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MEMORANDUM FOR : The Ambassador

FROM : Robert H. Marlin, SAIRD Associate Director of Economic Planning and Policy and Embassy Counselor of Economic Affairs

SUBJECT : Proposed Herbicide Missions - Quang Duc and Phu Dien Provinces

1. After considerable soul-searching and serious consideration, I feel compelled to recommend in both of the proposals for crop destruction in Quang Duc and Phu Dien Provinces.

2. Final authority must remain with the 303 Committee. The basic issue involves control over herbicide operations. Both proposals ask for blanket authority to destroy crops in large portions of the two provinces, including about 40 percent of Quang Duc and 30 percent of Phu Dien. They would authorize local authorities to decide on specific targets as long as one year in the future, without further consultation by the 303 Committee. In that case, the political, military, economic, psychological and pacification situation in the two provinces and in Vietnam as a whole would change radically. The factors which prompted the committee to authorize crop destruction originally may no longer exist when the actual herbicide operations are to take place. Although there may be no friendly crops, villages or pacification programs today, no one can be certain that the situation will be even a few months from now. In our view, if the committee concurred in these two proposals, it would in effect be abdication of its responsibility for making policy recommendations concerning crop destruction activity. We believe that final authority over crop destruction activity must remain within the 303 Committee.

3. The current transitional situation makes any type of committee review even more important. The "area clearance" provisions of the Herbicide Policy Review do appear to support the idea of wide grants of authority for crop destruction programs. Nevertheless, whatever may have been the merits of the area clearance policy when first adopted, the entire

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political, economic and military outlook has in the meantime changed drastically. The situation in Vietnam in November 1970 could in turn be greatly different from that of today. Especially in this period of flux in all aspects of the war in Vietnam and of our Vietnam policy, it is essential that decisions over herbicide projects continue to be made by the 203 Committee, so that all relevant political, military and economic considerations will be taken into account.

4. Effectiveness of crop destruction activity is irrelevant to issue of operational control. The necessity and usefulness of crop destruction activity in general is not such as to call for overriding of the committee's authority. Although crop destruction operations may have had some success, we suspect their effectiveness in hampering enemy military operations may have been exaggerated. The Report of the Herbicide Policy Review Committee, itself, on page 17 pointed out, "Herbicide crop destruction is only one aspect of the efforts to deny foodstuffs to the VC/NVA. The enemy relies on commercial purchases, imports, taxation, requisition and confiscation for some 90 percent of his food requirements". Advocates of these crop destruction proposals have cited intelligence reports of starving VC/NVA defectors. There can be many causes of this condition, and there is no convincing evidence of any direct, or even indirect, relationship between undernourished enemy soldiers and crop destruction activity. In any case, this subject is not immediately relevant to the current issue of operational control over herbicide missions.

5. Adverse effects of herbicides in wider context. Indeed, the effectiveness of crop destruction activity may well be counterbalanced by its adverse effects. Crop destruction from the air is an inherently indiscriminate weapon. There are Montagnard tribes scattered all over the areas in question. Although some of the food to be destroyed is no doubt being grown for NVA troops, some is being eaten by people who are quite helplessly in enemy territory. In addition, our knowledge of the effects of herbicides on human health is far from adequate. A recent study by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare reported that unrestricted use of pesticides, at least, could have "disastrous effects". It declared also that there is a "tremendous need for ecological research on a large scale".

6. Proposed reduction in area appreciated, but question of control remains. The original Phu Non proposal has not been changed, but for Quang Duc, the area proposed for blanket authority for crop destruction

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