnam. In May 1961, Komer had conducted a study of Eisenhower's police operations, which he termed “an orphan child that nobody seems to be paying any attention to.” “The 30 million that we give is small potatoes,” he wrote in a memo to the Special Group. “The police are in many cases a far more effective and immediately useful counter-subversive instrument than the

39. Martha K. Huggins, “U.S. Supported State Terror: A History of Police Training in Latin America,” in *Vigilantism and the State in Modern Latin America: Essays on Extralegal Violence* (New York, 1991), 230.

40. See Seymour Hersh, *The Dark Side of Camelot* (Boston, 1997); Noam Chomsky, *Retrieving Camelot: JFK, the Vietnam War and American Political Culture* (Boston, 1993); Stephen G. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: JFK Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1999). For the Camelot view, see Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *A Thousand Days* (Boston, 1965); Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation* (New York, 1964); Theodore Sorenson, *Kennedy* (New York, 1965).

41. John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York, 1982), 198–236.

42. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology*, 5.

43. Maxwell Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet* (New York, 1960); David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York, 1972).

44. See Michael McClintock, “The Kennedy Crusade,” in *Instruments of Statecraft: U.S. Guerilla Warfare, Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism, 1940–1990* (New York, 1992), 161–79.

military. Indonesia is a great example. The mobile brigade that we support is more like a paramilitary force.”⁴⁵ In another memo to Taylor and McGeorge Bundy, the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Komer stressed that the police were “more valuable than Special Forces in our global counter-insurgency efforts” and particularly useful in fighting urban insurrections. “We get more from the police in terms of preventative medicine than from any single U.S. program,” he said. “They are cost effective, while not going for fancy military hardware. They provide the first line of defense against demonstrations, riots and local insurrections. Only when the situation gets out of hand (as in South Vietnam) does the military have to be called in.”⁴⁶

Komer’s analysis was similar to academic modernization theorists who, in an updating of the white man’s burden, felt that Third World peoples could be uplifted through the importation of modern technology and Western administrative systems, of which policing was seen as a cornerstone. They also valued military and police training in its capacity to provide the security deemed necessary for the success of foreign aid programs and achievement of economic “take-off,” which could then undercut support for left-wing social movements.⁴⁷ Ironically, in practice the programs often yielded the opposite effect, resulting in an escalation of political violence, instability and resistance. Komer was influenced by Sir Robert Thompson of Britain, a RAND Corporation analyst who had become the darling of American policymakers as an expert on counterinsurgency. He had devised a successful strategy to defeat a Chinese-backed uprising in Malaya, in which peasants were relocated into fortified government zones and won over through reforms.⁴⁸ This became the basis for the Strategic Hamlet program in South Vietnam, where police were organized to protect vital installations from guerrilla infiltration. Thompson viewed civilian police as effective in intelligence gathering and more capable than military officers in implementing civic action programs, including public works and moderate

45. Robert W. Komer to CI, “Let’s Not Forget the OISP,” May 4, 1961, box 332, folder: Counter-Insurgency Police Programs, NSC.

46. Robert W. Komer to McGeorge Bundy, Maxwell Taylor, “Cutbacks in Police Programs Overseas,” May 5, 1962, box 332, folder: Counter-Insurgency Police Programs, NSC.

47. See Walt W. Rostow, *Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge, MA, 1957); *The Role of the Military in Underdeveloped Countries*, ed. John J. Johnson (Princeton, NJ 1962); Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA, 1957); Morris Janowitz, *The Military in the Political Development of New Nations* (Chicago, 1964); David H. Bayley, *The Police and Political Development in India* (Princeton, NJ, 1969); Robert Packenham, *Liberal America and the Third World: Political Development Ideas in Foreign Aid and Social Science* (Princeton, NJ, 1973).

48. Robert W. Komer, *The Malayan Emergency in Retrospect: Organization of a Successful Counter-Insurgency Effort* (Santa Monica, CA, 1972). See also A.J. Stockwell, “Police During the Malayan Emergency, 1948–1960,” in *Policing and Decolonization: Nationalism, Politics and the Police, 1917–1965*, ed. David M. Anderson and David Killingray (Manchester, England, 1992), 105–27.

land reform, which were designed to win the political war for “hearts and minds.”⁴⁹

In 1962, the Special Group established the Office of Public Safety (OPS) within the U.S. Agency of International Development (USAID) to “develop the civilian police component of internal security forces in underdeveloped states” and to “identify early the symptoms of an incipient subversive situation” (Figure 1).⁵⁰ Headed by former CIA operative Byron Engle, who had run the police programs in Japan, the central aim was to further maintain law and order and internal defense “without unnecessary bloodshed and an obtrusive display of the bayonet.”⁵¹ Many OPS training manuals stressed the need to demilitarize the police and promote nonlethal methods of riot control and control of mobs so as to maintain a positive image (Figure 2). Pointing to the Laotian conflict, where the CIA had subverted elections in 1958 and backed a right-wing coup, causing the growth of an underground guerrilla movement (the Pathet Lao, which attained a majority of seats in the parliament), one internal State Department memo noted that “the police were able to operate without interference in Pathet Lao controlled areas and earned great respect from the population through close contact. The [Royal Lao] army meanwhile was ambushed in these areas because it lived off the land, burned villages and had aroused widespread hatred.”⁵²

Over the long term, it is questionable to what degree this model was sustained given the mounting popular resistance that developed against U.S.-backed forces and the shift to a strategy of building a clandestine army among the indigenous Hmong. The OPS rapidly expanded nevertheless to include operation in twenty-six countries and spent over \$210 million in Southeast Asia, including \$88 million in Thailand, \$94 million in South Vietnam, and \$10 million in Indonesia.⁵³ In Latin America, where AID Director David Bell told Congress that the police were “strongly anticommunist and a bulwark against

49. Sir Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam* (New York, 1966), 103; Sir Robert Thompson, *Make for the Hills: Memories of Far Eastern Wars* (London, 1989), 128. See also Theodore Shackley, *The Third Option: An American View of Counter-Insurgency Operations* (New York, 1981); Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, 431.

50. Policy Research Study—Internal Warfare and the Security of the Underdeveloped States, November 20, 1961, box 332, Department of State, NSC; Maxwell Taylor, Address to the International Police Academy, December 17, 1965, in Klare and Aronson, *Supplying Repression: American Support for Authoritarian Regimes Abroad*, 19.

51. Chester Bowles, Memo for the President on Counter-Subversion Training for Latin American Police Forces, September 30, 1961, box 331, NSC; Nancy Stein, “Policing the Empire,” in *The Iron Fist and the Velvet Glove: An Analysis of the US Police* (Berkeley, CA, 1977), 42; David G. Epstein, “The Police Role in Counter-Insurgency Efforts,” *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science* 59 (March 1968): 148.

52. Ibid.; Role and Mission of Rural Police in South Vietnam, Roger Hilsman, report to JFK, Hilsman Papers, box 332, Kennedy Library, Boston, MA; “History of the Office of Public Safety, 1955–1969,” June 1969, box 4, OPS. On political developments in Laos, see Alfred W. McCoy, ed. *Laos: War and Revolution* (New York, 1970); Martin Stuart Fox, *A History of Laos* (New York, 1997), 105.

53. Mobile Brigade Re-Equipment and Training (Supporting Assistance), 21 February 1963, box 8, OPS. See also Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, 401.

