

## **Business, propaganda and terror**

*The Phoenix Program: America's Use of Terror in Vietnam*

Douglas Valentine

1990

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**Dr. T. P. Wilkinson**

**D**ouglas Valentine explained the purpose or at least the subject of his study of the Vietnam Phoenix Program as 'terror and its role in political warfare'. He is generous, like most Americans — even critical ones — when he writes:

'It will show how, as successive American governments sink deeper and deeper into the vortex of covert operations — ostensibly to combat terrorism and Communist insurgencies — the American people gradually lose touch with the democratic ideals that once defined their national self-concept. This book asks what happens when Phoenix comes home to roost?'<sup>1</sup>

Valentine is generous to his readers since he ascribes to them ideals which while attributed to the US regime and naively held by many, in fact bear little resemblance to the political reality in the USA. Valentine is not ironic. His book is written with sincerity to readers in a frustrating appeal to transcend their sentimental illusions and look honestly at the real political praxis of their country in a war it just happened to

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<sup>1</sup> Valentine alludes here to Malcolm X's notorious reaction to the assassination of John F. Kennedy: '[President Kennedy] never foresaw that the chickens would come home to roost so soon, Being an old farm boy myself, chickens coming home to roost never did make me sad; they always made me glad.'

This is by no means hyperbole since meanwhile a wide range of historical literature asserts that Kennedy's assassination was integrally related to the policies pursued by the US regime in Vietnam.

lose. In this sense it is also a polemic — although no way polemical in style — to learn the right lessons from the US invasion, occupation and genocidal war against the people of Vietnam.

*The Phoenix Program* was first published twenty four years ago, fourteen years after the Congressional investigations that exposed and swiftly washed it from public memory. After successful attempts to bury this book, e.g. Morley Safer's attack in the *New York Times*,<sup>2</sup> this essential study of US political warfare has been reissued as an e-book. One can only hope that the reign of terror in and by the US that expanded vastly with the election of Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan will finally reach the consciousness of the white 'Left' and those whose sentimental attachment to the American creation myth is sincere enough to rebel against the two-plus centuries of imperial hypocrisy which engendered this bureaucratic terror system under the Stars and Stripes.

To place the Phoenix Program in its proper historical perspective, however, it is necessary to grasp the genealogy of the regime responsible for its inception. This regime predates Vietnam. This author has reiterated elsewhere that it is scarcely possible to understand the role of political warfare in the US without returning to 1776, to the moral turpitude of the Founding Fathers.<sup>3</sup> These leading lights of the nascent American empire began their journey to Vietnam when they declared independence from the British Empire in order to preserve that peculiar institution known as chattel slavery that the mother country was being forced to abolish in the rest of its colonies.

Although the official history claims that this separation was intended to secure liberty in the face of British tyranny,

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<sup>2</sup> Morley Safer, 'Body Count was their most important product', *New York Times*, 21 October 1990. Morley Safer was probably one of the most well known TV correspondents in US homes during the war. It was not what he said about Valentine's book that counted but the fact that this 'face' of the Vietnam War said anything at all.

<sup>3</sup> T. P. Wilkinson, *inter alia* 'The Moral Equivalence of the Founding Fathers', Review of Gerald Horne's *The Counter-Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States of America*, in this issue of *Lobster*.

the fact was that the liberty to be secured was deliberately withheld from the majority of the country's inhabitants, Native Americans, African slaves, and European indentured servants (white slaves). The liberties enumerated in the unilateral declaration of independence and later in the Constitution were — and were generally recognised as such at the time — those deemed consonant with free trade for the Anglo-American settler elite, both merchants in the North and *latifundista* in the South.

