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22 October 1969

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Comments on the 6 October 1969 Paper Entitled "The Phoenix Program"

I. Goals

1. The goals, or target numbers, of Phoenix are no more arbitray than those established for other programs in South Vietnam. As in the case of most program goals throughout the world, they attempt to combine known capabilities with an additional margin aimed at providing incentives and indicating the degree of significance which the central authorities attach to the program. If goals were based solely on present capabilities, there would be little stimulus to progress. (If educational goals were established on initial capabilities teen-agers might still be playing with finger paints.)

2. Viewed in this perspective, the target figures for the Phoenix program do not really seem detached from reality. In fact, based on the results for the first eight months of 1969, they appear to have gauged fairly accurately the role of momentum and incentive in picking up the pace of VCI neutralization. As of the end of August 1969, the program goal of 1,800 VCI per month produced a goal total of 14,400. The actual total of VCI neutralizations was 12,156, an overall track record of slightly over 84 percent of the program objective. This record, particularly considering the more stringent criteria imposed on the definitions of VCI by USMACV-GVN authorities in February 1969, after the goals had been established, sheds a reasonably favorable light on gross Phoenix performance.

3. With regard to impatience as a casual factor in disappointment with the program, whether or not it be general or widespread, such disappointment is probably not only a function of the deep entrenchment of the VCI (an undisputed fact) but also of the attitudes derived from our western, industrialized world in which, typically, resources are gathered and allocated

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to a program with the expectation that a solution will be rapidly forthcoming. This problem of expectations, however, has characterized virtually all of our efforts in South Vietnam, and is not unique to the Phoenix program.

4. The problem of fungibility, or ease of substitution, arising from the predominance of low-level VCI appears to be largely a problem of our own conceptual creation. The current level of district and higher level VCI netted in the Phoenix program (23%, up from 17% in February 1969) does not, on balance, seem to be disproportionate. The VCI organization, as most political organizations, has pyramid-like characteristics. This being the case, netting better than a one-in-five ratio of chiefs to indians would suggest that in reality the Phoenix is weighted more heavily on the side of high-level rather than low-level types. Certainly if the Chieu Hoi or the DIA/CIA figures indicated that these operations were netting one officer for every four to five enlisted men we would be extremely surprised. Furthermore, at a certain point in the organizational evolution of the VCI it is likely that it will become easier to replace chiefs than indians. While it is not claimed that this point has yet been reached, it is already the case that the recruiting of indians (previously uncommitted) becomes more difficult as the probability of their being rolled up rises. Furthermore, neutralization of higher level types can be effected either directly through standard techniques or indirectly by denying these leaders the manpower and physical resources they require to present a threat. In this light, the fact that Phoenix operations have forced VCI to move from native villages because capture was imminent is not necessarily all bad. The VC cannot win this war by remote control any more than we can.

II. Performance Data

5. The Phoenix program has never claimed that all VCI neutralizations were or would be the result of Phoenix-initiated operations. The prime goal of the Phoenix program is organizational in nature rather than operational. In fact, the principal rationale for the establishment of the Phoenix organization was the realization that Chieu Hoi, RD cadre, RF/PF, conventional military and police operations were not independent and, at this stage of the war, should not be allowed to conduct their activities in an informational vacuum. As a result of this organizational outlook, the Phoenix program is neither discredited nor puffed by the percentage of neutralizations resulting from Chieu Hoi, or military operations, or police captures, or, for that matter any functional distribution. The prime

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objective of the Phoenix program is to ensure that local operations are exploited for their possible impact on the VCI, to provide information to managers of Chieu Hoi and military roundup operations on known VCI so that these can be exploited for their intelligence value, and to establish and maintain a ledger balance so that we and our Vietnamese allies can evaluate the VCI threat and how well we are doing against it.

