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7 December 1970

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Renewed CIA Participation in the Phung Hoang Program

REF : (A) Komer Report (Vietnam Revisited)

(B) The Situation in the Countryside (October 1970)

1. The report of former Ambassador Robert Komer on the status of pacification in South Vietnam included a special section on the Phung Hoang Program to eliminate the Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI). This section of the report, entitled "Phung Hoang Fiasco" inventoried many of the shortcomings of the program and included several suggestions for improvement. Among these suggestions was that the CIA renew its involvement in the program. 1/

2. Ambassador Komer's suggestion regarding CIA struck a responsive chord in many areas of government -- at least in Washington -- and as a result there is more interest in this suggestion than is usually generally generated by Veni Vidi reports. The interest in improving the program has been stimulated by the fact that the attack on the VCI has not reached up to its expectations. Disappointment in the program remains despite the fact that it has

1/ "The U.S. advisory effort must be pulled together more effectively. I realize how much pain it would cause, but if I could not think of a better solution, I would transfer opcon over the whole business to OSA."

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made its statistical goals in terms of VCI neutralized. The reason for this is that the low level of combat over the last year should have brought forth major efforts and successes in attacking the VCI. The Komer suggestion offers one of the few concrete changes in the program, and there is a desire to try almost anything that will make the plan work.

3. The following issues appeared to be relevant to the examining of the merits of Komer's proposals: First, the CIA involvement in such a large program [redacted] 25X1 in view of the recent difficulties [redacted] Second, 25X1 the funding of the program should remain under U.S. Army auspices since only this would comply with congressional intent. Under these circumstances, CIA would end up managing a program without control of its purse strings. Third, if the CIA were to be again involved in the program, logic would seem to dictate that it would do so only if we could provide skills and or services not available from other agencies.

4. There does appear to be a level and type of CIA involvement in the Phoenix program that would satisfy all of these constraints. More importantly, it offers at least the hope of greater success in the Phoenix program. In order to understand the proposed CIA involvement, certain background elements regarding the VCI and the existing Phoenix program must be understood:

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A. Over half of the VCI are concentrated in 8 provinces. (See attached map and table 1)

B. The existing communication and data processing network that supports the Phoenix program exhibits the classic tendency of information systems to data flows more easily upward than downward. The result is that more information exists at various command levels then is available at the operating levels.

C. One of the major problems effecting the program is the lack of emphasis placed on it by GVN officials and U.S. military. 2/

5. Given these characteristics and the constraints listed above, it would appear that a modest CIA-managed program might have a favorable impact. This program would have two major thrusts: The first would be to install CIA specialists as Province Senior Advisors in each of the eight provinces where the military situation offers the possibility of extensive roll-ups of the VCI. The second aspect of the program involves the establishment of an improved communication system and identification system for those eight provinces which would permit virtually instant identification data for GVN officials at check points and other pick-up areas.

2/ "The biggest lack of vigorous high-level operational GVN leadership at the center. "....."The U.S. advisory effort is fragmented and mostly low quality." Vietnam Revisited

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Examination of the Merits of the Proposal

A. Concentration of Effort. Concentration of Phung Hoang efforts in the eight provinces shown on the attached map would appear to have obvious merit and it is certain that this fact has not escaped the notice of MACCORDS. It is probably safe to assume that for CY 1971 concentration of effort, as such, would be characteristic of any variant of the Phung Hoang program. The program, however, is already bogged down by a very considerable inertia resulting from its committment to large-scale programs such as upgrading the National Police, the identity-card program, and Big Mack. Whether or not emphasis can be shifted to a more concentrated area from this type of national program in time to have any significant effect within a year is questionable.

B. CIA Province Senior Advisors. Whether we like it or not, or admit it or not, the career military officer in the U.S. Army gains little from a tour within the Phoenix Program. This is generally so whether he is working directly with the program or whether it is a matter of emphasis in his role as Province Senior Advisor. This phenomenon results only in part atavism; in large measure the marginal attitude toward Phoenix results from the absence of concrete results -- particularly the quantitative

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type. Given an opportunity to choose between clearing an area and upgrading the security scores of the included hamlets and devoting the same time, effort, and resources to rounding up an unimpressive group of suspect VCI, any red-blooded West Point graduate would choose the former. For much the same reasons, any U.S. military officer with an eye to career development would choose the same alternative. It is not surprising that the GVN province chief feels the same way; he too is a military officer.

The appointment of CIA officers as Province Senior Advisors and to fill district slots as well in the eight target provinces has several apparent advantages. First, the officer is being tasked with a job which not only relates to his professional skills but also which, if successfully completed, relates to his chances of promotion in a positive rather than a marginal or negative way. Second, the officer is somewhat freer to use command relationships not available to the U.S. military officer and also draw on logistics resources not generally available to military programs. Third, the officer can utilize unofficial means of financing efficiency if this appears appropriate. It should be noted that none of these advantages are founded on the premise that the CIA officer is smarter, better trained, or necessarily a superior

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human being in any respect; but rather that he fits into the existing political environment more easily and can therefore act with more freedom.

C. Target-Area Communications System. For reasons that are not at this time entirely clear, the communications and data processing systems supporting the Phung Hoang Program are not performing satisfactorily. It would be both interesting from an analytical viewpoint and necessary from a long-run standpoint to find out what is wrong and correct it. However, in order to achieve maximum impact in the short-run, i.e., 1971, the best action is probably to bypass the existing systems and set up what is required on the spot. Given that the effort can be divided into two separate areas of four provinces each, the communications and data processing systmes necessary would not represent a mamouth undertaking. Systems support should permit a radio-carrying policeman at a checkpoint to obtain immediate confirmation on a name check, 24-hour confirmation on fingerprints, and current information as to the status of prosecuted suspects. Systems support and data centers should be located in the target areas (e.g. Quang Ngai city and Can Tho) rather than in Saigon.

