The Phoenix with an Eagle's Wings

An Analysis of the Phoenix/Phung Hoang Programme, 1967-1975

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Abstract

The Phoenix/Phung Hoang Programme, a CIA-launched operation in South Vietnam lasting from 1967 to 1975, is a largely misunderstood topic, and no fully comprehensive account of its history has yet been produced. Through the use of primary and secondary source material, and by engaging with various historical and contemporary viewpoints, this thesis provides a contribution to the small yet diverse pool of scholarly debate surrounding the programme, paying particularly attention to disputes over effectiveness and ethical violations. To achieve this, Phoenix/Phung Hoang's history is examined from inception to conclusion and placed within the context of the broader Vietnam War. Moreover, the goals and impact of key figures, such as Richard Nixon, Robert Komer and William E. Colby, will be discussed throughout the thesis.

This study aims to demonstrate that Phoenix/Phung Hoang developed into a highly effective counterinsurgency programme, yet ultimately failed following the conclusion of American participation in 1972/73. Contrary to the assertions of a number of scholars, the programme made great strides, and had by 1971 taken a heavy toll on the communist political apparatus in South Vietnam. Furthermore, this study challenges the view that Phoenix/Phung Hoang was exceedingly immoral, and contends that most accusations of torture, assassination, corruption and mass arrests were inaccurate or exaggerated. Close attention is paid to the programme's role within, and dependence on, the broader Vietnam War, primarily regarding its inability to function capably without American support, guidance, or personnel. Emphasis is placed on the role of a number of factors relating to the broader war in accelerating American disengagement from Phoenix/Phung Hoang, such as US anti-war demonstrations, Nixon's efforts to attain a second term in office, and Vietnamisation. Additionally, this thesis explores parallels between the programme's failure in the political conflict, and the US/South Vietnamese failure in the military conflict as exemplified by the fall of Saigon. As will be seen, both failures were the result of the United States' departure from Vietnam.

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Abbreviations in Text

APC- Accelerated Pacification Campaign

ARVN- Army of the Republic of Vietnam

CIA- Central Intelligence Agency

CORDS- Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support

COSVN- Central Office for South Vietnam

CSA- Corps Senior Adviser

CTZ- Corps Tactical Zone

DGNP- Director/Directorate General of the National Police

DIOCC- District Intelligence and Operations Coordination Centre

DRAC- Delta Regional Assistance Command (MR IV)

DSA- District Senior Advisers

FForce/V- Field Force Vietnam

GVN- Government of Vietnam (South Vietnam's government)

ICEX- Infrastructure Intelligence Coordination and Exploitation

MACV- Military Assistance Command, Vietnam

MI- Military Intelligence

MR- Military Region

NCO- Non-Commission Officer

NLF- National Liberation Front

NPFF- National Police Field Forces

NSSM- National Security Study Memorandum

NVA- North Vietnamese Army (Also known as PAVN)

PAVN- People's Army of Vietnam (Also known as NVA)

PHREEX- Phung Hoang Re-examination

PHTS- Phung Hoang Training Schools

PIOCC- Province Intelligence and Operations Coordination Centre

POC- Police Operations centres

PRU- Provincial Reconnaissance Units

PSA- Province Senior Adviser

PSB- Police Special Branch

PSC- Province Security Committee

PSYOPS- Psychological Operations

RF/PF- Regional Forces/Popular Forces

RIOCC- Regional Intelligence and Operations Coordination Centre

RSA-Regional Senior Adviser

RVN- Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam)

SOP- Standard Operating Procedures

SRAG- Second Regional Assistance Group (MR II)

TRAC- Third Regional Advisory Group (MR III)

VC- Vietcong

VCI- Vietcong Infrastructure

US- United States

Abbreviations in Footnotes

Please note that some abbreviations within the footnotes will not appear here, as either they are already listed in 'Abbreviations in Text', or their unabbreviated form could not be found.

BHC- Bud Harton Collection

DAC- Dale W. Andrade Collection

DEPCORDS or DEP/CORDS- Deputy for CORDs (Used for both the head of CORDS and regional deputies)

DPC- Douglas Pike Collection

DTIC- *Defense Technical Information Centre*

FCO- Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Predecessors

CIA; FOIAERR- *Central Intelligence Agency, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading* Room

FRUS- *Foreign Relations of the United States*

GHC- Glenn Helm Collection

LBJ- Lyndon Baines Johnson

NAK- The National Archives, Kew, London

NARA/II- National Archives and Record Administration II, College Park

PH- Phung Hoang

RG- Record Group

SFC- Stephen Forcade Collection

TTUVVA- Texas Tech University, Virtual Vietnam Archive

VAC- Vietnam Archive Collection

WCC- William Colby Collection

<u>Introduction</u>

The Vietnam War was not one conflict, but rather a confluence of various political, guerrilla and conventional military struggles fought at different times across three and a half decades. For this reason, it could not be won through any single method of warfare. During the most notorious epoch of the Vietnam War, lasting roughly from 1960 to 1975, the ill-fated nation of South Vietnam attempted to surmount both an internal communist insurgency, and the external threat of North Vietnam. This struggle for dominance over the South essentially consisted of two wars waged simultaneously: the military war, which centred on destroying enemy forces and units, and the village war. The latter was a contest for control over South Vietnam's countryside and the rural peasantry who constituted the majority of the country's population. During this contest, the South Vietnamese government, also known as the Government of Vietnam (GVN), and its ally the United States attempted to repulse and defeat the internal communist insurgency's campaign to establish authority over the nation's villages and hamlets. It was not fought via large battles, but rather through intelligence, political/economic measures, local-security forces, and small units tasked with damaging each side's administrative infrastructure and functionaries. It is during this conflict that the Phoenix/Phung Hoang Programme, one of the most effective attempts by the allies to succeed in the village war, would rise and fall.

The Phoenix/Phung Hoang Programme was an integrated management and advisory structure developed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1967 to coordinate intelligence and operational assets against the Vietcong Infrastructure (VCI). It was formed of two programmes which functioned as one concerted effort, Phung Hoang being a South Vietnamese management structure, and Phoenix being the American advisory structure attached to Phung Hoang. For the sake of simplicity, Phoenix/Phung Hoang will be shortened in most instances to *Phoenix*, while the term *Phung Hoang* will only be used when referring solely to the Vietnamese aspect of the programme. Before Phoenix can be discussed in greater detail, the organisation and purpose of the VCI, the importance of the village war, and allied strategy in the village war prior to 1967, must first be addressed.

The Vietcong Infrastructure, also known as the shadow apparatus or shadow government, was the political and military support/command network of the communist insurgency in

South Vietnam. It consisted of the leadership and structure of the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP), which was the Southern arm of North Vietnam's communist Labour Party, and the leadership of the National Liberation Front (NLF), which encompassed the Vietcong (VC) and was under the direction of the PRP. The structure as a whole, including the PRP, came under the authority of the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), which answered directly to Hanoi. It is through this network that North Vietnam and the southern communist leadership directed the insurgency, extended political/military control, and commanded guerrilla and conventional forces.[1] The VCI's members and functionaries, known as cadre, operated at the village, district, provincial, regional and national echelons of South Vietnam's geographical hierarchy.[2] The cadre assigned to each area, for example a village or province, directed all insurgency activity in that area, and were responsible for establishing communist authority over that same location. Through imposing taxation, implementing local government, creating propaganda, and proselytising civilians, these cadre formed the backbone of the shadow government's campaign to extend its authority across South Vietnam, most notably throughout villages and hamlets. The VCI also supported the military side of the insurgency: cadre were responsible for digging tunnels, recruiting troops, military proselytising, stockpiling rice and other resources, and directing units.[3] In parts of the country where the VC held the dominant position, hamlet- and village-level cadre often lived within the same areas they directed.[4] The VCI within each village, district, province and region was administered by a party secretary, who answered to a party secretary at the echelon above their own; hamlets were administered by a village-level secretary. These secretaries oversaw a number of chiefs, each of whom was responsible for a different aspect of the insurgency within their administrative area.[5] The most accurate estimates in 1967 placed the VCI's size at between 80,000 and 150,000

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[1] Background paper, 'The Viet Cong Infrastructure', June 1970, DPC/2310412004, TTUVVA, URL: **http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?7Owk4ermcBWMRfH77dpMngg8g5VkNRk8TJ.dLzseapbUwqRfmbY9ocQZThw.x33qNmtOMx8SQyx2jEKIFAqSxMuNkbgpk2R.@DPx2Bu5Hxo/2310905022.pdf**, pp.2-5

[2] Mark Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: The CIA's Secret Campaign to Destroy the Viet Cong* (Naval Institute Press, 1997), p.11

[3] Letter for the Phung Hoang Committee, MR III, undated (circa late-1972), RG 472/General Records/Box 33/5642565, NARA/II, p.1

[4] Moyar, *Phoenix*, p.13

[5] 'The Viet Cong Infrastructure', June 1970, 2310412004, TTUVVA, pp.5-7, 15-19

personnel, which did not include guerrilla or conventional units because they were a separate force from the infrastructure's members and cadre.[6]

Unlike most conventional conflicts, the Vietnam War would ultimately be won or lost at the village and hamlet level. In order to ascertain why the village war was so crucial to the broader conflict, and by extension why destroying the VCI was of paramount importance, village society in South Vietnam must first be understood. The rural peasant populations of South Vietnam had little concern for national identity or ideology, and focused solely on the prosperity of their village and their families. As such, the loyalty of individual villages was guided by self-interest and self-preservation:

> '[T]the Vietnamese peasant does not change his political allegiance, if in fact allegiance was ever given, but rather continually adapts himself to what he perceives to be the political realities in his village at the moment'.[7]

Villages generally supported and acknowledged the most ubiquitous and commanding force in their local area. This was dictated both by self-preservation, and the ideals of Confucianism which many peasants followed.[8] As a result, control of rural South Vietnam necessitated the establishment of a presence within almost every village. The COSVN understood these concepts well, as the placement of VCI cadre within hamlets gave the appearance of dominance throughout the area, while offering land and low rents further enticed villagers to support their cause.[9]

The United States and GVN's struggle to control the countryside was referred to as 'pacification'. Pacification efforts, aiming to improve village security and combat the shadow government, were attempted in the early-1960s, but these efforts failed to comprehend village society. The most notable example was the Strategic Hamlet Programme. Between 1962 and 1964, the programme did little more than anger the

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[6] CIA, 'The Vietnam Situation: An Analysis and Estimate', 23 May 1967, LBJ, Papers of the Capital Legal Foundation, Box 5/Folder CIA 238, in, Moyar, *Phoenix,* p.11

[7] Staff report prepared for the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 2 February 1970, DPC/2390706003, TTUVVA, URL: **http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?pNEL.ojrg7ZxMCXCFP0L7Jn4aaD8DPxGWVC05K072OwspntXILVZCz.Z@vdazkw9yKRu6A8FrHM.fMrPBUW93YXLMaP0F6tmvmjAKD@fJco/2390706003.pdf**, p.7

[8] Moyar, Phoenix, p.19-20

[9] Ibid, pp.21-22

peasant populations through removing them from their ancestral homes and placing them in supposedly well defended hamlets.[10] This error in judgement had advocated removing the population from the VCI, rather than the other way round. By 1967, the succeeding pacification strategy utilised a three-pronged concept (political, economic, security) to pacify the pre-existing villages throughout South Vietnam.

From 1967 to 1975, the Phoenix Programme constituted a major aspect of the security element of pacification, tasked with dismantling the shadow government across South Vietnam. Meanwhile the political and economic sections of pacification were tasked with consolidating GVN authority in the areas freed from Vietcong and VCI control. Phoenix's strategy centred on a joint intelligence/exploitation approach, whereby individual cadre were identified, located and then neutralised. The programme had no intelligence or operational capabilities of its own, but rather was designed to coordinate the various GVN, and some American, agencies and programmes that were already combating the shadow government. These counter-VCI assets included military and civilian intelligence agencies, the National Police (NP), small counterinsurgency units, psychological operations, interrogation centres, and information centres. The GVN management structure was tasked with instigating cooperation and coordination between these assets, which would allow for the honing of intelligence and operational forces towards identifying and neutralising VCI targets with pinpoint accuracy. Although counter-VCI agencies remained separate from, and independent of, the Phoenix Programme, they were required to participate within it, as well as provide representatives and distribute relevant intelligence. The American role within Phoenix was ostensibly advisory, yet in truth advisers not only guided and assisted their GVN counterparts, but were in many instances the primary influencing force behind the programme's activities.

Phoenix remains a heavily disputed topic among scholars, with the bulk of debate pertaining to the success and/or morality of the programme. The arguments thus far raised, while diverse and often insightful, frequently fail to properly represent the programme and its history. Douglas Valentine attempts to portray Phoenix in an

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[10] Mark Atwood Lawrence, *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History* (Oxford University Press, 2008), p.74

overwhelmingly negative light, asserting that it aimed at 'terrorizing' the Vietnamese population into accepting GVN authority.[11] This view is echoed by Alfred McCoy, who states that the programme was a 'murderous covert operation' with 'limitless funding and unrestrained power'.[12] McCoy and Valentine also claim that Phoenix was ineffective, arguing that it mostly failed in its efforts and did not severely damage the VCI.[13] The case for Phoenix being a murder/terror campaign is predominately upheld both by hearings in the US during the early-1970s, which saw the programme's activities come under ethical scrutiny, and by interviews with former advisers. However, the accusations against Phoenix during these hearings, as well as the testimonies of a number of advisers, were often exaggerated, particularly in regards to allegations of corruption, torture, mass arrests and assassinations. Additionally, interviewees who condemned Phoenix did not represent a universal opinion, as numerous former advisers defended the programme's actions. It should also be noted that McCoy's statements regarding the funding, power and secrecy of Phoenix are largely false. The programme did enjoy significant influence and financial support at one time, but this was not unlimited, ubiquitous or consistent during its history. Furthermore, Phoenix was surprisingly overt: while most of its operations were classified, the programme was for much of its lifetime publicly endorsed in South Vietnam by the GVN.

Scholars such as Mark Moyar contest the ethical allegations against Phoenix, highlighting that they were commonly unfounded or inaccurate. Gerald Degroot has also questioned the validity of these allegations, stating that they were often exaggerated through 'sensationalist rumour'.[14] However, while Moyar defends Phoenix from a moral stand point, he is less inclined to do so in regards to its effectiveness. He suggests that counterinsurgency and counter-VCI activity did devastate the VCI, but Phoenix was not responsible, instead crediting these achievements to territorial forces such as Regional Forces/Popular Forces (RF/PF), and some of the programme's participants such as the Provincial Recognisance Units (PRU) and Chieu Hoi Programme. According to Moyar,

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[11] Douglas Valentine, *The Phoenix Program*, (iUniverse, 2000), p.13

[12] Alfred McCoy, *A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation, from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Owl Books, 2006), p.64

[13] Ibid, p.199, see also: Valentine, *Phoenix*, pp.203-204

[14] Gerald J. DeGroot, *A Noble Cause?: American and the Vietnam War* (Longman, 2000), p.217

because Phoenix 'merely attempted to coordinate intelligence sharing and encourage existing entities to neutralize the Viet Cong cadres', it 'could not possibly have damaged the shadow government to any great extent'.[15] However, this view underestimates the influence of American advisers and officials, neglects the impact Phoenix had on improving its participants, and fails to acknowledge the programme's usefulness as a tool to drive the nationwide counter-VCI effort. American advisers were able to not only guide, and often direct, their Vietnamese counterparts, but were also effective at identifying faults in both the programme and its participating agencies. Furthermore, the successes of many of these participants were largely the result of the programme's ability to build rapports, instigate training programmes, distribute intelligence and orchestrate operations. The PRUs, which Moyar praises above Phoenix, were most successful during the Phoenix era: their counter-VCI skills were enhanced and honed after joining Phoenix, their commanders attended Phoenix training centres, and many of their greatest successes came during campaigns or operations instigated by Phoenix or its advisers.

Dale Andradé offers a relatively accurate interpretation of the programme's achievements, although his book on the subject is now somewhat outdated, having been published in 1990. According to Andradé, Phoenix was 'taking a real toll on the VCI' by the early-1970s, but ultimately failed as a result of the pull-out of American advisory support during 1972.[16] He also argues, similarly to Moyar and DeGroot, that many of the accusations against Phoenix, particularly those relating to assassinations, were unsubstantiated.[17] Other proponents of the position that Phoenix was effective include Mark Atwood Lawrence, stating that the programme 'damaged the communist political network in many areas', and Marilyn Young, who argues that its activities were impactful, yet cruel and corrupt.[18]

John Prados agrees with the view that American advisors were crucial, but is ultimately sceptical about Phoenix's effectiveness. He states that the programme failed to neutralise the 'senior levels of the VC leadership', highlighting that only 'some 12.9 percent [of

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[15] Moyar, *Phoenix*, pp.XVI, 93-102, 246-248

[16] Dale Andradé, *Ashes to Ashes: The Phoenix Program and the Vietnam War* (Lexington Books, 1990), p.229
[17] Ibid, p.212

[18] Lawrence, *The Vietnam* War, p.133, see also: Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars: 1945-1990* (Harper Perennial, 1991)**,** pp.212-213

neutralised cadre in 1968] were classed as district-level or higher'.[19] This approach is erroneous, however, as a number of factors have not been taken into account. First, this percentage did not, as Prados goes on to say, decline in 1970 and 1971, but rather increased slightly. Second, as Moyar illustrates, the inherent nature of a hierarchical organisation (a pyramid structure) dictates that there are 'far more people at the lower levels than at the higher', and so drawing a negative conclusion from the above percentage is illogical.[20] Third, defeating the shadow apparatus did not necessitate destroying the higher echelons, as neutralising numerous low-level and a reasonable number of mid-level VCI was sufficient to prevent the higher echelons from implementing policies and authority at the village and hamlet levels. Furthermore, Prados asserts that counter-VCI activity, and by extension Phoeinx, became redundant in 1972, as North Vietnam could from this point onwards wage a conventional military war.[21] However, as the North Vietnamese armed forces, the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), often relied on the VCI when operating in South Vietnam, counter-VCI activity continued to be necessary until 1975. Only during the final months of the war, when North Vietnam's final offensives achieved victory in a very short space of time, did VCI and counter-VCI activities become irrelevant.

This study aims to provide a new perspective, one which emphasises Phoenix's history and outcome as having been primarily influenced by the broader Vietnam War. Between 1968 and early-1972, the programme's campaign against the shadow government was highly impactful, with the VCI being severely impaired, if not debilitated, in many areas throughout South Vietnam. During this period, Phoenix demonstrated a timeline of progress in cooperation, intelligence collection, operational planning, personnel quality, motivation, accuracy, efficiency and targeting abilities, all of which contributed to a gradual increase in the programme's ability to damage the VCI. These successes contributed to the overall strides made by pacification, with GVN authority established across large sections of the countryside by early-1972. Furthermore, while Phoenix was plagued with numerous internal issues and setbacks, many were gradually ameliorated over the course of its lifespan. It is also the goal of this study to reinforce and build upon the view that many of

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[19] John Prados, *The Hidden History of the Vietnam War* (Ivan R. Dee Inc., 1995), pp.213,219
[20] Moyar, *Phoenix*, p.252
[21] Prados, *Hidden History*, p.220

the allegations against Phoenix were unsubstantiated, which will primarily be discussed in Chapter Five.

In spite of its numerous successes, the inherent flaw of Phoenix, a flaw which was never resolved, was its dependence on American financial, military, logistical and advisory support. As a consequence, the progress of Phoenix was subject to the broader Vietnam War, particularly in regards the political situation within the United States. Until 1968, counter-VCI activity achieved very little, as American and Vietnamese officials displayed disinterest towards the political side of the war. This changed following the Tet Offensive, as the political and strategic ramifications of the nationwide assault resulted in a considerable expansion of GVN and American support for Phoenix, particularly as the programme became a tool of Vietnamisation. However, the political aftermath of Tet proved to be the instigating force behind both the rise and fall of Phoenix, as this had also sparked the beginning of United States' gradual withdrawal from the Vietnam War, which included the departure of America from pacification during 1972/1973. This departure subsequently saw counter-VCI activity suffer from stagnation and decline, which persisted until the fall of Saigon. Furthermore, the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam, which took place between 1969 and 1974, left pacification efforts exposed to assaults by large communist forces, as South Vietnamese forces proved incapable of defending the nation single-handedly. As a result of the withdrawal of US support, the Phoenix Programme, while highly effective, failed to completely dismantle the shadow apparatus. This was a key factor in why the allies did not achieve victory in the village war. However, even had the village war been won, the military side of the conflict was equally vital to South Vietnam's survival, and with Saigon's defeat in 1975 at the hands of the PAVN, it is clear that the allies had not achieved victory in either aspects of the Vietnam War.

The structure of this thesis is predominately chronological. Chapter One discusses counter-VCI activity prior to ICEX and the programme's establishment in 1967. Chapter Two focuses on 1968 and early-1969, particularly the Tet Offensive and its impact. Chapter Three highlights the expansion of, and improvements to, the programme during 1969. Chapter Four addresses the programme's effectiveness against the VCI during 1970 and early-1971, particularly during the Cambodian Campaign. Chapter Five evaluates the extent to which Phoenix had been successful by 1971, as well as the morality debate around accusations of

unethical activity brought against Phoenix throughout its lifespan. Chapter Six looks at the decline of Phoenix during and after the departure of American participation in the period 1972 to April 1975. Finally, the conclusion will measure the overall successes and limitations of the programme, illustrating how and why Phoenix/Phung Hoang failed to dismantle the VCI entirely, but also that this failure was one facet of why the allies were defeated in the Vietnam War.

Chapter One

From Shotgun to Rifle: The Rise of Phoenix

Prior to 1965, efforts to combat the VCI were sparse and frequently fruitless. Moreover, whenever attempts were made to implement pacification or counterinsurgency in an area, communist forces often assaulted the location, quashing any progress made by GVN or American programmes.[1] The military environment had to favour pacification for these programmes to survive, yet VC forces held the dominant military position in rural South Vietnam. This changed following massive US troop deployments in 1965, as the VC lost the strategic initiative and were placed on the back foot militarily. Subsequently, communist forces were less able to assault pacification activities, and so combating the VCI on a nationwide scale became viable.

By 1967, a number of agencies and programmes were combating the VCI. The Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU), a CIA-directed/funded Vietnamese force tasked with rooting out the VCI, functioned in small yet well trained squads of 15-20 men. PRUs were well paid, tenacious, had the advantage of operating in their home provinces, and utilised their own 'networks of informers in all parts of the province'.[2] VCI cadre were also captured or killed by the United States military, Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), local militias and GVN agencies such as the National Police (NP), Police Special Branch (PSB) and the Military Security Service (MSS). Additionally, VCI and VC were enticed to rally (defect) to the GVN through the Chieu Hoi Programme.[3] In early-1967, a CIA officer named Robert Wall, inspired by similar and effective British tactics against communist insurgents during the Malayan Emergency, created the District Intelligence and Operations Coordination Centres (DIOCCs).[4] These centres and their provincial equivalent, PIOCCs, were designed to 'break down the mutual jealousies and poor coordination practices of the [South] Vietnamese

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[1] Moyar**,** *Phoenix,* p.8

[2] James W. Trullinger, *Village at War: An Account of the Conflict in Vietnam* (Stanford University Press, 1994), p.173, see also: Memorandum for the 303 Committee, 11 December 1969, *FRUS; Vietnam, 1969-1976,* Volume VI, (Washington, 2006), pp.510-513

[3] L .Wade Lathran to Robert W. Komer, 'Action Program for the attack on VC Infrastructure', undated (circa 21 July 1967), RG 286/Subject Files/Box 64/7353633, NARA/II, tab 11, hereafter cited as Lathran/Komer

[4] Moyar**,** *Phoenix,* p.51

agencies'.[5] Cooperation was poor between South Vietnam's police, armed forces and agencies, which often competed with one another for recognition and funding. To achieve cooperation, these centres were tasked with collecting, collating and disseminating intelligence acquired by the various participating agencies and programmes within their respective districts/provinces, each of which provided a representative to the centre. Each centre was operated by Vietnamese staff, led by a Vietnamese chief, and housed American advisers tasked with instigating cooperation.