III. Political Apathy

6. "Malaise" seems to us an inaccurate word for describing one of the real and major problems associated with the Phoenix effort. "Malaise" means a sickness or being ill at ease. The root problem here, however, is that many local Vietnamese feel entirely too comfortable in the presence of the VCI. Thus "political apathy" would seem to be a better label for the problem here involved.

7. It would be flying in the face of the evidence to deny the existence of a substantial political apathy -- particularly at local levels -- in South Vietnam, but it would also be misleading to deny that this is both a cause and an effect of the total political situation, including the stalled talks in Paris. In terms of our perspective in program evaluation, however, it should be pointed out that the lack of native enthusiasm for prosecuting the war against the VC is, or would be, a problem affecting all of our programs in South Vietnam, not merely Phoenix. To the degree that U.S. forces and ARVN are fighting a foreign military force and ultimately rely on a highly ritualized form of discipline, they are partially immune to the initial effects of local apathy. It is not surprising, therefore, that local operations -- including, but not limited to the Phoenix program -- would be the first to encounter difficulties. This is truly a major problem that we face in South Vietnam and, at least at the present time, there are no simple solutions forthcoming. It would appear, however, that a continued emphasis on pursuing the VCI by dedicated GVN forces (which are substantial) and the continued demonstration of GVN resolve to neutralize the effectiveness of the Viet Cong will achieve a greater change in the apathy quotient than would agonizing over whether or not the VCI really wear black hats or white. The GVN cannot tolerate local accommodation at this time any more than it could previously; and the way to combat determination on the part of the VC is to show an equal determination to eliminate them. Whether this elimination is achieved through death, discredit, imprisonment or merely public identification is a matter to be determined by the operational

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necessities of the war. It is clear, however, that given the present goals and strength of the VC, the GVN cannot achieve its objectives by officially or institutionally sharing with local rural officials any private apprehensions of senior Saigon leaders regarding possible reprisals by the VC. If we must introduce analogies to the U.S. crime problem, consider the effectiveness of our police force if district attorneys felt as intimidated as shopkeepers.

IV. Suggested Reappraisal

8. All programs in South Vietnam should be reappraised; not periodically, but continuously. The Phoenix program is not and should not be an exception.

9. Criteria for reappraisal, however, are not insignificant. There are two distinct sets of criteria which can be applied to such a re-evaluation. One relates to the degree to which a program is achieving its goals; the other, to the degree to which the program goals are relevant or desirable.

10. On the basis of information available thus far, there does not seem to be evidence that the Phoenix program is not meeting its goals -- given some current margin of shortfall which should be offset by an acknowledgment of the impact of program momentum. Therefore it would appear that the principal criteria on which we should base any reappraisal of Phoenix should be the evaluation of that program's goals in the light of the total current situation in South Vietnam.

11. There is certainly merit in examining the possiblity of gradually emphasizing police and juridicial actions at the expense of those conducted under the more summary forms of martial law. However, it is probably a truism that such a substitution must be timed to meet the environmental variables. To apply constitutional law at Khe Sanh or at Ben Het would seem to be folly. The record of the U.S. Government during our own Civil War or the British during World War II constitute but two examples of the easily demonstrable fact that governments far more deeply rooted in traditions of constitutional legality than South Vietnam accept almost unquestioningly the need to bend, suspend or waive the rules when survival is at stake. While the Vietnamese Assembly, the Saigon press, and some sectors of international and U.S. opinion frequently choose to ignore it, there is a war going on in South Vietnam. The ultimate decision of how to balance the necessary degree of violent justice with constitutional justice

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must rest with the GVN. We can advise our Vietnamese allies, cajole them, and assist them in this decision, but in the end it must be theirs. Most importantly, given the political environment, the Paris talks, the military situation, and the propensity for local accommodation, the delicate balance between military, paramilitary, and civilian actions that the GVN must choose will very likely be one of the most significant factors influencing the future course of the war.

