MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

CONFIDENTIAL

July 11, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: Dean Moor

THROUGH: John Holdridge

SUBJECT: Status of the U.S. Reporting System on Pacification in South Vietnam

Mel Laird has sent you a memorandum (Tab A) assessing the critique of our pacification reporting system in Vietnam by a former field officer there (Tab B). Mel concludes that the critique has some validity, but that there have been many improvements in problem areas since the author of the critique left Vietnam in July 1968.

Among Mel's points are the following:

-- Currently, reporting tries to draw on a variety of both data and subjective sources, in an attempt to provide a better cross-check.

-- MACV recognizes that the HES system is still overly subjective and is in the process of revising it to allow for verification by an "independent" observer.

-- The criticism of the enemy body count is not valid, because many U.S. studies have shown it to be a good overall estimate of enemy losses.

-- An effort is made to screen out bias by monitoring all reports. Some are checked against evaluations of other, similar programs in Vietnam.

-- It should be recognized that quantitative reports cannot be relied on completely, and must be compared with other information before "meaningful" conclusions are drawn.
Mel also submits a detailed response by the Joint Staff who assessed the critique in response to his request. This assessment amounts to a short history of the Phoenix program, intended to show its gradual improvement in operation and reporting format, particularly since mid-1968. Among the major points are:

-- The Phoenix program was not fully organized until near the end of 1968. Full operation has resulted in a considerable improvement, with an increasing number of enemy infrastructure members (VCI) eliminated.

-- The criticism concerning the firm identification of VCI was applicable in 1968, but procedures have been tightened in 1969 and real improvements made.

-- The anti-VCI program, about which most of the criticism revolved, is only one part of the pacification picture. If judged overall, the pacification program is making significant progress. This is likely to continue.

NSC Staff Comment: Despite the claims of improvement, the reporting system overall appears to be only slightly more reliable now than it was in late 1967, following adoption of the HES system. Most of the author's criticisms are well taken (as DOD admits). Unfortunately, little can really be done about them, since they necessarily involve subjective assessments, and situations in which the U.S. is dependent for any data or conclusions on the opinions of the Vietnamese who often tell us what they think we would like to hear.