While DIOCCs improved cooperation, no nation-wide coordination and management structure yet existed. This was due to American and Vietnamese officials having little interest in pacification, particularly General William Westmoreland, commander of Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV). Westmoreland was apathetic towards the political conflict, and while advocating an increased effort for the 'other war', maintained a Two-War Concept.[6] He asserted that the military aspect of the war had to be won before the political 'termites' could be eradicated. Conversely, Dale Andradé argues that the exact opposite method, destroying the political structure first, would have been more logical.[7] However, only by waging both conventional and political warfare simultaneously could Hanoi and the VC be forced into capitulation, as communist military forces defended the political infrastructure while the infrastructure supplied and directed these forces.[8]

On 9 May 1967, pacification was re-invigorated through President Lyndon Baines Johnson's issuing of Security Action Memorandum No. 362. This directed that all American civilian and military responsibilities for pacification be melded into a 'single manager concept', titled Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS).[9] Westmoreland was given command of CORDS, but his disinterest towards pacification led him to devolve authority to Robert Komer, a ferociously efficient member of the CIA, who assumed the

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[5] George Carver to Robert S. McNamara, Memorandum Discussing the Attack on the VCI, 26 July 1967, *FRUS; Vietnam, 1964-68*, Volume V, (Washington, 2002), pp.644-646

[6] Frank Leith Jones, *Blowtorch: Robert Komer, Vietnam, and American Cold War Strategy* (Naval Institute Press, 2013), p.150

[7] Westmoreland, William C., *A Soldier Reports* (Dell Publishing, 1980), p.187, see also: Andradé, *Ashes to Ashes*, p.13

[8] Moyar, *Phoenix*, pp.4-5

[9] Lyndon Baines Johnson to the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense, 'National Security Action Memorandum No. 362', 9 May 1967, *FRUS; Vietnam, 1964-68*, Volume V, (Washington, 2002), pp.398-399

role of 'Deputy for Pacification'.[10] Alfred McCoy argues that Phoenix utilised a 'labyrinthine bureaucracy' to cloak a supposed murder campaign, but this is contradictory to the nature of Komer, the programme's architect, who held a 'disdain for bureaucracy'.[11] In Komer's eyes, 'the GVN's [pacification] efforts represented a "Vast mélange of relatively low-grade assets, reporting to a number of different Saigon ministries, largely independent, and with no sense of common purpose"'.[12] One of his first goals was to establish a management structure for counter-VCI agencies and programmes. Assisted by another CIA officer, Evan J. Parker Jr., Komer set out to establish a unified intelligence and exploitation system, in which intelligence collation was paired with rapid-reaction counterinsurgency units.[13]

The new strategy, as Komer described, would be 'analogous to a "rifle shot" rather than a "shotgun"', whereby intelligence was honed to identify individuals or small groups of cadre, who would then be neutralised by local reaction forces. This approach, known as 'specific targeting', contrasted greatly with the customary tactic of sweeping 'cordon and search operations' where entire villages were searched.[14] In order to launch precise strikes, specific targeting necessitated the opening of dossiers on identified cadre, containing their details and role within the VCI. Once sufficient intelligence/evidence on the exact location and illegal activities of the cadre was compiled, the target(s) would be neutralised by small reaction forces, such as PRUs or NP units. However, intelligence that was only useful for a short period of time (perishable intelligence), such as informants revealing a cadre's exact location at that very moment, would ideally be disseminated and exploited immediately, rather than added to a dossier.[15] While pitching the concept to Westmoreland and the American ambassador to South Vietnam, Ellsworth Bunker, Komer stressed that the US would act in an 'energizing and advisory role', while the GVN would provide the bulk of the manpower:[16]

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[10] Johnson, 'Action Memorandum No. 362', 9 May 1967, *FRUS*, pp.398-399
[11] McCoy, *A Question of* Torture, p.64, see also: Jones, *Blowtorch*, p.132
[12] Robert W. Komer, memorandum to William Westmoreland, 9 August 1967, in: Jones, *Blowtorch*, p.153
[13] Moyar, *Phoenix*, p.52, see also: Robert Komer to William C. Westmoreland, memorandum, 14 June 1967, *FRUS; Vietnam, 1964-68*, Volume V, (Washington, 2002), pp.503-506
[14] Ibid (Komer to Westmoreland), pp.505-506
[15] Ibid, pp.503-506
[16] Ibid, p.505

'While the agencies and personnel concerned must be predominantly Vietnamese, US personnel must play the vital catalytic role…By using existing OSA and MI personnel, added US personnel requirements can be held to a bare minimum of around 164…'[17]

As this statement highlights, the proposed structure would be GVN operated, but guided by an American advisory network extending down to the district level, and occasionally lower. The GVN command apparatus was already complemented by teams of American advisers, led by either a District Senior Adviser (DSA), Province Senior Adviser (PSA), or Corps/Regional Senior Adviser (CSA/RSA). Komer's proposed structure, titled Intelligence Collection and Exploitation (ICEX), would place an ICEX adviser in each advisory team, tasked with coordinating and directing their GVN counterparts towards combating the VCI. Additionally during his pitch, Komer, interestingly, placed the term '"advisor"' in quotation marks, implying that ICEX advisers were envisioned to instruct rather than advise.[18]

ICEX was formally approved on 9 July 1967 by MACV Directive 381-41, with funding for the programme provided through American channels, and Evan Parker Jr. named as its director. ICEX staff now set out to rapidly establish the programme's 'skeletal' structure, and discussions were initiated with the GVN regarding their eventual participation.[19] Committees were established at every echelon to improve communication and intelligence sharing between US and GVN agencies/programmes.[20] Provincial Interrogation Centres, which extracted 'perishable operational information' from captured/arrested communists, were instructed to disseminate all VCI related intelligence to PIOCCs and DIOCCs. The recipient PIOCC or DIOCC would then forward exploitable information to reaction forces to launch neutralisation operations.[21] PRUs were attached to each DIOCC as a rapid response force, and their training further focussed towards combatting the VCI. In addition to pre-

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[17] Komer to Westmoreland, memorandum, 14 June 1967, *FRUS*, p.505
[18] Ibid, p.505
[19] Lathran/Komer, tabs 5,7
[20] Evan J. Parker Jr., 'ICEX Memorandum No. 2', 11 August 1967, DPC/2234306065, TTUVVA, URL:
http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?YEwTU84JEcg3OwpJg5xYAkbjUkCqovEBNZ5xC6EFs0IyzrXZeb1s.zXIQXrP2UubSsm@oFH9g4n97V9uHPS9ucweLiOEDOGRA1dWf3kPjjU/2234306065.pdf, pp.4-5
[21] Dep/CORDS to G-2 and II FForce/V, 'Use of Provincial Interrogation Centres to Collect Intelligence on VC Infrastructure', 8 September 1967, RG 472/General Records/Box 33/5642555, NARA/II, pp.1-2, see also: Parker, 'ICEX Memorandum No. 2', 11 August 1967, 2234306065, TTUVVA, pp.2-8

existing civilian advisers, 40 American military personnel were provided to 'augment' this training to hone the PRUs' counter-VCI skills.[22] A grading system of preferred means by which to neutralise VCI cadre was established, and organised as follows from most to least ideal: 'Defection in place, inducement to rally, capture, destruction of infrastructure elements [killing cadre]'.[23] This illustrates that the death of VCI cadre or suspected cadre would be the result of circumstance, not preference.

American and GVN officials would measure ICEX's progress through neutralisation statistics. All neutralised VCI cadre would be tallied and reported, the total number of which within each district/province/region had to meet that area's monthly neutralisation quota. Quotas were implemented to motivate GVN personnel towards neutralising VCI, but were inherently flawed.[24] This is because neutralisation quotas equated to a numerical evaluation of success, yet the programme was also expected to prioritise neutralising high-level/leadership cadre. This created a paradox: quotas demanded that X amount of cadre be neutralised on a monthly basis, yet the programme could be criticised for failing to neutralise many high-level cadre. As considerable effort and manpower is required to identify, locate and neutralise a high-level cadre, and as far less effort is required to neutralise village- and hamlet-level cadre, advisers and their GVN counterparts would often be forced to either meet the monthly quota and fail to neutralise enough high-level cadre, or target high-level cadre and fail to fill the quota. This was made more problematic because destabilising the shadow government would necessitate weakening *both* the lower echelons, and commanding level authority. This is because the VCI was 'a highly decentralised political movement', and so two factors were needed to defeat it: the removal of commanding level authority, which disseminated the COSVN's policies to lower echelons; and the neutralisation of large portions of the lower echelon's manpower, which facilitated and implemented these policies.[25] Furthermore, as will be discussed during chapter four, impairing the commanding level authority did not require numerous high-

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[22] Lathran/Komer, tab 9

[23] Paper prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency, undated (circa 1968), *FRUS; Vietnam, 1964-68, Volume VI,* (Washington, 2002), pp.851-854

[24] Jones, *Blowtorch*, p.153

[25] Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of War: Vietnam, The United States, and the Modern Historical Experience* (The New Press, 1994)**,** p.397

level neutralisations, as destruction of the mid-level infrastructure was enough to sever the link between VCI leadership and low-level cadre. Therefore, unrealistic demands for both high-level and low-level neutralisations created a situation where personnel would only focus on one or the other, as meeting at least one of these goals was preferable to spreading resources across both and thus risk attaining neither.

Throughout mid/late-1967, ICEX's foundation was laid rapidly: It had been positioned as a major programme within CORDS' hierarchy, the small number of DIOCCS in operation had been placed within the programme, and some successful PRU operations against VCI were being launched.[26] By November, Komer was pleased with his staff's productiveness and the speed at which the advisory structure had been constructed. However, he also made clear via circulated message that the programme would have to focus on military intelligence as well as VCI intelligence.[27] This declaration, in conjunction with each district ICEX operation being allocated little funding outside of pre-existing district funds, conveys the continued imbalance of priority given by US officials to the military side of the War over the political side.[28]

Disinterest in ICEX was equally displayed by the GVN. ICEX advisers had by August identified that the GVN judicial system for captured VCI, *an tri*, was slow, overcrowded, and often released suspects in order to shorten queues.[29] Additionally it was discovered in late-1967 that district chiefs, the GVN officials commanding DIOCCs, often devolved this authority to the district S-2 (Vietnamese military intelligence) officer. This frequently hampered DIOCCs, as South Vietnamese military officers rarely cooperated with civilian or police personnel.[30] It was also noted during this period that the National Police Field Force (NPFF), a former police security force that was being sluggishly reformed into a counter-VCI unit, required 'proper traininh[*sic*], quick reaction and good coordination between units being

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[26] Andradé, *Ashes to* Ashes, p.61, see also: Lathran/Komer, tab 4; 'ICEX Reporting Guide', undated (circa mid/late-1967), RG 286/Subject Files/Box 64/7353633, NARA/II, p.8

[27] T. S. Jones to MR III PSAs, 'Emphasis in the ICEX Program', 15 November 1967, RG 472/General Records/Box 33/5642555, NARA/II, pp.1-2

[28] Lathran/Komer, tab 6

[29] Evan J. Parker Jr., 'ICEX Memorandum No. 1', 11 August 1967, RG 286/Subject Files/Box 64/7353633, NARA/II, Annex C, p.1

[30] Dep/CORDS, II FForce/V to DIOCC Advisers, III CORPS, 'Observations of Region III's District Operations and Intelligence Coordination Centres (DIOCC) Program', undated (circa late-December 1967), RG 472/General Records/Box 33/5642555, NARA/II, p.1

used', which could only be made possible with high-level GVN backing. [31] In spite of American advisers raising these issues, Vietnamese officials prioritised the communist military threat far above overhauling their counter-VCI capabilities. This was demonstrated in a statement by Randolph Berkeley, a former military intelligence officer:

> 'Vietnamese officials in 1967 paid polite attention to the arguments for Phung Hoang [ICEX], but in truth I think they really believed that the only serious problem their country faced was the NVA'.[32]

Some progress was made in December 1967, when Prime Minister Nguyễn Văn Lộc decreed that all Vietnamese counter-VCI agencies and programmes be integrated into a single coordinating/management structure named Phung Hoang. [33] Shortly after the decree, for reasons still debated, ICEX was renamed Phoenix. The committee structure within Phoenix was dismantled, and a similar organisation of committees began to be established within Phung Hoang. Phoenix now constituted the American advisory structure, which was attached to the Phung Hoang management structure at every operating echelon, thereby establishing the US advisory backbone for South Vietnam's counter-VCI activity; this was the structure envisioned by Komer. Phoenix/Phung Hoang had been born. However, no real GVN backing was given to this formal decree, and in conjunction with negligible financial, manpower, logistical and verbal support from the US, the programme remained half-baked. This was particularly noticeable in December 1967 when manpower shortages led to fourteen Assistant District DIOCC Advisers being reassigned as District DIOCC Advisers in other districts.[34] Furthermore, deficient resources, training and intelligence hindered specific targeting capabilities, and so most operations

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[31] 'Goal-Retarget the NPFF toward the VC Infrastructure', undated (circa 1967-1968), RG 472/General Records/Box 33/5642555, NARA/II, p.1

[32] Randolph Berkeley to William E. Colby, 15 September 1971, WCC/0440226018, TTUVVA, URL: **http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?sNDrx2cRakDuHEz29lGt2gZQKP2PmHrub6iPUUx4a95mrAAKZQkY5xMHLW9wvj5@J5TXZuIznjacLpSfaErBvtoUvLxloHkzOkw3Tyq9UQ4/0440226018.pdf**, p.2

[33] Thomas L. Ahern Jr., *Vietnam Declassified: The CIA and Counterinsurgency* (University Press of Kentucky, 2012), p.264

[34] DEP/CORDS, II FForce/V to Province Senior Advisers, III CTZ, 'Reassignment of ICEX NCO's', 24December 1967, RG 472/General Records/Box 33/5642555, NARA/II, p.1,

were geared towards entire villages.[35] Moreover, the military environment was still not ideal for Phoenix in many areas, as the programme's small, lightly armed reaction forces were frequently forced to avoid areas occupied by large VC units.[36] At the dawn of 1968, the Phoenix Programme was established and functional, yet lacked national support from the US or GVN. Thus, success was limited and progress stagnant. However, the events which unfolded in 1968 would reverse this lack of patronage and prove to be the key instigating force behind the programme's future achievements.

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[35] DEP/CORDS, II FForce/V to Province Senior Advisers, III CTZ, 'DOICC Modus Operandi – Selected Hamlet Concept', 16 December 1967, RG 472/General Records/Box 33/5642555, NARA/II, p.1
[36] Assessment of the ground situation for PRUs, Tay Ninh, 9 November 1967, RG 472/General Records/Box 33/5642555, NARA/II, p.1

Chapter Two

Changing Approaches: The Tet Offensive and its Impact

Between the 30 and 31 January 1968, South Vietnam erupted in a nationwide military conflict which saw the vast majority of its urban centres under attack. The Vietcong and PAVN had launched their largest offensive of the war thus far, with tens of thousands of regular and guerrilla forces pouring into Saigon, provincial capitals, district towns, and the rural countryside. The offensive had been initiated during the lunar new year holiday, Tet, a time which traditionally observed ceasefires between both sides. Anticipating that a limited ceasefire would once again occur until the holiday's conclusion, the massive assault launched by communist forces had caught American and South Vietnamese units largely off-guard. This massive assault, persisting until September 1968, came to be known as the Tet Offensive. During the cataclysmic period, which would soon usher in a myriad of changes for Phoenix, VCI activity exploded across rural and urban South Vietnam: hidden/covert cadre rose up within hamlets to establish local governments; advancing communist forces were fed, housed, treated and provided geographical guidance by the VCI; and propaganda, proselytising and recruitment cadre began inciting uprisings and increasing troop recruitment.

One short-term casualty of the Tet Offensive was Phoenix, as lightly defended pacification efforts across the country were quickly devastated by advancing communist forces. Notable examples occurred in Hau Nghia Province, where the Cu Chi District DIOCC was destroyed in February and the province's Phoenix Adviser was killed in April.[1] Mark Atwood Lawrence correctly states that the shadow government 'extended its control in the rural areas and crippled pacification efforts'.[2] Counter-VCI activity was debilitated during the offensive's opening months, which Komer attributed to both the need for Phoenix's facilities to focus on tactical intelligence rather than VCI intelligence, and the consistent battering of the programme's small reaction units and facilities by the communist

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[1] Eric M. Bergerud, *The Dynamics of Defeat: The Vietnam War in Hau Nghia Province* (Westview Press, 1991), p.211

[2] Lawrence, *The Vietnam War*, p.123

onslaught.[3] While operating well in some circumstances during Tet, including DIOCCs being the only active source of tactical intelligence in some areas, the programme was overall significantly impaired.[4] Even when intelligence on VCI identities and locations was available, launching operations to neutralise cadre proved difficult during Tet, as Phoenix's small reaction units were likely to encounter overwhelming communist forces. Only with the military initiative once again favouring the allies could reaction units function effectively.

While the Tet Offensive's opening months left Phoenix incapacitated, the policy changes brought about by this onslaught soon became the catalyst for the programme's rise to prominence and future successes. Although a resounding tactical victory for the ARVN and US military, having repulsed all but a few of the major VC/PAVN incursions within weeks of their initiation, the offensive was ultimately a major strategic defeat for the US. Tet revealed to the American public the true strength of the Vietcong, critically contradicting Johnson and Westmoreland's avowal that the war was nearing a favourable conclusion. Furthermore, the scale, organisation, and ferocity of the offensive had led many of Johnson's advisers to deduce that victory in Vietnam would require greatly increased American funding and manpower, thus posing the question of whether to escalate the war further, or enter into negotiations with Hanoi.[5] Johnson chose the latter, announcing on 31 March that the United States would seek peace in Vietnam through negotiation, additionally declaring the gradual de-escalation of American involvement. American policy towards Vietnam consequently shifted from attaining outright victory to attaining limited victory through negotiation, followed by eventual American withdrawal.[6] This transition in approach towards the war constituted the 'first steps of…Vietnamisation', and would prove to be the impetus for both Phoenix's rise and fall.[7]

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[3] Robert W. Komer to John Paul Vann, 'Memorandum for the Attack on the VCI', 23 April 1968, RG 472/General Records/Box 33/5642556, NARA/II, p.1

[4] Valentine, *Phoenix*, p.6

[5] David L. Anderson, (ed.), *The Columbia History of the Vietnam War* (Columbia University Press, 2011), pp.54-56, see also: Walt W. Rostow to Lyndon B. Johnson 'Information Memorandum', 4 March 1968, *FRUS; Vietnam, January-August 1968,* Volume VI, (Washington, 2002), p.312

[6] Lawrence, *The Vietnam War*, pp.132-133

[7] Ibid, pp.132-133

Controlling the rural countryside was paramount to any future negotiations, as the side with the most extensive and legitimate authority over South Vietnam's population, would garner an inherently stronger negotiating position. Bunker explained to Johnson in March that Hanoi was now preparing for a 'long war', whereby the extension of control over South Vietnam through a protracted political conflict, would provide the North and COSVN with 'a strong posture for negotiations'.[8] Bunker recommended 'an expansion of the Phoenix Program' as one of several means to counter Hanoi's political ambitions and expand GVN authority across South Vietnam, as removing the VCI from the countryside was an integral aspect of this process.[9] Subsequently, American support and funding for Phoenix began to increase exponentially, with more emphasis now placed on the village war, as the importance of counter-VCI activity became better understood by US officials. Furthermore, Tet resulted in General Creighton Abrams, a more avid supporter of pacification than his predecessor, replacing Westmoreland as Commander of MACV on 10 June 1968.[10]

The Tet Offensive also impacted GVN officials, particularly President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu, who had until 1968 displayed little interest for pacification. Tet illuminated to Thiệu the fragility of his hold over the rural population, prompting him to throw support behind the previously neglected pacification effort.[11] This realisation, in conjunction with lobbying by Komer and his deputy, William E. Colby; culminated in Thiệu's issuing of a decree on 1 July 1968, directing that all civilian and military counter-VCI agencies/activities be unified under one structure.[12] The decree gave effectual presidential backing to Nguyễn Văn Lộc's 1967 decree establishing Phung Hoang. Vietnamese agencies, officials, and staff were now directed to participate fully within the programme, and were subsequently more inclined to cooperate with, and adhere to, American advisers, although dis-interest and stubbornness still persisted in many areas and throughout all levels of the GVN command structure.