12. The problem of balance is not restricted to the GVN. It would be a simple matter to obtain from some ARVN officer an opinion that the VC are going to win; a simple matter to elicit from a village chief the opinion that his district chief is corrupt. The question remains: is this the dominant form of behavior and opinion in South Vietnam. If it truly is, then we should not waste the time reappraising the Phoenix program but should withdraw all of our forces and support immediately. If this is not the dominant attitude, however, we can, and should, take steps to alter the attitudes of those whose support we cannot count on. Wavering GVN officials can be replaced; committed GVN officials can be encouraged and their enthusiasm spread; and we can insure that at least in the areas of GVN influence the nature of the enemy is known and discredited.

V. The VCI Turnaround

13. The question of GVN prisoner accounting, jail procedures, and the ultimate return of "neutralized" to their scene of operations is a serious one that is the subject of current discussions between the U.S. and GVN authorities. Perhaps the principal cause of the problem has been the lack of detention facilities -- a problem not unknown in the United States. It is hoped that resources can be found to allocate to this problem, but it must be kept in mind that with the U.S. withdrawal, major military questions are being put to the GVN and spare resources -- both money and human -- are not going to be easily found.

VI. The Anatomical Analogy

14. To go for the head instead of the body may not be either practical or, necessarily, the most efficient way of attacking the VCI. Certainly, the intelligence required to identify and neutralize the "heads" (since there are obviously more than one) comes from the rather tedious roundup of low-level types. Additionally, it may be that the analogy itself is misleading.

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In an organization as idologically dedicated as the PRP, it may well be easier to find heads than bodies, particularly after a long period of attrition. While unquestionably it is more disruptive to an organization to have high-level cadre roped in or eliminated than to have a larger number of low-level operatives neutralized, it is also true that in operations which are police-like in nature, high-level intelligence depends on low-level intelligence. Significantly, the ultimate disruption of a tightly-knit organization is not to martyr the head but to dismember the body; that is, to deny to the high-level leaders the capacity to use the manpower resources of the country to further their ends.

VII. Phoenix as a Political Weapon

15. There is a very real danger that the intelligence (information) coordinating capabilities of the Phoenix organization could be used in an undesirable way as a means of political elimination. It should be noted, however, that Phoenix did not create this potential, it merely enhanced it as a by-product of increased efficiency. As was the case in the issue of political apathy, however, this situation is not unique to Phoenix but is common to all programs in South Vietnam. The type of safeguards that we can provide are truly a function of the degree of influence which we hold over the GVN, and while GVN decisions in this matter (among others) have the potential for creating current or future embarrassment for the U.S., it is important to remember: (a) that we cannot live the Vietnamese lives for them, and (b) the use of military and economic power for political ends is not unique to the Phoenix organization. Only a continuing emphasis and insistence on a balance of political stability and minority rights throughout all of our programs in South Vietnam can ensure that U.S. assistance is not used to create a new form of tyranny. On the other hand, an inefficient GVN will stand little chance of staving off the tyranny the Vietnamese Communist Party seeks to impose over all of Vietnam.

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QUANTITATIVE ASPECTS OF THE PHOENIX/PHUNG HOANG PROGRAM

The overall war in South Vietnam, as well as the Phoenix program, is a mixture of quantitative and qualitative aspects. This dichotomy is not unique; it is characteristic of all social phenomena and, significantly, of all attempts to measure change or progress in these phenomena.

The more remote that the evaluation or measurement process is from the actual events of change the greater the requirements for comparability in information and, in most cases, this requirement takes the form of a demand for quantitative reporting. To a certain degree, qualitative aspects of an event can be translated into quantative terms--this, for example, is the rationale of reporting high-level versus low-level VCI neutralized--but as is the case in most translations something is lost. The quantification process does provide Washington analysts and decision makers with a greater insight into overall program performance, but it should be remembered that it is at best an approximation that is of most value for remote viewers of the situation. A district chief does not need a historical data series to tell him how well the Phoenix program is going in his area but the program manager in Saigon needs such a data series in order to make each district report comparable in form to each other district report.

