

## Operation Phoenix in Vietnam

Operation Phoenix was launched by the CIA in Vietnam in 1967. It was a campaign of terror and assassination aimed at 'neutralizing' leaders of the National Liberation Front (NLF) and terrorizing all those suspected of supporting its objectives. According to Wayne Cooper, a former Phoenix advisor, it was a 'unilateral American program', CIA operatives 'recruited, organized and supplied, and directly paid CT (counter-terror) teams... to use Viet Cong techniques of terror -- assassination, kidnappings, and intimidations -- against the VC leadership'. Between 1968 and 1972 a total of 26,369 South Vietnamese civilians were assassinated under the Phoenix programme, another 33,350 were imprisoned in US built 'Provincial Interrogation Centers' where most were tortured. Cooper claims that the majority of these people were non-communist nationalists not involved in the NLF. On 13 September 1974, William Colby, Director of the CIA, appeared at a conference on the CIA and covert activities on Capitol Hill.

Colby had supervised Operation Phoenix and he spoke of it at the conference: 'The Phoenix program was one part of the total pacification program of the government of Vietnam. There were several other parts: the development of local security forces in the neighbourhood to protect the villages; the distribution of a half a million weapons to the people of South Vietnam to use in unpaid self-defense groups... The Phoenix program was designed to bring some degree of order and regularity to a very unpleasant, nasty war that had preceded it. It did a variety of things to improve the procedures by which that was run. It provided procedures by which the identification of the leaders, rather than the followers, became the objective of the operation... over two and a half years of the Phoenix program there were 29,000 captured; there were 17,000 defected; and there were 20,500 killed, of which 87% of those killed were killed by regular and paramilitary forces and 12% by police and similar elements.' [1]

**References:**

[1] Under the eagle :U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean /Jenny Pearce ; foreword by Richard Gott ; [maps by Michael Green]. ,0896081524 (pbk.) :, page 70