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[8] Ellsworth Bunker to Lyndon Baines Johnson 'Telegram from the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State', 6 March 1968, *FRUS; Vietnam, 1964-1968,* Volume VI, (Washington, 2002), pp.335-337

[9] Ibid, pp.335-337

[10] Bergerud, *Dynamics of Defeat*, p.241

[11] Chester L. Cooper, et al, *The American Experience with Pacification in Vietnam*, Volume III: History of Pacification, (Institute for Defense Analyses, 1972), p.284

[12] Ahern, *Vietnam Declassified*, p.299

Tet further improved Phoenix's prospects through the monumental casualties sustained by the VC and PAVN. This had severely diminished the COSVN's pool of manpower, consequently diminishing their ability to defend VCI cadre or obstruct pacification efforts.[13] Additionally, covert VCI cadre masquerading as regular peasants revealed themselves during Tet to establish local governments and instigate a general uprising against the GVN; this made Phoenix's task of identifying them somewhat simpler.[14] The impact of Tet began to bear fruit for Phoenix by mid-1968: the programme was formally 'restarted' in July, GVN backing began to improve cooperation between Vietnamese agencies, and the Two-War Concept slowly developed into a '"One-War Concept"'.[15] CORDS and MACV now set out to accelerate construction of DIOCCs and PIOCCs in every district and province, as well as expand the number of American advisers assigned to the programme. As Douglas Valentine accurately states, the Tet Offensive had 'pushed Phoenix into the limelight'.[16]

From July onwards, Phoenix and Phung Hoang were overhauled, interlinked and expanded. On 21 July, Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) was created/issued jointly by MACV and the GVN, establishing the basic structure of Phung Hoang. This included forming committees at the national, regional, provincial and city echelons, tasked with directing Phung Hoang at their respective levels, while each district would be directed by its respective DIOCC and district chief. Each committee consisted of a representative from every agency/programme participating in Phung Hoang, an American adviser, and a chairman.[17] Bunker stated in October that the period July-September 1968 represented the 'coming of age of the attack on the VC infrastructure', as the programme's basic structure was largely completed during these few months.[18] An example of this was Tay Ninh Province, as by October, the '14 allied intelligence outfits' which had been operating

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[13] Cooper, *American Experience*: Volume III, p.284

[14] Moyar, *Phoenix,* p.65

[15] William E. Colby to Francis C. Brown, 19 May 1976, WCC/0440226016, TTUVVA, URL: **http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?SeBHlyxAucpInzSoMQA0CrVlSolE7rvDCK7mhmruWDFgvDorEz7@KRl2MtPRzGcscgxrTVdityuFUAPIGC9.8Ybe4hueUUzPMrZVUt5pKtioq5ALkFj3XA/0440226016.pdf**, p.1, see also: Prados, *Hidden* History, p.211; Bergerud, *Dynamics of Defeat,* pp.241-242

[16] Valentine, *Phoenix,* p.177

[17] Central Phung Hoang Committee 'SOP', 23 July 1968, RG 472/General Records/Box 33/5642556, NARA/II, pp.3

[18] Ellsworth Bunker to Lyndon Baines Johnson 'Telegram from the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State', 19 October 1968, *FRUS; Vietnam, 1964-1968,* Volume VII, (Washington, 2003), pp.258-259

there a year prior, had been consolidated into a single intelligence and exploitation apparatus.[19]

Although limited during this period, success in collecting, collating, disseminating and exploiting intelligence was becoming more common by late-1968, notably regarding People's Liberation Committees. These committees were implemented to extend the COSVN's political influence and legitimise the 'People's Revolutionary Party…under the guise of democratic elections'.[20] From October onwards, Thiệu emphasised targeting Liberation Committees for neutralisation.[21] While specific targeting remained unviable in most areas during this period, due to the poor training of Vietnamese personnel, the programme was capable of launching operations against these committees in numerous provinces. In October alone, 71 Liberation Committee members, 30 of whom were in leadership positions, were neutralised.[22] October had been the first month where these committees were a priority target, demonstrating the programme's ability to hastily divert attention towards specific groups of targets. It is difficult to ascertain what percentage of neutralised committeemen resulted from Phoenix's reaction forces, as many may have been neutralised through regular military incursions. However, as these specific neutralisations were cited as evidence of the programme's progress during a CIA assessment, it is likely that Phoenix was responsible for the majority.[23]

Phoenix's first true trial came on the 1st November, when the three-month-long Accelerated Pacification Campaign (APC) was launched. APC was an American-Vietnamese effort utilising regular, local and pacification forces, launched to take advantage of the debilitated VC military situation, and envisioned to improve their negotiation position by bringing large sections of the countryside under GVN control.[24] William E. Colby, who

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[19] R. L. B. Cormack to Chargé d'Affaires Mr Martin and Mr Forter, Evaluation of Pacification in MR III, 9 October 1968, FCO 15/1088: Pacification Programme, NAK, p.1

[20] 'The Viet Cong Infrastructure', June 1970, 2310412004, TTUVVA, p.37

[21] Ellsworth Bunker to Lyndon Baines Johnson, 74th Weekly Telegram, 19 December 1968, DPC/1790118002, TTUVVA, URL: **http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?ZEn6yz4Klmcr4yWDL8iF@2JwxfLZUsUs7fs7fAY98z@rX2GWUlKkyv620zHaqk0uAQmWAz9pq@TWmtEjQgMkflWiNTWO0w2GzwbVpL7MuXNJhZ9.QMy9Yg/1790118002.pdf**, p.2

[22] CIA, 'Assessment of the PHOENIX Program', 16 December 1968, *CIA; FOIAERR*, URL: **http://www.foia.cia.gov/document/0005347532**, p.5

[23] Ibid, p.5

[24] Valentine, *Phoenix*, p.257

replaced Komer as Deputy for Pacification in November, had a large role in planning the campaign. Allied troops would confront the bulk of enemy forces, displacing and removing them from 'contested' and/or 'VC-controlled' villages and hamlets, while pacification operations which followed would consolidate GVN authority. Phoenix was tasked with rooting out the VCI within these areas and disseminating VCI-pertinent intelligence to allied units, Police and local/regional forces.[25]

APC saw allied troops inflict heavy casualties and territorial reductions on communist forces, while Phoenix assaulted the VCI on a larger scale than ever before. The campaign dramatically increased the number of ralliers (defectors) entering the Chieu Hoi Programme, often bringing intelligence related to 'enemy activities, locations of enemy forces, arms and rice caches, and…information on the VCI'.[26] This intelligence was regularly exploited by Phoenix, one example being a psychological operation launched on 24 December 1968, which led to an entire village in Binh Dinh Province rallying to the GVN [27]

APC concluded on 31 January 1969, with most observers citing the campaign as a success.[28] Phoenix performed well from a statistical standpoint, as although the programme failed to meet its APC quota of 3,000 neutralisations a month, the 7,000 total neutralisations that were achieved, equated to almost double the usual monthly target of 1,200.[29] Additionally, 40 percent of the 15,776 VCI neutralised in 1968, and 38 percent of neutralised cadre functioning above the village level, were achieved in the last quarter of the year.[30] However, statistical data for Phoenix was famously inaccurate, with various factors causing overestimations and underestimations. Mark Moyar highlights a number of these factors: many neutralisations during 1968/early-1969 were the result of conventional military engagements, not Phoenix's operations or reaction forces; PRUs did not always report their

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[25] Cooper, *American Experience*: Volume III, p.285, see also: Briefing on Pacification at MACV, in: C.M. Maclehose to D. Gordon, 27 May 1969, FCO 15/1088: Pacification Programme, NAK, pp.7-9

[26] 'National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) One[:] The Situation in Vietnam', March 1969, DPC/2120107001, TTUVVA, URL: **https://vva.vietnam.ttu.edu/repositories/2/digital_objects/96229**, section/page 19-6, hereafter cited as NSSM One

[27] Ibid, section/page 19-6

[28] Cooper, *American Experience*: Volume III, p.287

[29] Ibid, p.288

[30] NSSM One, section/page 19-2

neutralisations; and inspectors did not always approach hostile areas to identify cadre bodies.[31]

Inaccuracies also stemmed from falsified reports and inflated neutralisation numbers. Douglas Valentine presents an example of falsified reporting, in which Vietnamese civilians killed by an American airstrike were chalked up as neutralised VCI, and Moyar states that US and GVN officials 'failed to detect and reject many of the bogus reports'.[32] However, phoney neutralisation numbers, while indeed a serious symptom of quotas, were not as common as they seem: 30-40 percent of neutralisation reports were rejected by American and GVN personnel in 1968 for lack of evidence, indicating care was put into ensuring that non-VCI were not added to neutralisation statistics; while Valentine's example was clearly an uncommon occurrence, as airstrikes constituted a miniscule percentage of VCI neutralisations.[33] Additionally, Parker explained to Colby in early-1969 that the most blatant 'report padding' by Vietnamese personnel was being curbed through continued pressure at the national level and the removal of corrupt GVN officials, which had already decreased the frequency of these violations.[34] Nevertheless, report padding, albeit being reduced, still constituted a severe threat to statistical accuracy.

Another source of inaccurate data was the *an tri* detention system. It included very few judicial rights for suspects, who were not permitted a lawyer and could be found guilty of being a VCI member by any 'reasonably' indicative evidence, including incriminating documents, eye witness statements, interrogation statements or intelligence reports.[35] Surprisingly, however, the main shortcoming of *an tri* was the leniency of both the Province Security Committees (PSCs), which sentenced suspected VCI and determined length of incarceration, and the rehabilitation system: months could be spent deliberating one suspect, innocence was often opted for over guilt when in doubt, and sentencing lengths

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[31] Moyar, *Phoenix*, pp.235-237

[32] Valentine, Phoenix, pp.215-216, see also: Moyar, *Phoenix,* p.236

[33] CIA, 'Assessment of the PHOENIX Program', 16 December 1968, *CIA; FOIAERR*, p.5

[34] Evan J. Parker to William E. Colby, 'VCI Neutralisations January 1969', 19 February 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 5/5642290, NARA/II, p.4

[35] 'Legal Packet: Materials on Legal Aspects of An Tri Detention', June 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 27/5642497, NARA/II, p.1

were absurdly short.[36] Regarding sentence lengths, 'more than half' of suspected cadre who were tried and incarcerated were released within a year, not including VCI that were simply set free for insufficient evidence.[37] Additionally, suspects were marked as neutralised upon capture/arrest rather than after being sentenced, and although they were supposedly removed from neutralisation reports if set free or sentenced to less than six months, pressure to fill quotas likely took precedence over adjusting this data. This culmination of leniency and inaccuracy made any report on sentenced VCI extensively erroneous and rapidly obsolete.

These factors show that statistical data is a poor method for measuring Phoenix's impact on the VCI. However, there are reliable methods. Andradé, for example, emphasises that Phoenix can be assessed through identifying the time and effort Hanoi committed to 'denouncing it', and there is a wealth of information pertaining to this.[38] Throughout 1968, Hanoi-directed radio stations, notably Liberation Radio on 3 December, instructed communist forces to '"crush the head of the venomous snake PHOENIX"'.[39] COSVN Directive 58, 5 December 1968, emphasised the need for APC to be halted, signifying the damage inflicted by the campaign.[40] Additionally, the NLF had created two clandestine forces in mid-1968 to counter Phoenix, the 'People's Security Agency and the Armed Security Force'.[41]

Evidence of the Phoenix Programme's achievements is also present in statements by VC and PAVN members. Bùi Tín, a former colonel in the PAVN, explained in his memoir that 'our side also suffered seriously' at the hands of Phoenix during late-1968.[42] In January 1969, a VCI proselytiser in Saigon confessed to a friend that the programme's committees

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[36] Trần Thiện Khiêm to DGNP and Director of Corrections, 'Classification and Rehabilitation of Offenders', 21 March 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 2/5642268, NARA/II, p.1

[37] Prados, *Hidden History*, p.211

[38] Andradé, *Ashes to* Ashes, p.255

[39] NSSM One, section/page 19-2

[40] MACV; Strategic Research and Analysis Division, 'Compendium of COSVN Directives (1966-1971)', undated (circa late-1971), RG 472/General Records/Box 18/5642434, NARA/II, p.6

[41] Report on the People's Revolutionary Government's activities, November 1969, DPC/2310310002, TTUVVA, URL: **http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?MlSOOq15yOMdKE41wuMg8Y7rIl.b78zmFtCl89JxI9jUJ7KhygFlmzSmwyt4ENoDuS1fzAzP1uFNoWb4910DwYAGHuqM1owf1byonXkcTSRBVY63jxpNcQ/2310310002.pdf**, p.2

[42] Bùi Tín, Translated by Judy Stowe and Do Van, *Following Ho Chi Minh: Memoirs of a North Vietnamese Colonel* (Hurst and Company, 1995), p.63

had been so 'active' in recent weeks that orchestrating any political activity had become extremely arduous. Unaware he was actually speaking to a GVN informant, this cadre further added that he was contemplating going into hiding.[43]

Additionally, American pacification staff identified a correlation between Phoenix's activity during APC, and an increased number of VCI ralliers through the Chieu Hoi program.[44] Phoenix, a programme which hunted the VCI in even the most remote locations of South Vietnam, repeatedly damaged cadre's morale, highlighted best during this period by COSVN Directive 71, 31 January 1969: this attempted to ensure all cadre that, with the provision they remain committed, ultimate victory would eventually ensue; it also instructed the VCI to 'step up' the assault against pacification personnel.[45]

APC and the events of 1968 boosted Phoenix internally. Morale had risen among US and GVN personnel, and multiple circumstances of 'cooperation and coordination…, often where little or none previously existed', were now occurring.[46] Moreover, 41 PIOCCS, three CIOCCs (City centres) and 217 DIOCCs, 173 of which housed American advisers, had been established by January 1969.[47] It was also noted, during September 1968, that all provinces and districts that had performed well had also cited for the level of cooperation between the province/district chief and their American advisers, which would prove to be a running theme throughout Phoenix's history.[48]

To conclude, political turmoil caused by the Tet Offensive had shifted American and GVN policy, ushering in a greater appreciation for the political aspect of the war. American desire for de-escalation, the need for a strong position during future negotiations with Hanoi, and Thiệu's determination to re-invigorate GVN authority over the rural countryside, resultantly positioned Phoenix as a priority programme. Subsequently,

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[43] NSSM One, section/page 19-2-19-3

[44] Ibid, section/page 19-6

[45] MACV, 'Compendium of COSVN Directives', (circa late-1971), 5642434, NARA/II, pp.9-10

[46] Phoenix Coordinator, III Corps to DEP CORDS, III Corps, 'Findings, Comments and Recommendations Resulting from Visits to Provinces and Districts, III CORPs', 17 September 1968, RG 472/General Records/Box 33/5642556, NARA/II, pp.2-3, see also: CIA, 'Assessment of the PHOENIX Program', 16 December 1968, *CIA; FOIAERR*, p.3

[47] Ibid ('Assessment'), p.3

[48] Phoenix Coordinator, III Corps to DEP CORDS, III Corps, 'Findings, Comments and Recommendations Resulting from Visits to Provinces and Districts, III CORPs', 17 September 1968, 5642556, NARA/II, p.3

funding, manpower, political backing and resources provided to the programme climbed sharply. 179 million piastres (approximately US$2,780,000 today) of US funding was expended on Phoenix throughout 1968, the vast majority of which was used to construct regional, provincial and district centres.[49] The South Vietnamese, owing to the deplorable state of their economy, provided little-to-no funding, thus demonstrating the monolithic importance of American support. Furthermore, the American advisory effort had been crucial in instigating motivation and participation among Vietnamese agencies, further highlighting the necessity of American participation within the programme.

Phoenix's expansion resulted in significant improvements to cooperation and operational capability, which is attested by evidence other than unreliable statistics, such as communist documents, statements and directives. However, statistical data can be used on occasion to highlight trends: only 2,259 of the 15,776 reported neutralisations in 1968 were fatalities.[50] As dead VCI were the easiest to fabricate in a report, the smaller percentage of VCI that were reported as killed compared to captured or rallied affirms that the programme was not the assassination/murder campaign it has been accused of being by senators and scholars alike. In addition to cadre losses, communist military casualties during Tet and APC were staggering, with the PAVN's conventional units forced into hibernation, thereby leaving the shadow apparatus exposed to intelligence and counterinsurgency operations. This military aspect also displays the importance of American support, as US troops were fundamental in stabilising the nation to the extent needed for pacification programmes to operate effectively.

While Phoenix saw substantial progress and expansion during 1968, this did not, as Thomas Ahern illustrates, 'persuade agency or CORDS officials that the program was fulfilling its potential'.[51] Particularly, officials were concerned that only 13 percent of neutralised cadre had been above the village level.[52] This had, however, been the result of three factors: the

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[49] John H. Mason to all Phung Hoang Coordinators, 'Phung Hoang Monthly Report for January 1971', undated (circa February 1971), RG 472/General Records/Box 25/5642488, NARA/II, attachment 3, p.1, see also: Douglas C. Dacy, *Foreign Aid, War, and Economic Development: South Vietnam, 1955-1975* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.190
[50] Adapted from 'Vietnamization of the Phung Hoang (Phoenix) Program', 18 September 1972, *U.S. Army Center of Military History,* Washington, D.C., p.1, in: Moyar, *Phoenix,* p.236
[51] Ahern, *Ashes to Ashes*, p.319
[52] NSSM One, p.22

programme was still in its infancy; GVN staff still lacked much in terms of motivation, training and participation; and specific targeting was not yet a widely implemented concept. However, as highlighted in Chapter One, numerous low-level neutralisations damaged the COSVN's ability to implement its policies at the crucial village and hamlet echelons. VCI casualties had been substantial, and while these cadre were easily replaceable, the pool was not infinite. This is not to say that the programme had no shortcomings, as many imperfections persisted: cooperation instigated by American advisers was 'rather the exception than the rule', military and police officials frequently refused to collaborate, Vietnamese centre chiefs and staff were often poorly trained or lacked interest for Phoenix, specific targeting was uncommon, corruption was prominent in some provinces, and *an tri* remained sluggish and impractical.[53] Furthermore, some provinces, notably Hau Nghia, were cited for atrocious GVN participation and operational capability.[54]

Nevertheless, the Phoenix Programme entered 1969 far more capable to resolve these shortcomings than a year prior, owing largely to the impact of the Tet Offensive and subsequent events of 1968. However, while Tet gave Phoenix the attention and resources needed to now prevail, it had also instigated a policy that would arise during the Nixon administration, Vietnamisation, ultimately resulting in the eventual withdrawal of the American military forces, advisers, and funding that were crucial to the programme's success and longevity.

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[53] Phoenix Coordinator, III Corps to DEP CORDS, III Corps, 'Findings, Comments and Recommendations Resulting from Visits to Provinces and Districts, III CORPs', 17 September 1968, 5642556, NARA/II, p.3
[54] Ibid, p.4

Chapter Three

Nixon, Vietnamisation, and the 1969 Pacification Plan

Richard Milhous Nixon entered the White House on 20 January 1969 on the back of a promise to the American people to withdraw from the Vietnam War. The new president advocated negotiations with Hanoi, reduced commitment to Vietnam, and a peace that would leave America's image untarnished. A cornerstone policy of the new administration was to subsidise gradual American withdrawal by steadily increasing South Vietnamese responsibility for the war, whereby American monetary power would be used to expand and invigorate the South Vietnamese economic, military and political position. This policy came to be known as Vietnamisation. The Phoenix Programme was crucial to Vietnamisation, as it aided the policy's implementation in three respects: GVN territorial supremacy was vital not only to ensuring a strong negotiation position, but also for creating the appearance of allied victory; pacification was one of the three key means by which to facilitate American troop withdrawals, the other two being an expanded air campaign and increased financial and material support for the ARVN; and, providing US military forces continued to support pacification programmes and defend pacified areas, Phoenix operations could damage the Vietcong Infrastructure, which acted as a source of 'food, recruitment, intelligence and concealment' for the PAVN and VC.[1] Consequently, Phoenix continued to enjoy extensive support from the US and South Vietnamese governments.

The 1969 Pacification and Development Plan, designed to consolidate and expand on gains made by APC, featured Phoenix as one of its eight priority points.[2] The plan had two phases, the first lasting from February to June, and the second from July to October. Phoenix's role within the plan included its further augmentation and improvement, as shortcomings and potential areas for development were highlighted by a number of sources, including National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) One: further emphasis needed to be placed on quality over quantity regarding neutralisations; while the programme enjoyed support from the Thiệu government, this motivation decayed at the

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[1] Briefing on Pacification, in: Maclehose to Gordon, 27 May 1969, FCO 15/1088, NAK, p.4, see also: Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, p.240; NSSM One, section/page 25-3

[2] Prados, *Hidden History*, p.210

local province and district administrations; most GVN officials and staff lacked training in counter-VCI intelligence and operations; 'Vietnamese manpower shortages' were common; cooperation and coordination too often relied on the relationship between the local leaders of various civilian, military and police agencies; and 'judicial reforms' for *an tri* were recommended, as the Phoenix Directorate, CORDS, and the South Vietnamese Interior Minister, Trần Thiện Khiêm, expressed concern over the system's inefficiency.[3]

During phase one of the 1969 pacification plan, the programme observed several developments. On 10 February, US and GVN officials instructed all echelons to ensure closer cooperation and coordination between Phoenix intelligence channels and Regional Forces/Popular Forces (RF/PFs), as these capable units' frequent presence within villages placed them in a unique position to gather intelligence.[4] RF/PFs were instructed to regularly disseminate all relevant VCI intelligence to the local district or province Phoenix centre(s), and vice versa. In order to obtain the support of province chiefs for the new initiative, American advisers across all agencies and echelons were instructed to coordinate placing pressure on the GVN command structure, as Vietnamese staff and chiefs were frequently stubborn towards cooperating with other agencies unless compelled to do so by their superior officers.[5] This resulted in reasonable improvements to cooperation by mid-1969, and RF/PFs were by then also assisting in clearing villages of both covert and overt VCI.[6]

As Vietnamese personnel were generally untrained in counter-VCI activity, Phung Hoang Training Schools (PHTS) were established in Military Regions (MR) III and I in December 1968 and February 1969 respectively, wherein seminars were held on the exact tasks that each specific staff member at a Phoenix facility was responsible for. Chiefs and commanders of PRUs, RF companies, the NPFF and various other agencies, attended three-

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[3] NSSM One, section/page 16-15, 19-5, see also: Andradé, *Ashes to* Ashes, p.235; Dean E. Moor to Henry Kissinger, Memorandum on Status of Phoenix and PRU Programmes, 28 May 1969, *FRUS; Vietnam, 1969-1976,* Volume VI, (Washington, 2006), p.230; NSSM One, p.22; Khiêm to DGNP and Director of Corrections, 'Classification and Rehabilitation…', 21 March 1969, 5642268, NARA/II, p.1

[4] Norman J. Furth to Province Phoenix Coordinators, 'Coordination with Special Forces and CIDG', 10 February 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 1/5642250, NARA/II, p.1

[5] Deputy Phoenix Coordinator, Binh Long Province, to DEPCORDS, II FFV/III Corps, 'RF/PF Participation in the Phung Hoang Program', 10 April 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 1/5642250, NARA/II, pp.1-2

[6] G. Gardiner Brown to the Deputy for CORDS, III CTZ, 'Targets for Phung Hoang Operations', 12 August 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 2/5642269, NARA/II, pp.1-2

day seminars; province S-2s, 'National and Special Police Chiefs, Districts Chiefs, and District National Police Cadre' attended one-week seminars. These schools were entirely US-funded during this period.[7] A school specifically for American personnel was also established, in Vung Tau City.