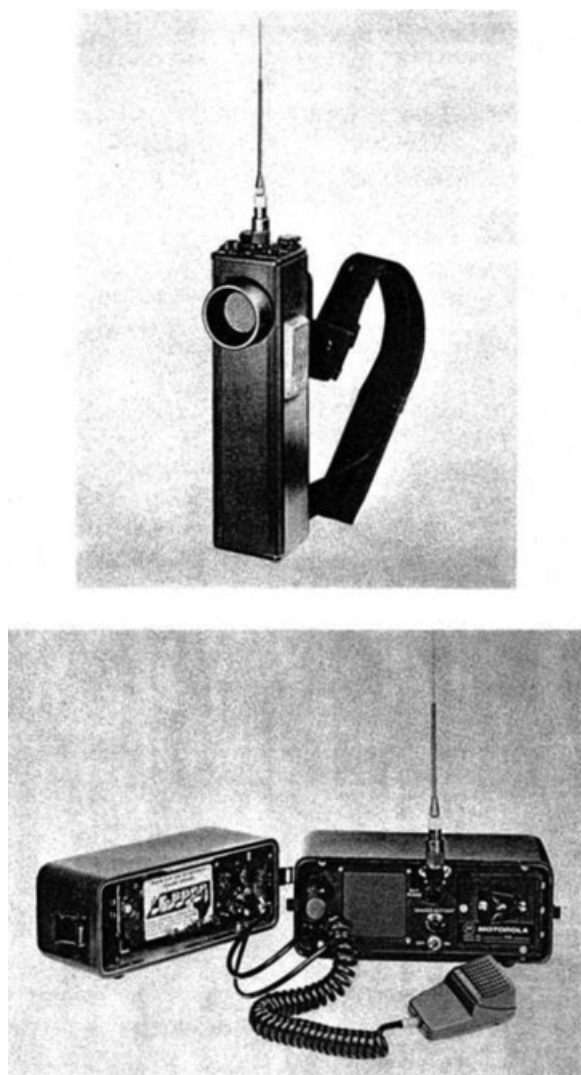


Figure 1: FM1 (top) and FM5 radios furnished by the USAID Combined Telecommunications Directorate.

terrorism,” the total was over \$54 million, including \$8 million in Brazil.⁵⁴ In August 1962, Kennedy ordered the creation of an International Police Academy

54. U.S. Public Safety Programs, 1961–1972, U.S. Agency of International Development, Operations Report, June 30, 1972 (Washington, DC, 1972); U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations, Foreign Assistance Hearings (Washington, DC, 1964), 75; Michael T. Klare, “U.S. Police Assistance Programs in Latin America,” *NACLA*, December 1972.



Figure 2: Training in riot control and control of mobs without excessive violence so that “no martyrs are created.” Courtesy National Archives, College Park, MD.

(IPA) in Washington, DC, which became known as the “West Point of the law enforcement community” and trained over 100,000 foreign police, including 600 high-ranking officers.⁵⁵ OPS advisers were usually of the rank of detective and above and recruited from the ranks of the FBI, CIA, and Special Forces. They took pride in their ability to serve as “missionaries of modernization,” as one historian termed it.⁵⁶ They saw it as their duty to bolster organizational efficiency and police professionalism in targeting both criminals and subversives—an ability that was seen as central to nation-building by liberal policy elites who had supported the growth of the FBI as vital to the New Deal national security state.⁵⁷

Operating under the premise that good policing was a pivotal characteristic of a modern nation, the OPS introduced technical innovations and provided foreign police with skills in management, finger-printing, intelligence gathering, counternarcotics, and counterterrorism, as well as more mundane tasks like traffic control and licensing. They stressed the importance of record keeping as a means of elevating arrest and prosecution rates and provided funds to upgrade

55. JFK to Maxwell Taylor, August 1962, Memo for the Special Group, June 18, 1963, box 332, NSC; JFK to Secretary of Defense, September 5, 1961, box 331, NSC; Michael T. Klare, *War Without End: American Planning for the Next Vietnams*, foreword by Gabriel Kolko (New York, 1972), 260.

56. Robert H. Holden, *Armies Without Nations: Public Violence and State Formation in Latin America* (New York, 2004), 156.

57. See Clare B. Potter, *War on Crime: Bandits, G-Men and the Politics of Mass Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1998); Ellen Shrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston, 1998).

police benefits and pay to help limit corruption.⁵⁸ They also helped to supply state-of-the-art equipment, including modern radio and telecommunication instruments, fingerprint kits, Smith & Wesson revolvers, and laboratory materials. This was in addition to new police cruisers and vehicles, hand grenades, gas masks, and shields for riot control.

Because the police often served as the enforcement arm of undemocratic regimes valued for their anticommunism, and were oriented towards internal security and social control, the new equipment frequently resulted in an intensification of state repression, which was in effect modernized.⁵⁹ The creation of elaborate intelligence infrastructures allowing for better coordination in tracking down subversives, who often represented popular aspirations for social justice and change, enhanced this development, as did the trend towards militarization. Though in theory OPS trainees were supposed to be apolitical, when “all the chips were down,” internal reports conceded, they were militantly anticommunist and predominantly conservative, owing in part to their training. One feature of the IPA course was to school the students in anticommunist ideology. The culmination was a mock counterinsurgency operation, where they had to suppress a disturbance and protect the ruling government from being swept from power. Observers noted that the simulation was harder than real life and that officers returned home with a certain “swagger,” ready to engage in the fight against communism—at whatever the human cost.⁶⁰

Through an examination of student papers, a congressional investigating committee headed by Senator James Abourezk (D-ND) came to suspect that the IPA condoned torture. One Nepalese student wrote that “torture is a practical necessity in extracting information as a last resort.” A Vietnamese student added: “Despite the fact that brutal interrogation is strongly criticized by moralists, its importance must not be denied if we want to have order and security in daily life.”⁶¹ These comments exemplify how the emphasis on order and security came to trump considerations about civil liberties during the Cold War, thus magnifying political repression. IPA students were tellingly shown Gillo Pontecorvo’s film the *Battle of Algiers*, which depicted graphic scenes of torture undertaken by the French police who wreaked reprisals on Algerian nationalists at night.⁶²

58. E. H. Adkins, Resources Control, National Police of Vietnam, Public Safety Division, USOM, March 1965, 23.

59. See, for example, Byron Engle, “AID Assistance to Civil Security: The Office of Public Safety,” *Police Chief* (reprint: Gaithersburg, MD, 1972): 34–39.

60. Langueth, *Hidden Terrors*, 120. For other controversial dimension of the curricula, including a course on bomb-making taught by CIA lecturers, see Jack Anderson, “CIA Teaches Terrorism to Friends,” *Washington Post*, October 8, 1973, C33; Michael T. Klare and Nancy Stein, “Police Terrorism in Latin America: Secret U.S. Bomb School Exposed,” *NACLA*, January 1972.

61. Jack Anderson, “Questionable Means of Interrogation,” *Washington Post*, August 3, 1974, C15. Another student advocated drugging suspects to obtain information—a technique that was advocated in CIA interrogation manuals.

62. Alfred W. McCoy, *A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (New York, 2006), 62.

Instructors responded to criticism by claiming that “the questionable techniques of extracting information” helped to create “abhorrence among students for inhumane methods.”⁶³ Amnesty International, however, documented widespread physical and psychological torture by police in twenty-four of the forty-nine nations that hosted OPS police training teams.⁶⁴ Declassified interrogation manuals used at the academy display a particular emphasis on sensory deprivation and other psychological torture techniques derived from CIA-funded mind control experiments, which were widely adopted across the so-called Third World.⁶⁵

The training of police in riot control and halting urban insurrections and strikes hastened the link to human rights violations. In principle, this was designed to lessen the degree of violence, as students were taught to use tear gas as an alternative to submachine guns so that “no martyrs were created and the Communists had nothing to exploit.”⁶⁶ In practice, however, there were few efforts at regulation. The sanctioning of moderate degrees of force further served as a barrier to peaceful reconciliation and reinforced existing power relations. OPS trained police were linked to severe beatings, often of nonviolent demonstrators. In El Salvador, adviser Adolph Saenz candidly reports in his book *The OPS Story* that police, issued wooden batons by the United States, clubbed to death a young student protesting against social inequalities in the country, while injuring many others quite brutally.⁶⁷ The State Department later rationalized human rights abuses by attributing them to “pervasive cultural and legal attitudes typical of lesser developed countries,” which, it predicted, would “be overcome as the country gradually modernizes.”⁶⁸

Similar stereotypes were invoked to rationalize the involvement of OPS-trained police in extortion and graft, which was largely a product of continuously poor pay and legal impunity. Many were also implicated in the narcotics traffic, in some cases to fund their political operations or to supplement their income.⁶⁹ Embassy officials and the CIA often turned a blind eye so long as the police

63. Martha K. Huggins, “U.S. Supported State Terror: A History of Police Training in Latin America,” in *Vigilantism and the State in Modern Latin America: Essays on Extralegal Violence* (New York, 1991), 234.

64. See Michael T. Klare, *War Without End: American Planning For the Next Vietnams* (New York, 1972), 382–83; Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights: The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism* (Boston, 1979); William Blum, *Killing Hope* (Monroe, ME, 2004), 202.

65. McCoy, *A Question of Torture*, 62; Central Intelligence Agency, KUBARK Counterintelligence Interrogation, July 1963, 87; National Security Archive, George Washington University, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv>.

