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SVN: Phoenix

WORKING PAPER

SUBJECT: The U.S. Role in the GVN's Phung Hoang (PH) Prog...

PURPOSE:

1. The objective of this paper is to examine current U.S. advisory support to the GVN PH Program; suggest how U.S. advisory support should continue for the forthcoming 18-24 month period; and to outline now an option for further continuance, if required.

BACKGROUND:

2. At the heart of insurgency/counter insurgency is the struggle by both sides to organize themselves and to organize the general populace sufficiently for the purposes of governing. This is pacification in its broadest terms. While both sides try positively to organize themselves, they also attempt negatively to destroy their opponent's organization. On the Communist side the attempt to destroy the GVN organization results in a policy of subversion and terror as an instrument of policy directed at all echelons of the GVN administration, most importantly at the main GVN link with the populace -- the local official. On the GVN side, the need for action against the Communists' insurgent and subversive organization results in a policy of counter-subversion -- the effort to neutralize the enemy's organization at all levels through the legal process. The process must be in accord with the rule of law or it is self-defeating. The term "Phung Hoang" is the label used to designate the GVN's organizational response to the need for a counter-subversive effort.

3. Experience over the past four years in the Phung Hoang Program has pragmatically shown that anti-VCI activity divides in practice into three relatively distinct areas. Any overall plan for support to the GVN's anti-VCI effort should recognize these distinctions and clearly allocate responsibilities for them.

(a) the specialized intelligence effort directed against the higher levels of the VCI who possess intelligence information of value on enemy plans and intentions. This is generally the responsibility of the Police Special Branch and MSS.

(b) the broad intelligence effort directed against the lowest level of the VCI mechanism -- the links with the populace. By and large, these VCI do not possess intelligence information of value that is not already known, and they perform an essentially political function of relating the Communist Party organization to the general population. Intelligence efforts against this VCI echelon have been handled within the PH Committees

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(c) counter-subversion--an action effort to neutralize the targets in (a) and (b). The action forces are directed by the various legally responsible arms of government either within the PH Committee framework or acting outside of it. In essence, the anti-VCI action effort is the responsibility of the National Police in a society threatened by subversive movement. The anti-VCI effort, as an idea, is the most important function of the police in a State threatened by subversion. "Normal" police law and order functions and the prevention of crime must either be included in this definition or take a secondary role.

4. On 15 October 1971, COMUSMACV informed Washington of proposed major changes in the concept and operation of the PH Program involving accelerated Vietnamization to include:

(a) On the Vietnamese side transfer of national level responsibility from the PHUNG HOANG Central Committee to the National Police Command.

(b) On the Vietnamese side deactivation of the PHUNG HOANG Committees and Centers at all levels.

(c) On the Vietnamese side increased emphasis on the anti-VCI responsibilities of province and district chiefs.

(d) On the Vietnamese side use of National Police as the primary operational element of PHUNG HOANG.

(e) On the U.S. side withdrawal of U.S. military advisory support as the National Police Command assumes responsibility.

5. The proposal to phase down U.S. military advisory support through CORDS to the PH Program could, as currently planned, result in a minimum staffing level of about thirty positions during CY 1972.

6. U.S. planning, however, is not entirely in phase with GVN activity. On 14 December 1971 COMUSMACV advised Washington that the GVN Prime Minister had issued a directive (3738/PTHT/BDPT/KH) on 2 December 1971 concerning the implementation of the PH Program. Key points of the directive:

(a) The Phung Hoang Centers and Committees will be retained.

(b) In 1972, the National Police will assume overall responsibility for the Phung Hoang Program.

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(c) By the end of 1972, the Phung Hoang Centers will be completely manned by the National Police.

(d) Special emphasis on the Phung Hoang Program must be applied at all echelons.

(e) Wise and active publicity of the Phung Hoang Program must be made so that the people clearly understand the importance of their support to the GVN.

REASONS TO DISENGAGE:

7. The major arguments offered, directly or indirectly, to support the current U.S. phase down proposal are that:

(a) Shifting total responsibility for the conduct of the PH Program to the GVN and the withdrawal of U.S. military advisors is consistent with the Vietnamization policy. It is not at all clear, however, that this argument really supports an abrupt drawdown in U.S. effort, as Vietnamization implies a phased and orderly turnover of responsibility to the GVN.

(b) A basic confusion between the specific Phung Hoang Program and the more general anti-VCI idea has emerged in the implementation of the idea. The PH Program was intended to be a coordinating forum for all of the various government arms that included among their responsibilities at least a part of the anti-VCI effort--the Police (all Branches), the military (including the MSS), the civil administration. Instead, the Phung Hoang Committees have tended to take on a life of their own displacing the idea of a joint anti-VCI effort. The participating organizations have tended to neglect their basic responsibilities while thinking of the Committees as responsible. Along with this basic malaise, the PH Program has developed a number of serious, built-in deficiencies which need to be compensated by a reorganization and shifting of responsibilities. Deficiencies include: lack of GVN coordination and cooperation, poorly qualified and poorly motivated GVN personnel, centers that lack secure repositories for intelligence information, lack of a direct line of GVN authority and responsibility and an overall "U.S. sponsored" atmosphere about the program that does not satisfy Vietnamese xenophobic inclinations. These arguments point toward a more effective advisory effort, but not total removal of the effort.