The task of Reforming the *an tri* system took its first major steps on 21 March, when Circular 757 was introduced, establishing a formal classification criteria for VCI cadre. Class A VCI were party members or cadre in leadership positions and could be sentenced to a minimum of two years, class B VCI were any members of the VCI and could be sentenced to between one and two years, and class C were not cadre but assisted the VCI in some capacity, and could be sentenced to a year maximum or set free.[8] Additionally, monthly minutes were to be sent from every PSC to the Phoenix Directorate, reporting on the identity and final disposition of all tried suspects.[9] Furthermore, a Phung Hoang representative would now sit on every PSC, and it was stressed that these committees meet weekly.[10]

Regarding the American advisory effort, Theodore Shackley became the CIA station chief for Saigon in December 1968, and almost immediately after began pushing for Phoenix's staff requirements to be met by MACV rather than the CIA. Shackley achieved this in June 1969, when responsibility for manpower, management and support was turned over to MACV. The top spot in Phoenix would continue to be held by a CIA official, John H. Mason, who replaced Parker as Phoenix's director in early-1969. This transfer of responsibility was an astute move by Shackley, as not only could he now divert his limited CIA staff towards other matters, but also because the military was far more capable of providing the manpower and intelligence officers needed for Phoenix's expanding advisory effort.[11]

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[7] DEPCORDS Conference: 'Phoenix Fact Sheets', 2 August 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 6/5642303, NARA/II, tab E, pp.1-2, see also: Norman J. Furth to Saigon Phoenix Staff, 'Expenditure of PHOENIX Funds', 24 May 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 1/5642247, NARA/II, pp.1-2

[8] John H. Mason to All Phoenix Coordinators, 'Classification of Detainee Guidelines and Implementation of Instructions', 24 April 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 2/5642268, NARA/II, p.1

[9] Ibid, p.2

[10] 'Phoenix Fact Sheets', 2 August 1969, 5642303, NARA/II, p.5

[11] Ahern, *Vietnam Declassified*, pp.316-318, see also: Moor to Kissinger, Status of Phoenix and PRU Programmes, 28 May 1969, *FRUS; Vietnam, 1969-1976,* Volume VI, (Washington, 2006), p.230

MACV also assumed the CIA's role of managing, and providing advisers to, PRUs in mid-1969, although the CIA continued to fund these units.[12]

Operationally, Phoenix continued to expand its capacity for combating the VCI. Rare but increasingly frequent instances of specific targeting were now occurring as a result of advancements made in coordination and training, although progress remained slow for the first half of 1969. Additionally, collaborative operations between Phoenix and American military units became commonplace during 1969. II Field Force Vietnam, the American military command responsible for III Corps, expressed a desire in early-1969 for American military forces to 'assist/participate in these PHUNG HOANG operations'. Consequently, province advisers from February onwards began identifying cadre and villages for military operations. The Deputy for CORDS in MR III, Charles S. Whitehouse, stated in July 1969 that 'several successful PHUNG HOANG operations were planned and executed' as a result of this collaboration.[13]

The NPFF was an example of a participating agency that had failed to make much progress, which was particularly problematic considering its envisioned importance as a counter-VCI unit. During May, Colby correctly identified that the NPFF's failure resulted from it not being brought closely enough into Phung Hoang operations and placed pressure on Trần Văn Hai, the Director General of the National Police (DGNP), to 'energize' Phung Hoang's command chain towards ensuring the agency was wholly involved in the programme. Additionally, Colby instructed American advisers to ensure that NPFF participation occurred at every echelon.[14] By mid-1969, too little time had passed to ascertain whether Colby's initiative had made much of an impact on the NPFF, but it is likely, on account of Colby's significant influence over the GVN, that this contributed to progress made in the second half of the year.

By June 1969, Phoenix activity included Psychological Operations (PSYOPS). These operations had three stages: posters denouncing specific cadre as criminals were

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[12] Ibid (Moor to Kissinger), p.230

[13] Charles S. Whitehouse to Deputies for CORDS and Phoenix Coordinators, MR III, 'Targets for Phung Hoang Operations', 31 July 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 2/5642269, NARA/II, p.1

[14] William E. Colby to Phoenix Director, DEPCORDS for MR I,II,III,IV, 'Use of NPFF', 9 May 1969, RG 472/Generals Records/Box 1/5642251, NARA/II, p.1

distributed, urging the public to assist in their arrest; cadre were then made to appear as traitors before their compatriots through a number of methods; finally, broadcasts, leaflets and other forms of media were honed towards the individual cadre, declaring the hopelessness of their situation and threat to their life, ideally then leading to their defection through the Chieu Hoi system.[15] Leaflet campaigns were particularly potent, as between 1969 and 1971 one third of VC and PAVN members who rallied did so with a leaflet in their hand.[16] Psychological operations such as this became an increasingly effective tool of the Phoenix Programme.

Phase one of the pacification plan concluded on 30 June, with Colby and a number of CORDS officials stating that Phoenix's progress had been slow and/or poor, notably asserting that too many cadre had been neutralised 'by accident' rather than being identified prior to capture/death/rallying.[17] Conversely, C.M. MacLehose, British ambassador to Vietnam, stated that he 'heard plenty of criticism' for Phoenix during mid-1969, but was able to see its ever-growing potential.[18] Additionally, CORDS had praised Phoenix's intelligence and exploitation capabilities, and it was stated in NSSM One that Phoenix had only recently become a priority programme, and so minimal progress was expected for 1969.[19] Moreover, the route of Phoenix's criticism largely stemmed from unfair standards: while the programme only obtained 7,262 of its quota of 9000 neutralisations for phase one, previous chapters have already highlighted the flaws in this method of assessment; the judicial system was criticised for slow progress, yet substantial improvement attempts had only begun to be implemented months prior; and while it is true that 'considerable US pressure' was required to obtain results, not only was this the case for most American programmes that involved the South Vietnamese, but Phoenix was

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[15] T. S. Jones to Province Senior Advisers, CTZ III, 'Utilisation of PSYOPS Assets', 19 June 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 6/5642303, NARA/II, pp.1-2

[16] 'Final Technical Report Psychological Operations Studies—Vietnam', Volume One, 25 May 1971, DPC/2171501001/part three, TTUVVA, URL: **http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?nRotA9h1.GmiMT3baKH7JUcxJoyZaxtMuMYkK9vSkyEWEttQWPCOnbzNibagn9fjV3fFH A9Us89glLkz7FdfnjSRfhiJ0t7pEoAifyve1y8/2171501001c.pdf**, p.1

[17] C.M. James to Mr Martin, 'Talk with Ambassador Colby', 17 July 1969, FCO 15/1088: Pacification Programme, NAK, p.1, see also: J. W. D. Margetson, minutes of meeting, 28th July 1969, FCO 15/1088: Pacification Programme, NAK, p.1

[18] Maclehose to Gordon, 27 May 1969, FCO 15/1088, NAK, p.15

[19] C.M. MacLehose, 'Visit to IV Corps 9/10 May', 20 May 1969, FCO 15/1088: Pacification Programme, NAK, p.2, see also: NSSM One, p.22

built on the understanding that American advisory pressure would be crucial for some time.[20] Ergo, while various difficulties and shortcomings remained, criticism regarding phase one was generally either unfounded or lacked appreciation for the progress made relative to the amount of time that Phoenix had been a priority programme.

Phase two of the 1969 pacification plan observed further developments. Circular 2212, designed to improve and expand upon Circular 757, was introduced on 20 August.[21] As the instructions of 757 were constantly ignored by security committees and arresting units, particularly regarding adherence to classification criteria and the continued lack of speedy sentencing, 2212 was introduced to streamline the *an tri* process. Aside from demonstrating increased GVN demand for adherence to *an tri* regulations, 2212 instructed that all evidence and investigations pertaining to a suspect be completed and provided to the local PSC within thirty days of the suspect's capture/arrest. Furthermore, to expedite the sentencing phase, PSCs were now instructed to convene more than once a week.[22] The culmination of Circulars 757 and 2212, aided by further emphasis from GVN leadership and Phoenix advisers, resulted in noticeable improvements in some regions by September: between July and September, the number of suspected VCI cadre awaiting trial in MR III dropped from 1,126 to 586, and a slight increase in PSC meetings occurred in some provinces.[23] However, failure to adhere to regulations persisted in most circumstances: A and B class VCI were still receiving sentences shorter than their prescribed minimum; and local detention centres in certain provinces, notably Hau Nghia, remained or became so crowded that prisoners were forced to sleep on the floor.[24]

Efforts during this period to expand the training of American and Vietnamese staff were more fruitful than efforts to improve *an tri*. In October, Phung Hoang Training Schools were opened in MR II and IV, and by December, 849 GVN personnel had attended the PHTS in

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[20] Phase one pacification status, undated (Circa mid-1969), FCO 15/1088: Pacification Programme, NAK, p.1, see also: Margetson, minutes of meeting, 28 July 1969, FCO 15/1088, NAK, pp.1-4
[21] Valentine, *Phoenix,* p.293
[22] Trần Thiện Khiêm to all Province Chiefs and Mayors, the Saigon Prefect, Director General National Police and Directorate of Corrections, 'Improvement of the Methods of Resolving the Status of Offenders', 20 August 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 6/5642306, NARA/II, pp.1-3
[23] John J. Chamblee to Deputy for CORDS, 'VCI Detainees', 29 July 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 6/5642306, NARA/II, pp.1-2, see also: John C. Drummond Jr. to Phoenix Directorate, 'VCI Detainees', 22 September 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 6/5642306, NARA/II, pp.1-2
[24] Ibid (Chamblee to Deputy), p.3, see also: Ibid (Drummond to Directorate), pp.3-4

MR III.[25] These schools, as well as growing staff experience and increased GVN/American pressure, led to noticeable advances in specific targeting during mid/late-1969. In February, the Phoenix directorate had requested lists of specific targets from every province, the vast majority of which could only provide lists of villages where the VCI reportedly had a strong presence. However, by 31 July, many provinces could now provide a number of specific individuals and details about them.[26] The most notable improvement occurred in Gia Dinh Province, as their February list included close to no specific targets while their July list was composed almost entirely of these targets. Additionally, most of Gia Dinh's dossiers provided an array of details, including the cadre's name/cover name, date of birth and position within the VCI.[27]

Increasingly detailed dossiers naturally resulted in a higher volume of successful operations: two of Long Khanh Province's districts launched ten successful specific targeting operations between 13 and 20 August; In Long An Province, the Propaganda, Indoctrination and Cultural Section Chief for Can Duoc District, a priority mid-level VCI, was neutralised in August; and frequent specific targeting operations in Saigon, Hue and Danang had severely weakened the VCI's grip over the population in these cities.[28] In the most successful provinces, VCI captured during operations were interrogated rapidly, subsequent intelligence was disseminated to the local DIOCC or PIOCC, and quick reaction operations were then immediately launched to neutralise further cadre. Occasionally, this resulted in devastating cycles of capture, interrogation and capture; as one VCI rallier explained in August, Phoenix operations had led to the VCI in Long An being 'torn apart'.[29]

While specific targeting was now being implemented in most provinces across South Vietnam, the concept was virtually non-existent in others. Hau Nghia's PIOCC, for instance,

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[25] John H. Mason, 'Training Division, PHOENIX Directorate', 22 October 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 8/5642346, NARA/II, pp.1-2, see also: William L. Knapp to Phoenix Directorate, 'Action Programme Against VCI', 3 December 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 6/5642305, NARA/II, p.1

[26] List of targets for Phung-Hoang operations, 5 August 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 2/5642269, NARA/II, pp.2-16

[27] Ibid, pp.2-16

[28] Charles S. Whitehouse to Province Senior Advisers, III CTZ, 'Specific Targeting of VCI', 28 August 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 2/5642269, NARA/II, pp.1-2, see also: John H. Mason, 'GVN Command Emphasis: Trends and Future Plans', 23 October 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 8/5642346, NARA/II, p.1

[29] Whitehouse to PSAs, III CTZ, 'Specific Targeting', 28 August 1969, 5642269, NARA/II, pp.1-2

had not successfully targeted a single cadre by the end of the year.[30] Daniel M. Smith, a Hau Nghia Phoenix adviser, explained that the province's failure was due both to constant GVN transfers, and the head of the province's Phung Hoang operations devolving authority to the Police Special Branch representative, who paid the programme little attention.[31] Even in provinces where specific targeting was being implemented, it remained limited, examples of which were Phu Yen and the above praised Long An. Only 16 percent of the cadre neutralised in November in these provinces were, prior to being neutralised, listed on blacklists, which listed known VCI cadre within each province. Therefore, only a maximum of 16 percent of reported neutralisations could have resulted from specific targeting operations, since the concept necessitated a cadre's identity and location be ascertained before an operation could be orchestrated/launched.[32]

Developments pertaining to phase two, thus far discussed, have highlighted the progress and limitations of Phoenix during this period, while the following two case studies illuminate the threat Vietnamisation posed the programme in the long term. In October 1969, a new Regional Intelligence and Operations Coordination Centre (RIOCC) was opened. The centre's construction was originally intended to be funded by the GVN, but a lack of resources and capital resulted in the project stagnating by April. Consequently, US officials agreed to fund and construct the centre, which was then completed and opened within six months, thus acting as a testament to American capabilities, while also revealing the GVN's inability to support Phoenix without American assistance.[33] The establishment of Village Intelligence and Operations Coordination Centres (VIOCCs) further highlighted this necessity for American funding. Introduced in 1969 to strengthen Phoenix's presence at the village level, assist the 'anti-VCI publicity program', and encourage village participation in intelligence gathering, VIOCCs were being established across the countryside by phase two, with some already producing worthwhile intelligence.[34] While VIOCCs were, officially, not funded by American channels, Long Khanh's province Phoenix

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[30] Bergerud, *Dynamics of Defeat*, p.260

[31] Daniel M. Smith to John C. Drummond Jr., 'Effectiveness of Phung Hoang Program, Hau Nghia', 14 July 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 6/5642303, NARA/II, p.1

[32] Roger Martin, 'Phoenix Programme', 18 November 1969, FCO 15/1088: Pacification Programme, NAK, p.2

[33] Frank Burnet to Daren J. Flintcroft, 'Funding for RIOCC Construction', 17 April 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 3/5642277, NARA/II, p.1

[34] Knapp to Phoenix Directorate, 'Action Programme Against VCI', 3 December 1969, 5642305, NARA/II, p.2

adviser identified that DIOCC funding was increasing following the establishment of VIOCCs, and explained that the surplus funds were likely being distributed amongst the village centres.[35] Not only does this adviser's theory seem plausible, as GVN channels lacked the affluence to support every VIOCC nationwide, but this also, in conjunction with the first case study, highlights that Phoenix's longevity depended on American support and funding which would later be withdrawn under the policy of Vietnamisation.

During and after the conclusion of phase two of the 1969 Pacification and Development Plan in October, a series of MACV directives were issued relating to the Phoenix Programme. Directive #381-2, 30 December 1969, established the 'Volunteer Informant Program', which offered rewards to anyone who provided information on the VC, PAVN, or VCI, that led to successful neutralisation missions or similar positive outcomes. Since rewards were scaled depending on the information's value, and as these rewards were only bestowed when intelligence led to successful outcomes, the potential for corruption and/or fake intelligence was largely curbed from the outset.[36] Informants were fruitful assets to Phoenix agencies, and so the introduction of this reward scheme aided in increasing the number of such assets. Other directives during this period focused less on enhancing Phoenix, and more on limiting US commitment to the programme. MACV Directive #550-4, 12 November 1969, capped interpreters at one per district advisory team.[37] District level Phoenix activity had also been impacted earlier that year by MACV Directive #10-20, 23 May, instructing that each District Senior Adviser double as the District Phoenix Adviser.[38] Furthermore, while it was decided in December 1969 that the PRU would retain CIA funding until at least the end of 1971, it was also affirmed that the GVN would assume all other responsibilities for these units by July 1971. Although Bunker beheld the now 4,200 strong PRU as 'the most effective method…to strike directly at the covert communist apparatus', these units were increasingly controversial on account of

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[35] Owen W. Wells to Phoenix Coordinator, MR III, 'Topics for Corps Phoenix Coordinator, Conference, 17th January 1970', 3 January 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 10/5642363, NARA/II, p.1

[36] Elias C. Townsend to MR, I, II, III, IV, 'Military Intelligence[:] Volunteer Informant Program', 30 December 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 11/5642368, NARA/II, pp.1-6

[37] Owen W. Wells to William L. Knapp, 'DIOCC Interpreters', 12 November 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 8/5642340, NARA/II, p.1

[38] Elias C. Townsend to Senior Advisers, CTZ I, II, III, IV, 'District Senior Advisor Attendance of the Phoenix Orientation Course', 14 December 1969, RG 472/General Records/Box 8/5642346, NARA/II, p.1

the similarity between their guerrilla-like tactics and those of the VC, as well as acts of brutality committed before joining ICEX. Consequently, the PRU was destined to eventually be stripped of American involvement.[39] The latter three points in this paragraph pertain to Vietnamisation and the gradual reduction of American commitment which it facilitated, while the previously discussed cases studies highlight both the necessity and impermanence of American support. In conjunction, these factors reveal that while Vietnasmisation was only negatively impacting Phoenix to a minor extent during 1969, later acceleration of the policy would inevitably be disastrous for the programme.

To reflect on the year as a whole, 1969 represented a period of continued progress for Phoenix. Advancements had been made in cooperation, training and specific targeting, particularly during phase two, while less effective reforms in aspects such as *an tri* had at the very least established basic operating procedures for the system. Colby stated that Phoenix's progress by the end of the year, notably in MR IV, had been a 'resounding success', while a separate report praised the programme's 'operational improvements' during the second half of the year.[40] A direct result of Phoenix's growing efficiency and capability had been a reduction in VC taxation and terror activities by late-1969.[41] Furthermore, during the second congress of South Vietnam's communist party, which convened in September, it was averred that pacification, Phoenix and Chieu Hoi posed greater threats than any other allied programmes.[42] Although a US annual report revealed that only around 20 percent of documented neutralisations in 1969 resulted from Phoenix operations or intelligence, the report also stated that this figure was based on approximations, and therefore unreliable. Furthermore, it was noted that the proportion of ralliers which could be credited to Phoenix was also inaccurate, due to difficulties in

[39] Memorandum for the 303 Committee, 11 December 1969, *FRUS; Vietnam, 1969-1976,* Volume VI, (Washington, 2006), pp.510-513

[40] J. O. Moreton, assessment of the Phoenix Programme, 24 March 1970, FCO: 15/1368: Pacification Programme and the Phoenix project: reports on progress, NAK, p.5, see also: 'Historical Report – Tour Extension', 8 March 1971, VAC/F015800160823, TTUVVA, URL: **http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?wDh0TY3@R8JSa6MylfhOwY7hbRi3yTnkg.DvmxdmBsXPNV5qXVGXF7fU4uYGt2ZQ7Jvmysu4BM@lOsp7HjwY4V@yPBSGsikv1WGpzuJmXUk/F015800160823.pdf**, p.3

[41] Norman W. Praet to Director, Phoenix Staff, 'Consolidated Vietcong Infrastructure Report', 3 January 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 5/5642292, NARA/II, p.1

[42] Henry Kissinger to Richard Nixon 'Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon', 22 August 1970, *FRUS; Vietnam, 1969-1976,* Volume VII, (Washington, 2010), pp.52-54

identifying the motivations behind a cadre's decision to rally. Given that ralliers constituted 25 percent of all reported neutralisations in 1969, and as Phoenix's psychological operations and general impact on cadre morale were both substantial during the year, the percentage of neutralisations attributable to Phoenix was likely higher than that which was reported.[43]

American advisory support had increased during 1969, with 450 advisers serving in Phoenix, and 101 in the PRU, by the end of the year.[44] One staff report in early-1970 stated that 'Continuing progress in pacification appears to depend, too, on maintaining a large American advisory infrastructure'.[45] This further highlights that Phoenix's ability to damage the VCI relied on persistent American advisory support. American monetary support, another key stipulation for progress and success, remained substantial in 1969, as CORDS had expended 172 million piastres.[46] US support was also provided in the form of vehicles, technology, resources and logistics. This assistance would be vital going forward, as shortcomings remained within the programme, including *an tri*'s sluggishness and leniency, the limited implementation of specific targeting, poor cooperation between participating agencies in various provinces, and the large number of American and Vietnamese staff who had not yet received training. American troops were also crucial, as not only did these units prevent conventional attacks against pacification programmes, but they were now actively participating in counter-VCI operations. However, American participation within Phoenix was not everlasting. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Vietnamisation was responsible for both increased and decreased levels of support for Phoenix: the programme's role in facilitating the implementation of Vietnamisation ensured that it would enjoy American support for some time, yet successful implementation of this policy would expedite the removal of this same support, as Vietnamisation's purpose was ultimately to reduce American commitment to the war. Nevertheless, the negative impact of Vietnamisation on

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[43] James B. Egger to Charles S. Whitehouse, 'Proportion of VCI Neutralisations Attributable to Phung Hoang', 22 September 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 11/5642373, NARA/II, pp.1-2

[44] Staff report for Committee on Foreign Relations, 2 February 1970, 2390706003, TTUVVA, p.6, see also: Memorandum for the 303 Committee, 11 December 1969, *FRUS; Vietnam, 1969-1976,* Volume VI, (Washington, 2006), pp.510-513

[45] Staff report, 2 February 1970, 2390706003, TTUVVA, p.7

[46] Mason to PH Coordinators, 'Monthly Report for January', (circa February 1971), 5642488, NARA/II, Attachment 3, p.1

Phoenix would be dwarfed by the overall benefits of the policy until late-1971, and the programme would continue to inflict increasing damage upon the VCI for the next two years.

Chapter Four

Cambodia, Phoenix and Progress in the Village War

At the dawn of 1970, the Phoenix Programme was in the best position thus far to combat the VCI. The Nixon administration's first year saw considerable development for the programme, as far more resources were allocated to pacification during 1969 than any year of the Johnson era, subsequently allowing Phoenix's infrastructure and capabilities to expand rapidly. Furthermore, not only had the programme continued to improve internally since 1968, but allied troops had exacted a heavy toll on communist forces by early-1970, reducing their capacity to assault pacification efforts. As had been the case in 1969, CORDS, and by extension William Colby, were heavily involved in formulating the 1970 pacification plan, titled 'Protection of the People from Terrorism'.[1] Pacification had little to do with counter-terrorism, and the plan's title was actually an attempt to make pacification appear more ethical and legitimate, undoubtedly because of concerns regarding the American domestic front: the anti-war movement in the United States had long contested the morality of American support for the GVN, a government that few saw as democratic, and so pacification efforts to expand GVN authority were poised to face criticism. Phoenix, for example, had attracted the attention of Western media since 1968, principally because of the programme's covert nature, its conspicuous name, accusations of corruption and assassinations, and the guerrilla-like tactics of the PRU. The attention garnered by Phoenix forced Colby to defend the programme's ethics in February 1970, when 'Senator J. William Fulbright's Senate Foreign Relations Committee held four days of hearings on pacification'.[2] Likely as a result of this growing controversy, which will be discussed fully during Chapter Five, the pacification plan for 1970 placed more emphasis than those of previous years on improving both the programme's public image, and its appearance as a predominately Vietnamese operation. Nevertheless, overall, the plan's primary objectives pertaining to Phoenix continued to focus on internal reform and improving effectiveness.

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[1] Staff report for Committee on Foreign Relations, 2 February 1970, 2390706003, TTUVVA, p.8, see also: William L. Knapp to Chief OPC, CORDS III CTZ, 'Counter-Terrorism Activities, 14 May 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 11/5642374, NARA/II, p.1

[2] John Prados, *Lost Crusader: The Secret Wars of CIA Director William Colby* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p.225

In early-1970, new reforms were introduced for Phoenix. From January onwards, captured and arrested VCI suspects could only be reported as neutralised *after* being sentenced to six months imprisonment or more. This made sentencing statistics more accurate, as prior to 1970, suspects were reported as neutralised upon capture/arrest, and were supposedly removed from the final neutralisation report if they had been found innocent or sentenced to six months or less.[3] An additional amendment, on 30 May, stated that arrested and captured VCI could only be reported as neutralised if sentenced to a year or more, thereby extending the amount of time neutralisation reports remained accurate for.[4] The result of these reforms to *an tri*, coupled with previously stated demands for Province Security Committees to adhere to national guidelines, was that 'by mid-1970, PSCs were functioning fairly well and improving each month'.[5] On 1 February, to assist specific targeting, DIOCCs were directed to introduce three lists: A list, for ten priority targets; B list, also known as the 'Target List', for cadre whose dossier included three or more reports that evidenced their identity and position within the VCI (confirmed VCI); and C list, for cadre whose dossier required more information (identified VCI).[6] Subsequently, personnel could now easily ascertain which targets required more or less attention. On 3 February, Province Senior Advisers were bestowed the authority to acquire information regarding the VCI structure in provinces that bordered their own from the PSAs of those bordering provinces. This was beneficial because the VCI used different regional, provincial and district borders to those of the GVN and US, and so if a VCI provincial structure existed within the bounds of two or three GVN provinces, the PSAs from those provinces could now pool their respective intelligence collections against their common foe.[7] These foregoing policies are examples of the progressing efficiency of Phoenix, the primary result of which was the

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[3] John H. Mason, 'VCI Neutralisation Report System and VCI Arrest Accountability System', 26 January 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 10/5642359, NARA/II, p.1

[4] Trần Thiện Khiêm to Province/City Phung Hoang Committee Chairmen, 'Reporting on VCI Neutralisations', 14 October 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 10/5642359, NARA/II, p.1

[5] William L. Knapp, 'Phoenix/Phung Hoang and the Future: A Critical Analysis of the US/GVN Program to Neutralize the Viet Cong Infrastructure', 8 March 1971, AD0529215, *DTIC,* URL: **http://www.dtic.mil/docs/citations/AD0529215**, p.56

[6] John H. Mason to Phoenix Coordinators, MR I,II,III,IV, 'Exposure of VCI', 20 November 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 11/5642370, NARA/II, p.1

[7] Deputy for CORDS, MR III to MACCORDS Phoenix and Phoenix Division, III CTZ, 'MACV Directive 381-43, Reporting on Neutralization of Vietnamese Communist Infrastructure', 16 February 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 10/5642359, NARA/II, p.2

programme's increasing ability to damage the VCI. The extent and impact of this ability by mid-1970 was demonstrated during the Cambodian Campaign, lasting from 29 April to 22 July 1970.