66. Records of the 4th Meeting, Interagency Group, April 30, 1963, box 8, IPS.

67. Saenz, *The OPS Story*, 22.

68. Kate Doyle, “Human Rights and the Dirty War,” National Security Archives, March 24, 1976, doc. 6, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv>.

69. See “Testimony of Frederick P. Herter,” War Related Civilian Problems in Indochina, Part III—Vietnam, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, 92d Cong., 1st sess., April 21, 1971 (Washington, DC, 1971), 24; Thomas C. Fox, “South Vietnam’s Police Force Gaining in Size and Status as U.S. Increases Aid,” *New York Times*, April 14, 1971.

continued to serve what were perceived to be American national security interests.⁷⁰ In Thailand, for example, intelligence reports estimated that 90 percent of the police were “graft-prone” and “bribed and paid protection fees by the smuggling syndicates,” which “the government had little desire or power to stop.”⁷¹ The United States nevertheless escalated support for strategic reasons, including a desire to retain air bases crucial to the waging of war on Vietnam. On September 28, 1971, Ambassador Leonard Ungar brokered a pact to send Black Hawk helicopters to the Thai police ostensibly for counternarcotics purposes, although Congressman Lester Wolff (D-NY) discovered that they were used in an increasingly brutal counterinsurgency campaign.⁷² Internal reports also show how the OPS focused on building the paramilitary capabilities of the Thai border police, who assisted in countering local subversion and mounted raids into neighboring Laos, where they compiled an atrocious human rights record fighting alongside the CIA’s Hmong Army.⁷³

The situation in Thailand was no anomaly, as the OPS frequently created rural mobile police units designed to track down guerrilla units and also, paradoxically, win popular support through building schools and promoting economic and infrastructural development. The civic action dimension, however, usually received short shrift, largely because of the emphasis placed by policymakers on geostrategic and Cold War considerations, as well as the nature of their training in counterinsurgency. The oppressive reputation of the police, in turn, made the public fear their intentions, resulting in added hostility and conflict, and violent cycles of retribution.

70. See Douglas Valentine, *The Strength of the Wolf: The Secret History of America's War on Drugs* (London, 2004), 331; Alfred W. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Narcotics Traffic* (New York, 1991); Jonathan Marshall, *Drugs Wars: Corruption, Counterinsurgency and Covert Operations in the Third World* (San Mateo, CA, 1991).

71. Quoted in Mitchell Satchell, “U.S. Drug Reports Differ,” *Washington Star-News*, August 16, 1972, 3; Thomas Lobe, *U.S. National Security Policy and Aid to Thailand* (Denver, 1977), 75. See also Post-War Southeast Asia—A Search for Neutrality and Independence, Report by Senator Mike Mansfield, U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (Washington, DC, 1976), 6; Fred Branfman, “Presidential War in Laos, 1864–1970,” in *Laos: War and Revolution*, ed. Alfred W. McCoy and Nina S. Adams (New York, 1970), 277.

72. Roger Ernst, Director U.S. Operations, Mission Bangkok Thailand to Joe W. Johnson, Audit Manager, Bangkok Office, Far-East Bureau, October 3, 1973, box 212, folder 1, Records of the United States Agency of International Development, Office of Public Safety, Thailand, Narcotics Control, National Archives, College Park, MD (hereafter Thailand Narcotics Control); Southeast Asian Narcotics, Hearings Before the Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control, House of Representatives, 95th Cong., 1st sess., July 12, 13, 1977 (Washington, DC, 1978), 2.

73. Bob Lowe, “Observations on Thai National Police,” June 1963, box 6, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Thailand Files, National Archives, College Park, MD; “Proposed Border Police Civic Action Program,” April 11, 1962, box 6, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Thailand Files, National Archives, College Park, MD; Ibid. On the secret war in Laos, perhaps the dirtiest in U.S. history, see Alfred W. McCoy, “America’s Secret War in Laos, 1955–75,” in *A Companion to the Vietnam War*, ed. Marilyn B. Young and Robert Buzzanco (London, 2005), 283–332. One reason was the offering of bounties for the cutting off of enemy ears by CIA advisers like Tony Poe.

In Colombia, where the United States escalated advisory support in the early 1960s after the Cuban revolution, OPS reports proudly document the role of the police in “neutralizing leftist and terrorist groups” as a result of expanded telecommunications and killing “bandits” loyal to the ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional) and Camillo Torres, a sociology professor and populist priest murdered under suspicious circumstances.⁷⁴ In one incident during the “dirty war,” police entered a bar and killed three alleged guerrilla supporters as well as a female employee.⁷⁵ The language shows how the dehumanization of political adversaries, who threatened U.S. business interests, in this case, by promoting the nationalization of state resources, was used to rationalize acts of police violence and terror. Not coincidentally, OPS-trained units evolved into operational death squads across the Southern Cone.⁷⁶ Though not directly involved with or necessarily condoning them, American officials had helped to set up an opportune climate in which they could flourish and did not often press for legal censure. Products of a Cold War ideological mindset, they held to the notion that the ends justified the means.

UNDER THE FAÇADE OF BENEVOLENCE: RIOT CONTROL AND FURTHER HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Fitting with its social control function, the OPS frequently delivered emergency equipment to curb rioting that threatened to topple pro-U.S. regimes. This was a recipe for disaster, in part because there was little oversight of police activity or way of monitoring how the equipment might be used.⁷⁷ In June 1963, after demonstrations erupted in Tehran against American-backed dictator Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlevi, the OPS provided over \$500,000 in riot-control gear. The State Department later expressed gratification to Chief of Police Nematollah Nassiri (later head of SAVAK) for crushing the protests, even though they had killed at least one major mullah and helped to engender support for Islamist

74. Theodore Brown, “Public Safety Monthly Report—February 1966,” April 18, 1966, box 4, folder: Colombia, OPS. On the broader counterinsurgency and underlying economic motives, see Douglas Stokes, *America’s Other War: Terrorizing Colombia* (London, 2005), 57; Nazih Richani, *Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia* (Albany, NY, 2002).

75. Theodore Brown, “Public Safety Monthly Report—February 1966,” in Saenz, *The OPS Story*, 279.

76. On the case of Brazil, see “OPS, Death Squads and the CIA,” *New York Times*, July 7, 1970; Martha K. Huggins, *Political Policing*, 144; Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. Senate, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Western Hemispheric Affairs, United States Policies and Programs in Brazil (Washington, DC., 1971), 6; Archdiocese of Sao Paulo, *Torture in Brazil* (New York, 1986). On El Salvador, as another example, see Michael McLintock, *State Terror and Popular Resistance in El Salvador* (London, 1984).

77. American Embassy Bogota to Secretary of State, February 8, 1966, box 4, folder: Colombia, OPS. Following Torres’s death in Colombia, the OPS sent hundreds of shields, megaphones, carbines, grenades, and tear-gas to police, which brutally suppressed a series of student protests.

oppositional forces.⁷⁸ In Guatemala, where police aid was central in American attempts to “manage the counter-revolution” following the 1954 CIA-sponsored coup against Jacobo Arbenz, the OPS expedited the shipment of over 3,000 batons and hand grenades in April 1962 to assist in the suppression of rioters threatening to bring down U.S.-backed Colonel Enrique Peralta.⁷⁹ Unrest from below, nevertheless, continued, causing the OPS to send advisers from Thailand to coordinate a security unit, which wound up executing thirty prominent opposition leaders. Guerrilla warfare commenced soon thereafter.⁸⁰

As these cases demonstrate, the attempt to impose social stability through force often backfired in breeding animosity and resistance, resulting in ever harsher government social control mechanisms and the eventual onset of civil war and revolution.⁸¹ In packaging the OPS programs publicly, government officials stressed the importance of police training to the democratization process, which the media often accepted uncritically.⁸² They claimed that the OPS instilled humane policing standards and denied assistance to authoritarian states, including Nicaragua under the Somoza dynasty.⁸³ This was far from reality.⁸⁴ In the Congo, for example, in order to quell civil unrest following the CIA-supported murder of the anti-imperialist Patrice Lumumba, the OPS equipped the secret police of Joseph Kasavubu (1961–1964) and Dictator Joseph Mobutu (1965–1994) with grenades, shells, jeeps, and helmet liners courtesy of

78. Stuart W. Rockwell to Ambassador, “Riot Control Equipment,” July 12, 1963, and “Performance of the National Police in the Tehran Riots,” June 5–6, 1963, box 8, folder 3, OPS.

