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The Honorable Otis G. Pike  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Pike:

The following is in response to your request that GAO determine (1) if the Department of Defense has authorized the Air Force to initiate a program for the procurement of Light Strike Aircraft for the needs of our Southeast Asia Allies, and (2) if so, what is the status and nature of that program.

The Department of Defense instructed the Air Force to initiate a study to determine an interim approach for satisfying the needs of our Southeast Asia Allies. This project (called PAVE COIN) completed by the Air Force in late 1971 evaluated "off the shelf" aircraft for various roles including the Light Strike (LSA) mission. This evaluation identified several aircraft with military potential and in October 1971 the Air Force recommended to the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) that funding authorization and programming guidance be given in late Fiscal Year 1973 to allow a formal source selection.

On March 10, 1972, military commanders in the field advised OSD that replacements for Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) A-1s should be high performance aircraft (such as the F-4, A-4, A-7, and the F-5) rather than the LSA type.

A second in-depth study entitled Aircraft for VNAF was initiated by OSD and assigned to the Air Force. This study, completed on September 1, 1972, considered all existing aircraft and recommended various options, but no specific aircraft was singled out. The study did, however, recognize that a high performance aircraft is required for VNAF. Subsequently, the Secretary of Defense directed that VNAF be provided additional F-5s.

The peace negotiations with Hanoi in October 1972 provided a turn of events which may disrupt long-range programs for VNAF development. Therefore, DOD has provided the VNAF with additional aircraft including F-5s, A-37s, C-130s and A-1s. In addition, the Fiscal Year 1973 aircraft procurement appropriation includes \$32 million for the purchase of 60 A-37Bs to replace VNAF losses of A-1s.

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A program for future provision of aircraft to Southeast Asia nations will depend on the terms of the peace treaty.

If we can be of any further assistance in this matter, please let us know.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "James B. Parsons".

Comptroller General  
of the United States