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VIET CONG REACTION TO THE ACCELERATED PACIFICATION PROGRAM AND THE PHOENIX PROGRAM

Summary: Documentary evidence as well as specific actions undertaken by the Viet Cong (VC) during the late November 1968 - late March 1969 period indicate that the stepped-up Pacification and PHOENIX Programs have been major Communist targets. While the Post-Tet Offensive has set back the pacification effort in certain provinces, its overall effect on such efforts in the country as a whole has been slight. This, and the failure of other VC actions to make much of a dent in the Pacification and PHOENIX Programs then, would appear to constitute yet another example of current Vietnamese Communist weakness and their inability to match actions with plans even against a relatively vulnerable target.

I. PLANS

1. The Viet Cong (VC) reaction to the Accelerated Pacification Program and its component PHUNG HOANG DONG TIEN (Stepped-up PHOENIX Program) has been characterized by a relatively wide gap between calls for counteraction and actual measures taken against the programs. Almost immediately following the inauguration of the Accelerated Pacification Campaign,* references to it began to appear in captured VC documents, and during the November 1968- January 1969 period, several comprehensive VC directives were promulgated setting out in broad terms the measures to be taken to counter these new Allied programs. An order of the Peoples Liberation Armed Forces, dated 25 November, was unique in that it was overt, being broadcast over the VC Liberation Radio three days later. A circular, apparently issued by VC Sub-Region 3 (SR-3) on 26 November and by SR-5 on 10 December, was noteworthy for its detailed treatment of the structure and activities of the PHOENIX organization. A

*Initially inaugurated on 1 November 1968 under the rubric "Accelerated Pacification Campaign," the Accelerated Pacification Program is now the preferred term. Although kicked off on 20 October 1968, the PHUNG HOANG DONG TIEN was incorporated as an integral part of the increased pacification effort.

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document published by SR-5 on 12 December gave a similarly extensive description of the Accelerated Pacification Program. Finally, documents picked up in VC Military Region 2 (MR-2) and apparently published throughout this November-January period mentioned a VC anti-pacification program which apparently had two stages labeled "Rang Dong 1 and 2." This VC effort placed special emphasis on the use of tactical military and psychological warfare factors.

2. The countermeasures generally called for by the VC in these documents can be grouped into the following categories:

a. Military attacks (with an emphasis on guerrilla warfare techniques) on Allied units conducting sweep operations, Regional and Popular Forces (RF/PF) involved in pacification tasks, and on the pacification teams themselves.

b. Terrorist activity stressing the assassination of "enemy" administrative personnel and returnees, plus the destruction of facilities associated with the pacification effort.

c. Counterintelligence efforts directed at uncovering "enemy" (especially PHOENIX) intelligence networks and eliminating their members, inserting "friendly" agents into the networks as a means to this end, and increasing other defensive security measures.

d. Propaganda efforts directed at improving the morale of "friendly" elements; re-educating captives released by the Government of Vietnam (GVN); motivating the masses in general to conduct "political struggle"; encouraging Southern refugees to return to their native villages; and converting "enemy" military personnel, pacification cadre, and local government officials.

3. The objectives of the VC effort were said to be the defense, consolidation, and expansion of the "liberated areas." And 'though the aforementioned documents certainly take note of the damage done by the stepped-up PHOENIX and Pacification Programs, the latter are presented as a frenzied "last gasp" of the "Free World" agencies involved, an effort that is doomed to failure.

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4. Less comprehensive, but more specific, VC provincial and district plans provide further insights into the anti-pacification program. As for military/terrorist activity, VC guerrillas in the Que Son District of Quang Nam Province reportedly were ordered in January 1969 to concentrate on sniping and the use of mines in thwarting the pacification program. In the terrorist/counterintelligence sphere, it was reported that the VC in Khanh Hoa Province had been directed in early February to make lists of GVN village and hamlet cadre, Provincial Reconnaissance Unit members, and Revolutionary Development (RD) personnel for the purposes of assassination. And an extension of the propaganda/conversion effort might be seen in the report that the VC in Tran On District, Vinh Long Province, were making arrangements to buy off hamlet and outpost chiefs and low-level GVN security personnel as of December 1968.

II. ACTIONS

There are indications that prior to the inauguration of the Post-Tet Offensive on 22 February 1969, the VC had begun to implement some of their anti-pacification plans. The PHOENIX year-end report of 1968 noted a general stepping-up of VC counterintelligence activities, and the number of VC assassinations and overall incidents directed against the civilian population both showed a steady increase between late November 1968 and late February 1969. These activities developed unevenly, however, and appear not to have been conducted on the scale planned for -- a presumed result of VC weakness. There was, however, a notable increase of terrorism in Quang Nam Province, especially directed against low-level GVN officials, during December and January.* Further, a sharp increase in terrorism occurred in II Corps in early February, noted as being specifically targeted against the pacification program in Phuoc Tuy Province. In addition, there was an increase in attacks on RD teams in Thua Thien, Vinh Long, and Ba Xuyen Provinces just prior to the onset of the Post-Tet Offensive, and an apparently stepped-up use of the threat of

*Liberation Radio, incidentally, concurrently noted that the fiercest struggle against the pacification program was being conducted in Quang Nam Province.

