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THE CHIEU HOI PROGRAM

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Background, Evaluation and Recommendations

Background: The Chieu Hoi Program appeals to those who have served, or are serving, in the Viet Cong to return to their rightful allegiance to the RVN. It is not, strictly speaking, a surrender program or a defector program, since it does not call on enemy to surrender to save their lives, or to betray their comrades. This may seem a small semantic point, but it is of critical psychological significance, both to those who may "come in" and to those who actually administer the program. (See Annex A, Part I for the purposes of such a program.)

The Chieu Hoi program in Vietnam was formally proclaimed on 17 April 1963, by President Diem after nearly eight years of persuasion. That it was accepted, by the officialdom, at least to the extent that few, if any, returnees under the program have been physically mistreated or killed, is in itself a major success. The program has brought in substantial numbers of Viet Cong-Communists of many years training and standing, some of whom have given information of value. (Annex B and Part III, D, of Annex A). All in all, the accomplishments of the first year of the Chieu Hoi program were substantial (see Annex A. Parts II and III) even though some were lost (the Nha Be National Center is now a military headquarters, and several of the provincial installations have been converted to other uses) and the exploitation of the others was far below that which might reasonably have been expected.

The positive accomplishments of the program, although a pitifully small part of what they might have been, are nevertheless substantial and have caused the Viet Cong and the DRV serious concern, as evidenced by captured documents and interrogations of prisoners of war as well as returnees. Currently, over 17000 returnees are listed. This figure undoubtedly includes many who were not actively serving the Viet Cong at the time of their return - so, probably, do most casualty figures. (There is no report available here on weapons brought in. This figure, and aspect, is of minor significance.) Authenticated cases of re-defection are few, although too many have been recaptured by the Viet Cong, and too few have escaped afterwards. (Some have, bringing back heads and weapons.) While many of these returnees have not been as well rehabilitated, or as well exploited, as they might have been, the vast majority can testify to the advantages of "returning" rather than being captured 1/ or "fighting it out."

1/ The reports of prisoners maltreated, tortured, or executed by GVN forces refer to those captured in action, or arrested. There seem to be amazingly few cases of mistreatment of returnees.

SOURCE Note: This paper has been prepared for the Office of Vietnam Affairs, A.I.D., by the Consultant who was principal advisor to the Chieu Hoi program from December 1962 through March 1964. It is based primarily on his personal knowledge, augmented to a limited degree by official sources. Although incomplete, it is nevertheless substantially accurate factually, as well as in current evaluation.

Some provinces have made and are making excellent efforts to retrain and rehabilitate returnees, teaching them improved agricultural and artisanal practices, even to returning them to their homes with improved propagation materials, both seeds and cuttings. One returnee, a "Dr" Sau, who represented the program abroad, was reported in February 1965 as having an excellent propaganda effect in Saigon itself.

The deficiencies of the program almost defy enumeration. Some of the more glaring ones, as they existed in 1963, are listed in Part IV of Annex A. Efforts were made throughout 1964 (as they were in 1963) and are still continuing, to correct these deficiencies, and a significant amount has been accomplished.

Among these accomplishments:

1. Closer liaison and coordination among American agencies. A interagency committee, established about August 1964, has given substantial added emphasis to the program on the American side.
2. A nation-wide Chieu Hoi organization, headed by a minister of cabinet rank (once chief of information under Bao Dai!) has been established, with a responsible officer assigned to each province as of 15 February 65).
3. An US-GVN Release Agreement, signed in July 1964 provided 57 million piastres (almost US \$300,000) for the field expenses of caring for and rehabilitating returnees, as well as for propaganda and other costs.
4. The GVN approved a CY 65 budget of 86 million piastres (over US\$ 1 million) for personnel and administrative costs. (It is not known here to what extent this has been implemented, or overlaps funding provided in the 1964 Release Agreement.) For the first time this makes adequate allowance for administrative costs. It also includes provision for compensation of cadre, and for equipping special agit-prop teams of Chieu Hoi returnees. (See Annex C for one accomplishment from this inter-governmental, inter-agency venture.)
5. Vocational training courses have been started in several provincial centers, as well as in the new national center (from which the Chieu Hoi program was reportedly evicted in February 1965).
6. Those Chieu Hoi returnees (Quy Chanh, in Vietnamese) who have been exploited for psychological purposes have generally met with very favorable reception.

Evaluation

1. The Chieu Hoi program has proven its potential value, in this as in other countries. Further, it has established a sound base on which a really effective program can be built. This base should be used and built upon, rather than abandoned.

2. The principal impediments to success have been Vietnamese apathy and insistence upon following accepted practices. Vietnamese unwillingness to forgive enemies has not been the principal stumbling block; there are as many or more who are willing, even anxious, to secure their support and allegiance as there are who are determined upon punishment. The majority of those who can influence the program really do not care; they are unable to comprehend that the attitudes or actions of "a few peasants" can have any significant effect. (That, incidentally, is one of the principal reasons why we are losing.)

3. Almost equally important in the lack of conspicuous success has been American unwillingness really to appreciate the potential of the program, and to act unconventionally to give it the effective support which the Vietnamese have withheld. This failure has been more due to lack of perception than to unwillingness to act.

4. A major stumbling block, since the fall of President Diem, has been the political instability. Real success, real acceptance of such a program traditionally requires, especially in Asia, that it be guaranteed by an individual of stature, usually a chief of state, or one who, although acting in his name, is of at least equal stature in the eyes of the people concerned — the potential returnees, their families and friends.

5. Finally, it must be said that Chieu Hoi has been much like the weather with many people talking about it and too few acting. This has been compounded by the apparent, but unexpressed, feeling (especially on the Vietnamese side) that the important part of the mission has been accomplished when an individual has surrendered. Americans do emphasize, more than the Vietnamese, the desirability of intelligence exploitation, but even this value has been relatively little realized and extracted. The number of man-days work on the program so far, performed by Americans is incredibly low.

Recommendations

1. That the Chieu Hoi Program be continued, and given major US emphasis.

2. That a US Joint Chieu Hoi Task Force be established in Vietnam. See Annex D for details.