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MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Subject: The Phoenix/Phung Hoang and Provincial
Reconnaissance Units (PRU) Programs

1. ~~(S)~~ Reference is made to:

a. Memorandum from the Secretary of the Army to the Secretary of Defense, subject: The Phoenix and Provincial Reconnaissance Unit Programs in Vietnam, dated 20 October 1969, which expressed concern over these programs.

b. COMUSMACV message #65930, subject: Phung Hoang Operational Results, October 1969 (U), DTG 290233Z Nov 69, which assessed progress of the program during October.

c. Memorandum from the Secretary of Defense to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, subject: Evaluation of US Involvement in the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit Program in the Republic of Vietnam, dated 29 November 1969, which expressed growing anxiety over the program in view of recent events concerning US military conduct in South Vietnam.

2. ~~(S)~~ During your discussion with General Wheeler on 20 October, you expressed concern over the lack of progress in the Phoenix/Phung Hoang Program as reported to you by the Secretary of the Army (reference a). This report is in response to your expressed concern.

3. ~~(S)~~ While much has been done over the past 18 months to develop this program, it is clear to me and to the commanders in the field, that the program does not yet have the degree of sophistication and depth necessary to combat the highly developed and long experienced VC Infrastructure (VCI) in South Vietnam. A number of recent steps have been taken to increase the effectiveness of the program and to remedy weaknesses which have become apparent as a result of closer US involvement in all elements of the program.

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*Declassified by
DTES 6 12 May 86*

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4. ~~(S)~~ The GVN, especially President Thieu, has given full support to the program. President Thieu has nominated it as one of the major programs for the coming year and has given it full command support in pacification reviews of the four CTZs. Prime Minister Tran Thien Khiem has been the leading exponent of the program over the past year. It is true that some local officials have been less than fully energetic in carrying out the program, but the top level of the government has certainly endeavored to structure the program so as to stimulate better performance. In this connection, COMUSMACV has advised that Ambassador Bunker has agreed that, at an appropriate time, he will explore with President Thieu additional ways by which the GVN could improve the program, especially with respect to improving GVN local official attitudes.

5. ~~(S)~~ Statistically, the program has made significant progress in recent months. September results were the highest of the year when 2,005 VCI were neutralized, of whom 525 rallied, 822 were captured, and 658 were killed resisting capture. October represents (reference b) the third consecutive month that the 1969 GVN monthly goal of 1,800 VCI has been exceeded.

6. ~~(S)~~ Three recent actions have been taken with respect to the Phung Hoang Program which should produce substantial improvements. First, publicizing the program as one to protect the people against terrorism. This is designed to stimulate and encourage the active participation of the whole population in the program rather than conducting it as a secret police operation. Second, Ministry of Interior Directive 2212 of August 1969 includes several provisions which should make a marked improvement in the effectiveness of the program. Examples are: requiring mandatory sentences for

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higher level VCI to put an end to the "revolving door syndrome," simplifying the paperwork for legal processing, and requiring the immediate movement of higher level VCI to Con Son Island or similar national correction centers rather than crowding local facilities while Ministry of Interior approval of the case is obtained. A national level seminar of two representatives from each province was held on 15-16 October to discuss this decree and ensure its clear comprehension by province security committees. Third, Phung Hoang training courses are now in process in all four CTZs. While it is too early to point to specific results from these steps, they should improve the impact of the Phung Hoang Program.

7. ~~(S)~~ With respect to Secretary of the Army's comments in reference as to social and moral costs and the desirability of selective attack, this concern is shared also by the commanders in the field, and the GVN is moving to do something about it. For example:

a. The 1970 GVN Pacification and Development Plan, Annex II, contains a particular reference to the need for the population and detainees to be treated in a fair, considerate, and just manner. It calls for full notification to village officials of operations in their villages. With respect to the disposition of detainees from the village, it calls for rapid and equitable screening and release of innocents, better dossiers for more accurate charges, expeditious interrogation and processing of offenders, and notification to all echelons concerned as to the whereabouts and disposition of detainees to provide more effective accountability.

b. In order to focus on more selective attacks on the VCI leadership, the quota system for the provinces in the 1970 plan will be more sophisticated. It will require that a percentage (yet to be determined) of the goal of those

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VCI to be neutralized consist of previously identified VCI (rather than those revealed after capture); will credit VCI captured only after sentencing, rather than upon apprehension; and will be subdivided so that specific quotas will be required of province and district level VCI, rather than allowing quotas to be satisfied with low-level VCI.

8. ~~(S)~~ In view of the above, it is considered that appropriate actions are being taken in the field to improve operational results and to correct recognized program deficiencies of the Phoenix/Phung Hoang Program.

9. (U) A separate report will be provided to you on the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit Program (reference c).

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