The fundamental structures created by the Constitution were in fact designed to prevent majority rule and protect the political terror apparatus maintained by the elite for that purpose: for example, the system of indirect election, the gerrymandering of electoral districts to favour slaveholders and the maintenance of the infamous slave patrols. Much confusion and consternation arises as to why the Second Amendment to the US Constitution proclaimed, 'a well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.' In fact, the amendment was justified by James Madison to prevent the federal government from passing laws to restrict the slave patrols raised by the governments of the Southern states to maintain slavery.<sup>4</sup> Under the banner of 'Indian Removal' — an early form of what would later be called 'pacification' — the Anglo-American settler elite proceeded to seize the entire North American continent. This later became known *inter alia* as the Monroe Doctrine and Manifest Destiny. In fact this was nothing less than the annihilation and/or enslavement of non-whites from sea to shining sea. Largely oblivious to this constant commercial adventure, wave after wave of European immigrants were deliberately co-opted while serving as arrow or cannon fodder until, with the annexation of California, only British Canada and Mexico south of the Rio Bravo had not been conquered. The wide Pacific was opened to further invasion and exploitation.

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<sup>4</sup> See also Thom Hartmann, 'The Second Amendment was ratified to preserve slavery', *Truth Out*, 15 January 2013 at <<http://truth-out.org/news/item/13890-the-second-amendment-was-ratified-to-preserve-slavery>>.

However it was not until the war against Spain garnished Cuba, the Philippines and sundry islands in the Caribbean and Pacific basins that official American discourse began to admit imperial designs. Apparently this admission was only deemed necessary once the US began to seize territory from other European powers.

One of the consequences of this century of North American conquest was the physical and ideological isolation of the emergent 'white' settler majority paired with the extermination of the indigenous and chronic incarceration of the terrorised ex-slave African-Americans. In the prelude to the next campaign of Anglo-American conquest, World War I, the still Southern-dominated regime in Washington, together with the merchant-industrial class in New York and Boston, launched what might be called the greatest international corporate advertising campaign since the hegemony of the medieval Roman Catholic Church — presaging today's so-called 'social media': the Committee on Public Information, a.k.a. the Creel Committee.

Although primarily instituted to propagate the US regime's aims for entering the European Great War of 1914, the central message, both at home and abroad, was the fabrication of American history as the fulfilment of Enlightenment humanism. Applying the combined resources of the US industrial and banking cartels, every available mass medium was harnessed to create and disseminate stories about the virtues of the US and the 'American way of life' — of course, without Native Americans, Blacks, Chinese or Mexicans and other non-whites. This enormously successful campaign not only persuaded ordinary Americans to work, fight and die for the speculative advantage of the US war machine, it also succeeded in creating the myths which have deceived the peoples of European colonial empires into believing that the US was indeed exceptional, a potential ally in the fight for freedom and dignity being waged from Ireland to India.

Without acknowledgement of this campaign and its combination of propaganda and terror (the 'five minute men', 'the war to make the world safe for democracy', the Palmer

raids, and the Klan)<sup>5</sup>, no-one can begin to comprehend how something like Phoenix could arise. Nor is it possible to grasp how, despite revelations in the Church and Pike committees of the 1970s,<sup>6</sup> this vicious system not only remained in tact but has been growing exponentially, largely unknown and unchecked to this day.

### **Propaganda and terror: 'the business of America is business'<sup>7</sup>**

The greatest mystery — or better said, mystification — to be overcome is the apparent contradiction between America's proclaimed principles and the intensity of its covert operations practices. Philip Agee once called the CIA, 'capitalism's invisible army'. He recalled that one of his first tasks as a junior CIA officer had been to conduct background checks on Venezuelan applicants for jobs at the local subsidiary of a major US oil company.<sup>8</sup> In fact, his conclusion after quitting the 'Company' was that capitalism could never be maintained without an

5 The 'five minute men' were propagandists trained by the Committee of Public Information to be able to render a seemingly spontaneous speech 'within 5 minutes' at any venue in order to agitate for US war aims.

Woodrow Wilson pronounced that the US was entering WWI for this purpose.

Wilson's attorney general A. Mitchell Palmer led the sweeping police raids against political dissidents between 1919-1920.

The Ku Klux Klan was re-founded in Georgia in 1915 and became a notorious paramilitary terror organisation directed mainly but not exclusively against African-Americans. With membership reaching to the highest realms of US government, it operated throughout the South and Midwest with impunity for most of the 20th century. It was glorified in D.W. Griffith's 1915 film, *Birth of a Nation*, based upon the novel *The Clansman*. Although occasionally members have been charged and convicted of serious crimes, the organisation has never been outlawed.

