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**Remarks**

I think you will find this follow-up report on Viet Cong irregular strength interesting. I would recommend that it be forwarded to the DRI.

This memo suggests that MACV will probably have prepared several reports on irregulars. This would enable MACV to establish a growth in irregular units, which is emerging as a result of recent reports. Two studies, relevant memos are attached.

**CONFIDENTIAL**

**RESERVED**

**OFFICIAL ROUTING SLIP**

FROM: Sidney Bearman/C/PEA

DATE: 8 Nov 66

DECLASSIFIED

Declassified by 006687
Date 16 JUL 1975
MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, Indochina Division

SUBJECT: Viet Cong Irregular Strength

ATTACHMENTS: 1) The Strength of the Viet Cong Irregulars, Draft Working Paper, 8 September 1966
               2) COMUSMACV Report November 6 075 7739 66, 18 October 1966

1. Additional evidence indicates that the contention made in the draft working paper, The Strength of the Viet Cong Irregulars (attached), is correct. The paper maintains that MACV J-2's current Order of Battle (OB) holdings for Viet Cong irregulars are far too low.

2. After receiving a copy of the paper, the OB component of MACV J-2 sent an intelligence collection requirement (SICR) to its subordinate S-2's in all provinces in South Vietnam, asking the S-2's to review their irregular holdings. COMUSMACV Report number 6 075 7739 66 (also attached), compiled by the American S-2 Advisory Team in Quang Tin Province, is the first response to J-2's SICR to arrive in CCI.

3. This report estimates that as of mid-October, there were 17,037 irregulars in the province, including 7,702 guerrillas, 8,953 in the Self Defense Force, and 369 in the "Secret Self Defense Force."

4. By contrast, MACV J-2's old holding for irregulars in Quang Tin was 1,760, including 1,160 guerrillas, 390 in the Self Defense Force, and 300 in the "Secret Self Defense Force." Thus, the estimate of the Quang Tin S-2 is about ten times higher than MACV J-2's holding. Our original working paper had suggested that Quang Tin was one of the provinces where the irregular strength was substantially underestimated.

5. If it turns out that MACV's current irregular OB holdings are far too low in several other provinces, as seems likely on the basis of documents now in CCI,
then the overall estimate of irregulars should rise considerably. Conceivably, if MACV continues to use the same criteria in defining irregulars, their total could rise from the current overall holding of 103,573 to several hundred thousand.

6. It would not be surprising, therefore, to see MACV revise its criteria for defining irregulars, in order to prevent a mass influx of new bodies into the officially-prolamgated irregular rolls. MACV could, for example, require "irregulars" to possess firearms; this would greatly cut down on their numbers (Even so, there probably would be many more than 103,573.). Defining irregulars in this way could overlook most of self defense forces, many of whom are unarmed or armed only with grenades. The self defense forces are also responsible for setting booby traps and digging spike pits. As indicated in a recent series of press articles, such devices account for about 20% of all US casualties; so the self defense forces are effective despite their lack of modern weapons. They are also a partially-trained source of manpower for other Viet Cong units.

7. We have been trying to find out from MACV if it plans to revise its official estimate of the irregular strength, or if it intends to change its definitions of irregulars. We have been informed unofficially by DIA that MACV is "reviewing" the evidence, and that it appears MACV's irregular strength holding is "moving in the direction" indicated by the draft working paper.

6. Meanwhile, OGI/FE is preparing a lengthy memorandum about irregulars, based on a review of several thousand captured documents, interrogations, and agent reports. The memorandum will deal with the number of irregulars, their weapons, organization, functions, morale and effectiveness. It will attempt to grapple with some of the analytical ramifications of a sharp rise in the irregular total, and will discuss some of the doctrinal disputes the Viet Cong appear to be having about their use. It will also discuss the Viet Cong Assault Youths -- paramilitary personnel entirely omitted from the MACV OB -- who probably number in the tens of thousands, many well-armed. The memorandum, should be ready in about late-November.

Prepared by: Samuel Adams
The Strength of the Viet Cong Irregulars

Summary

A review of captured Communist documents available in Washington strongly suggests that our long-used estimate of the numerical strength of the Viet Cong irregular forces should at least be doubled from the present figure of 100,000-120,000. The low-level militia, who are often sketchily trained and at best poorly armed, probably constitute the largest part of the irregular strength. Raising the estimate would help resolve some of the analytical problems which have arisen in assessing Viet Cong capabilities. Most important, perhaps, it would help explain where the southern Communists find the manpower to fill in their increasingly large regular army despite heavy casualties and a high desertion rate.