79. “Capability of the Guatemalan Government to Control Riots,” April 11, 1963, box 332, Memorandum for the President, Deputy Secretary of Defense, NSC. Peralta’s predecessor, Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes, had invited the leader of the 1944 revolution, Juan Arevalo, who had written a book critical of U.S. policy, *The Shark and the Sardines*, back into the country to stand for reelection. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World*, 75–76.

80. Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago, 2004), 96–97; Stephen Streeter, *Managing the Counter-Revolution: The United States and Guatemala, 1954–1961* (Athens, OH, 2000); Public Safety Program, Guatemala, 1966, box 8, folder 3, OPS; American embassy Guatemala City to Secretary of State, September 30, 1966, Thomas L. Hughes to the Secretary, “White Terror,” U.S. Department of State, Director of Intelligence and Research, October 23, 1967, National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv>.

81. See Nikki R. Keddie, *The Iranian Revolution and the Islamic Republic* (Syracuse, NY, 1986); Piero Gleijeses, “The Culture of Fear,” in Nick Cullather, ed., *Secret History: The CIA’s Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952–1954* (Palo Alto, CA, 1999).

82. “Panama Communists Held ‘Under Control,’” *Washington Post*, June 6, 1963, A24; “International Police School Graduates 68,” *Washington Post*, August 8, 1964, A4. On the general symbiosis between mass media and official government pronouncements, see Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York, 1988).

83. U. Alexis Johnson, “The Role of the Police Force in a Changing World,” *Department of State Bulletin*, September 13, 1971, 280; John A. Hannah, “In Support of Orderly Change,” Address to International Police Academy, May–June 1970.

84. On police aid to Ferdinand Marcos’s brutal regime in the Philippines, for example, see “Testimony of Benedict J. Kerkvliet, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Smithsonian Institute,” in Political Prisoners in South Vietnam and the Philippines, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, House of Representatives, 93d Cong., 2d sess., June 5, 1974 (Washington, DC, 1974), 74; McCoy, *A Question of Torture*, 131.

Firestone rubber. They also constructed a national police school equipped with a firing range. According to the State Department's own assessment, Mobutu "ruled through fear," while most police units displayed a "lack of discipline, engaged in extortion and theft, and used vehicles for their own enjoyment." Case officers, nevertheless, expressed satisfaction for their role in helping to suppress popular uprisings in conjunction with South African mercenaries and industrial police forces established to protect Belgian-owned installations and plantations.⁸⁵

Elsewhere in Africa, the OPS spent over \$700,000 in developing a police college in Ethiopia and a new imperial police force trained in part by Israeli advisers who proved "effective in riot control" as a result of the "authoritarian" character of the emperor Haillie Selassie.⁸⁶ The OPS also funneled arms into Kigali, Rwanda, via military airlift to avoid customs in supporting "graft ridden police" loyal to President Gregoire Kayibanda against "Chicom supported Tutsi terrorists," as the U.S. embassy portrayed them.⁸⁷ These were in fact a group of poor refugees deprived of political rights and expelled from their homeland as a result of a racist campaign by "Hutu Power" extremists who would later commit genocide against the Tutsi.⁸⁸ Insensitivity to regional variation and the inclination to see a Soviet or Chinese hand in all political conflict ultimately helped to account for the paradoxes of the police programs in Africa. The use of police aid to create a modernized security apparatus for regimes with little public support further shaped the high levels of abuse, as did the flooding of poor nations with advanced weaponry.

"THERE WERE SADISTIC PEOPLE IN AUTHORITY:" POLICE
TRAINING AND THE VIETNAM WAR

The OPS program was largest in South Vietnam, where it exemplified the coercive character of American social policing efforts and helped to arm the most reactionary elements in society with all of the modern instruments of repression. It nonetheless proved to be geostrategically disastrous, and pointed to the limits of American social engineering efforts and power. Training of the police began in 1955 as a central dimension to America's nation-building campaign on behalf of President Ngo Dinh Diem, who replaced French puppet

85. Public Safety Monthly Reports, May 1966 and June 1966 (U.S. consul Lubumbashi, Kinshasa), USAID, to Kinshasa, box 5, Congo, OPS. See also Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002), 57-77.

86. "Ethiopia—Country Report, 1963," May 27, 1965 (Memo to the CI, From the Department of State, Public Safety Review—Country Report Ethiopia), box 258, OPS.

87. Police Survey Mission to the Republic of Rwanda, May 1964, Records of the USAID, OPS, Office of the Director, Programs, Surveys and Evaluations, National Archives, box 11, Rwanda.

88. See Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton, NJ, 2001); Gerard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: A History of Genocide, 1959-1994* (London, 1995); Paul Rugwamba, Tutsi refugee, interview by author, Harvard University, Boston, MA, June 7, 2006.

emperor Bao Dai following the temporary division of the country under the 1954 Geneva Accords. Valued for his anticommunism, Diem had little interest in developing a Western-style democracy and wanted to establish his own political dynasty.⁸⁹ The police operation was run by professors from Michigan State University (MSU) under contract with the State Department, whose aim, in the words of political scientist Wesley R. Fishel, was to facilitate law and order so as to create the conditions necessary for economic and social development and the “enlargement of freedom and prosperity.”⁹⁰ They urged police to develop a more efficient record gathering system and modeled Diem’s Sureté after the American FBI, arming it with twelve-gauge shotguns, sedans, ammunition, and riot-control equipment to counter subversion. There were few pretenses from the beginning that the police were anything but a political instrument, with many of the top officials, including Sureté Director Nguyen Ngoc Le, having been previously trained by France.⁹¹

After Diem’s forces helped to dismantle the Binh Xuyen criminal network, Fishel advised him to crack down on narcotic smuggling to cement his political legitimacy.⁹² The MSU team further developed an identity card system to monitor political activity as part of Diem’s anticommunist denunciation campaign.⁹³ Those found with links to the Vietminh, who had led the liberation struggle against France, were arrested and faced torture at an assortment of prison camps, or were “disappeared,” as internal reports conceded.⁹⁴ U.S. support was crucial in shaping South Vietnam’s evolution into what *Foreign Affairs* described as a “quasi-police state marred by arbitrary arrests, censorship

89. See Philip E. Catton, *Diem’s Final Failure: Prelude to America’s War in Vietnam*. (Lawrence, KS, 2002).

90. The Role of the Michigan State University Group in Vietnam, Dr. Wesley R. Fishel, Remarks to the Rotary Club of Saigon, September 12, 1957, *Vietmy*, February 1957, 41.

91. Ralph H. Smuckler and Members of the Police Team, *Report on the Police of Vietnam*, Michigan State University, Vietnam Technical Assistance Project, December 1, 1955; Jack Ryan, *Study of the VBI in the Field, Can Tho Province* (Saigon, April 19, 1956); *Second Report of the Michigan State University Advisory Team in Public Administration to the Government of Vietnam*, submitted to Edward W. Weidner (Saigon, December 31, 1955); Texas Tech University, Vietnam Center, Virtual Archive, <http://www.ttu.edu>.

92. “Present Status of the Government Opium Factory in Vietnam, Re: Wesley Fishel,” September 28, 1954; Wesley R. Fishel, “Notes on Visit to Opium Factory Operated Under the Direction of the Director General of Customs, Vietnam,” February 19, 1955, box 164, file Vietnam, BNDD.

93. Robert Scigliano and Guy Fox, *Technical Assistance in Vietnam: The Michigan State University Experience* (New York, 1965), 8; Warren Hinckle and Robert Scheer, “The University on the Make or How MSU Helped Arm Madame Nhu,” *Ramparts* 4 (April 1966): 14; John Ernst, *Forging a Fateful Alliance: Michigan State University and the Vietnam War* (East Lansing, MI, 1998).