The program goals of Phoenix are stated in quantitative terms primarily for purposes of information compatability. In this respect they are highly, but not totally arbitrary; there is no certainty that the achievement of these goals will bring about a termination of the war on a specific date. Based on a conservative extrapolation of the 1968-1969 data on total VCI neutralized, however, it appears that the results for 1969 will lie between 95% and 105% of the program goals of 1800 VCI per month. This range would strongly suggest that the quantitative goals fairly accurately reflected capability projections and were not merely conjured up by Saigon public relations types. The fact that projected year-end results of the Phoenix program will be close to the quantitative program goals is not sufficient information on which to base a program evaluation. Noting that more

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stringent criteria were imposed on the definition of VCI after the establishment of program goals, however, suggests that the program is actually performing somewhat more effectively than the gross quantitative data would indicate.

From a qualitative standpoint, the interpretation of the data becomes more difficult, particularly in its highly aggregated form available in Washington. However, the increasing percentage of district and higher VCI being netted by the program (see attached table) would indicate that from a qualitative standpoint the Phoenix program is being increasingly effective against higher-level VCI. Perhaps more importantly, the overall ratio of approximately 1:4 for high to low level VCI being neutralized would not seem to be particularly good prima facie evidence that only low-level types are being attacked. It is most certainly not clear that attempts to push this ratio further in favor of high-level types would be in the best interests of our attack on the infrastructure. Firstly, there is the question of which level of cadre are at this time easier to replace by the VC; the ultimate impact on VC recruiting may be felt more strongly by Phoenix's rounding up of low-level types. Secondly, while the percentage of higher-level cadre that are netted is simultaneously a cause and an effect of their morale, it would appear very likely that continued attacks on their resources is a necessary adjunct to reducing their morale.

One measure of the morale aspects involves the relationship between the Phoenix program and the Chieu Hoi program; one that must in aggregate terms at least be expressed quantitatively. The technique by which this relationship is measured is a by-product of the accounting techniques established at the onset of the Phoenix program itself. Just as the increasing complexity of commercial transactions and the necessity of establishing income for a particular time period produced the double-entry bookeeping system, the need for a measure of progress in the attack against the VCI produced the accounting system currently used by USMACV. The fact that this attack is dependent on many interrelated military and civil programs in South Vietnam is not denied by Phoenix managers. On the contrary, the very interdependence of these programs and their relationship to the VCI

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was the rationale for the development of Phoenix in the first place. In the attached tables may be found a functional breakout of the VCI that have been neutralized during 1968 and 1969. Included in these tables is a historical perspective of the percentage of VCI neutralized that originate in the Chieu Hoi program. The fact that this percentage is rising, however, suggests that the Phoenix program, along with others, is operating with more rather than less effectiveness. The prospect of entering the Chieu Hoi program is a far more appealing alternative than being rounded up in a military or police net. The evidence that an increasing percentage of VCI are choosing this alternative would appear to be a credit to the Phoenix organization rather than a criticism.

The Phoenix program is organizational rather than operational in nature and related rather than supplantive to other programs in South Vietnam. As such, while the numbers and quality of VCI neutralized are relevant to Phoenix program effectiveness, the means or program by which the neutralization takes place is not. Thus, the percentage of VCI neutralized by dint of Phoenix-initiated actions is relevant to local management but not particularly relevant to Washington-level analysis. From a quantitative data standpoint, the prime production responsibility of Phoenix is to establish a data base which indicates the extent of the infrastructure and to identify and quantify on a periodic basis changes in this data base. The phenomenon that changes to this liability account occur through the results of Chieu Hoi, police operations, or, for that matter, natural death is not a directly relevant statistic in evaluating Phoenix program effectiveness.