Launched by Nixon and Thiệu, the Cambodian Campaign was a land and air assault aimed at destabilising the communist apparatus within the areas of Cambodia that bordered South Vietnam. ARVN and US troops entering Cambodia were tasked with destroying communist strongholds, infrastructure elements, weapon and rice caches, supply lines and hideouts.[8] As most allied military operations would be launched into areas of Cambodia that bordered South Vietnam's provinces in MR III, this region's Phoenix agencies and centres were given firm instruction from the national level to take advantage of the campaign by increasing operations and inter-agency coordination. The campaign presented an opportunity to shatter much of MR III's shadow apparatus: not only would military assaults within Cambodia force VCI cadre operating and/or hiding there to return to Vietnam along with thousands of refugees, where screening operations could separate cadre from civilians, but the increased presence of allied troops within MR III would lead to hidden cadre in the region's villages and hamlets revealing themselves while attempting to flee to less hazardous areas.

During the campaign's opening weeks, no major increase in operations or neutralisations occurred as a direct result of events in Cambodia, with reports from provinces such as Bien Hoa and Gia Dinh stating that no opportunities had yet presented themselves. [9] Additionally, the initial flood of refugees from Cambodia overwhelmed the screening capabilities of Phoenix's participating agencies, particularly the Police Special Branch and Military Security Service.[10] The campaign had, however, instigated a marked increase in motivation and participation on the GVN's part by mid-May, notably in MR III. Do Cao Tri, Phung Hoang Committee Chairman for MR III; and Lieutenant Colonel Tham, deputy for

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[8] Lawrence, *The Vietnam War*, p.146

[9] Norbert F. Kockler to Charles S. Whitehouse, 'VCI Resulting from Cambodian Operation', 17 May 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 10/5642360, NARA/II, p.1, see also: David H. McKillop to Deputy for CORDS, MR III, 'Affect of the Cambodian Situation on Gia Dinh Province VCI', 14 May 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 10/5642360, NARA/II, p.1

[10] Joseph W. Knittle to Deputy for CORDS, 'Estimate of Damage to the VCI in Cambodia/Vietnam Border Area', 29 May 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 10/5642360, NARA/II, p.2

MR III's Phung Hoang Programme; were inspired by the Cambodian Campaign to the extent that during May, both placed pressure on their subordinates to invigorate personnel and 'make efforts to identify and exploit' opportunities presented by the campaign.[11]

By late-May, Allied incursions into Cambodia and MR III began creating opportunities for Phoenix, while improved GVN motivation allowed for more frequent and successful exploitation of these opportunities. The retreat of Tay Ninh's entire shadow apparatus, as a result of encroaching allied forces, not only decimated its organisational structure, but the sudden surfacing of its cadre allowed local Phoenix centres to identify, locate and neutralise many of these members.[12] In Long An, owing to American 'advisory emphasis' and the province's 'strong willed' chief, Colonel Tu, day-time platoon operations increased in number from 769 in April to 1707 in May. This, aided by PSYOP campaigns, led to a steep rise in neutralisations and ralliers, further impairing the Vietcong Infrastructure within Long An, which had been slowly eroded by Phoenix activity since late-1969.[13] In Long Khanh, improved motivation among GVN staff resulted in increased efforts to take advantage of the Cambodian Campaign, notably through PRU and NPFF ambushes, specific targeting and Chieu Hoi operations, expanding screening staff and centres, and training ralliers to guide military forces to VCI strongholds.[14]

It was also during this period, on 3 June, that national-level authority over Phung Hoang was transferred from the Interior Minister's office to the Directorate General of the National Police (DGNP), initiating a transition where all PIOCC/DIOCC leadership roles filled by South Vietnamese military/civilian officers would eventually be assumed by National Police personnel.[15] The placing of Phung Hoang under NP authority would occur on a province-by-province basis, and American advisers were tasked with determining when

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[11] Do Cao Tri to all Prefects, Mayors and Province Chiefs, 'Acceleration of Phung Hoang Operation', 19 May 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 10/5642360, NARA/II, p.1, see also: Joseph W. Knittle to John H. Mason, 'Trip Report, Bien Hoa Province, 4th-5th May 1970', 5 May 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 9/5642348, NARA/II, p.4

[12] Knittle to Deputy for CORDs, 'Damage to the VCI', 29 May 1970, 5642360, NARA/II, pp.2-4

[13] William N. Thomas to Frederick C. Krause, 'Exploitation of Cambodian Operation', 30 May 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 10/5642360, NARA/II, p.1

[14] 'Operation VCI', 16 May 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 10/5642360, NARA/II, pp.1-4

[15] James B. Egger to OPC, 'Input to Pacification and Development Questionnaire', 4 August 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 10/5642356, NARA/II, pp.1-2

DIOCC/PIOCCs were ready to be handed over to NP leadership.[16] This transition had been envisioned since the programme's inception, as police forces are inherently better suited for combatting domestic political threats within civilian populations. According to Colby, Phung Hoang was placed under the NP instead of the Police Special Branch, which was a more effective counter-VCI agency, because the programme needed to be more overt and within the public eye, therefore illustrating the impact of Phoenix's poor public image on national-level decisions.[17]

In order to capitalise fully on the VCI's weakened position during ongoing Cambodian operations, the '"Toan Thang"' (Total Victory) Campaign was launched on 9 June, tasking MR III's counter-VCI agencies with mounting an all-out assault against the shadow apparatus: PIOCCs would locate exposed VCI targets for DIOCC operations; specific targeting and PSYOPS operations would occur more frequently; and Phoenix's publicity campaign would be expanded.[18] Additionally, temporary prisons were erected, RF/PFs would provide units for operations, and PRUs were positioned near the Cambodian border to gather intelligence.[19]

Toan Thang was largely successful. It's Implementation at the province level was observed by Charles S. Whitehouse as being 'excellent', with the province chiefs of 'Binh Tuy, Gia Dinh, Phuoc Long, Ninh Duong and Long Khanh' all complimented on their guidance and leadership.[20] Intelligence collection and exploitation had improved, specific targeting was occurring to some extent in every province, and certain province chiefs, such as the chief for Binh Duong, had orchestrated an unprecedented level of coordination between previously competing agencies. PSYOP campaigns induced several key VCI members to rally, including a province-level Deputy Political Section Chief in Gia Dinh. Frequent district-level specific targeting operations in Long An had resulted in the capture of numerous

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[16] William L. Knapp to the Deputy for CORDS, 'Placement of Phung Hoang into Directorate General of the National Police', 17 June 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 11/5642373, NARA/II, p.2

[17] J. O. Moreton, Phoenix assessment, 24 March 1970, FCO: 15/1368, NAK, p.1

[18] Do Cao Tri, 'The order of Battle for the Phung Hoang "Toan Thang" (Total Victory) Campaign to Destroy the VCI in CTZ III', 5 June 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 10/5642360, NARA/II, pp.1-4

[19] Ibid, pp.1-4

[20] Charles S. Whitehouse to Commanding General, II Field Force Vietnam, 'Implementation of Operation "Toan Thang" (Total Victory) in III CTZ (U)', 22 June 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 10/5642360, NARA/II, p.1

cadre.[21] In Tay Ninh, the VCI's medical establishments and supply lines were obliterated.[22] The VCI in SR-2, a provincial territory that existed in MR III within the aforementioned VC province boundary system, had been crippled, with all but a few of its leadership having fled or been captured.[23] By late June, the refugee screening/interrogation process was better manned and operated than it had been a month before, and accordingly, the number of refugees screened, and VCI discovered, increased greatly.[24] At the conclusion of Toan Thang in early-July, Phoenix had not only experienced substantial internal development, but had, in conjunction with US/ARVN military operations, dealt the VCI in MR III a heavy blow. The VCI in MR I, II and IV had also suffered to some degree, as improving GVN motivation across the country resulted in expanded operations in every region.

The Cambodian Campaign concluded on 22 July. It had been fruitful in both the conventional military sense, as communist armaments were captured in abundance and their supply lines disrupted, and in terms of counter-VCI activity[25] James B. Egger, Phoenix coordinator for MR III, proclaimed the campaign to have been 'the best single event in support of the PHUNG HOANG Programme'.[26] He also affirmed that, in addition to pressure from American advisers and GVN leadership, a key instigating force behind the 'rejuvenation of the program' during the campaign had been the placing of Phung Hoang under NP authority.[27] This was an accurate statement, as police personnel functioning within the programme were far more accepting of NP authority than political or military authority. However, while the DGNP's assumption of responsibility had taken place rapidly and efficiently at the national level, and while leadership roles within provincial centres were also being assumed by NP personnel at an acceptable pace, this process was taking

[21] Ibid, pp.1-2
[22] James B. Egger to Deputy for CORDS, 'Campaign After Action Report, Cambodian Operations', 9 July 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 10/5642360, NARA/II, p.2
[23] Ibid, pp.1-2
[24] Knittle to Deputy for CORDs, 'Damage to the VCI', 29 May 1970, 5642360, NARA/II, p.2
[25] Kevin Ruane, *War and Revolution in Vietnam, 1930-75* (UCL Press, 1998), p.92
[26] Egger to Deputy for CORDS, 'After Action Report', 9 July 1970, 5642360, NARA/II, p.4
[27] Egger to OPC, 'Questionnaire', 4 August 1970, 5642356, NARA/II, pp.1-2

considerably longer at the district level, owing to a shortage of qualified NP officers.[28] Resultantly, Phoenix/CORDS officials did not expect this process to be completed until mid-1971. This foreshadowed events that would occur in 1972, when the NP were required to assume almost all responsibilities for the programme, but would lack both the resources and manpower necessary to ensure that this transition was rapidly and efficiently executed.

The Cambodian Campaign was overwhelmingly beneficial for the Phoenix Programme, yet it also illuminated the consequences of reducing American military forces in areas where pacification programmes operated. The redeployment of American troops to Cambodia and South Vietnam's bordering provinces had reduced security in the areas where these troops were previously stationed. In MR II, for example, US/ARVN troop redeployments led to security in some now-exposed areas dropping by as much as 34 percent, which was calculated through the total number of hamlets that were either contested, GVN controlled, or communist controlled. Within these areas, VC/VCI counter-pacification activities retook control over large portions of the region's rural population.[29] In Phu Yen, a coastal province in MR II, GVN Phoenix personnel functioning within villages and hamlets were increasingly the target of assassination/capture attempts by the Vietcong.[30] This demonstrates that Phoenix's progress was dependant, not only on American advisory, financial and material support, but also on US military forces. Their continued presence within South Vietnam was critical to maintaining rural security and defending pacification efforts. The ongoing withdrawal of US forces under Vietnamisation, which had reduced troop numbers from over 500,000 in 1968 to 334,600 by late-1970, would by 1972 leave Phoenix exposed to communist retaliation.[31]

In August 1970, Egger asserted that Phoenix had improved to such an extent, it was now possible for some American advisers to be withdrawn, going as far to suggest that each

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[28] Charles S. Whitehouse to Do Cao Tri, 'Phung Hoang Training and Placement of Phung Hoang into Directorate General of the National Police', 26 June 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 11/5642373, NARA/II, p.2

[29] Roger Martin, report of pacification efforts in South Vietnam, 29 May 1970, FCO: 15/1368: Pacification Programme and the Phoenix project: reports on progress, NAK, p.1

[30] 'South Vietnam: Pacification Holding the Line', 24 July 1970, FCO: 15/1368: Pacification Programme and the Phoenix project: reports on progress, NAK, p.2

[31] David L. Anderson, *The Vietnam War* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.95

advisory team could now 'cover two districts'.[32] However, this view, held by many within CORDS and MACV, failed to recognise that US advisory support was fundamental, not only to improving the programme, but also to maintaining its current level of effectiveness. Tenuous cooperation between participating agencies was often sustained by careful liaising between each agency's American advisers, and GVN staff motivation frequently depended on persistent American pressure. Furthermore, American advisers were the sole cause of improvement in certain districts. For example, Lieutenant John L. Cook, Phoenix adviser for Di An District, Bien Hoa Province, had singlehandedly turned the district around between 1968 and 1970. A master of opportunities, Cook ensured that every disillusioned VCI rallier was exploited for intelligence relating to other cadre targets. He was so vital to the intelligence gathering and exploitation mechanism, that the district chief for Di An had on multiple occasions successfully requested for Cook's tour to be extended.[33] Therefore, the concept of American withdrawal posed a critical threat to Phoenix, as the programme's continued progress would assist in justifying the withdrawal of American advisers, subsequently accelerating the programme's downfall.

Notwithstanding the continued need for American support being abundantly clear, the Vietnamisation of Phoenix persisted during 1970, and was further accelerated by the US government's growing desire to reduce its affiliation with the controversial programme. The PRU had been placed under NP administrative authority on 31 March. American terminology and idioms were removed from a number of official documents, memoranda and directives, while most references to 'Phoenix' were replaced with 'Phung Hoang'.[34] Additionally, US advisers were given questionnaires throughout mid/late-1970, querying which DIOCCs/PIOCCs in their respective areas of operation would require advisers through 1971, the reply to which was most commonly 'all'.[35] While this reply assisted in ensuring that most advisory staff would be retained for some time, the issuing of such a questionnaire demonstrated the United States' eagerness to begin decreasing its

[32] Egger to OPC, 'Questionnaire', 4 August 1970, 5642356, NARA/II, p.2

[33] Prados, *Hidden History*, p.212

[34] James B. Egger to John H. Mason, 'Phoenix Coordinator and Advisory Handbook', 30 July 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 12/5642381, NARA/II, p.1

[35] Deputy for CORDS to Phoenix Division for CTZ III and Saigon Phoenix Coordinator, 'Action Programme against the VCI', 19 June 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 11/5642373, NARA/II, p.1

commitment to Phoenix, particularly as Vietnamisation of the entire war effort continued at an increasing pace.

Interestingly, however, the Vietnamisation of Phoenix had not yet undermined immediate requirements for additional advisers, as the advisory effort was expanded during mid/late-1970. From August onwards, every DIOCC was allocated a Military Intelligence (MI) captain, while every PIOCC was allocated an MI major, both of whom had a basic understanding of the Vietnamese language. [36] The 'Military Assistance Security Adviser course' was introduced at Fort Bragg in September, which trained American advisers for operating with South Vietnamese counterparts. [37] Non-Commission Officer (NCO) intelligence specialists were introduced in certain districts as Deputy DIOCC Advisers, tasked with improving specific targeting and intelligence gathering. [38] As a result of the various American advisory training programmes established between 1968 and 1970, the quality of district level advisers in particular had improved greatly, both in their understanding of counter-VCI activity, and their ability to form rapports with Vietnamese counterparts.

The 1970 pacification plan concluded on 31 October. It was immediately followed by a 'Supplementary Pacification and Development Plan', lasting from 1 November 1970 to 28 February 1971, in order to provide additional time for CORDS and the GVN to formulate the pacification plan for 1971. [39] The supplementary plan called for 'maximum elimination of the VCI and a maximum increase in security', focusing particularly on increasing the roles of police and local forces. [40] Trần Văn Hai began gearing the NP towards fulfilling their intended role as the 'principle operating agency of the PH [Phung Hoang] Plan'. [41] This

[36] Information concerning the DIOCC/PIOCC special personnel management programme, p.1, in: Alice A. Long to all MRs, PSAs/DSAs and MACV J-2, 'PIOCC and DIOCC Programme ', 7 October 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 10/5642365, NARA/II

[37] 'The Evolution of American Military Intelligence', May 1973, WCC/0440220002/part one, TTUVVA, URL: **http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?5FYZGnanDyyHDh0qGIFJ.DXfTjT93nFC3DQo8nydVi1IAZLdtAwsr5McipQeZeCMmrOmvOtS0aL5f7iifdx@lfz2wjtdnnm@wcl37YdvX0M/0440220002c.pdf**, p.117

[38] Richard Funkhouser to Province/District Senior Advisers, MR III, 'PHUNG HOANG/PHOENIX Programme', 30 September 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 11/5642373, NARA/II, p.2

[39] '1970 Supplementary Pacification And Development Plan', 26 October 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 10/5642365, NARA/II, p.1

[40] Ibid, pp.7-8

[41] Tran Van Hai to Deputy for SP Bloc, et al, 'Support of Phung Hoang Operations', 6 November 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 33/5642559, NARA/II, p.1

included increasing the NP's ranks by 17,000 officers by the end of 1970, and placing pressure on all police agencies to provide the resources and manpower required for the programme to succeed in its endeavours.[42]

It has proven difficult to locate documents highlighting the events that unfolded during the supplementary plan. Nevertheless, several notable developments were uncovered. One such development, on 16 December, was Colby's assignment of additional American intelligence officers, including NCO 'Counterintelligence Specialists', to provinces with high numbers of identified VCI, such as Quang Nam and Kien Hoa.[43] Another development was the successful implementation of 'Area Specific Targeting' in Dinh Duong Province during early-January. This strategy focused on identifying villages under covert VCI control, establishing an intelligence network within the village to acquire information on the identities, roles and behaviours of each cadre, and then launching PRU/NPFF operations to eradicate the village's entire communist apparatus.[44] A final development occurred on 11 January 1971, when a report from Hau Nghia revealed that the province's counter-VCI effort was now enjoying improved communication between police and programme personnel, and a soaring quantity of useful intelligence had begun entering its Phoenix centres. Hau Nghia had been an example of meagre and sluggish Phoenix activity since the programme's inception, and while poor performance and a lack of specific targeting still persisted, it was stressed by Egger that the recent improvements constituted a 'step in the right direction'.[45] The reorganisation of Hau Nghia's Phung Hoang Programme under NP authority, and the 'placement of a US adviser' in the province's Military Security Service office in late-1970, were cited as the primary causes of this progress.[46] In conjunction, these developments demonstrate that, as late as February 1971, officials continued to adapt, implement new tactics, and improve the Phoenix Programme.

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[42] Ibid, pp.2-4, see also: 'Supplementary…Plan', 26 October 1970, 5642365, NARA/II, pp.7-8

[43] William E. Colby to DEPCORDS for MR I, II, III, IV, 'Phung Hoang Programme', 14 December 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 33/5642559, NARA/II, p.1

[44] Gerald F. Feeney to MR III Phung Hoang Coordinator, 'Results of Area Specific Targeting ', 8 January 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 17/5642422, NARA/II, p.1

[45] James B. Egger to Deputy for CORDS, 'Significant Events Covered in December Neutralisation Reports', 11 January 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 33/5642564, NARA/II, p.5

[46] Ibid, p.5

In assessing Phoenix between January 1970 and February 1971, a number of summaries and reports provide an interesting insight. During 1970, 22,357 VCI were reportedly neutralised, 757 more than the annual quota. While VCI neutralisation statistics remained inaccurate, this had improved slightly since 1968. Stricter criteria set in 1970, such as previously highlighted amendments to the reporting system for captured/arrested VCI suspects, had reduced the potential for overestimations.[47] Furthermore, in October 1970, Egger asserted that the primary cause of many inaccurate neutralisation reports was not overestimations, but 'just the opposite'.[48] Egger highlighted that VCI killed by participating agencies or combat troops were often not reported in instances where there was no camera available for providing photo evidence of the neutralised cadre, as well as when coordination between these units and Phoenix centres was poor.[49] Therefore, while the 1970 neutralisation count was inaccurate, it was less so than in previous years, and many KIA inaccuracies had likely derived from underestimations rather than overestimations. In relation to specific targeting, 63 percent of neutralised VCI in 1970 had been identified prior to neutralisation.[50] This represented a significant improvement in specific targeting, as although no earlier statistics on this subject could be found, such a percentage contrasted greatly with Colby's declaration, in July 1969, that too many neutralisations had been 'by accident'.[51] Regarding the quality of neutralisations, a report from 1971 revealed that 24.8 percent of all VCI neutralised in 1970 had functioned at the district level or higher, as opposed to 13 percent in 1968. This further highlights the growing effectiveness of specific targeting, while also demonstrating that the VCI were sustaining increasingly heavy losses above the village and hamlet level.[52]

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[47] Ellsworth Bunker to Richard Nixon, 'Ninety First Weekly Telegram', 23 January 1971, DPC/1790123001, TTUVVA, URL: **http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?uFKtmvkQW6eoL6I2vvsWU4AIgWSyBNKgyEBJ9l.s0HhsVigDdR8ac2Kg5O1rGVOBxruItgLP3TcOTI4liaKEw@8Ss0rD@HBMtZCrwIWbNJo/1790123001.pdf**, p.26

[48] 'Remarks by Colonel James B Egger, Quarterly Phoenix Coordinators' Conference', 31 October 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 10/5642365, NARA/II, p.13

[49] Ibid, p.13

[50] Joseph W. Knittle to Deputy for CORDS, 'A and B Category Neutralisation Statistics', 21 April 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 17/5642421, NARA/II, p.2

[51] James to Martin, 'Talk with Ambassador Colby', 17 July 1969, FCO 15/1088, NAK, p.1

[52] 'Comparative Neutralisation Results for Jan and Feb 1971', p.1, in: Joseph W. Knittle to Military Senior Adviser, 'Level of VCI Neutralised', 20 April 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 17/5642421, NARA/II

In spite of the increasing number of mid/high-level neutralisations being achieved, Phoenix continued to be criticised in the US government, particularly by Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, as the majority of neutralisations still occurred at the 'lower echelons'.[53] Moyar has rebutted this criticism, highlighting that the lowest echelon of any hierarchal structure almost always comprises the highest number of functionaries, and so the notion that high-level VCI neutralisations could ever match or surpass low-level neutralisations is nonsensical.[54] Moreover, this disparity between mid/high and low-level neutralisations did not, as Laird affirmed, leave the 'overall party organization viable'.[55] This is because although the shadow government's leadership remained relatively intact, destruction of the lower echelons destabilised their control over the population. Additionally, Andradé has identified that the volume of 'mid-level' VCI being neutralised by 1970 had proven sufficient to sever the link between high-level and low-level cadre in numerous districts/provinces, thus preventing the shadow government from disseminating instructions and policies to the crucial village/hamlet level.[56]

To conclude, between January 1970 and February 1971, the Phoenix Programme dealt a severe blow to the Vietcong Infrastructure and achieved a marked rise in motivation, participation, internal efficiency and effectiveness. Amendments to *an tri*, target lists, and cross-province intelligence sharing, aided specific targeting operations and improved the accuracy of neutralisation reports. The launch of the Cambodian Campaign, pressure applied by GVN national/regional officials and American advisers, and the transfer of Phung Hoang under NP authority, had instigated a major rise in motivation among Phoenix personnel. Furthermore, counter-VCI activity and military operations during the Cambodian Campaign greatly impaired VCI operations in Cambodia and MR III's bordering provinces. Developments during the supplementary plan revealed that Phoenix remained capable of adapting and progressing, while annual assessments of the programme were increasingly accurate and positive. There were of course limitations to this progress: *an tri* remained plagued by slow processing speeds and instances where reporting guidelines

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[53] Melvin R. Laird to Henry Kissinger 'Current Status of the Pacification Programme', 3 September 1970, *FRUS; Vietnam, 1969-1976,* Volume VII, (United States Government Printing Office, 2010), pp.1-2
[54] Moyar, *Phoenix,* p.252
[55] Laird to Kissinger 'Pacification Programme', 3 September 1970, FRUS, p.2
[56] Andradé, *Ashes to* Ashes, p.238

were not adhered to; Phoenix's efficiency and impact varied across districts, provinces and regions; and police assumption of Phung Hoang authority at the district level remained a laborious task. Resolving these shortcomings was largely a matter of time and pressure. However, much of Phoenix's progress was maintained by American advisory, financial and military support, and so the ongoing Vietnamisation of America's war effort limited the amount of time available. As will be discussed during the following chapters, dependence on American support would prove to be the programme's Achilles heel, particularly following July 1971, when the process of Vietnamising counter-VCI activity was accelerated exponentially.