6 Two special committees of the US Congress, named after their respective chairmen, Sen. Frank Church and Rep. Otis Pike. These select committees investigated the illegal activities of the CIA, FBI, and NSA between 1975 and 1976.

7 Calvin Coolidge, 'After all, the chief business of the American people is business...' Reported in a speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, 25 January 1925.

8 Philip Agee, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary*, (Harmondsworth, Penguin: 1975) p. 103. See also John Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies* (1984).

extensive military and secret police force to suppress opposition to it.

Officially, US national security means the protection of its territory, fundamental 'freedoms' and the interests of the US abroad, including certain allies who are deemed necessary for the aforementioned protection. In practice US national security means guaranteeing the conditions suitable for what US President Calvin Coolidge defined as 'America's business'. Smedley Butler put it more bluntly when describing his career as a member of the US Marine Corps.<sup>9</sup> The CIA and other covert action agencies (over which the CIA has ultimate control) were founded to protect Business. In the US the collective term for opposition to US Business was 'communism'.<sup>10</sup> However this translation of the 'Cold War' slogans does not suffice to explain what the US, in particular the CIA, was doing in Vietnam.

The answer has to be sought in the Korean War — one of the best-concealed periods of US history.<sup>11</sup> When the US conquered Japan in 1945, the military government under General Douglas MacArthur set about rebuilding Japan as an industrial bridgehead by which the US could pursue its domination of the Asia-Pacific basin, including China. When China was 'lost' to the People's Liberation Army under Mao Tse Tung in 1949, the US lost its business bases on the mainland, concentrated in Shanghai. Their fascist ally Chiang Kai-shek was forced to retreat to Formosa. At the same time Korea, which had become a Japanese colony, with US blessing, at the beginning of the 20th century, was dominated in the South by

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9 Smedley Butler, *War is a Racket* (1935). See <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smedley\\_Butler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smedley_Butler)>.

10 On 11 September 1973 it was still communism but since 1989 and ultimately since 11 September 2001, the threat has been renamed 'global terrorism'.

11 Prior to the Korean War (1950- ), it was the OSS, with its strong links to the so-called 'China Lobby', that managed US covert action in Asia. For a detailed discussion of this major US war, to date only subject to a ceasefire from 1953, see Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, Vol. 1 (1981), Vol. II (1992). For a summary of its relevance to US imperial history see T. P. Wilkinson, 'Is a New Cold War Coming?', in this issue of *Lobster*.

US Forces (USMGK).<sup>12</sup> The US regime had invaded in 1945 in order to preserve it as a strategic resource for the reconstruction of Japan under its suzerainty.

Korea and Vietnam were considered strategic — for Business — because they could both deliver the cheap food (rice) and mineral resources needed to feed Japan's workers and factories. The defeat of Japan only meant that the US assumed the burden of sustaining the Japanese industrial economy. It immediately aligned itself with the feudal landlord class of both countries as a means of continuing the flow of resources to Japan. In Korea, this provoked massive peasant uprisings, which the USMGK helped to subdue together with fascist gangs under the tutelage of American mission-educated Syngman Rhee.

However, both Korea and Vietnam had developed strong independence movements, aimed at ending colonialism and battle-hardened in their resistance to the Japanese. These independence movements were committed to land reform for the masses of peasantry, and were concentrated in the southern parts of each country. Both the Korean and Vietnamese independence movements enjoyed mass support, for economic as well as nationalist motives. Essentially the Korean War was fought by the US to retain the status quo ante while the armies under Kim Il-Sung fought to reunite an independent Korea.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike in Korea however — where war scuttled diplomatic agreement to unite Korea under one national government — the Vietnamese under Ho Chi Minh had succeeded in forcing France to withdraw and agree to formal reunification processes in Geneva. The US had forced the French government to negotiate by ending its support for the colonial regime. Hence it was diplomatically obliged to proceed with the plans for elections agreed in the Geneva Accords.