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Shortcomings of the Proposal

The major shortcoming of the proposal is that it reintroduces CIA into a program from which it had willingly disengaged because of Congressional and logical pressures regarding financial and cover aspects of Phung Hoang. Since the proposed concentration program would not involve a large number of people, it would not appear that cover, as such, would present serious problems. Nor, for that matter, would finance, since the communications/data systems would be funded overtly and extraordinary expenditures should not be large.

A second shortcoming of the proposal is that it fragments an effort against the VCI that is already suffering from organizational and motivational difficulties. Given the concentration of VCI in the target areas, however, it would not appear that an equivalent effort within Phung Hoang seriously jeopardizes the overall effort. Moreover, it is possible -- but assuredly not guaranteed -- that a high-impact program such as that proposed could galvanize the National Police into the type of force needed in South Vietnam's future. This could result not only from satisfaction resulting from the job done (witness the Cambodian operations' effect on ARVN) but also from an appreciation at the Saigon level where the National Police have yet to achieve full membership in the bureaucracy.

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TABLE 1

VCI Strength in Eight Provinces: March 1970

	Strength	Percent of Total in SVN
Quang Nam/Danang	6,156	8.1
Quang Tin	5,668	7.4
Quang Ngai	3,908	5.1
Binh Dinh	3,997	5.2
Dinh Tuong	4,192	5.5
Kien Hoa	4,698	6.2
Vinh Binh	6,449	8.5
Vinh Long	3,714	4.9

Source: USMACV; As reprinted in SEA Analysis Report, Sep/Oct 1970, published by ODASD (SA) Regional Programs.

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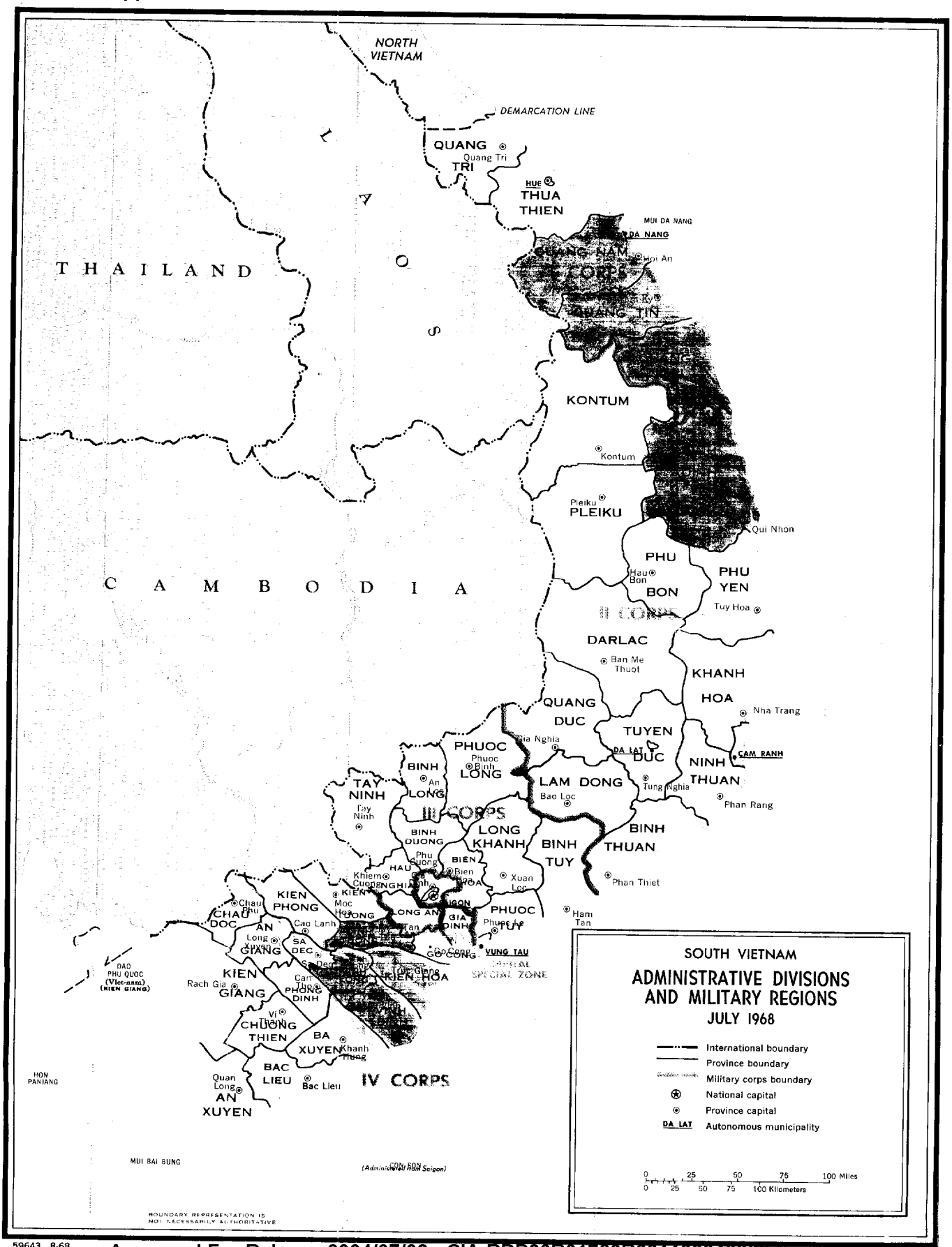
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