The terms Phoenix and Phung Hoang are not totally synonymous. It is part of the Vietnamization process that Phung Hoang--the Vietnamese input--will ultimately replace Phoenix, the US input. To the degree that this process of Vietnamization can be measured by official decrees and enthusiasm, it would appear that it is progressing fairly satisfactorily. The noise level that the program produces in the Vietnamese legislative branch and the apathy that the program faces at local levels, however, are indeed hurdles which must be faced. To a major extent, however,

these problems are highly qualitative and subjective in nature and are not reflected in any quantative data available currently. While it is conceivable that the slow growth of the Phoenix program in 1969 could be traced to qualitative variables such as these, the volatile nature of the data series cannot. Significantly, the increasing rate of VCI neutralizations suggests that while these problems may well exist they do not exist in sufficient magnitude to determine the course of the attack against the VCI itself.

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VCI INPUT TO THE CHIEU HOI PROGRAM
AND CHIEU HOI INPUT TO THE PHOENIX PROGRAM

1968	Percent of Total VCI Neutralized by Rallying	1./ Percent of Chieu Hoi That Were VCI
JAN	26.6	38.5
FEB	9.4	38.0
MAR	5.5	81.3
APR	8.8	22.4
MAY	7.6	36.3
JUN	10.4	43.8
JUL	13.3	25.8
AUG	16.5	33.9
SEP	17.1	39.9
OCT	17.0	39.0
NOV	15.6	50.3
DEC	19.8	51.0
TOTAL 1968	14.1	39.8
1969		
JAN	15.3	35.6
FEB	18.7	29.9
MAR	N.A.	N.A.
APR	20.4	22.8
MAY	22.2	24.1
JUN	22.5	27.5
JUL	23.5	16.9
AUG	25.0	24.6

1./ *Does not include military (Hoi Chanh) ralliers.*

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VCI NEUTRALIZATION BY CATEGORY - 1968-69

	Killed	Captured	Rallied	Total
1968				
JAN	48	310	130	488
FEB	91	398	51	540
MAR	150	1099	74	1323
APR	183	997	115	1295
MAY	146	1028	97	1271
JUN	93	947	121	1161
*JUL	149	970	172	1291
AUG	152	780	185	1117
SEP	123	806	192	1121
OCT	270	940	249	1459
NOV	409	1563	366	2338
DEC	441	1452	470	2372
TOTAL 1968	2,255	11,290	2,231	15,776
1969				
JAN	542	1483	368	2393
**FEB	376	624	230	1230
MAR				1481
APR	557	871	367	1795
MAY	462	674	326	1462
JUN	475	565	303	1343
JUL	666	703	421	1790
AUG	598	783	458	1839