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<sup>12</sup> USMGK = US Military Government in Korea. Established ostensibly to disarm the Japanese forces, the military government became the backbone of the Rhee regime.

<sup>13</sup> Food and natural resources, especially Korea's enormous tungsten reserves, were both deemed essential for US heavy industry, whether in Japan or at home.

Nonetheless Vietnam had been an important food supplier to Japan that the US needed to control along with Korea. To maintain this flow of cheap resources from Indochina, it was necessary — as in Korea — to protect the post-colonial elite in Saigon and enforce the land and tax system upon which the hyper-exploitation was based. In that sense Vietnam was no different in the eyes of the US regime than any of its Latin American banana republics.

Unlike Latin America, however, the Vietnamese had a strong and heavily armed resistance with mass support, successful in battle against the Japanese and the French. The challenge of US policy was to suppress the resistance in the South and establish a client regime capable of policing the extractive structures installed by the French and Japanese.

The Geneva Accords constituted a major obstacle since, unlike Korea, where the US was able to prevent international agreement on reunification, the US was legally compelled to permit Vietnamese independence. Hence the necessity of covert operations — and enter the CIA. In order to create, stabilise and defend a permanent partition of the country, it was necessary to establish a regime in the South that would be permanently recognised as a separate country. As in Korea the US was faced with an elite compromised by its collaboration with the French and Japanese. Covert action, the deployment of 'advisors', was intended to select and have elected people who would enjoy some credibility as nationalists while complying with the needs of US Asia-Pacific corporate strategy. It is necessary here to recall that the American public was told that South Vietnam was a democracy threatened by 'communism' because this was the general term used in the West to define any and all opposition to Western capital. It was impossible to tell the American public that the US was defending the 'American Way of Life' in Southeast Asia: a) because endemic US racism did not admit Asians to be

entitled to the same life as 'white' Americans;<sup>14</sup> and b) unlike Europe and Latin America, there were no widely held assumptions justifying US control over Asian territory.<sup>15</sup> In fact until the faked Tonkin Gulf incident, Vietnam remained largely invisible within the United States.

As resistance to the perpetuation of the neo-colonial regime in Saigon increased, along with diplomatic demands from Hanoi for compliance with the Geneva Accords, 'advisory' activity was intensified. Meanwhile it had become clear that were elections to be held the government in Hanoi would win and the Saigon regime would collapse. Despite this certainty and the intelligence showing that there was absolutely no popular support for the elite in Saigon, the decision was made to have Ngô Đình Diem deposed in favour of a regime whose leader might be more marketable. The assassination of Diem in 1963 only aggravated the crisis on the ground.<sup>16</sup> The US President, Lyndon Johnson, ordered pacification of the peasantry to be intensified. That was and remains the CIA's remit. However, it became clear that the CIA could not do the job alone. Any day the Hanoi government could decide to oppose Southern (US) procrastination and rightly claim that the Geneva Accords had been breached. In order to pre-empt Hanoi's actions, Johnson used the Tonkin Gulf incident in August 1964 as a pretext to invade the South and bomb the North.

As Nelson Brickham, the architect of the Phoenix Program, explained in an interview with Valentine, the US military was brought in to 'shield' the covert pacification campaign until a stable government could be established permanently with the capacity to rigorously police the

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14 Any doubt as to this can be removed by examining the history of US laws against Asians as well as the notorious mass internment of Japanese-American citizens from 1942 until 1946. This was not only a landmark for 'white' abuse of Asians but generated windfall profits for those who acquired the homes and property of the incarcerated.

15 The US had finally recognised Philippines independence in 1946 and made Hawaii a state in 1959, ending formal colonial rule in the Pacific — for the most part.

16 Diem was assassinated on 2 November 1963. John F. Kennedy was assassinated on 22 November 1963, leaving Lyndon Johnson with the consequences.

peasantry. Brickham's preferred instrument was the Special Branch of the National Police.<sup>17</sup> The CIA had been in Vietnam since 1954. But now time was of the essence.