Chapter Five

Jumping Ship: Controversy, Accelerated Vietnamisation, and the Beginning of the End for the Phoenix Programme

Between March and December 1971, counter-VCI activity stood at a point where both victory and defeat appeared to be on the horizon: the shadow apparatus, having for years suffered at the hands of pacification and allied military forces, was in a weaker position than ever before, yet the expansion of Vietnamisation now constituted a major threat to the programme's prospects of success. Phoenix continued at first during this period to progress and achieve promising results, but would to its detriment be Vietnamised at an accelerated pace from late-1971 onwards. The cause of this hastened American withdrawal largely lies within the broader context of the Vietnam War. Between February and March 1971, the ARVN launched an ill-fated operation into eastern Laos, codenamed Lam Son 719, to destroy communist strongpoints. As no American troops participated in 719, the operation would test whether South Vietnam could successfully face communist forces without the aid of US soldiers. To Nixon and Kissinger's dismay, the operation was a failure and the ARVN suffered high casualties, thereby demonstrating South Vietnam's military weakness. Clearly, ensuring the GVN could survive alone required more time than Nixon could afford, particularly as he was conscious of the upcoming November 1972 presidential election, and so his administration moved towards streamlining negotiations with Hanoi. [1] Furthermore, Nixon faced increasing political pressure, with American popular support for the war dropping in April 1971 to its lowest point thus far and the Democrats challenging the administration's policies at every turn. [2] Because of these factors, the president was left with little option but to advance the pace of negotiations and withdrawal. The accelerated Vietnamisation of Phoenix can also be linked to the controversy surrounding it in the US by mid-1971. The programme had suffered negative American media attention since 1968, particularly allegations of unethical and illegal activity. By 1971, this controversy had, similarly to controversy surrounding the Vietnam

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[1] Ruane, *War and Revolution*, pp.93-94

[2] Philip B. Davidson, *Vietnam at War: The History, 1946-1975* (Oxford University Press, 1991), p.664

War as a whole, intensified considerably. Phoenix would be the subject of congressional hearings, as well as face allegations of assassination, corruption, mass-arrests and torture by a number of American politicians, officials and veterans. The cause, accuracy and impact of these allegations will, along with all other facets of the Phoenix morality debate, be discussed at length later during this chapter. In summary, Chapter Five focuses on the programme's successes and limitations thus far, the morality debate, and the hastening of American departure from counter-VCI activity during the second half of 1971.

By early/mid-1971, it was clear that the VCI were losing the village war. More cadre existed within Cambodia than South Vietnam, as many had fled the increasingly hazardous country. [3] The COSVN was attempting to recruit more cadre who owned legal documentation, as this would assist in concealing the shadow apparatus's functionaries from Phoenix's intelligence network. [4] Since late-1968, the assumption of VCI roles by Vietcong military personnel had become increasingly common, owing to the consistent drain on cadre manpower by counter-VCI activity and military operations. Additionally, in a growing number of instances, cadre within the infrastructure were being supplemented by PAVN officers. [5] This highlighted that the apparatus was losing trained cadre faster than it could replenish them, the impact of which, as a captured communist document revealed, was a decreasing level of proficiency exhibited by cadre by 1971:

> '…the leadership of the cadre and agencies at various levels was inappropriate…For that reason, in this year, the strengthening and training of cadre, agencies, and local armed forces have a greater significance and are more pressing'. [6]

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[3] 'VC/VCI Strength Estimation Figures', in: Joseph W. Knittle to Military Senior Advisers, 'VC and VCI in and Against MR 3', 13 April 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 17/5642421, NARA/II p.1

[4] National Intelligence Estimates, 'South Vietnam: Problems and Prospects' 29 April 1971, in: David F. Gordon; National Intelligence Council, *Estimative products on Vietnam, 1948-1975* (National Intelligence Council, 2005), p.585

[5] William L. Knapp to DEPCORDS, III CTZ, 'NVA Participation in the VC Infrastructure (U)', 13 April 1970, RG 472, General Records, Box 11, 5642368, NARA/II, p.1, see also: Vo Nguyen Giap, 'South Vietnam Situation: An Assessment', undated (circa early-1970), DPC, 2121513001/part one, TTUVVA, URL: **http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?AM9IgdIgKiqTsEz5CJxFZb8VoWaLAF3@9Emh@SWppYNmSjSVabq2HBRkJ3X@vHQQM z9buVzpST52FxOXHwaVuvUYwxVPhgZj@tPb4kp0sNk/2121513001a.pdf**, p.4

[6] Jack A. Hanover Jr., 'Training Material', 20 December 1971, DPC/2310409004, TTUVVA, URL: **http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-**

Hanoi was attempting to combat pacification through methods as controversial as those employed by Phoenix, namely neutralising low-/mid-level GVN officials. This had the disadvantage of potentially drawing as much international criticism to the communist political struggle as Phoenix had drawn to pacification. However, Hanoi and the COSVN had little choice, as they would 'lose all chance of staging a comeback in the South' if the VCI were destroyed prior to America's total withdrawal from Vietnam.[7]

Counter-VCI activity continued to progress during the first half of 1971. Gerald T. Bartlett, Hau Nghia's senior adviser, stated in May that dossiers were improving, the NPFF were 'first rate', and the district chiefs for Trang Bang and Cu Chi district were committed and capable.[8] Additionally, reports from July revealed that although specific targeting and cooperation required improvement, the PIOCC was now rapidly exploiting perishable intelligence and neutralising key VCI, particularly Village Secretaries and Village Section Chiefs.[9] A number of other provinces in MR III were inspected during June by John S. Tilton, who replaced John Mason as Phoenix Director a month earlier. Tilton was pleased with the region's progress, particularly in Binh Long Province, where the PSA was cited for 'exceptional and genuine interest in the program'.[10] Other province reports from June were similarly positive. Long Thanh and Bien Hoa were noted to be 'progressing in a positive and forward direction', and Phuoc Tuy was cited for its effective exploitation of intelligence.[11] Furthermore, the quality of counter-VCI intelligence provided by the village

bin/starfetch.exe?uWPJMIMQ3mqbjyq8ttRw@.asdkn4ZvKjD3Fg0ht.VZoS9XqscdD0bAsOploQC0ZhiWHr8sOo@bs10Pw6zJ5fRJUPcc4AQ6PZ4ILxMxh7BGb84HZz.EzBWg/2310409004.pdf, p.1

[7] Konrad Kellen, '1971 and Beyond: The View from Hanoi', June 1971, DPC/2120110012, TTUVVA, URL: http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?srQUQBp2mDp.HZ0KNUjS5CzGL6wp2690dvzH1NrKwV1ZnCFVauGi7G@C.Rf2sbNe2d4GGxk9OCKF5FW.nOVXlnS4bFqSz3sqOEUg4g1rzAA/2120110012.pdf, p.19

[8] 'Comments on DEPCORDS Agenda', 27 May 1971, in: Gerald T. Bartlett to DEPCORDS, TRAC, 'Comments on Subjects Raised at DEPCORDS Conference', 27 May 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 21/5642452, NARA/II, p.1

[9] Richard B. Culp to Commanding General, TRAC, 'Weekly Key Neutralisation Report', 1 July 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 21/5642451, NARA/II, p.1, see also: Richard B. Culp to Director, Phung Hoang Directorate, 'Consolidated Vietnamese Communist Infrastructure Neutralisation Report', 29 July 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 21/5642451, NARA/II, p.1

[10] Joseph W. Knittle to MSA, MR III, 'Visit of Phung Hoang Director to MR III', 20 June 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 22/5642453, NARA/II, pp.1-2

[11] Leroy A. Wood, Memorandum for the record, Phung Hoang Status – Long Thanh District, Bien Hoa Province, 11 June 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 22/5642453, NARA/II, p.1, see also: Joseph W. Knittle

populace had risen in all provinces where the Volunteer Informant Programme had been introduced.[12]

While Phoenix had proven itself an effective means by which to combat the VCI, shortcomings and drawbacks persisted. Corruption was a major problem in MR IV, specifically that VCI suspects were bribing GVN officials to release them prior to their trial.[13] Another setback was the continued slow pace at which NP officers were assuming leadership positions. A consequence of this was that, in provinces where military officials still had considerable authority over the programme, cooperation was poor and police personnel were given little direction. The most notable example of this was in Dinh Quan District, Long Khanh, where the District Chief, a military officer, asserted that he would have no involvement with the police.[14] Another area which required improvement was specific targeting, as although this was now being employed in every province, the extent to which the strategy was used over cordon and search operations varied from area to area, with some centres still lacking the qualified staff and intelligence stockpile necessary to target individual cadre. Moreover, it had not ceased to be the case that specific targeting and inter-agency cooperation relied on consistent American advisory support.

Vietnamisation continued steadily between March and July. Financial support for the programme was increasingly becoming a South Vietnamese responsibility, with American funding for 1971, forecasted at 56 million piastres (approximately US$868,000 today), being subsidised by 17 million piastres of GVN capital.[15] During the first half of the year, Colby, Mason, and later Tilton, established their strategy for the eventual departure of American advisers. A Phoenix Directorate meeting on 24 March illustrated that the 'ultimate objective' was to give operational control over Phung Hoang to the Police Special Branch, while the NP would assume national-level authority and all financial/logistical

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to John S. Tilton, 'MR III Phung Hoang Overview for the June 1971 Reporting Period', 12 July 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 23/5642465, NARA/II, p.3

[12] John S. Tilton to all Phung Hoang Coordinators, 'Phung Hoang Monthly Newsletter', 20 September 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 25/5642488, NARA/II, Attachment 1, p.2

[13] Robert O. Viterna to Nguyen-Van-Phuoc, 'People's Image of the Phung Hoang Programme', 28 April 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 29/5642513, NARA/II, pp.2-4

[14] Wollam to Funkhouser, letter, 26 May, p.1

[15] Mason to PH Coordinators, 'Monthly Report for January', (circa February 1971), 5642488, NARA/II, Attachment 3, p.2, see also: report for March within the same folder, attachment 1, p.1

responsibilities. However, the meeting also stated that the NP and PSB did not yet have the resources, training, or authority to direct Phung Hoang and its various participating agencies, and so both would require further time to meet these requirements.[16] By May, a three-phase plan was being advocated, whereby the police would gradually assume authority. Phase one involved slowly increasing police responsibilities for the programme; Phase two focused on further transferring DIOCCs/PIOCCs, on a province-by-province basis, over to police direction. During phase three, Phung Hoang would be transformed into an arm of the NP.[17] Furthermore, Tilton emphasised in June that American participation should be withdrawn from each province as it became more effective, thus highlighting the same flawed approach which had been asserted by Egger in 1970.[18] While the three-phase plan was viable on paper, it had been conceived at a time when American advisers were not expected to have been fully withdrawn from the programme until mid-1973.[19] As hindsight can reveal, the American advisory effort would in fact have departed entirely by late-1972, on account of accelerated Vietnamisation from late-1971 onwards, and so the police would assume all responsibilities for the programme before they had fully developed the capability to do so. Furthermore, regardless of the plan's viability as means to withdrawal from the programme, the fact that such a departure was being formulated at a time when US participation remained crucial and the VCI had not been defeated suggests that an ulterior motive was at play. That is, because American departure from the programme was being planned for reasons other than the VCI being defeated or US support no longer being required, it is unlikely that the three-phase plan was motivated solely, if at all, by considerations for the village war. It is more likely that the push towards departure was the result of the United States' growing determination to reduce its commitment to the Vietnam War as a whole, particularly following the political developments discussed during this chapter's introduction. These developments, in conjunction with the controversy surrounding Phoenix by 1971, would prove to have an

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[16] Joseph W. Knittle to Deputy for CORDS, MR III, 'Phung Hoang Directorate Meeting, 24th March 1971', 1 April 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 29/5642513, NARA/II, pp.1-2

[17] Thomas J. Kennedy Jr. for the Record, 'May Monthly Phung Hoang Directorate Senior Coordinators' Meeting', 22 May 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 29/5642513, NARA/II, p.4

[18] Knittle to MSA, MR III, 'Visit of Phung Hoang Director', 20 June 1971, 5642453, NARA/II, p.3

[19] Phung Hoang Directorate, Staff Study: Phung Hoang Re-examination (PHREEX) I, undated (circa 20 July 1971), RG 472/General Records/Box 30/5642521, NARA/II, Annex G, p.2

even greater impact on the United States' departure from counter-VCI activity during the second half of the year, when Vietnamisation of the programme would, as a result, be adversely accelerated.

However, the morality debate surrounding Phoenix must be discussed before the second half of 1971 can be addressed. The House Committee on Government Operations opened hearings on the Phoenix Programme in mid-July 1971. Colby stood at these hearings on 19 July, barraged by a series of questions pertaining specifically to the programme.[20] This had come three months after Jerome R. Waldie, a democrat member of the House of Representatives, argued that Phoenix had been responsible for a number of unethical activities. Waldie asserted that a statement in an MACV directive from 18 May 1970, which emphasised that Americans were 'specifically unauthorised to engage in assassinations', implied that Americans had been performing such actions.[21] Furthermore, Waldie argued both that the killing, capturing, arresting and sentencing of thousands of suspects was a breach of legality, as these individuals were not given true court hearings, and that Phoenix was a potential tool for corruption and 'political suppression'.[22] Identifying the actual extent to which Phoenix caused/instigated immoral activity requires an in-depth analysis of both the various arguments made by scholars/American officials during and after the programme's lifetime, and primary source material pertaining to this subject. Therefore, the following paragraphs will discuss the various unethical activities which Phoenix was accused of instigating/participating in throughout its history.

A common accusation against Phoenix was that it was an assassination programme. In addition to Waldie's comments, Theodore Jacqueney, a former official for the United States Agency for International Development, who had served in Vietnam in 1970, was cited in a congressional report on US assistance programmes in Vietnam as having stated

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[20] Prados, *Lost Crusader,* p.235

[21] Jerome R. Waldie, speech in the House of Representatives, 20 April 1971, in: 'Congressional Record-Extension of Remarks', 22 April 1971, DPC/2131803066, TTUVVA, URL: **http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?VxlAH.KWhnsPqcg08GmjFyObY.6jTbRpHgNw4TX.fiQls8GPL4K8HaCP@cCzHhJTEJjUja8wbd1qGosn1O.0V9w1uTZ4nFNlPrpr9642kfU/2131803066.pdf**, p.2

[22] Ibid, p.3

that American advisers were 'going around killing Vietnamese People'.[23] Other proponents of the assassination programme argument include scholars such as Douglas Valentine, who states that 'VCI members were brutally murdered along with their families or neighbors as a means of terrorizing the neighboring population into a state of submission', and Alfred McCoy, who labels the programme as a 'murderous covert operation'.[24]

However, most evidence reveals that while unjust killings did occur on occasion, they were neither common nor sanctioned. First, as discussed in Chapter One, Phoenix had a graded list of methods for neutralising VCI, which cited killing as the least preferable. This is unsurprising because killing potential sources of intelligence was counterproductive, particularly for an intelligence programme such as Phoenix. Second, during the programme's lifetime, rallies and captures accounted for more neutralisations than fatalities did, and although the death toll for neutralised VCI was high, these were not assassinations, as most KIA cadre died during military engagements or situations where a neutralising force saw no safe or viable way to capture their target.[25] Third, Zalin Grant highlights that Phoenix's reputation as an assassination campaign largely derived from brutal actions committed by the PRU prior to being placed within ICEX. While PRUs became less brutal after becoming a participant within the programme, public attention primarily focused on the darker past of these units.[26] Although it was still common for PRUs to use lethal force against VCI targets during the 1970s, this was because cadre were often accompanied by armed guards, thus making arrest attempts hazardous. Fourth, Valentine's argument that Phoenix operations were aimed at 'terrorizing' the population is illogical, as the programme represented one of the three prongs of pacification, which focused on winning the hearts and minds of the peasantry through political, economic and security programmes; thus, actively attempting to terrorise the public was counterproductive to pacification. Finally, in regards to the MACV directive cited by Waldie, this was not issued in response to Americans committing immoral acts. Rather, it was an

[23] Committee on Government Operations, *U.S. Assistance Programs in Vietnam: Twenty-Second Report*, 92nd Congress, 2nd Session, 17 October 1972, (United States Government Printing Office, 1972), DPC/2390217001, TTUVVA, URL: **https://vva.vietnam.ttu.edu/repositories/2/digital_objects/40586**, p.91
[24] Valentine, *Phoenix,* p.13, see also: McCoy, *A Question of Torture*, p.64
[25] 'Vietnamization of the Phung Hoang (Phoenix) Program', Discussion Paper, p.1, in: Moyar, *Phoenix,* p.236
[26] Zalin Grant, *Facing the Phoenix: The CIA and the Political Defeat of the United States in Vietnam* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1991), pp.295-296

extension of a CORDS directive from October 1969, issued in order to cover Colby and Phoenix in the event that the story of an American artillery officer, who had refused to become a Phoenix adviser on the grounds of moral ambiguity, resulted in an over-exaggerated perception of the programme as an assassination operation. [27] As the foregoing factors illustrate, acts of assassination were neither preferable, practical, sanctioned nor common.

Another accusation faced by Phoenix was that it was a torture programme. In 1971, Kenneth Barton Osborn, who served with MI groups in Vietnam during 1967/68, stood before a congressional committee and declared that every suspect who he had observed being interrogated under Phoenix had 'died and the majority were either tortured to death or things like thrown from a helicopter'.[28] Mark Moyar, who spent considerable time and effort researching Osborn, found that his claims were not supported by any evidence, were refuted by his co-workers in Vietnam, and were disproven by a 'wealth of concrete information' provided by the 'U.S. Army Intelligence Command'.[29] Although torture did occur within Phoenix, individuals such as Osborn exaggerated the frequency and brutality of these acts. Many American advisers, such as Bruce Lawlor and Rex Wilson, have explained that they permitted limited torture, such as slapping, pushing and 'putting a VC's head in a pail of water', because it often elicited accurate intelligence.[30] More brutal forms of torture happened on occasion, although these were regularly either halted by American advisers, or only permitted in instances of great urgency.[31] Furthermore, torture was one of many approaches for extracting intelligence. Other methods included treating suspects respectfully to elicit cooperation, or threatening to spread rumours that they were already assisting the GVN, which would result in VC retaliation against their families.[32] Whenever specific intelligence was not required immediately, or the individual being interrogated was likely to withstand torture, the carrot was generally preferred over the stick as it was more

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[27] Prados, *Lost Crusader,* p.221

[28] House Committee on Government Operations, *U.S. Assistance Programs in Vietnam*, 92nd Congress, 1st Session, pp.321, 357, cited in: Moyar, *Phoenix*, pp.93-94

[29] Moyar, *Phoenix*, pp.94-96

[30] Bruce Lawlor, interview, in: Moyar, *Phoenix*, p.102, see also: Rex Wilson, interview, cited in: Moyar, *Phoenix,* p.102

[31] Ibid (both interviews)

[32] Moyar, *Phoenix*, pp.104-105

effective. Therefore, while torture occurred within Phoenix, this was one of many methods used, and was neither as brutal nor as commonplace as some have contested.

Corruption allegations were also prominent. In addition to Waldie's assertion that the programme constituted a potential tool for corruption, Donald Luce, an agricultural volunteer who spent twelve years in Vietnam, argued that Phoenix staff could extort funds from anyone by threatening to target them as a member of the VCI.[33] Additionally, Douglas Valentine asserts that the *an tri* system was a 'boondoggle for corrupt GVN officials', whereby innocent civilians were held perpetually if they failed to pay for their release.[34] As was the case in most GVN agencies/institutions, corruption was a key issue for Phoenix, particularly in MR IV and provinces such as Bien Hoa. However, not only was corruption less common or severe than its detractors argue(d), but American/GVN officials had persistently reduced its presence since Phoenix's inception. In regards to mass arrests and extorting funds, James R. Ward, the CIA's regional officer for the Mekong Delta during 1967/68, stated the following:

> 'If someone took money here and there for a favour or took something small from a VC family, that would be considered normal. On the other hand, if someone harassed or arrested innocent civilians and forced them to pay large bribes, that would be considered corrupt, and people would get upset about it. As a result, the latter occurred much less often'.[35]

Moyar has also refuted the argument that Phoenix prompted mass arrests, revealing that the number of civilian prisoners, including both *an tri* and regular inmates, actually declined from '45,000 to 41,000' between 1967 and 1970.[36]

Regarding other forms of corruption, Major Hein, the district chief for Long Thanh District, Bien Hoa, until January 1971, was proven in late-1969 to have both accommodated the VCI, and been involved in the local black market.[37] Additionally, in MR IV, a serious issue in

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[33] Committee on Government Operations, *U.S. Assistance Programs in Vietnam: Twenty-Second Report*, 92nd Congress, 2nd Session, 17 October 1972, DPC/2390217001, TTUVVA, p.99

[34] Valentine, Phoenix, p.220

[35] James R. Ward, interview, in: Moyar, *Phoenix,* p.222

[36] Moyar, *Phoenix,* p.207

[37] Norbert F. Kockler to DEPCORDS, 'Critical Problem Areas, Long Thanh District, Bien Hoa Province', 15 February 1970, RG 472, General Records/Box 9/5642348, NARA/II, p.1

1971 was that VCI suspects were bribing personnel to secure their release. However, there is little evidence to suggest that these examples were the result of Phoenix, as similar situations could, and did, take place prior to the formation of ICEX. Rather, corruption pertaining to counter-VCI operations improved during Phoenix's reign: 113 district and province chiefs were removed from their position for corruption in 1968 alone; there was seldom corruption in Hau Nghia from mid-1970 onwards, which contrasts greatly with earlier years; and corrupt district chiefs in Bien Hoa and Long Khanh were reassigned in 1970 and 1971 respectively.[38] Corruption persisted as a major issue within Phoenix until the programme's end, yet the foregoing factors illuminate that it was not ubiquitous, was often exaggerated, and declined between 1968 and 1971. Consequently, it is more likely that Phoenix did not cause or exacerbate corruption, but rather made strides in attempting to overcome it.

