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WORKING PAPER

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

PURPOSE:

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

2. Experience over the past four years in the Phung Hoang Program has pragmatically shown that anti-VCI activity breaks down in practice into three relatively distinct areas. Any overall plan for support to the GVN anti-VCI effort should recognize these distinctions and plan for their continuation.

(a) the intelligence effort against the higher levels of the VCI who possess intelligence information of value on enemy plans and intentions. This is generally the purview of the Police Special Branch, with Police Field Forces as action arm.

(b) the 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 on the enemy's plans and intentions that is not already known, and they perform an essentially political function of relating the Communist Party mechanism to the population. Intelligence efforts against this VCI echelon were handled by the National Police within the PH Committees.

(c) an action effort to neutralize the targets in (a) and (b). The action forces were directed by the various PH member organizations and coordinated within the PH Committees.

BACKGROUND:

3. 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:

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(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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

(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.

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(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:

6. The major arguments offered, directly or indirectly, to support the current MACV 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) The PH Program has a number of serious, built-in deficiencies which will 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.

(c) Because 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 soverign government has the right to counter subversion within its territory.

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REASONS TO STAY:

7. 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 at present still very fragile and 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.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. 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, given the program effort of the GVN, it might be more appropriate to parallel their effort and simply alter the U.S. program name. In either case, it would appear to be a USMACV decision as to how best the objectives and the public relations aspects can be reconciled.

11. 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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12. 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.

13. 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:

14. 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.

15. 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.

16. 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.

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17. 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 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 shifted to 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.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LONG TERM:

18. Plans should be drawn up to have the U.S. military advisory structure absorb anti-VCI advisory duties during and beyond the transitional period of the drawdown. In the sense that MACV's mission is to support the GVN's pacification effort, the PH Program cannot be ignored.

19. 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. Clear direction regarding U.S. agency responsibility for advising the National Police/Special Police anti-VCI effort is urgently needed and one by-product of this survey should be data helping to bring that still unresolved problem into sharper focus.

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