## **From ashes to ashes**

**V**alentine's autopsy of the Vietnamese Phoenix Program starts by recognising that the CIA was (and is) central to US corporate policy. In Vietnam the Company developed ICEX, a.k.a. Phoenix, as an intensive corporate management and public relations campaign for what is called 'nation-building'.<sup>18</sup> The overall aim of 'nation-building' is to destroy the indigenous and nationalist infrastructure — what Americans would consider to be their state and local government together with all the social organisations and networks by which communities are organised and maintained — and replace it with one that operates on the same basis as US corporate infrastructure. In a sense the CIA was developing what would later be called — also euphemistically — private-public

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17 Special Branch is the name given to the political police/intelligence branch of the regular (usually) civilian force in Britain, the Empire and Commonwealth countries. First organised as the Special Irish Branch of the Metropolitan Police in 1883, this form became the model for British secret police units throughout the empire, e.g. in India (1888) and Palestine (1937), the security branch in South Africa. The Malaysian Special Branch was a preferred instrument of Sir Robert Thompson in his successful efforts to suppress the Malayan insurgency (1948 – 1960). The importance of Special Branch cannot be overestimated. Brickham felt it essential that civilian policing, not military repression, be used to maintain control in Vietnam.

18 ICEX = Intelligence Co-ordination and Exploitation, the name first given to the project to co-ordinate all the CIA and other covert activities in Vietnam, also called ICEX-SIDE. 'Nation-building' is a term in US imperial vernacular used to imply that there are peoples in the world who occupy territory but have no mature political, social and economic institutions with which to live (like the US wants them to live, that is). It is a descendent of the 'white man's burden' and the British myth about educating peoples for self-rule. The term survives today in US foreign policy language. Its real meaning is the creation of Phoenix-like structures, often with the support of NGOs and so-called 'civil society' organisations in places where the US has or is attempting to destroy indigenous institutions, e.g. in Iraq or Afghanistan. That is why it has been rightly said that the US National Endowment for Democracy has simply absorbed a range of functions and technologies developed in the CIA.

partnerships. The idea was that the US regime could install systems like the ones with which it had traditionally controlled local governments and economies in Latin America for the benefit of US corporations.<sup>19</sup> Like other CIA operations, there was to be a multifaceted campaign to paint the Hanoi government as puppets of Russia or China, invent a regime in Saigon that would embody 'real Vietnamese independence' and create the machinery by which that regime could preserve itself. At the same time this effort had to be sold both in the USA and abroad within the dominant post-war decolonisation discourse. Here the central elements were 'revolution' and 'development'. Part of the reason for this marketing strategy was a belief fostered in academia, especially in area studies, that any post-war dispensation would have to take the steam out of revolutionary socialist/nationalist movements by packaging modernisation as a revolutionary process. Initially the US could benefit from widely held beliefs about the creation of the US as a non-Marxist (pre-Marxist) revolutionary success story, complete with a healthy national spirit. On the other hand it was impossible to retain the rhetoric of the pre-war European colonial powers given the UN Charter and its promise of national self-determination. The US regime was also able to market itself as the ideal development agent. Unscathed by World War II, it had already devoted substantial efforts to 'rebuild' Europe and supply food and other economic aid to countries left in distress after the war. US 'free trade' policy was sufficiently ambiguous to be sold as a realistic alternative to the constraints imposed by Britain, France, the Netherlands and Belgium on their colonial possessions. In other words, capitalising on the hugely successful propaganda campaigns since 1914, the US was able to profit from good will abroad and naiveté at home to launch what would become Phoenix.

Free trade meant that US corporations deliberately avoided the costs of governing economically profitable

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<sup>19</sup> In 1954, the CIA had very successfully returned Guatemala to United Fruit. Its unsuccessful campaign against Cuba notwithstanding, the Company was confident in its capacity to create and manage Business-friendly regimes.

territories. Instead, what has been called 'an archipelago of empire' was preferred.<sup>20</sup> This meant expanding the British principle of indirect rule by creating and supporting nominally independent regimes that bear all the social costs through extortionate taxation, while assuring that labour and natural resources are freely accessible to US corporations — in Vietnam's case, particularly those operating in Japan.