94. Political opponents of Diem and members of religious sects like the Hoa-Hao and Cao Dai were among the “disappeared.” The Rehabilitation System of Vietnam, A Report Prepared by Public Safety Division, United States, Operations Mission to Vietnam, Saigon, October 1, 1963, 16; Ngo Vinh Long and Noam Chomsky, “30 Year Retrospective on the Fall of Saigon,” Public Forum, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, April 30, 2005. Ngo recounted his role in the campaign while working for the CIA as a teenager, before defecting to the United States and supporting the antiwar movement.

of the press and the absence of political opposition.”⁹⁵ The passage of Law 10/59 allowing for the execution of regime opponents resulted in the declaration of armed resistance by the National Liberation Front (NLF), whose leader, Nguyen Huu Tho, was rescued from house arrest due to the infiltration of Diem’s policing apparatus by revolutionary supporters.⁹⁶

In 1961, after taking over from Michigan State, the OPS sent advisers to Malaya to learn how the police could be used to fight “Communist terrorism” and destroy the “nexus between civilians and the insurgents.”⁹⁷ Over the next fourteen years, working with the Public Safety Division of the U.S. Operations Mission to Vietnam (USOM), the OPS provided more than 300 advisers and \$300 million towards this goal, bolstering the number of police from 16,000 to 122,000. They funded eight specialized training schools and built over five hundred rural police stations and high-tech urban headquarters equipped with firearm ranges, computer systems, and padded interrogation rooms.⁹⁸ The OPS also helped to create a telecommunications network linking police headquarters in rural villages to major cities such as Saigon. Emphasis was placed on building a corps of informants and developing a climate of fear in which people would be afraid to challenge the government.⁹⁹ Penetration by the NLF, however, and a lack of ideological conviction on the part of U.S.-trained forces helped to stymie these efforts, to the frustration of many American advisers who could not get around the strength of Vietnamese nationalism and political dynamic underlying the civil war.¹⁰⁰ Language and cultural barriers and an underlying paternalism helped to strain social relations further, and made communications difficult, limiting effectiveness.¹⁰¹

Performing duties that would be subcontracted to private mercenaries in later wars, the OPS developed “Tiger Battalions” to escort and protect key government officials and to serve as emergency riot control units. They were

95. Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled*, vol. 2 (New York, 1967), 976; George McT. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York, 1986), 155.

96. Truong Nhu Tàng with David Chanoff and Doan Van Toai, *A Vietcong Memoir* (New York, 1985), 70. Prince Souphanouvong, leader of the Pathet Lao, was sentenced to death by the U.S.-backed Royal Lao government in Laos following a CIA-backed coup but also escaped with the help of pro-Communist prison guards.

97. Bradford Adkins, “Resource Control Program, Hop Tac Saigon,” Public Safety Division October 1, 1964, box 11, folder 2, Records of the Agency of International Development, OPS-Thailand, National Archives, College Park, MD (hereafter OPS-Thailand).

98. “The Role of Public Safety in Support of the National Police of Vietnam,” Office of Public Safety, USAID, Department of State, April 1, 1969; Ngo Vinh Long, “The CIA and the Vietnam Debacle,” in *Uncloaking the CIA*, ed. Howard Frazier (New York, 1978), 71.

99. “Resources Control by the National Police of Vietnam,” Office of Public Safety, USAID, Vietnam, July 1966.

100. See Orrin Deforest with David Chanoff, *Slow Burn: The Rise and Fall of American Intelligence in Vietnam* (New York, 1990); D. E. Bordenkircher as told to S. A. Bordenkircher, *Tiger Cage: An Untold Story* (Cameron, WV, 1998), 54.

101. This was a general problem associated with U.S. advisory efforts in Vietnam and in many other foreign interventions. See, for example, Ronald Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years of the United States Army in Vietnam, 1941–1960* (New York, 1985).

given special permission to “apply force against the VC.”¹⁰² In July 1963, according to OPS adviser Ray Lundgren, in spite of the “amazing results” yielded by riot control courses, police displayed “unnecessary brutality” in suppressing a peaceful Buddhist rally against religious persecution and government violence, beating monks and other civilians. They then arrested them and herded them into trucks, which backed into the crowd and ran several people over. Police later scuffled with newsmen trying to report the day’s events.¹⁰³ Buddhists responded by engaging in self-immolation, bringing international attention to their plight and the crisis enveloping the country.¹⁰⁴

In an attempt to maximize social control in the face of mounting popular resistance, the OPS expanded the surveillance program first initiated by MSU. They issued identity cards to everyone over the age of fifteen and also developed a Family Census program, enabling police to amass a set of fingerprints, housing information, and data on the political beliefs of nearly twelve million people (Figure 3).¹⁰⁵ Once dissidents were identified, the police would undertake sweeps in their villages, usually late at night, and “arrested anyone under the remotest suspicion of being left-wing,” as one witness put it. “The government has a blacklist of suspects, but I understand that wives, mothers and fathers—anyone with the slimmest association with those on it, are being caught in the net.”¹⁰⁶

Reflecting the increased militarization of the police, the OPS established over 650 checkpoints to monitor movement and intercept guerrilla supplies, and created a river-boat patrol squad on the Mekong Delta armed with assault rifles.¹⁰⁷ From 1965 to 1969, police confiscated over twenty-two million kilos of contraband, including foodstuff, medicine, firearms, and ammunition, and claimed to have detained 458,000 suspected NLF collaborators.¹⁰⁸ They also

102. “Required Arms for Presidential Guard,” July 20, 1961, box 278, folder: Police Operations, OPS East Asia; Jeremy Scahill, *Blackwater: The Rise of the World’s Most Powerful Mercenary Army* (New York, 2007).

103. Ray Lundgren to Frank Walton, “Observations of Buddhist Police Incident 17 July 1963 at 582 Pham Thanh Gien Near the Ginc Minh Pagoda,” July 17, 1963, box 286, OPS East Asia. These actions seem to have been typical. For reports on another incident of police harassment of reporters, see “Ambassador Durbrow’s Press Relations,” in Situation in Vietnam, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on State Department Organization and Public Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, 86th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, DC, 1959), 25.

104. See David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire* (New York, 1965), 231.

105. National Identity Registration Project: ID Card, Public Safety Division, Office of Civil Operation, June 8, 1966, box 11, folder 4, OPS-Thailand; Resources Control, National Police of Vietnam, Public Safety Division, USOM, Saigon, March 1965, 23; E. H. Adkins Jr., The Police and Resource Control in Counter-Insurgency, Public Safety Division, USOM, Saigon, January 1964, 76. The OPS would try to replicate this system in the Philippines.

106. Chomsky and Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights*, 384; Truong Nhu Tang, *A Vietcong Memoir*, 81, 102–16. Training manuals stressed the importance of carrying out arrests late at night, or in the dawn hours, to keep suspects off-guard.

107. Resources Control, National Police of Vietnam, Public Safety Division, U.S.O.M., March 1965, 40–41. The Michigan State advisers had objected to this militarization.

108. “The Role of Public Safety in Support of the National Police of Vietnam,” Office of Public Safety, USAID, Department of State, April 1, 1969 (Washington, DC, 1969).

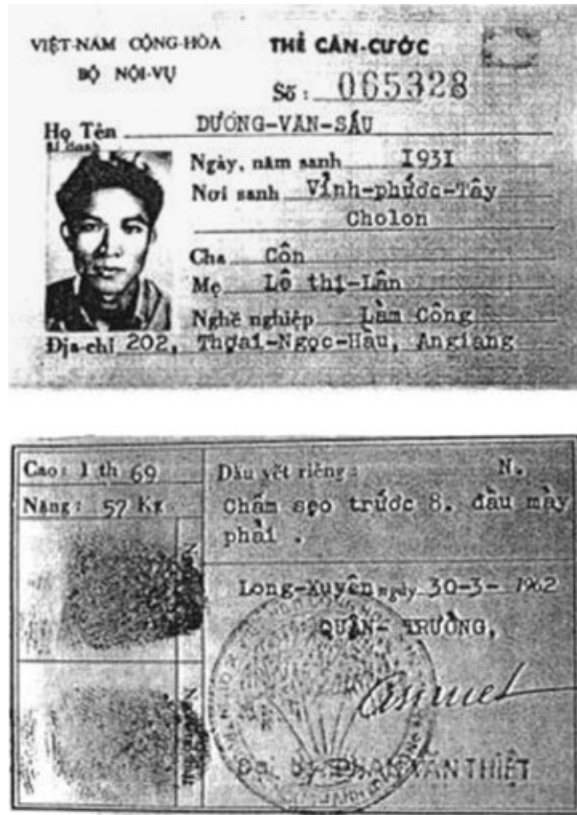


Figure 3: Identity cards that all Vietnamese, age 18 and over, were required to carry on their persons at all times.