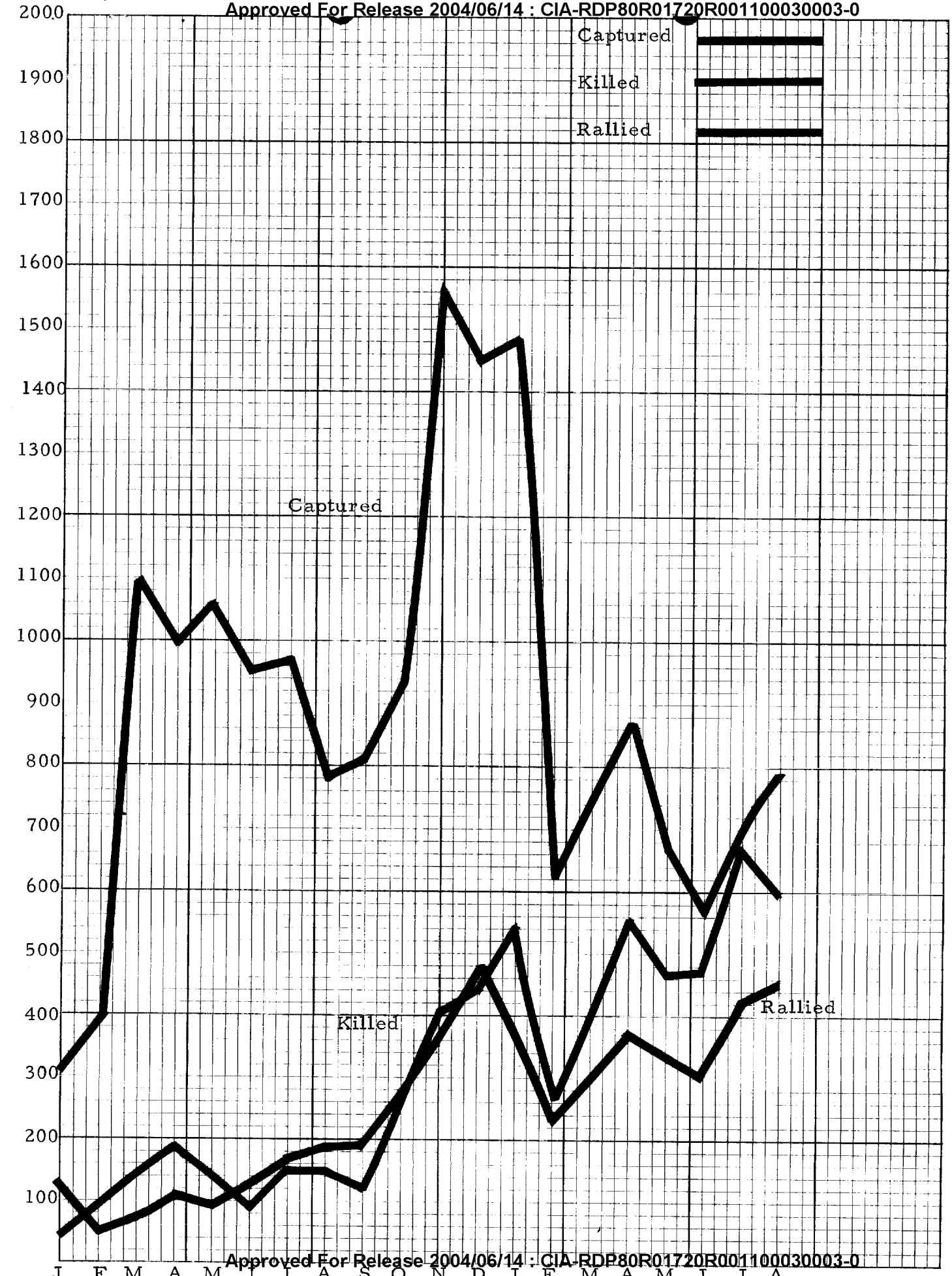
**GVN PHOENIX Directive Signed 1 July 1968*

***More stringent, US-GVN approved identification criteria were applied for the first time to February 1969 neutralization reports.*

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VCI NEUTRALIZATION BY CATEGORY 1968-69