Unlike industrial economies, peasant economies, such as those prevailing in southern Korea and Vietnam, are still structured around land ownership and use. Industrialised populations such as those of Europe and the US already have structures easily manipulated by corporations: employment, housing, entertainment, and mass consumption. Conflicts are reduced largely to issues like wages and working hours, healthcare and pensions — essentially monetary problems. In rural economies conflicts focus on land ownership and access, availability of agricultural inputs, and the maintenance of family and village structures.

Thus the CIA was confronted with a peasantry for whom land reform and peaceful cultivation in villages within families were paramount. In Latin America, the US regime had inherited the colonial *latifundia* systems imposed by the Spanish centuries ago. Southeast Asia was completely different. Of course this did not prevent the CIA from taking action. Drawing on what they thought were the lessons of US counter-insurgency in the Philippines and Sir Robert Thompson's model Malayan campaign, a variety of tools were developed on the assumption that there are in essence two Vietnams south of the DMZ, the demilitarised zone, created under the Geneva Accords of 1954 to separate North and South Vietnam.<sup>21</sup> The task of the CIA was to disaggregate them. The term that emerged was 'VCI' or Viet Cong Infrastructure (Vietnamese communist infrastructure). The 'real' Vietnamese were to be corralled and branded while the 'communists' were to be culled from the herd.

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<sup>20</sup> Bruce Cumings, *Dominion from Sea to Sea* (2009).

<sup>21</sup> The most frequently cited source for Thompson's campaign is his *Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experiences in Malaya and Vietnam* (1966).

Since this distinction was an ideological fiction — albeit an indispensable one — two processes were needed: one which would create the real herd of South Vietnamese, identifiable at least by demonstrated loyalty or dependence on the Saigon regime; and one which would continuously cull the 'enemy' from the herd. This loyal herd could be led to the elections that would validate the Republic of Vietnam (South). The rest could be 'captured, turned, or killed'. This is essentially the way corporations create markets for superfluous products. There was no need for the Saigon government since most Vietnamese were justified in believing that when the French withdrew it was only a matter of time before the country would be unified under one government. However, to create a viable client regime the CIA had to create a market for it.

The term 'infrastructure' denoted the fact that Vietnamese society, especially in the rural areas where the Saigon regime was scarcely present, functioned without any need for the US clients. Although the term is also used as a euphemism for 'cadre',<sup>22</sup> members of the Vietnamese Communist Party in the South, this limited use obscures the strategy underlying Phoenix and the US regime's presence. In order to create the 'Saigon product' so to speak, there had to be a need for it — namely an administrative apparatus reaching into the village level which could make demands on the population and at least nominally satisfy local wishes. It is fair to say that no-one who had spent any time in the country believed that there was any demand for 'Saigon product' among the peasantry. Hence the only way to create and stimulate that demand was to reach into the depths of rural life and do everything possible to destroy the indigenous

<sup>22</sup> 'infrastructure' – When the CIA officers tried to explain what was meant by 'infrastructure' to the Vietnamese, none of them understood the word the way the CIA meant it – organisational structure, 'the shadow government'. They could only grasp the term in its literal sense, telephone lines, roads, electricity grid, etc. Finally someone hit upon the term 'cadre' as an approximation of the targets. This word could be more easily explained to the Vietnamese. While this seems like a banal aspect, one must not forget that the terminology used by the CIA to describe the program was also part of the psychological deception Phoenix entailed. Technical terms were far from trivial.

structures, both economically and socially. Ideally this vacuum would be filled speedily by US-subsidised Saigon infrastructure. This was the underlying theory of the strategic hamlet program and all the activities of the US Agency for International Development (USAID).<sup>23</sup> Because the Saigon regime was and remained unable and unwilling to provide the substitute infrastructure, the nation building (counter-insurgency) programs never acquired the varnish of acceptability that they enjoyed among the middle classes in the West.