widely harassed civilians, which the OPS tried to curtail through instruction in public relations.¹⁰⁹ OPS advisers trained paramilitary field police units to carry out full-scale combat operations. They worked in tandem with the Police Special Branch, which adopted “an operational and intelligence role against the VC apparatus,” as Robert Komer put it.¹¹⁰

Between 1967 and 1971, as a result of concerns about drug use by American soldiers, the OPS provided 1,254 national police with an eighty-hour course in

109. Adkins, *The Police and Resource Control in Counter-Insurgency*, 42.

110. David Welch, “Pacification in Vietnam,” *Ramparts* 5 (October 1967): 39; Robert W. Komer, *The Other War in Vietnam: A Progress Report*, Department of State Publication (Washington, DC, 1966), 14; Texas Tech University, Vietnam Center, Ogden Williams Papers, <http://www.ttu.edu>; Richard A. Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam’s Hearts and Minds* (Boulder, CO, 1995), 56.

the enforcement of narcotic laws.¹¹¹ They further established a special Narcotics Bureau and patrol equipped with offshore boats to intercept Thai fishing trawlers smuggling heroin and testing kits capable of “on-the-spot” identifications.¹¹² The OPS extended over \$2 million to these initiatives, which resulted in a 70 percent increase in arrest rates and contributed to further violations of civil liberties, due in part to the imposition of draconian prison sentences, including the death penalty.¹¹³ Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs (BNDD) agents meanwhile suspected that officers were skimming the profits from all seizures, which one OPS adviser evidently concluded presented a “major problem in narcotics investigations.”¹¹⁴ Corruption was alleged to have permeated even among prison wardens who regularly sold narcotic contraband on the black market.¹¹⁵

As with broader modernization programs, local noncooperation and resistance to American drug policies was enhanced by the attempt to impose Western societal standards that were not necessarily universal. The massive social dislocation bred by the war and high profitability of the black market economy amidst an influx of Western luxury goods lay at the root of the “legendary” corruption of police, who developed rackets on PX goods and regularly stole refugee relief supplies. They also engaged in shakedowns of businessmen and farmers, causing them to gravitate to the revolutionary side, and intimidated voters in staged elections.¹¹⁶ One village chief commented, “The police ‘protect’

111. “Historical Narrative—PSD Support of Narcotic Control,” Michael G. McCann, Director OPS, Bureau to John Maopoli, Chief Vietnam Division, OPS, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, CORDS, June 1971, box 286, folder 2, DEA Library, Pentagon City, VA, Records of the United States Army Vietnam, Personnel Policy Division, Drug Abuse Programs.

112. Nelson Gross, “Bilateral and Multilateral Efforts to Intensify Drug Abuse Control Programs,” *Department of State Bulletin*, April 3, 1972, folder: 1961–1975, Drug Enforcement Administration Library, Pentagon City, VA, International Control on Narcotics; Peter Osnos, “U.S. Presses Saigon into War on Smuggling,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 1971, 2; “Updating of Narcotics Control Action Program,” Office of Public Safety to American Embassy Saigon, July 1971, box 113, folder 6, Records of the USAID, Office of Public Safety, Narcotics Control, Vietnam, National Archives, College Park, MD (hereafter Narcotics Control, Vietnam).

113. Southeast Asian Narcotics, Hearings Before the Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control, House of Representatives, 95th Cong., 1st sess., July 12, 13, 1977 (Washington, DC, 1978), 2–3; “Department of State Telegram,” American Embassy Saigon to E.A Drug Coordinator, October 13, 1972, Narcotics Control, Vietnam, box 112, folder 8; “Antinarcotics Campaign in Viet-Nam,” *Department of State Bulletin*, April 3, 1972, 508, folder: International Narcotics Control, Drug Enforcement Administration Library, Pentagon City, VA. On the abuse of civil liberties, see Thomas Szasz, *Ceremonial Chemistry: The Ritual Persecution of Drugs, Addicts and Pushers* (New York, 1975).

114. “Alleged Corrupt Practices of Nguyen Huy Thong, Chief, Narcotics Bureau,” Frank Walton to Charles Vopat, March 31, 1971, box 112, folder 4: Narcotic Control, Vietnam.

115. “The Present Situation of Chi Hoa Prison,” in Brown and Luce, *Hostages of War: Saigon’s Political Prisoners*, 56; Henry Kamm, “Drive Fails to Halt Drug Sale in Vietnam,” *New York Times*, August 30, 1971, 1.

116. “Alleged National Police Misconduct (Shakedown),” Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, CORDS, March 18, 1972, box 278, folder 2, Records of the USAID, Office of Public Safety, Special Branch Forces in Southeast Asia, National Archives, College Park, MD; “PSD

the populace the same way that gangsters ‘protected’ businesses from which they wanted to squeeze a profit.”¹¹⁷

From the perspective of Vietnamese nationalists, OPS advisers served as a symbol of foreign coercion and imperialism, especially in light of the repressive tactics employed by their protégés. They were often the target of guerrilla attacks, with the NLF emerging as “heroes” in many communities for blowing up police precincts and thus “protecting the people from police abuses,” as with the Vietminh during the French occupation.¹¹⁸ On November 5, 1960, Dolph Owens became the first Public Safety adviser killed after his convoy was ambushed en route to the Counter-Guerrilla Training Academy at Cat Lo. During the 1968 Tet offensive, field police units sustained over three thousand casualties, including more than one thousand killed. Three U.S. advisers also died. During the war as a whole, at least twenty-five U.S. advisers lost their lives.¹¹⁹

Part of the enmity stemmed from their role in developing South Vietnam’s draconian prison system, which was among the most “hated and feared entities” in the country.¹²⁰ In the early 1970s, the South Vietnamese Committee to Reform the Prisons calculated that it harbored 202,000 political prisoners—three times the number Amnesty International estimated were held in the Soviet Union, East Germany, South Africa, and a half dozen other authoritarian states combined.¹²¹ Between 1967 and 1973, the State Department spent at least \$6.5 million for the maintenance and renovation of the forty-two major prisons run by the GVN (Government of Vietnam) Department of Corrections and built

Survey of Black Market Activities,” April 16, 1964, box 285, folder: Black Market, OPS East Asia; Edward S. Herman and Frank Brodhead, *Demonstration Elections: U.S. Staged Elections in The Dominican Republic, Vietnam and El Salvador* (Boston, 1984).

117. William J. Lederer, *The Anguished American* (London, 1968), 120. For further corroboration, see “Testimony of Frederick P. Herter,” War Related Civilian Problems in Indochina, Part III—Vietnam, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, 92d Cong., 1st sess., April 21, 1971, 24; Don Luce and John Sommer, *Vietnam: The Unheard Voices* (Ithaca, NY, 1969), 96; Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, “Saigon’s Corruption Crisis: The Search for an Honest Quisling,” *Ramparts* 13 (December 1975): 22; Orrin DeForest and David Chanoff, *Slow Burn: The Rise and Bitter Fall of American Intelligence in Vietnam* (New York, 1990), 206.

118. Lederer, *The Anguished American*, 120. For parallels in Korea, see Richard J. Johnston, “Korean Reds Fight Police and Others,” *New York Times*, July 29, 1947, 8.

119. “The Role of Public Safety in Support of the National Police of Vietnam,” USAID, April 1, 1969 (Washington, DC, 1969), 6.

120. Debrief of a Prison Advisor (Public Safety); Phuoc Thuy and Gia Dinh, Vietnam, 1960–1967 (Honolulu, 1967), 14, box 287, Penology, folder 1, OPS East Asia.