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(c) Becuase of press distortions the PH Program is politically sensitive in the U.S. and is a potential source of adverse criticism. This criticism, however, is wide of the mark since every sovereign government has the right to counter subversion within its territory. The anti-VCI effort must be legal and within the laws.

REASONS TO STAY:

8. The need for an effort to neutralize the Viet Cong Infrastructure remains as great as ever, or greater in view of the Viet Cong's increased emphasis on attacking pacification. The next 18-24 months will be crucial in reinforcing the political and economic stability which is still vulnerable to concerted enemy subversive efforts. The enemy's administrative apparatus, the organization which implements Hanoi's will within the villages of South Vietnam, will remain a principal source of this threat, and hence remains a valid primary target for the allocation of GVN/U.S. resources.

9. The lower VCI echelons, by and large, are currently in a relatively weakened position. Indeed, they are in greater disarray than at any time during the past several years. Precisely for this reason, maximum pressure upon the VCI membership should be maintained in order to further limit its capabilities or otherwise neutralize its activities.

10. The GVN's recent directive that provides special emphasis on the Phung Hoang Program at all echelons reflects a priority in program management that should be encouraged and which would benefit from continued U.S. support. Furthermore, care must be exercised that the manner of the U.S. drawdown in PHUNG HOANG does not give the GVN the wrong signal--i.e., what the Vietnamese could construe as an indication that the U.S. considers the effort not worth the allocation of resources.

11. The concept of the anti-VCI effort as a "program" and the titles PHOENIX and PHUNG HOANG advisors could be dropped on the U.S. side, however, the U.S. should not drop the idea of an anti-VCI effort. It would appear to be a USMACV decision as to how best the objectives and the public relations aspects can be reconciled.

12. The proposed close-out of the U.S. military advisory effort impinges directly upon the GVN capability to neutralize the VCI. It is recognized by all sides that the National Police are not yet strong enough institutionally to take over the full burden at this time.

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13. Given the continued importance of the anti-VCI effort, a central problem for the U.S. is one of providing resources, primarily advisors, to ensure adequate transition to an all-GVN program, and enable the U.S. to monitor GVN performance in this critical area.

14. To ensure an orderly drawdown that does not of itself defeat one of our major objectives, it may become necessary to make adjustments in the original plan to phase down the Army PH advisors.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NEAR TERM:

15. Current U.S. military advisory staffing levels of the PH Program are not necessary to maintain the U.S. advisory input and monitoring role. Staffing at national, regional and provincial levels would, as a minimum, be adequate to meet our requirements. Aggressive management by a province-level staff would permit relinquishing current U.S. monitoring efforts at the district level, except for selected key districts.

16. Staffing levels of U.S. military advisors to the PH Program should be continued at national, regional and provincial levels, although many of the PH Elements' province staffs could conceivably be lowered to the irreducible minimum of one advisor. The distribution of VCI throughout South Vietnam is not uniform and there appears to be compelling merit to the idea that our advisory effort--and the GVN's effort as well--should parallel the VCI threat rather than the political boundaries of the provinces. An equivalent logic should determine the level of PH advisory staffing at district level. That is, while most of the district PH advisory structure can be safely dismantled. those districts with a chronic problem of VCI activity should have continued U.S. support and advisory staff. In fact, if one adjusts the allied effort to the actual threat, there might be a small U.S. advisory presence in some key districts but none in certain largely secure or non-critical provinces. MACV/CORDS should decide these priorities.

17. The above structure--Saigon, region, province and district--should provide the GVN with appropriate levels of support and in addition should provide the U.S. with a capability to monitor not only the GVN program but also to develop some semblance of an independent estimative capability. This latter capability could well be significant in the months to come as U.S. capabilities to observe and evaluate GVN performance are diminished.

18. The staffing levels for the U.S. side of the program are at this time difficult to predict, although clearly they can be expected to diminish along with the general reduction of U.S. presence. The CORDS minimum staffing level appears to be about thirty

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positions, which would provide coverage of the program at national, regional, and a few key provincial echelons. Although this number of slots may be proposed for CY 1972, there exists a strong possibility that the number is too low, given that the exact structure of the Vietnamese effort and their advisory/logistic needs has not yet shaken out. While it may be that much of the tasking presently directed to the Phung Hoang advisory staff can be absorbed in the Provincial and District Senior Advisory staffs, this is essentially a management problem for USMACV to resolve. Given the relatively small numbers involved and the state or organizational flux characterizing the National Police who are to be given the program eventually, it is probably advisable to count on a gradual reduction in advisor requirements rather than a precipitous drop to minimum level sometime in 1972.

CONCLUSIONS:

19. Plans should be developed by the Mission to have the MACV/CORDS advisory structure to continue support to the GVN PH Program during the forthcoming 18-24 month period.

20. An immediate survey of all anti-VCI training being conducted by the members of the Mission Council should be drawn up in order to project the long-term U.S. concentration of effort in judging and supporting GVN performance in this vital area.

21. The mission should prepare a study for Washington of the ideal in country advisory effort needed to support the GVN counter-subversive effort. This study should form the basis for a decision which must be made at the Washington level regarding the U.S. Agency responsibility for advising the National Police/Special Police in the anti-VCI effort over the long term.

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