Of course this did not mean that the programs bundled under ICEX/Phoenix were to be abandoned. Quite the contrary: they were to be refined. Just as corporate marketing and design departments in seemingly innocuous sectors like automobile and electronics are dedicated to producing anything — if there is a promise of reportable profits or increased market share — the corporate propaganda and terror campaign introduced to Vietnam by the CIA became a self-perpetuating system. To meet the need to show that the herd and the culls were being managed effectively — profitably — measurement and reporting systems were borrowed from the leading edge of management and organisational theory. General William Westmoreland was discredited for 'accounting fraud' while waging the military side of the campaign.<sup>24</sup> However such fraud was inherent in the overall strategy, both covert and overt. As there were not two Vietnams but only one, it was absurd to try to measure the numbers of the

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<sup>23</sup> USAID was an organisation under the US State Department with the mission to execute 'development aid' type projects around the world. In Vietnam it was responsible for 'revolutionary development' programs, mainly through CORDS, Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support. This was also part of what was called euphemistically 'winning hearts and minds' (WHAM) or civic action in rural areas. In addition, USIS, the US Information Service, was the State Department psychological operations arm, also active in Vietnam during the war.

<sup>24</sup> General William Westmoreland filed a libel suit in 1982 against CBS News for alleging that he had manipulated intelligence and estimates of enemy strength, in part contributing to near military disaster during the surprise Tet Offensive in 1968. The case was settled out of court.

phantom herd, 'real Vietnam minus VC'. The only thing that could be measured was the number of victims and no one had an interest in honest reporting there.

In order to invent South Vietnam, it was necessary to fabricate a South Vietnamese population, complete with features that ought to distinguish it from North Vietnam. The US attempt to do this in Korea had failed; leaving it with only one choice — permanent military occupation. The CIA, certainly guided by its numerous successes in Iran, Latin America, and Africa, undertook the ambitious task of manufacturing not only a client regime, but a whole country. The Company drew on its vast repertoire of propaganda and terror methods, tried and tested throughout the world, and concentrated them in Southeast Asia. When it found itself unable to work alone, it brought in massive military cover. It was hoped that MACV would prevent the NVA from attacking and ejecting the Saigon regime and at the same time prevent the 'enemy' below the DMZ from deposing the US clients on their own or rendering the South ungovernable from Saigon.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile Saigon's incompetent, corrupt and generally useless police and civilian administration were to be indoctrinated and trained to maintain this invented herd of South Vietnamese, needed to maintain the fiction of a separate Vietnamese state — a state that was to continue the hyper-exploitation of the South within the overall US Asia-Pacific imperial archipelago.

Douglas Valentine shows in lucid detail how this campaign emerged, who was responsible — both for policy and operations — what actually was done and with what consequences. *The Phoenix Program* is not a theoretical work but it is more than a case study in the US propaganda-terror system. By carefully refraining from opinions about the actors or actions, he forces the reader to weigh the preponderance of evidence as to the nature of this purely CIA — and hence purely American form of political warfare. He also forces the critical reader to transcend revulsion and examine a complex

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<sup>25</sup> MACV = Military Assistance Command Vietnam, the unified command structure for the US military invasion of Vietnam. NVA = North Vietnamese Army, the regular land forces of the government in Hanoi.

bureaucratic system, created by the same people who create the management systems used to organise and discipline workers and consumers — short of killing them. The reader needs to pay careful attention to what seem to be technical details such as nomenclature or reporting structures. These details have survived in US political and economic warfare systems to this day. One could say that they were first systematically applied in Vietnam, only to be revised and tapered for future targets of the US regime. Not least the *dramatis personae* should be studied carefully. Phoenix, like any elite club, produced many *alumni* who have gone on to make and guide policy and wage political warfare against the targets of the US regime.<sup>26</sup> In Western mythology it is not the end of the phoenix that counts but its rebirth from the ashes.

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26 The late Richard Holbrooke began his 'foreign service' career at USAID in 'rural pacification' in Vietnam, spending his formative years in the Phoenix program. It should not surprise anyone therefore that he was assigned to help bring Serbia to submission or that his last assignment was co-ordination of the US wars in South Central Asia. Before John Negroponte acquired his Honduran notoriety, he had also served in Vietnam with Holbrooke.