121. Not all prisoners were officially classified. It is thus impossible to determine the real numbers, which U.S. officials insist was closer to 30,000. They admit that 70 percent were political prisoners (whom they characterized as “communist criminals”), including politicians opposed to the Thieu-Ky clique, religious leaders, labor activists, intellectuals, and students. “South Vietnam’s Prisons,” *Washington Post*, July 20, 1973, A37; Chomsky and Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights*, 330; John Atherton et al., “The Forgotten Prisoners of Nguyen Van Thieu, by A Group of French University Professors” (Paris, 1973), Vietnam Center, Texas Tech University, <http://www.ttu.edu>.

three additional facilities. The OPS provided generators and handcuffs, and sent in advisers to help instill a disciplined regimen and oversee the institution of vocational training and recreation programs.¹²² They also funded the construction of over thirty state-of-the-art detention centers, where some of the worst abuses took place.¹²³ The lack of legal representation and shortage of lawyers made efforts to promote due process impossible. Secret reports disclosed that at most three out of ten inmates had access to a trial.¹²⁴

Owing to massive overcrowding, administrative difficulties, and the subordination of penal reform to the broader exigencies of the war, the conditions in most prisons, according to internal OPS surveys, were “appalling.” Described as “hells on earth,” garbage was often scattered across the floor, and inmates suffered from malnutrition, diarrhea, and diseases like beriberi from a lack of proper sanitation and diet, and ill-maintained kitchen facilities ridden with vermin and flies.¹²⁵ Many prisoners were forced to use a “honey bucket” as a toilet. Ventilation remained poor, and prisoners were also deprived of medicines and access to doctors.¹²⁶ At Kien Tung Provincial Prison, just ten kilometers from the seat of government, adviser William C. Benson reported in February 1962 that the cells were “extremely dirty and the stench so nauseating” as to make him sick.¹²⁷ Eyewitnesses reported prisoners being confined to tiny or crowded cells ridden with cockroaches and rodents where they had to sleep standing up. During the day, many were forced to work long hours making uniforms for the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). “Hard-headed inmates” and “communist criminals,” as the most noncooperative and politicized were called, faced restrictions on exercise opportunities and the right to visitors. They were given courses, or “brainwashed,” as OPS personnel conceded, in anticommunist ideology.¹²⁸ When noncompliant, further, they were forced into solitary confinement indefinitely and often “hand-cuffed,” “bolted to the floor,” or immobilized by “leg irons,” which many advisers claimed were

122. The Rehabilitation System of Vietnam, A Report Prepared by Public Safety Division, United States, Operations Mission to Vietnam, Saigon, October 1, 1963; Fred Branfman, “South Vietnam’s Police and Prison System: The U.S. Connection,” in *Unclanking the CLA*, 114.

123. Ibid.; DeForest and Chanoff, *Slow Burn*, 55.

124. Randolph Berkeley to William Colby, September 15, 1971, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, 4, Vietnam Center, Texas Tech University, <http://www.ttu.edu>.

125. “Visit to Vung Tau Prison,” Frank Walton to William C. Benson, July 8, 1961, box 287, folder 2, OPS East Asia; Bordenkircher, *Tiger Cage: An Untold Story*, 54; The Rehabilitation System of Vietnam, A Report Prepared by Public Safety Division, United States, Operations Mission to Vietnam, Saigon, October 1, 1963, 25.

126. “Visit to Bien Hoa Prison,” June 1, 1961, box 287, Penology, folder 2: William C. Benson to Frank E. Walton, PSD, OPS East Asia; Thomas Lippman, “Clandestine Document Assails South Vietnam on Prisoners,” *Washington Post*, July 27, 1973, A10.

127. “Visit to Kien Tung Provincial Rehabilitation Center,” *Moc Hoa*, February 19, 1962; William C. Benson to Frank E. Walton, box 287, Penology, folder 1, OPS East Asia.

128. “Visit to Pleiku Rehabilitation Center,” William C. Benson to John F. McCabe, PSD, December 12, 1961, box 287, Penology, folder 1, OPS East Asia.

necessary to prevent rioting and escape. Such measures occurred with a wide frequency.¹²⁹

Rather than fostering conformity, oppressive prison conditions drove scores of people into the arms of the NLF. After a tour of penal facilities in the Mekong Delta, senior American adviser John Paul Vann, who advocated a “hearts and minds” approach, commented: “I got the distinct impression that any detainees not previously VC or VC sympathizers would almost assuredly become so after their period of incarceration.”¹³⁰ Among those subjected to the harsh regimen were pregnant women and children. Torture using every imaginable technique was widely reported, including the forced drinking of lime solutions, waterboarding, and the rape and chaining together of prisoners.¹³¹ Poor education among guards and the lack of oversight by chief jailers, who predominantly came from military backgrounds and owed their positions to political favoritism, was one factor accounting for the high levels of brutality, as were the hatreds engendered by the war (and often whipped up by the United States). The carryover of methods and personnel from the French era was also important.¹³² One Public Safety adviser admitted in a private report that there were “sadistic people in authority” whose interrogation methods were “terrible” and who sometimes “beat prisoners to death.”¹³³ A Vietnamese woman recalled, “When you were being interrogated, you could hear the screams of people being tortured. There was a popular saying among the police—*kong danh do co*—“If they are innocent, beat them until they become guilty.”¹³⁴ A Mennonite volunteer further told the *Washington Post* that prisoners faced “electroshocks, beatings with pins and being burned with cigarettes . . . Of the ones I talked to, none had ever had a trial and many had never even had a hearing or knew how long their sentence was.”¹³⁵

The most horrific abuses occurred in the notorious Con Son island prison, whose repressive environment helped to create a groundswell of revolutionary

129. “Visit to Bien Hoa Prison,” June 1, 1961, William C. Benson to Frank E. Walton, PSD, box 287, folder 2, OPS East Asia.

130. Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds*, 239.

131. Georgie Ann Geyer, “The CIA’s Hired Killers,” *True* (February 1970): 105; “Testimony of David and Jane Barton,” The Treatment of Political Prisoners in South Vietnam by the Government of the Republic of South Vietnam, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, House of Representatives, 93d Cong., 1st sess., September 13, 1973 (Washington, DC., 1973), 50–51.

132. See Peter Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862–1940* (Berkeley, CA, 2001), 27; “Personnel,” The Rehabilitation System of Vietnam, A Report Prepared by Public Safety Division, United States, Operations Mission to Vietnam, Saigon, October 1, 1963, 12.

133. Debrief of a Prison Advisor (Public Safety) Phuoc Thuy and Gia Dinh, Vietnam, 1960–1967 (Honolulu, 1967), 10–11.

134. Brown and Luce, *Hostages of Wars*, 14.

135. Jack Anderson, “Prisoners Tortured in South Vietnamese Jails,” *Washington Post*, August 31, 1970, B11; Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars: 1945–1991* (New York, 1991), 61; Dennis Neeld, “South Vietnam’s Non-Persons,” *Washington Post*, June 24, 1973, A18.

support, as had occurred in the French period.¹³⁶ In 1970, a congressional delegation found inmates shackled to the floor in six-foot boxes, or “Tiger Cages,” badly malnourished and beaten to the point of paralysis. Frank Walton, head of the OPS and a former LAPD police chief, had sanctioned a report stating that prisoners, whom he referred to as “reds who keep preaching the commie line,” were “isolated in their cells for months” and permanently “bolted to the floor or handcuffed to leg-irons.” This was standard practice shaped by the war climate.¹³⁷

While some policymakers later tried to rationalize that Vietnamese cultural standards resulted in the spread of political repression, the conditions in American army barrack prisons were themselves substandard. Inmates at Long Binh Jail, who were overwhelmingly black and dissented against the war or were charged with petty narcotic violations, reported being taunted and abused by racist guards and treated like “caged animals,” while confined to “vermin” and “rat-infested cells.”¹³⁸ Some had been deemed “emotionally unfit” for military service because they were homosexual.¹³⁹ Those who failed to conform were forced into solitary confinement in tiny con boxes lacking in proper ventilation.¹⁴⁰ These conditions eventually resulted in a series of major riots, which exemplified the rebellious climate in the armed forces at the time and paradoxes of U.S. international criminal justice policies that were ostensibly designed to promote humanitarian reform.¹⁴¹ The state of prisons domestically, which were beset by racial discrimination and violence and characterized by Attorney General John A. Mitchell in a 1970 *Washington Post* exposé as a “national shame,” reflects on the moral hypocrisy further, as does the high levels of police brutality.¹⁴²

136. On the brutal history of Con Son, see Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille*, 4.

137. Brown and Luce, *Hostages of War*, 14; “The Rehabilitation System of Vietnam,” Report Proposed by PSD, USOM to Vietnam, Foreword by Frank Walton, January 1961, box 287, Penology, folder 1, OPS East Asia; Sylvan Fox, “4 South Vietnamese Describe Torture in Prison ‘Tiger Cages,’” *New York Times*, March 3, 1973, 7; Bordenkircher, *Tiger Cage*, 180. Bordenkircher, who worked with the OPS at Con Son, claimed that prisoners were only shackled at night because the doors were easy to pry open to prevent them from escaping and admits to inmates being paralyzed, though remains proud of his involvement in the program.