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assassination in propaganda/indoctrination activities directed against Civil Self-Defense cadres, GVN officials, and RF/PF members throughout the country during the December-February period. It is not known to what extent the lack of further information on VC counterintelligence activities targeted against the pacification program results from a lack of activity in this field and to what extent it results from a successful implementation of such policies. One of the more novel VC innovations, and one which does not appear to have been duplicated elsewhere, was the activation in January 1969 of a "Counter-Pacification Committee" in Chau Thanh District in VC SR-5. The committee included personnel from the regular Communist Party apparatus, e.g., Youth, Women's, Finance-Economy, Supply Council, Military Affairs, Military Proselyting, Training and Propaganda, and Security Sections.

6. Following the onset of the Post-Tet Offensive, Liberation Radio broadcasts stressed what they claim was the high degree of damage to the Program inflicted by the Offensive without, however, claiming that such was the latter's main objective. Covert reporting from Binh Dinh Province, moreover, indicates that at least in that province VC orders from the Central Office of South Vietnam stated that the specific purpose of the Offensive was to attack the Program, and a North Vietnamese diplomat in Vientiane was said to have revealed in early March that the chief mission of his country's troops in South Vietnam was to help the VC destroy the Accelerated Pacification Program. In view of the targets actually hit during the opening stages of the Offensive and the considerable documentary evidence now available, however, it appears that the pacification effort was not the immediate or major target of the Offensive.

7. Nonetheless, it seems clear that harming the Accelerated Pacification Program remains a major VC objective and, it also appears that the Post-Tet Offensive served to some extent to this end. But the overall effect of the Offensive on the pacification effort was not great, and the damage that occurred was localized. In March, during the succeeding phases of the Offensive, there was considerable stress on attacking the pacification program and the various elements involved in it. Thus, there was an increase in terrorist incidents

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directed at personnel involved in various aspects of the overall pacification effort.

8. As of 1 March 1969, CORDS reporting noted that as a result of the Offensive, the momentum of the pacification effort had been slowed in Quang Nam, Thua Thien, Gia Dinh, and Dinh Tuong Provinces and that its momentum had been halted with a somewhat lowered security level in the rural areas in Quang Tin, Kontum, and Hau Nghia Provinces. Further, it was reported that pacification had been "set back" (i.e., that the GVN had suffered more than a five percent loss in population control) in Phuoc Long Province. In the latter province, the GVN defense effort appeared to have collapsed in the face of a VC onslaught, a situation at least partially attributable to the lower caliber of governmental leadership there. As a result, the PHOENIX Program was largely suspended and the RD effort reduced to a security role.

9. By mid-March, Kontum Province had moved into the "pacification set-back" category. Moreover, there were indications that the situation in Quang Ngai Province had deteriorated. Reporting on the province agrees that the pacification momentum has been slowed down there, and one source says that the Program has suffered a set-back. CORDS in its early March tabulation noted that Quang Ngai Province had more RD teams withdrawn for security reasons than any other province. As the month progressed, it looked as if the pacification effort might have received significant damage in Long KhanhProvince as well, since the Accelerated Pacification Program hamlets were reported to have been hit especially hard by the VC.

10. The Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) statistics for 31 March indicated that the following provinces had suffered over a one percent decrease in "relatively secure," "GVN controlled" population over the course of the month: Quang Ngai (from 62.2% to 59.8%), Phu Yen (from 89.4% to 87.0%), Kontum (from 92.4% to 90.4%), Phuoc Long (from 90.1% to 88.3%), and Quang Nam (from 65.6% to 64.2%). Thus, the two provinces apparently hardest hit at the onset of the late February Offensive, Phuoc Long and Kontum, seem to have continued to decline from a security standpoint, albeit at a lower rate. Similarly, in Quang Nam Province, where the pacification program has been noted as encountering trouble since

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December 1968 (above, paragraph 5), and in Quang Ngai Province, where such difficulties have been noted from late February onward, the situation apparently continues to go downhill. Finally, however, according to the 31 March statistics, the situation has been stabilized in Quang Tin, Hau Nghia, Thua Thien, Gia Dinh, and Dinh Tuong Provinces, initially reported to have been affected by the Post-Tet Offensive (above, paragraph 8), and in Long Khanh Province where similar difficulties had been reported during March. It should be noted that this set of HES statistics shows an overall increase for the country as a whole in the percentage of population in the "relatively secure," "GVN controlled" category on 31 March as compared to the situation on 28 February.

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