Therefore, allegations of unethical activity within, or as a result of, Phoenix, were frequently exaggerated. It is also worth noting that while certain unethical actions, such as torture and corruption, did occur within the programme, these acts took place in every facet of the Vietnam War, particularly the conventional military side. This begs the question, why was Phoenix targeted by such accusations? Interestingly, the answer would partly appear to be the programme's title. Andradé explains that when 'Phoenix was ICEX few in the [American] press paid it much attention', as the original title was far less eye-catching.[39] Andradé is supported by Moyar, who asserts that 'Phoenix became a magnet for criticism on account of its name'.[40] Not only did the term *Phoenix* garner mass-media attention, but the inherent renown of such a staple of western culture and Greek mythology gave rise to inaccurate connotations of mystery and ethical ambiguity; resultantly, as Gerald DeGroot highlights, the negative moral implications of Phoenix were

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[38] NSSM One, section/page 16-3, see also: 'Comments on DEPCORDS Agenda', 27 May 1971, pp.1-2, attached to: Gerald T. Bartlett to DEPCORDS, TRAC, 'Comments on Subjects Raised at DEPCORDS Conference', 27 May 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 21/5642452, NARA/II; Kockler to DEPCORDS, 'Long Thanh District', 15 February 1970, RG 472/General Records/Box 9/5642348, NARA/II, p.1; Fact Sheet: Long Khanh Province, 18 September 1971, p.1, attached to: Chas. S. Johnson Jr., 'Ten Poorest Districts', 18 September 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 30/5642520, NARA/II

[39] Andradé, *Ashes to Ashes,* p.72

[40] Mark Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism in Vietnam*. Rev. ed. (University of Nebraska, 2007), p.392

exaggerated for the sake of tabloids and 'sensationalist rumour'.[41] In addition to its name, the rise of inaccurate allegations against Phoenix can also be attributed to controversy surrounding the PRU, as the reputation they developed from activities that predominately occurred prior to ICEX had not faded despite their actions becoming far less brutal since 1967. Notwithstanding that most accusations brought against Phoenix were exaggerated, their impact on American commitment to counter-VCI activity was substantial, particularly from July 1971 onwards.

During the second half of 1971, the process of Vietnamising the Phoenix Programme was accelerated exponentially. This was first signalled by the Phung Hoang Re-examination (PHREEX) Study. PHREEX was completed by the Phoenix Directorate in draft form on 20 July 1971, and focused on establishing a plan for 'more effective action against the VCI'. However, unlike previous reports and studies, PHREEX openly stated that withdrawal of American support would 'take place at a faster rate than previously planned'. While it did focus on correcting issues within the programme, this centred on ensuring there was a viable counter-VCI programme in place by the time American participation had been fully withdrawn.[42] Therefore, the study's primary purpose would appear not to be that of furthering the progress of counter-VCI activity, but facilitating American withdrawal. The proposals made in PHREEX were revised twice by American officials and advisers before being approved by Bunker and Abrams in late-September, who then implemented it as official US policy.[43] Several more adjustments were made by the GVN, who also then implemented the policy, on 2 December.[44]

There were a number of principle policies that resulted from PHREEX. Over a transitional period, the NP would assume national-level authority and overall responsibility for the programme, while the PSB would assume the primary intelligence role.[45] American

[41] DeGroot, *A Noble Cause?*, p.217

[42] Directorate, PHREEX I, (circa 20 July 1971), 5642521, NARA/II, pp.1-2

[43] John S. Tilton to all Phung Hoang Coordinators, 'Phung Hoang Monthly Newsletter', 15 October 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 25/5642488, NARA/II, p.3

[44] Office of the Secretary of the Joint Staff, '1971 Command History', Volume I, undated (circa early/mid-1970s), BHC/168300010822/part six, TTUVVA, URL: **https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/reports/images.php?img=/images/1683/168300010822.pdf**, section/pages VII-23-24

[45] Phoenix Directorate, extracts from PHREEX III, undated (circa late-September 1971), RG 472/General Records/Box 30/5642521, NARA/II, p.11

advisers would be withdrawn as the police assumed more responsibilities, and the Phoenix Directorate would eventually be closed. [46] DIOCCs/PIOCCs would eventually be consolidated within 'Police Operations Centres' (POCs), which would run the police's day-to-day counter-VCI activity. [47] Phung Hoang staff would now be provided by the NP as 'organic personnel', rather than being attached to the programme from participating agencies. [48] Although many of these policies were not dissimilar from the plans drawn up earlier in the year, PHREEX, and examples of Vietnamisation already occurring during mid/late-1971, emphasised that the process would now be fast-tracked.

As late as July 1971, the total removal of American advisers from Phoenix was not scheduled to take place until mid-1973. However, by late-1971, the vast majority were now expected to have departed by mid-1972. [49] Under the new policy, from January 1972 onwards, advisers would be withdrawn from provinces in sequence of most-to-least effective/efficient counter-VCI operation: measured by a number of criteria, including 'Results of DIOCC/PIOCC inspections', 'Status of NP Control' and 'Compliance with PSC procedures', advisers in the provinces deemed most successful were to be removed first, thus embodying the aforementioned flawed approach to Vietnamising Phoenix which both Egger and Tilton had advocated. [50] Additionally from January 1972 onwards, advisers would be phased out through 'normal attrition', in which they were not replaced once their tour ended. [51] The deadline for most American advisers to have withdrawn from the programme was set as June 1972.

The negative implications of accelerating the withdrawal of American support from Phoenix were evident. Neither the NP nor the PSB, despite increased recruitment, were

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[46] Secretary of the Joint Staff, '1971 Command History', Volume I, (circa early/mid-1970s), 168300010822/part six, TTUVVA, section/pages VII-23-24, see also: Directorate, extracts, (circa late-September 1971, 5642521, NARA/II, p.13

[47] Secretary of the Joint Staff, '1971 Command History', section/page VII-23

[48] Trần Thiện Khiêm to the Commanding Generals, et al, 'Implementation of Phung Hoang', 2 December 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 30/5642521, NARA/II, p.1

[49] Chas. S. Johnson Jr., memorandum for record, 'Phung Hoang Phase Down Planning Conferences', 20 December 1971, RG 472/General Records/1967-1972/Box 30/5642521, NARA/II, p.1

[50] Chas S. Johnson Jr. to DEPCORDS, 'Phase Down of PHUNG HOANG Advisory Structure', 11 November 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 30/5642521, NARA/II, pp.1-2

[51] Fred C. Weyand to Deputies for CORDS, MR I, II, III, IV, 'Considerations in the Phase Over of the Phung Hoang Program to the GVN During Calender Year 72', 24 December 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 30/5642521, NARA/II, pp.2-3

fully prepared to assume responsibility for Phoenix by mid-1972. Only 621 South Vietnamese case officers graduated from the Central Phung Hoang Training School between April and September 1971, almost 25 percent less than expected.[52] On 8 November, province Phoenix advisers in MR III were instructed to provide a list of PSB staff who were considered determined and efficient. With the exception of Long Khanh, every documented reply listed between zero and seven individuals, illuminating the limited number of capable PSB personnel.[53]

Despite obvious inadequacies within the PSB and NP, the United States was determined to accelerate Phoenix's Vietnamisation. During a conference on 18 December for phasing down the programme, it was affirmed that the US government 'wanted CORDS out of PHUNG HOANG'. Tilton followed this remark by stating that 'the guidance was clear'.[54] This desire to withdraw from the programme was also evidenced in a memorandum from Bien Hoa's PSA, Clifford C. Nunn Jr., to the Deputy for CORDS in MR III. Bien Hoa was listed as one of the first provinces to be entirely vietnamised, but Nunn proposed that American advisers be retained until mid-1972 because the 'coordination of Vietnamese activities' could otherwise be jeopardised.[55] The response Nunn received asserted that the 'mission of any advisor is to work himself out of a job as quickly and efficiently as possible', followed by the assertion that Bien Hoa displayed the 'capability' to maintain an effective counter-VCI programme without advisers.[56] This suggests that assessing the *appearance* of NP/PSB proficiency in operating the programme unaided was preferred over assessing their actual ability to do so, likely because the former option assisted in justifying the withdrawal of advisers.

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[52] Tilton to Coordinators, 'Newsletter', 15 October 1971, 5642488, NARA/II, p.6, see also: John S. Tilton to all Phung Hoang Coordinators, 'Phung Hoang Monthly Report for April 1971', 8 May 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 25/5642488, NARA/II, p.3

[53] Chas S. Johnson to Province Phung Hoang Coordinators, MR III, 'Selection of Outstanding Phung Hoang Personnel', 8 November 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 27/5642500, NARA/II, p.1, (replies to this document are located within the same folder)

[54] Johnson Jr. for the record, 'Conferences', 20 December 1971, 5642521, NARA/II, p.1

[55] Clifford C. Nunn Jr. to DEPCORDS, TRAC, 'Phung Hoang Phase-Out', 16 December 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 30/5642521, NARA/II, p.1

[56] Chas S. Johnson Jr. to Clifford C. Nunn Jr., 'Phung Hoang Phase-Out', 29 December 1971, RG 472/General Records/Box 30/5642521, NARA/II, p.1

The US government's determination to accelerate Vietnamisation from mid-1971 onwards, in spite of the obvious potential ramifications, illustrates that jumping ship was prioritised over truly ensuring the GVN could direct counter-VCI activity unassisted. The question therefore arises, why jump ship? A key factor to note is the morality debate. Phoenix's depiction in the media as a murder campaign had increasingly influenced the American approach towards it since 1969, as is evidenced by earlier attempts to rebrand the programme as being both more Vietnamese and ethical. Mounting accusations against Phoenix had, by mid-1971, greatly exacerbated the US government's desire to rid itself of this controversy, and so withdrawal was hastened.[57] One other crucial factor was the overall American war effort. US support for Phoenix had always been subject to the broader Vietnam War, and during 1971, 'growing pressure from antiwar dissidents', opposition in Congress, and the failure of Lam Son 719, drove the Nixon administration towards making heaving concessions to North Vietnam.[58] This weakening resolve was spurred by the administration's awareness of the upcoming United States presidential election in November 1972, as Nixon sought to secure his second term through achieving a 'speedy end to American involvement in Vietnam'.[59] This undoubtedly influenced the pace at which American support was withdrawn from Phoenix, as not only was the programme controversial, it also represented one part of the much larger US commitment which Nixon intended to remove from Vietnam as soon as possible. Therefore, while it was abundantly clear that hastily withdrawing American support from Phoenix would have disastrous implications during 1972, ethical controversies, coupled with developments pertaining to the broader Vietnam War, took precedence over achieving victory in the village war.

To conclude, by December 1971, the Phoenix Programme was heading for defeat in a war which it had been winning since 1968. The communist shadow apparatus was by this time a shell of its former self, having suffered for years at the hands of pacification and allied military supremacy. Although still operational and influential, the VCI had, across much of the rural countryside, lost its once-dominant position at the village level, and was now

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[57] Andradé, *Ashes to Ashes*, pp.229-230
[58] Davidson, *Vietnam at War*, p.665
[59] Ruane, *War and Revolution*, pp.93-94

struggling to collect taxes, recruit cadre or even obtain food. Phoenix had played a vital role in dismembering the VCI across large swaths of the rural countryside, and consistent improvement since its inception had by 1971 made the programme highly effective. However, progress over the past four years had run parallel with growing controversy, the impact of which was that the American government becoming decreasingly willing to provide support and subsequently accelerated the Vietnamisation of Phoenix. This hastened withdrawal of American participation was not due to ethical controversies alone, but equally, if not predominately, because of developments pertaining to the broader war effort. As America cried out for an end to the conflict which had dragged its prestige through the dirt, and as Nixon sought a second term in office, the entire U.S. war effort was consequently being withdrawn at an increasing pace. As will be illustrated throughout the final chapter, the Vietnamisation of the Phoenix Programme would ultimately render counter-VCI activity largely ineffective; thus the process of Vietnamisation and American withdrawal, which had in 1968/69 given Phoenix the capability to succeed, now ushered in its downfall.

Chapter Six

The Eagle Flies Home: Counter-VCI Activity During and After American Departure, 1972-75

At the onset of January 1972, the Phoenix/Phung Hoang Programme underwent the largest transitional phase of its history. Phoenix, referring specifically to the American side of the programme, was being withdrawn and closed down, while the Vietnamese aspect, Phung Hoang, began the process of becoming an arm of the National Police. Advisers were now reduced at a more significant rate than ever before, and the DGNP, renamed 'National Police Command' in March 1971, was expected to assume almost all logistical, financial, administrative and manpower responsibilities by year's end. As a result of this accelerated American withdrawal, and the ramifications which followed, 1972 would mark the decline of the programme. However, counter-VCI activity did not plummet immediately following January, but rather continued to progress throughout the year's opening months before succumbing exponentially to a myriad of factors from April/May onwards.

Throughout the early months of 1972, Phoenix continued to demonstrate proficiency in waging war against the shadow apparatus. In January, the percentage of neutralised cadre who had functioned at the district level or higher was 26.3, a small yet noteworthy increase over the 1970 annual figure of 24.8.[1] Effective intelligence collection and specific targeting in Vinh Long had brought about several key neutralisations during February, notably the province's Security Section Chief.[2] During March, 'Several "Blitz" operations' launched in Quang Tin Province elicited results in the form of numerous neutralisations and a drastic decrease in all forms of terror activity, particularly abductions, which dropped by 75

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[1] Office of the Chief of Staff, 'Army Activities Report: SE Asia', 29 March 1972, VAC/F031700280614, TTUVVA, URL: **http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?5N7sm.Y6rp2qO7eitvRbJV8Vdu18lSDGw3zF31QI@mgndbKZdUtasn9NehWbjBk1RmZog3vLRpm1ks.MjJjCYGuD1NuRFshJWbH0fDJNrtg/F031700280614.pdf**, p.42

[2] Wilbur Wilson, 'Military Region Overview', in: Thomas M. Tarpley, 'CORDS/DRAC Military Region Overview for the Month Ending 29 February 1972', 14 March 1972, GHC/1070101004, TTUVVA, URL: **http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?0@QVQSNr0X249TmM7Skp2yoabe44H0SpuNXTRUZfAAfqZGSUhyWp31UiJ0OSYprwR8yjXw@IesjnxCskAwKE1wu8mgwqj@yKxMASh9boThs/1070101004.pdf**, p.5

percent. [3] Trương Như Tảng, Minister of Justice for the Provisional Revolutionary Government from June 1969 until he fled the country after the fall of Saigon, stated that the shadow apparatus in Hau Nghia had by 1972 been 'virtually eliminated'.[4] Even if we assume that Tảng's recount is exaggerated, which is likely given the common North Vietnamese/VC inclination towards labelling the programme as terrifying yet immoral, American accounts from the era confirm that the programme's activities were at the very least inflicting heavy casualties upon the province's shadow apparatus.[5]

Although the programme remained impactful, and continued to progress, during early-1972, dependence on American advisory support lingered. During 1972, PSA Bartlett asserted that while Hau Nghia's centres were neutralising a high number of cadre and experiencing improved 'reaction to intelligence', he constantly had to hound his subordinates and Vietnamese counterparts. [6] Furthermore, progress in the province's districts of Duc Hue and Trang Bang was only occurring because the advisers there were directing the programme entirely by themselves. [7] Moreover, the police were still not prepared to shoulder the burdens of total responsibility. For example, during March, the NP in Vinh Long were not only unwilling to assume management of the programme, but had also failed to even provide office supplies, which led to staff purchasing such provisions with American funds. [8] Additionally, many centres still suffered from poor cooperation and/or specific targeting capabilities, and American advisers were often the only hope for improving or resolving these shortcomings.

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[3] John Gunther Dean, 'Military Region Overview', in: Frederick J. Kroesen, 'MR 1 Field Overview (RCS-MACCORDS-32. 01) for March 1972', 14 April 1972, GHC/1070102001, TTUVVA, URL: **http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?C.Z86RfjHqR2rqxuieI0KDQ7SWsJW8WkVUtW3iIPksBYY6xnsQK0AM@PrMthSVjK80Cms hmE2KNG6HfyB4ecWnyF88RZbTwjljr3.XAO9F0/1070102001.pdf**, p.5

[4] Truong Nhu Tang, et al, *A Vietcong Memoir: An Inside Account of the Vietnam War and its Aftermath* (Vintage Books, 1986), pp.201-202

[5] Department of the Army, Office of the Adjutant General, Debriefing Report: LTC Gerald R. Bartlett, 15 December 1972, SFC/22850101002, TTUVVA, URL: **http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?pzKn718AIMvmAmBRqqOE7m0jZFdQGi.ry9vYZ96VDatufxh.cioI6my0BF@mOwnukJ9fq WPPSMdNydn4sfJcXVwN.NMg3@wIfHZoB1R6YLU/22850101002.pdf**, p.17

[6] Debriefing Report, 15 December 1972, 22850101002, TTUVVA, p.17

[7] Bergerud, *Dynamics of Defeat*, p.312

[8] Douglas K. Watson, 'Province Report': Vinh Long Province during March, 3 April 1972, GHC/1070104006, TTUVVA, URL: **http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?JxXQdBuXr.kvQnvAodsEORSbD1yyfE3t8RkRie3HxSL.qy831FUM2x42LNr9EX4aA.AOKq WBhIUAZI8vSt4TxG2PqQY0cDVWk1a7Jz.RESA/1070104006.pdf**, pp.2-3

Because American participation continued to be vital, rapidly decreasing advisory manpower ran parallel with decreasing effectiveness and efficiency. As Andradé astutely states, 'Just as anti-infrastructure operations were taking a real toll on the VCI, American advisers were on their way home'.[9] The necessity of American support was also evinced by Ahern, stating that the 'initiative came, as usual, from the American side'.[10] Conversely, while Prados agrees advisers were fundamental to achieving success, he argues that the VCI, and by extension Phoenix, became redundant once North Vietnam obtained the ability to 'prosecute the conflict at the conventional level'.[11] That is, as conventional warfare re-emerged during 1972, largely due to reducing American troop numbers, and as the VCI were a key aspect of *guerrilla* warfare in South Vietnam, the shadow apparatus was no longer crucial to the communist war effort. Prados' argument, however, overlooks the important role VCI cadre played in supporting conventional warfare, as was best demonstrated during the Easter Offensive.

Launched on 30 March 1972, the Easter Offensive was a nation-wide invasion of South Vietnam by approximately 125,000 North Vietnamese troops.[12] Initially, large sections of the country were overrun, but communist forces began to lose momentum in May. By the offensive's conclusion in October, the ARVN, decisively aided by U.S. airpower, had retaken much of the territory lost earlier in the year.[13] The VCI had been of paramount importance to PAVN efforts during the offensive, providing food, shelter, resources and fresh recruits.[14] Furthermore, in areas where it continued to operate capably, the shadow apparatus was far more efficient than the GVN apparatus, and so PAVN forces could be better supported by local resources than the ARVN could.[15] Counter-VCI activity was prominent during the offensive, particularly in the old imperial capital, Hue, where during April, Phoenix assisted in apprehending numerous covert cadre.[16] The need for a counter-

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[9] Andradé, *Ashes to* Ashes, p.229

[10] Ahern, *Vietnam Declassified*, p.348

[11] Prados, *Hidden History*, p.220

[12] DeGroot, *A Noble Cause?*, pp.227-229

[13] Ibid, pp.227-229

[14] Letter for Phung Hoang Committee, MR III, (circa late-1972), 5642565, NARA/II, pp.1-2

[15] Conference held in MR III on 7 November 1972, undated (circa late-1972/early-1973), RG 472/ General Records/Box 33/5642565, NARA/II, p.2

[16] Robert W. P. Condon, written interview, 3 May 1973, in: M. B. Powe and E. E. Wilson, *The Evolution of American Military Intelligence* (United States Army Military Centre and School, 1973), p.117

VCI programme did not diminish after the offensive either: during October/November, defeated communist forces placed five-seven person teams in villages and hamlets so as to 'impress that the communists are existing everywhere'.[17]

The Easter Offensive demonstrated the continued importance of combating the shadow apparatus. However, it also highlighted the disastrous implications of American withdrawal. While US airpower proved decisive in staving off ARVN military catastrophe, it had been unable to prevent the PAVN from pouring into South Vietnam and severely inhibiting, if not destroying, pacification efforts throughout much of the country.[18] The VCI re-emerged in many of these areas, as the weakened GVN position allowed for cadre to re-enter previously hazardous villages.[19] Pacification could only succeed if protected from enemy assaults for an extended period of time; even temporary military occupation in an area posed the threat of reversing years of work to establish GVN authority. Between 1969 and early-1972, overwhelming American military forces had deterred Hanoi from launching large-scale conventional incursions into South Vietnam; Tet had revealed the consequences of such actions. However, with less than 100,000 US troops remaining by early-1972, North Vietnamese policy shifted once again from insurgency and guerrilla warfare to the main-battle approach. Thus, while the Easter Offensive was technically a military victory for the allies, it marked the end of an era where pacification could be implemented with minimal risk of interruption by conventional communist armies.