138. Prison Conditions: Report of the Special Civilian Commission for the Study of the U.S. Army Confinement System, Austin McCormick, Chair, May 15, 1970 (Washington, DC, 1970), 46–47; Bob Spencer and Carol Spencer, “Addiction in the Army,” *Civil Liberties*, December 1971: 14; Richard Kunnes, *The American Heroin Empire: Power, Profits and Politics* (New York, 1972), 169.

139. Prison Conditions: Report of the Special Civilian Commission, 28–29.

140. From the perspective of a rebellious soldier, see “How Nazi Brass Run Long Binh Jail,” *The Bond*, October 21, 1970. See also Cecil B. Currey, *Long Binh Jail: An Oral History of Vietnam's Notorious U.S. Military Prison* (Washington, DC, 1999), 50.

141. On the riot, see Robert Sherrill, “Justice, Military Style,” *Playboy*, February 1970, 217–18; David Cortright, *Soldiers in Revolt: GI Resistance During the Vietnam War* (Chicago, 2005, 1975), 40–41; David Geiger, *Sir No Sir! The Suppressed Story of the GI Movement to End the Vietnam War* (Displaced Films, 2006).

142. Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Shame of the Prisons* (New York, 1972). See also George Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (New York, 1994, 1970); Leonard

American-trained police contributed to some of the worst atrocities in Vietnam through participation in the notorious Phoenix program, which was inaugurated in 1968 and aimed at destroying the revolutionary underground through use of sophisticated computer technology and intelligence systems.¹⁴³ K. Barton Osborne, a military intelligence specialist, testified before Congress that “not a single suspect survived the interrogation process” and that he witnessed acts of torture such as the prodding of a suspect’s ear with a six inch dowel until it reached his brain and killed him.¹⁴⁴ Failing to land many high-level officials due to bad intelligence, CIA Director William Colby conceded that Phoenix led to the deaths of over twenty thousand civilians. This stemmed largely from police using the program to carry out extortion rackets and settle old scores, and because the imposition of death quotas encouraged indiscriminate killings.¹⁴⁵ A Phoenix operative who had served in Czechoslovakia during World War II commented, “The reports that I would send in on the number of communists that were neutralized reminded me of the reports Hitler’s concentration camp commanders sent in on how many inmates they had exterminated, each commander lying that he had killed more than the other to please Himmler.”¹⁴⁶ While more of a CIA than OPS-led operation per se, Phoenix epitomized how American police training programs helped to facilitate state repression and terror under the rubric of internal security and modernization.¹⁴⁷ The attempt at social control through imposition of an Orwellian regime of mass surveillance and torture lay at the root of the humanitarian abuses, which were all too characteristic of twentieth-century developments on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

CONCLUSION

Neglected in recent commentary on the Iraq occupation, where lessons from the past have gone ignored, police training and the associated prison

Orlando, *Prisons: Houses of Darkness* (New York, 1975); Frank Browning and Ramparts, eds., *Prison Life: A Study of the Explosive Conditions in America's Prisons* (New York, 1972); Sasha Abramsky, *American Furies: Crime, Punishment and Vengeance in the Age of Mass Imprisonment* (Boston, 2007); Paul Chevigny, *Police Power: Police Abuses in New York City* (New York, 1969); Frank Donner, *Protectors of Privilege: Red Squads and Police Repression in Urban America* (Berkeley, CA, 1990).

143. “Inception of Phung Hoang,” MACV to Department of State, October 19, 1971, box 280, OPS.

144. U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Assistance Programs in Vietnam, 93d Cong., 1st sess., Committee on Armed Services, Hearings on July 2, 20, 25, 1973 (Washington, DC, 1973), 319–21; Alfred W. McCoy, “Torture in the Crucible of Counter-Insurgency,” in *Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam, or How Not to Learn from the Past*, 243. For more revelations of torture, see Frank Snapp, *Decent Interval: An Insider's Account of Saigon's Indecent End* (New York, 1977), 1.

145. McCoy, *A Question of Torture*, 67; Ralph W. McGehee, *Deadly Deceits: My 25 Years in the CIA* (New York, 1999), 156.

146. Douglas Valentine, *The Phoenix Program* (New York, 1990), 192.

147. “Summary of Problems of Phung Hoang Program—Recommendation for Turning it Over to the National Police,” Secretary of State to American Embassy (MACV to CICPAC), 19 October 1971, box 280, 1971–1973, OPS East Asia.

construction programs have been a central component of American nation-building strategies since the late nineteenth century. Displaying a faith in technology and modernization as a pathway to human progress, they have been designed as a cost-effective means of upholding the power base of strategic allies and providing the internal security deemed necessary for the adoption of liberal-capitalist development programs. The Kennedy administration was particularly influential in championing policing initiatives as a pivotal dimension of its flexible response doctrine, which sought to counter “wars of national liberation” through unconventional methods. The Special Group on Counterinsurgency spearheaded these efforts. It saw itself as being at the vanguard in a global crusade against totalitarianism, though the forces that it trained were implicated in torture and political violence and bequeathed a legacy of institutionalized repression that was a hallmark of U.S. foreign policy influence.¹⁴⁸ This stemmed in large part from the politicization and militarization of the police and the providing of modern equipment to state security forces bent on stamping out communist subversion, widely defined.

In 1973, in the face of congressional scrutiny and condemnations by human rights groups and the antiwar left, the State Department reduced police assistance and phased out the OPS. The executive branch, nevertheless, found alternative ways of funding, including through the military and through counternarcotics programs, which employed many former OPS personnel and provided extensive police aid.¹⁴⁹ Between 1973 and 1974, President Richard M. Nixon increased the State Department’s counternarcotics budget in Argentina from \$3,000 to \$347,000—the same total, not coincidentally that Congress had cut from police training programs because of their support for methods of “selective torture” and “assassination.”¹⁵⁰ In a televised press conference, Argentine Social Welfare Minister Jose Lopez Rega, who was ironically later forced into exile amid charges that he funded death squad operations through cocaine trafficking, openly proclaimed that American funding intended for drug war purposes would “be used in the anti-guerrilla campaign as well.”¹⁵¹ Stan Goff, a Special Forces officer who headed a counternarcotics training team in the early 1980s in Colombia, where American-trained police were implicated in extrajudicial killings and the torture of suspected guerrilla collaborators, commented, “The training that I conducted was anything but counter-narcotics. It was updated Vietnam-style counter-insurgency, but we were told to refer to it as

148. Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terror* (New York, 2005); Odde Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Time* (New York, 2007).

149. Klare and Aronson, *Supplying Repression*, 28.

150. J. Patrice McSherry, *Predatory States: Operation Condor and Covert War in Latin America* (New York, 2004), 74–75; Nancy Stein, “Policing the Empire,” in *The Iron Fist and the Velvet Glove: An Analysis of the U.S. Police* (Berkeley, CA, 1977).

151. Penny Lernoux, *Cry of the People* (New York, 1980), 338–39; Peter Dale Scott and Jonathan Marshall, *Cocaine Politics: Drugs, Armies and the CIA in Central America* (Berkeley, CA, 1991), 44.

counter-narcotics should anyone ask. This was a clear cover.”¹⁵² These revealing quotes suggest that the War on Drugs has served the same primary function that the OPS did during the 1960s and early 1970s, namely to promote counterinsurgency and social control in the developing world under the cover of humanitarianism.¹⁵³ The end results, meanwhile, remained catastrophic—certainly for the torture victims and “disappeared.” Their dismal fate sheds light on the dark side of American modernization and social control efforts and the high human cost of informal empire, which has gone neglected in too many scholarly accounts.¹⁵⁴

152. In Stokes, *America's Other War*, 90. See also *The Colombian National Police, Human Rights and U.S. Drug Policy* (Washington, DC, 1993), 24; Javier Giraldo, *Colombia: The Genocidal Democracy*, with foreword by Noam Chomsky (Monroe, ME, 1996).

153. See Rachel Neild, “U.S. Police Assistance and Drug Control Policies,” in *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America: The Impact of U.S. Policy* (Boulder, CO, 2005), 61–99; Jonathan Marshall, *Drug Wars: Corruption, Counterinsurgency and Covert Operations in the Third World* (San Mateo, CA, 1991).

154. John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York, 1997) characteristically neglects the dark side of American foreign policy influence. Even more critically oriented books, like Melvyn Leffler's *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, The Soviet Union and the Cold War* (New York, 2007) and Michael Hunt's elegantly crafted *The American Ascendancy: How the United States Gained and Wielded Global Dominance* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2007) do not convey its full scope.