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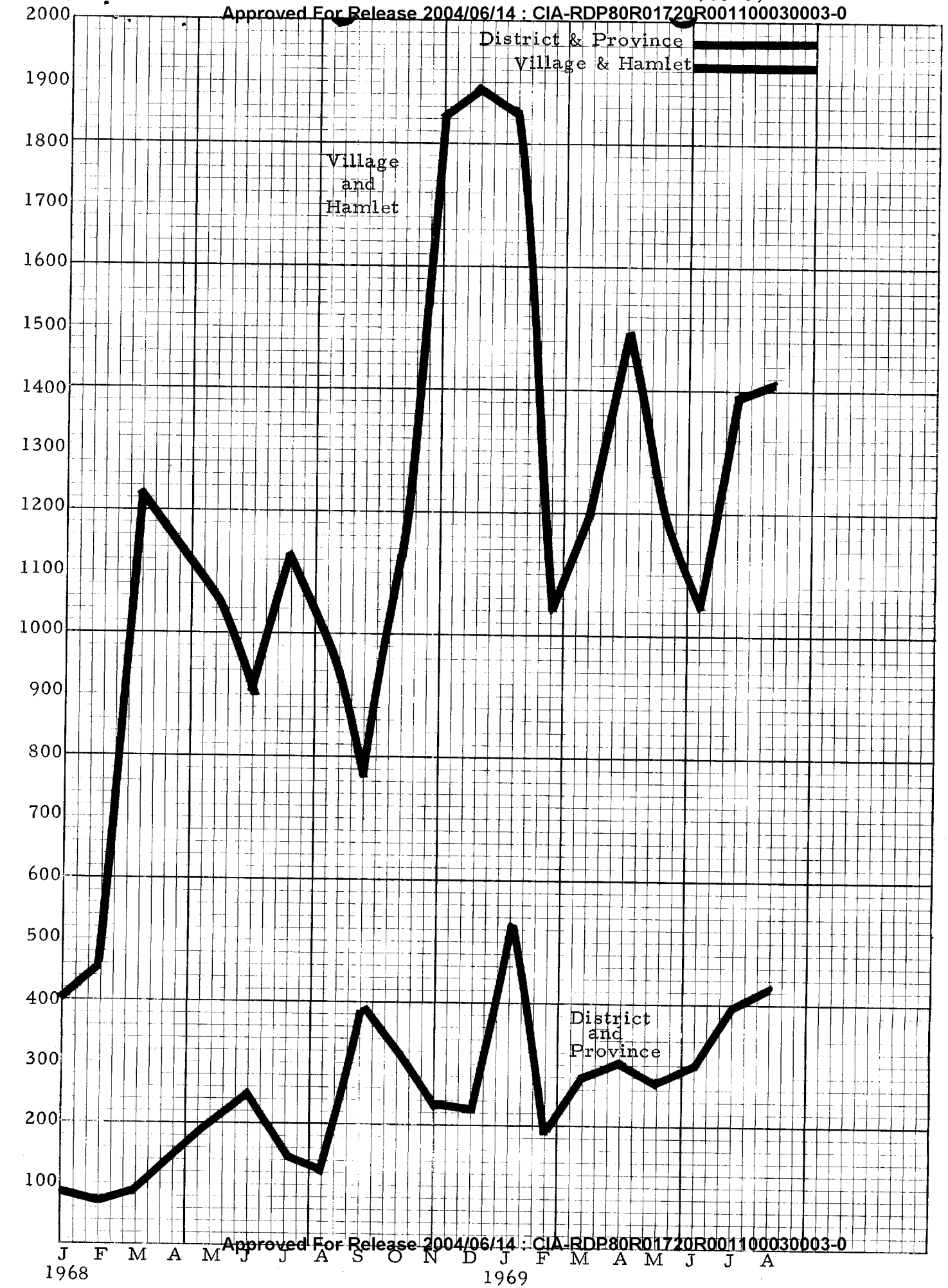
VCI NEUTRALIZATION BY LEVEL - 1968-69

	Hamlet and Village	District and Province	% of District and Province
1968			
JAN	404	84	17.2
FEB	463	77	14.2
MAR	1232	91	6.9
APR	1139	156	12.0
MAY	1070	201	15.8
JUN	904	257	22.1
JUL	1132	156	12.1
AUG	984	133	11.9
SEP	773	384	33.1
OCT	1131	328	22.5
NOV	1843	233	11.2
DEC	1884	228	10.8
TOTAL 1968	12,959	2,328	15.2
1969			
JAN	1855	532	22.0
FEB	1040	190	15.4
MAR	1200	281	19.0
APR	1491	304	16.9
MAY	1185	277	18.9
JUN	1043	300	22.3
JUL	1394	396	22.1
AUG	1408	431	23.4
TOTAL 1969			20.0

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VCI NEUTRALIZATION BY LEVEL - 1968-69



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