While the offensive had been ongoing, the process of Vietnamising Phoenix/Phung Hoang was largely completed. On 12 April, Decree #210/TT/SL was issued, officially handing 'primary responsibility' for Phung Hoang over to the National Police. [20] All PIOCCs/DIOCCs/CIOCCs were now merged into Police Operations Centres, although participating agencies would continue to staff these centres until there were sufficient

[17] Letter for PH committee, (circa late-1972), 5642565, NARA/II, p.1

[18] DeGroot, *A Noble Cause?*, p.229

[19] Ahern, *Vietnam Declassified*, p.352

[20] Deputy Secretary of the General Staff, 'Army Activities Report: SE Asia', 26 April 1972, VAC/F031700280784, TTUVVA, URL: **http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?RS1PLInD33ow.6.43hPpsMXcbQT6gdc8r0HtISIhR.vMG6AnBYlJXo71bLt1SBn9OiKB3Z.af ePAC383rt9KXFJY@hfZPsWy8@6RMjrag1U/F031700280784.pdf,** p.43

numbers of qualified NP officers to meet manpower requirements.[21] By early-May, as Americans withdrew rapidly, chaos ensued within the advisory effort's organisational structure, with regional headquarters struggling to keep track of the locations of advisers.[22] On 12 June, the National Police assumed financial responsibility for the programme, and in July, the CIA ceased funding for PRUs, which were soon after placed within the PSB.[23]

By mid-1972, almost all American advisers had been withdrawn from the programme, thus removing the *Phoenix* from Phoenix/Phung Hoang.[24] Between 21 and 22 July, Colonel Nguyen Van Giau, Assistant National Police Commander, expressed his eagerness towards the National Police's 'new role as the responsible agency for Phung Hoang'.[25] However, in spite of such enthusiasm, this transition had immediate and damaging consequences. Shortly after CIA funding was halted, PRUs were displaying a lack of concern for provincial and national-level authority, and their integration into the police was being stalled by mutual aversion between 'PRU personnel and the uniformed police'.[26] During August, GVN staff being transferred to POCs were in most instances untrained, substandard, and/or insufficient in number.[27] Furthermore, many civilian Vietnamese interpreters and translators working as part of Phung Hoang were on wages higher than the National Police could afford. Consequently, most were 'unwilling to accept future employment with the National Police'.[28] Additionally, the withdrawal of advisers had already negatively impacted some provinces, notably Hau Nghia: On 16 September, Bartlett sent an exceptionally stern letter to Province Chief/Sector Commander Lieutenant-Colonel Doan

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[21] C.M. Hurtt to Deputy for CORDS, MR III, 'Personnel Status of POCs and POs MR 3', 11 September 1972, RG 472/General Records/Box 33/5642565, NARA/II, p.1

[22] Ralph H. Cruikshank to Phung Hoang Directorate, et al, 'Rooster of US PHUNG HOANG Personnel, CORDS MR III', 9 May 1972, RG 472/General Records/Box 33/5642566, NARA/II, p.1

[23] Ahern, *Vietnam Declassified*, p.353

[24] Andradé, *Ashes to* Ashes, p.250

[25] John S. Tilton to DEPCORDS/MACV, 'Summary of Significant Activities', 27 July 1972, in: CORDS, 'Summary of Significant Activities', undated (circa, July/August 1972), VAC/F015800300380, TTUVVA, URL: **http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?Mmwdl9o5jEoFXe5gB0yCC3k3ljB5zPvNyP0V@AMXsLaGWf0gBbZX4qp6IJRtuYXVEwpM41sm@JCqKex178AtNeL.V8TPIDt9O9dHPF3IdVk/F015800300380.pdf**, p.2

[26] Ahern, *Vietnam Declassified*, pp.353-354

[27] Hurtt to Deputy, MR III 'POCs and POs', 11 September 1972, 5642565, NARA/II, p.1

[28] Robert L. Walkinshaw to COMUSMACV, 'Phase Out of US Military Phung Hoang Advisory Programme', 11 September 1972, RG 472/General Records/Box 33/5642565, NARA/II, p.3

Cong Hau, expressing considerable unhappiness over the condition the POC's Situation Section had fallen into. During this letter, Bartlett bluntly asserted that:

'All GVN officials should work very hard to eliminate the VCI because if we do not eliminate them, they will eliminate us. <u>Yet, after two months, the situation Section of the Police Operations Centre has not neutralized a single enemy cadre.</u>'[29]

Although residual American advisers were aware of these issues, they lacked the authority they once had to impose change and effectuate improvements; as Ahern highlights, the 'continuing shrinkage of U.S. participation in Phung Hoang reduced American leverage proportionately'.[30] Advisers such as Bartlett could do little more than threaten to withdraw any advisers remaining within their province, which would only exacerbate the situation. Moreover, lacking authority also prevented American officials from instigating or maintaining cooperation as they once had; the aforementioned PRU/NP mutual aversion is indicative of this.

The American advisory effort within Phung Hoang concluded in December 1972. All remaining vehicles and office equipment provided by the US were handed over to the National Police.[31] An ostensible ceasefire between all combatants of the Vietnam War came into effect on 28 January 1973, and the last American troops departed from South Vietnam in March of the same year.[32] Also during March, the American role within pacification concluded with the departure of CORDS.[33]Although some American assistance remained available, such as financial aid afforded to South Vietnam and a small CIA contingent, pacification was now essentially a Vietnamese endeavour.[34] Counter-VCI activity had been restricted since January, as the ceasefire came into effect, but was revitalised in May.[35] However, from this point onwards, Phung Hoang took on a more covert role than it had in the past. This had also resulted from the ceasefire, as while both

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[29] Gerald T. Bartlett to Doan Cong Hau, 16 September 1972, RG 472/General Records/Box 33/5642566, NARA/II, pp.1-2

[30] Ahern, *Vietnam Declassified*, p.353

[31] Andradé, *Ashes to* Ashes, p.250, see also: Robert L. Walkinshaw to II A-Plus, et al, 'Disposition of Phung Hoang Material Assets', 6 October 1972, RG 472/General Records/Box 33/5642566, NARA/II Park, p.1

[32] James E. Westheider, *The Vietnam War* (Greenwood Press, 2007), p.27

[33] Andradé, *Ashes to* Ashes, p.247

[34] Ibid, p.247

[35] Telegram, 'Phoenix goes Underground', 16 May 1973, 1973SAIGON08618_b, WikiLeaks, URL: **https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1973SAIGON08618_b.html**

warring sides continued to clash throughout this period of nominal peace, Phung Hoang remained under the radar to avoid accusations of violating the truce.[36]

Documentary evidence about counter-VCI activity becomes scarce in the period after 1972, but available information is sufficient to highlight that VCI defeat was not achieved between 1973 and April 1975. The PRU continued to disregard authority during 1973, particularly in January when they sold the uniforms recently issued to them by the police, as they claimed wearing them would invite 'VC attack'.[37] By late-1973, the programme was still attempting to combat the VCI, while the VCI was itself attempting to rebuild and expand. However, the programme was by this time, as referred to by National Security Council Staff member William L. Stearman, a 'low-key' operation. [38] Furthermore, as a US report from 12 October reveals, efforts to combat the VCI were limited by the capabilities of South Vietnamese forces. That is, if security forces within a province were insufficient to defend pacification efforts, the province or district chief(s) would likely hesitated to dislodge the local communist apparatus, as such actions would invite retaliatory strikes by the Vietcong. [39] As the ARVN were unable to defend the entirety of South Vietnam's countryside, accommodations by district or province chiefs in numerous areas would have undoubtedly been made for the VCI. Throughout 1974, the VC were occasionally able to revive their infrastructure in some locations, notably in Bac Lieu Province: during the second half of the year, Vietcong forces captured several GVN outposts within the province, triggering a surge in support for the shadow government throughout local villages and hamlets. This boost in support was immediately used to increase recruitment, revealing the speed at which the VCI could re-establish control in an area where GVN authority was enfeebled.[40]

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[36] Saigon Embassy to Secretary of State, 'Ceasefire and Political SITREP, MR 1', 14 June 1973, DAC/24993301001, TTUVVA, URL:
https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/reports/images.php?img=/images/2499/24993301001.pdf
[37] Ahern, *Vietnam Declassified*, p.353
[38] Memorandum from William Stearman to Henry Kissinger 2 July 1973, *FRUS: Vietnam, 1969-197,* Volume X, (United States Government Printing Office, 2010), p.368
[39] National Intelligence Estimate, 'Short Term Prospects for Vietnam', 12 October 1973, in: David F. Gordon; National Intelligence Council, *Estimative products on Vietnam, 1948-1975* (National Intelligence Council, 2005), p.612
[40] Report on the Vietcong Infrastructure, undated (circa 1974/1975), DPC/2311003026, TTUVVA, URL:
http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-

Although the shadow government did not recover in most parts of South Vietnam between 1973 and 1974, and actually declined in many instances as a result of GVN regular and local forces, pacification and counter-VCI activity failed to deliver a knockout blow.[41] This was because such a blow required complete destabilisation of the shadow infrastructure, a task the GVN were unable to achieve before their ultimate downfall. As is revealed by the programme's decline during mid/late-1972 as a result of American withdrawal, the progress of counter-VCI activity from 1973 onwards was at best impaired, if not reversed. Had pacification and counter-VCI activities damaged the shadow apparatus more rapidly during the last two years of the GVN's existence, and had more time been available to implement pacification before the nation's abrupt end, perhaps the village war could have been won. However, such increases in available time and programme efficiency would only have occurred if American military forces and support for Phung Hoang had been withdrawn later than they were. Therefore, Phoenix/Phung Hoang's failure to defeat the VCI can be attributed both to the programme's inherent flaw of dependence on American support, and developments pertaining to the broader Vietnam War which ensured American participation was withdrawn prior to the village war being won. Such developments included the United States' increasing desire to depart from Vietnam, anti-war demonstrations, Operation Lam Son 719, opposition in Congress, and Nixon's determination to win a second term in office.

Between December 1974 and April 1975, Hanoi launched its final, decisive offensives against South Vietnam. Beginning with Phuoc Long in December, PAVN forces soon spread across the entire country, conquering city after city. The United States, entrenched in internal political debates and reeling from the Watergate scandal, was unwilling to re-enter the infamous quagmire. The ARVN, overstretched, undersupplied, and no longer supported by American troops or airpower, crumbled at the hands of superior communist forces. By 27 April, the PAVN were at the gates of Saigon, with the city's defenders ill-prepared, outgunned and outmanned.[42] The rapidity of North Vietnamese victory in 1975 had done that which neither Tet nor the Easter Offensive had, rendered counter-VCI activity

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HRFYYC2vO9JbuGEZkr72yeatLQWeIuHuzLDqubY/2311003026.pdf
[41] Moyar, Phoenix, pp.271-278
[42] David L. Anderson, *The Vietnam War*, pp.114-116

redundant. With entire sections of South Vietnam falling in mere weeks, the communist infrastructure, and by extension counter-VCI activity, were less strategically valuable than in previous and more indecisive offensives. This reveals that even had village war been won, this was only one aspect of ensuring South Vietnam's survival, as the ARVN would need to be capable of withstanding Northern assaults for long enough that the invading forces were required to draw upon local resources, which would have been more difficult to acquire without the VCI. The history of the Phung Hoang Programme came to its conclusion on 30 April, the day Saigon fell to Hanoi.

Conclusion

In order to accurately evaluate the successes and limitations of the Phoenix/Phung Hoang Programme, one must consider the objectives and goals envisioned during its inception. As an integral component of the security side of pacification, the programme was established with the primary charge of dismantling the communist shadow apparatus. To achieve this, its objectives centred on orchestrating a more concerted, efficient and capable attack against the VCI than had previously existed. These objectives consisted of instigating cooperation and coordination between participants, expanding intelligence and operational capabilities, improving the motivation and morale of personnel, and implementing universal regulations, strategies and procedures. Therefore, the programme's success must be measured through its impact on the development of counter-VCI activity, and its effectiveness against the shadow government.

Substantial advancements in the development of counter-VCI activity were made between 1968 and 1971. Although progress was initially stagnant, with neither Vietnamese nor American officials placing much emphasis on the 'other war', the Tet Offensive's political aftermath resulted in a rapid increase in the manpower and resources available to Phoenix, thereby accelerating the pace of progress. The introduction of training schools in 1968-69 marked the beginning of a process to increase the quality of Vietnamese and American personnel, which had by the early 1970s elicited a more competent intelligence and operations community. Amendments to the *an tri* system had resulted in the establishment of basic operating procedures, as well as increased reporting accuracy and sentencing speeds. The establishment of DIOCCs and PIOCCS across South Vietnam, in culmination with the rapports built between American advisers and GVN officials, significantly improved cooperation and coordination between Vietnamese agencies. Increased cooperation where little had previously existed, in addition to the organisational structure of DIOCCs/PIOCCs, greatly streamlined intelligence collection, collation and dissemination. By attaching Provincial Recognisance Units to Phoenix centres and honing their skills and training towards counter-VCI activity, an already effective force became truly devastating. Even less capable reaction units, such as the National Police Field Force, progressed to become a viable option during many operations. Success in these areas was

best illustrated through the rise of specific targeting. That is, between 1967 and 1971, the strategy's implementation transitioned from being largely unviable to occurring frequently, due to the gradual rise in quality and efficiency of programme personnel and participating agencies.

There are a number of methods for measuring the programme's effectiveness against the VCI. One such method is neutralisation data, as 81,740 cadre were reportedly neutralised between 1968 and 1972. This could be argued as indicative of success. However, neutralisation statistics were inaccurate, with both underestimations and overestimations undermining the reliability of these figures. Furthermore, it is difficult to identify the proportion of neutralisations attributable to Phoenix. There are, however, more reliable methods of assessment. Through looking at the attention which Hanoi and the VC paid to Phoenix, it becomes clear that the programme was considered a major threat: radio broadcasts denouncing Phoenix, the creation of clandestine forces to counter its activities, and assassination attempts against GVN officials involved in the programme, were all illustrative of the North and VC's concern.

The extent to which Phoenix damaged the VCI is also revealed through the North Vietnamese and VC sources presented during this thesis, notably the second congress of South Vietnam's communist party, captured documents, and statements by cadre and communist officials. These sources highlighted that the programme was highly effective, with the shadow government in many parts of the country either severely impaired or completely decimated. Additionally, individual VCI reports illuminate that cadre morale had been weakened by the programme's activities and proficiency. Source material from the American side offers a similar perspective, illustrating that the programme gradually became more effective, particularly during 1970-71. In 1970, most officials, notably Egger, saw the Cambodian Campaign as having demonstrated the programme's capabilities given the correct environment and circumstances. This is largely accurate, as the combined actions of Phoenix and allied military forces devastated the apparatus in many of the provinces bordering Cambodia. The damage inflicted upon the VCI increased during 1971, as was shown through reduced communist taxation, declining cadre manpower, and the COSVN's efforts to conceal its activities. While the programme's success against the higher echelons was limited, the neutralisation of numerous low-level cadre and sufficient

numbers of mid-level cadre destabilised the shadow government's command structure, impairing the higher echelon's ability to project authority at the village and hamlet level.

Therefore, contrary to the assertions of Valentine and McCoy, the Phoenix Programme was by 1971 very effective, having destabilised the infrastructure in many parts of the country and inflicted heavy casualties on cadre manpower. Although Prados contends that Phoenix's failure to neutralise many high-level cadre is indicative of poor performance, not only were cadre at higher echelons inherently fewer in number, but the damage inflicted at the lower and middle echelons prevented the flow of high-level direction and authority. Mark Moyar's argument that the programme is owed little credit for the shadow government's impairment during the late-1960s and early-1970s is unsubstantiated. Many of the achievements of counter-VCI units and territorial forces stemmed from training and increased personnel quality resulting from Phoenix's efforts to strengthen these assets.

While it is clear that Phoenix displayed consistent growth in efficiency and effectiveness between 1968 and 1972, there were limitations. Improvements to the *an tri* system failed to entirely resolve many of its shortcomings. Leniency and negligence continued to be prominent. Processing and sentencing speeds were still slow in some parts of the country. Furthermore, in many instances, sentencing guidelines were not adhered to, and so numerous VCI received sentences shorter than the prescribed length. Specific targeting was used in every province by 1972, but varied from area to area in how regularly it was employed. In Phoenix centres where specific targeting was only taking place on some occasions, such as Hau Nghia, this was generally due to a lack of qualified staff and an insufficient intelligence collection. Cooperation remained poor in some areas of the country, particularly between military and police personnel, which hindered intelligence sharing and the viability of joint operations. The establishment of training schools provided the programme with skilled staff and advisers, but in 1971 far fewer case officers graduated than expected, which was made more problematic by the increased need for officers as Americans withdrew from the programme. Finally, the National Police's assumption of authority over Phoenix centres was lethargic, particularly at the district level, with this process still incomplete by 1972. Consequently, competition between military and police officials persisted in those centres not yet under NP direction. While the foregoing examples highlight that there were limitations to the programme's successes, Phoenix's

history demonstrates that issues could be resolved given enough time and attention. Had American participation continued for longer, it is likely that additional ameliorations would have occurred.

Another key aspect in any assessment of Phoenix is the morality debate. Allegations against the programme were often exaggerated or unsupported by tangible evidence. While acts of corruption, torture, assassination and mass arrests occurred, they were neither as common as some scholars and American officials have stated, nor were they approved by leading authorities within South Vietnam, the United States or the Phoenix directorate. To the contrary, these authorities placed considerable emphasis on reducing unethical acts, not only as means to improve efficiency, but also to prevent controversies from arising. Contrary to Valentine's argument, Phoenix was neither envisioned to be, nor ever was, a terror campaign tasked with inciting fear. Rather the programme functioned as part of the larger pacification effort, which aimed to win the hearts and minds of the peasantry, not through terror but by offering wealth, security and political stability. Moreover, despite McCoy's contentions, the programme meets very few of the criteria for a murder campaign, as non-lethal neutralisations were preferred to, and more common than, lethal neutralisations. Phoenix's hearings were fuelled by false evidence and claims, such as those presented by Kenneth Barton Osborn. As Andradé, Moyar and Degroot have highlighted, the allegations specifically against Phoenix were less the result of actual moral violations, which occurred to some extent across every facet of the Vietnam War, than they were the result of the programme's ostensibly symbolic title. Furthermore, although units such as the PRU also drew controversy, the programme's name gave rise to negative connotations which American media outlets and politicians latched onto.

By assessing the source material and scholarly debates surrounding this subject, one can establish that the Phoenix Programme was an effective and capable force through which a genuinely devastating campaign against the communist shadow apparatus was mounted. Furthermore, ethical violations committed by Phoenix personnel and its participating agencies were at worst similar to those perpetrated in every other aspect of the Vietnam War, and in most instances measures were taken to curb or reduce the frequency of immoral acts within the programme. Nevertheless, while Phoenix achieved many successes, it ultimately failed in its foremost task of dismantling the VCI. This failure did not

stem from ineffectiveness or a lack of progress. Rather, it can be attributed both to dependence on American participation, a flaw which was never resolved, and the external factors which ensured that American participation in Phoenix and the wider conflict would be withdrawn before the village war could be won.

Dependence on American participation persisted throughout Phoenix's history, and much of the programme's progress was owed to American involvement. Rapports between American advisers and GVN officials were frequently the only thing maintaining the fragile cooperation built between participating Vietnamese agencies, and advisory pressure aided greatly in boosting personnel motivation. Advisers also offered much needed expertise in intelligence collection, operational procedures, reaction-force tactics, and administrative organisation. Furthermore these advisers often directed Phoenix's activities themselves, and had in some instances become the de-facto leaders of the DIOCC or PIOCC they were assigned to. In addition to advisory support, American funding was imperative. The drastic rise in financial support afforded to Phoenix following the Tet Offensive had allowed the programme to expand rapidly, notably in terms of facilities, reward programmes and manpower. Between 1967 and mid-1972, the bulk of Phoenix/Phung Hoang's financial requirements were met by the United States, as the South Vietnamese government was incapable of bearing such costs. This financial dependence had not ceased by June 1972, and GVN sources, specifically the National Police, lacked the capacity to provide the same level of funding which had been available under American sponsorship. The US was equally vital at the national level, with individuals such as Komer and Colby having influenced the programme greatly and pushed the GVN to participate fully. One example of this influence was Colby's input in the formation of annual pacification plans between 1968 and 1971. American support also came in the form of resources, such as vehicles and building materials.

Because Phoenix functioned as part of the village war, which was itself one facet in a much wider conflict, support for the programme depended on the circumstances of the United States' commitment to the Vietnam War as a whole. The backing afforded to Phoenix had been minimal in 1967 for this reason, as officials such as Westmoreland focused primarily on the military side of the conflict. The nature of America's commitment altered greatly in 1968, with the Tet Offensive's aftermath shifting US policy towards de-escalation and

gradual withdrawal. This shift initially favoured Phoenix, as the programme's potential as a means to expand GVN authority and improve rural security, and by extension justify American troop withdrawals, made it a valuable asset. Subsequently, American involvement in the programme increased drastically, particularly following Nixon's entrance into the White House. Thereafter, counter-VCI activity became a tool of Vietnamisation. However, the long term implications of this policy shift proved disastrous, as the introduction of de-escalation, withdrawal and Vietnamisation set in motion a process which eventually saw American participation torn from the programme, leaving behind a weakened and stagnant Phung Hoang. Because the American effort in Vietnam as whole was from 1968 onwards geared towards eventual departure, there was only limited time available before support for Phoenix would face the chopping block. Between 1969 and early-1971, the gradual Vietnamisation of Phoenix had few negative effects, except for some small reductions in some manpower and funding. However, this process was greatly accelerated during late-1971.

This acceleration stemmed from a number of factors. One was the political situation within the United States. As the Vietnam War progressed, pressure from the American domestic front mounted, with anti-war demonstrations demanding an end to US involvement in the conflict. The rising tide of anti-war sentiment placed considerable strain on the Nixon administration, which had come into office on the back of a promise to end America's involvement in the war. This was further exacerbated by the 1972 presidential election, as Nixon sought a hastened end to the Vietnam War, or at least to America's role in it, in order to appease protesters and ensure a second term in office. Another factor was the improved security situation in South Vietnam by 1971. During this period, VC/PAVN forces were on the back foot, and the decreasing scale of military engagements, as well as declining communist presence at the village level, sufficed to justify an accelerated American withdrawal. Finally, the controversy surrounding Phoenix, although largely unfounded, weakened US resolve to the extent that withdrawal from the programme was prioritised over achieving victory in the village war. Accusations hurled against the programme's activities, in conjunction with the already substantial discontent held by large sections of the American public towards the overall war effort, were decisive in accelerating Vietnamisation within Phoenix. As counter-VCI activity grew increasingly controversial in

the US, it added further fuel to the anti-war movement. Consequently, the United States government sought to distance itself from Phoenix.

Between late-1971 and early-1973, the American role within counter-VCI activity was hastily withdrawn. By late-1972, the removal of American advisers, funding, logistical support, resources and national-level guidance had severely impaired the programme's effectiveness and capabilities. Efficiency plummeted, cooperation withered, and the National Police buckled under enormous financial burdens. The withdrawal of American troops also negatively impacted Phoenix, as once again pacification efforts were exposed to large-scale communist assaults. Therefore, the events of 1972 demonstrated that South Vietnam, alone, could not maintain the level of success achieved by Phoenix during the era of American participation. The Phoenix could not fly without an Eagle's wings. The programme's history after 1972 remains for the most part a mystery, yet it is clear that counter-VCI activity declined in prominence and, crucially, failed to defeat the VCI; thus the village war was never won. While it is impossible to identify whether the programme would have defeated the shadow apparatus if the United States had not pulled out from pacification as early as it did, it can be firmly asserted that the prospect of victory would have improved had the US continued its support for a longer period of time.

Overall, the Phoenix/Phung Hoang Programme was highly effective, having devastated communist authority throughout large sections of South Vietnam. Nevertheless, it ultimately failed to defeat the shadow apparatus. The programme constituted a revolutionary approach in counter-VCI activity, as no comparable effort had previously been made on a nationwide scale to unify the agencies and programmes engaged in this struggle. During the short period of substantial American support, between late-1968 and late-1971, Phoenix progressed gradually into a highly proficient structure, ensuring that counter-VCI activity was improved, augmented and coordinated to the extent that communist cadre at the lower and middle echelons suffered greatly. However, an inherent flaw existed at the heart of the programme: dependence on American support limited the window of opportunity available for Phoenix to achieve its primary goal, and subsequently the VCI was never entirely dismantled. Defeating the apparatus would undoubtedly have required the United States to provide considerable resources to the programme for longer than it did. Disinterest in the village war prior to 1968, and the drive to disengage from

Vietnam following the Tet Offensive, precluded such participation from beginning earlier or concluding later. Nevertheless, even had the United States and GVN succeeded in the village war, this alone would not have altered the course of South Vietnam's history, as the nation's downfall ultimately came about as a result of its inability to stand militarily without American troops or airpower. South Vietnam's survival required victory in both the political and military side of the war, neither of which were achieved. Phoenix, alone, could not have prevented the fall of Saigon.

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