*NOTE: This working paper is a preliminary study of evidence available in Washington on the numerical strength of Viet Cong irregulars. We invite your cooperation in further investigation of this subject. Efforts are now under way to arrange for a fuller review of the evidence by MACV.
Kinds of Irregulars

1. Irregulars are subordinate to the Communist apparatus in villages and hamlets. There are three types:

   a. Guerrillas, consisting of full-time squads and platoons, not always operating in their own villages or hamlets. Guerrillas are the principal military arm of the Communist Party on local levels, and carry out both offensive and defensive operations, often in conjunction with Viet Cong regulars. They also collect taxes, disseminate propaganda, and commit acts of terror and sabotage. A typical guerrilla has received at least one month of military training. Usually a guerrilla platoon has 30 to 40 men, mostly armed with rifles but with a few submachine guns and an occasional BAR.  

2. Guerrilla units in areas where fighting is frequent are usually better armed than those in base areas. Regular Viet Cong formations often draw on guerrilla units for replacements.

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1. The Viet Cong, John F. Kennedy Center for Special Warfare, 2d Revision, November 1965, pp. 11-25-29.
b. People's Self-Defense Forces, often called "militia," consisting of part-time paramilitary forces assigned to defend hamlets and villages. Militiamen also perform many noncombat tasks. They dig trenches and burrow tunnels for Viet Cong combat hamlets, and sometimes act as porters when regular units pass through. They are expected to defend their hamlets as best they can when the enemy arrives, but because they are at the bottom of the logistical ladder, their defensive capability is limited. Many are unarmed, others have only rudimentary firearms or grenades, and only a few have modern weapons. Like the guerrillas, militiamen in combat zones are better armed than those deep in Viet Cong territory. They represent a partially trained manpower pool from which regular and guerrilla units draw.

c. Secret guerrillas, who operate clandestinely in government-controlled areas. Among their duties are intelligence collection, sabotage, and dissemination of propaganda.

* Last year, about 15 percent of the weapons captured by the allies were homemade. Probably most of these had belonged to militiamen.


4. Although called the "Secret Self-Defense" in The Viet Cong and in MACV's OB, these soldiers are usually referred to as "secret guerrillas" by the Viet Cong.
Present Intelligence Estimates

2. Since early 1965, the US intelligence community has been estimating the size of the Viet Cong irregular force at 100,000-120,000 men. The estimate is based on COMUSMACV's Order of Battle, which carries 103,573 as the number of Viet Cong irregulars. MACV's estimate includes 34,313 guerrillas, 35,661 militia-men, and 33,597 secret guerrillas (identified as the "Secret Self-Defense Force.") The OB breaks down the irregulars by province as well as by type. 5

Irregular Strength Goals

3. A captured report issued by the Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN) apparently in the spring of 1965 states that attempts were then being made "to increase the militia-guerrilla strength in the entire SVN to 250,000-300,000 men." The context suggests that the Viet Cong hoped to attain this goal during 1965. 6

4. In promulgating 1965 irregular force requirements to lower echelons, COSVN seems to have asked for well over 300,000 men. Two similar documents dated August 1965 picked up in Quang Nam and


Phu Yen provinces outlined COSVN's promulgated requirements. According to the documents, "the participation of the people" was required as follows:

--Guerrillas: 5 percent of the people in the lowlands and 10 percent of the people in the highlands.

--Self-Defense: 15 percent of the people. (Here the documents disagree; one says 25 percent.)

--Women: to make up one third to one half of the irregulars. (Again, the documents disagree.)

5. It is unclear exactly who the "people" are to whom the above percentages apply. Presumably, the Viet Cong mean "people in Viet Cong-controlled areas." The American intelligence community currently estimates there are three to five million of these, but the Viet Cong themselves—presumably using their own criteria—stated in a document dated 30 November 1965 that they controlled six million people and that three million others lived in areas of "mixed control." It seem likely also that in applying the percentages,

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7. MACY DEC Log #12-1536-65, MACY DEC Log #04-1371-66, 29 April 66.
the Viet Cong exclude most children, who make up roughly one third of the Vietnamese population.\\textsuperscript{9}

**Irregular Strength**

6. The COSVN document which outlined irregular force requirements in the spring of 1965 declared that during the first quarter of the year some 13,000 "new guerrillas and militiamen" had been recruited in South Vietnam, and that this number had met COSVN's "development criteria." Presumably, then, an increase of 52,000 irregulars (i.e., four times the first quarter's figure) would have been sufficient to meet COSVN's minimum goal of 250,000 at the end of 1965. This would suggest that irregular strength at the beginning of 1965 was at least 198,000 (that is, 250,000--the minimum goal--less 52,000, the number of recruits needed to fulfill it.)\\textsuperscript{10}

7. Other evidence suggests that the Viet Cong met and perhaps surpassed their minimum goal for 1965. Documents are available on Viet Cong irregular strength in at least three of South Vietnam's 43 provinces. In these three provinces alone the Viet Cong claim an

\\textsuperscript{9}MACV DEC Log #12-1525-65. If, as this document states, there are to be only half as many women as men among "guerrilla personnel," the Viet Cong must also exclude at least some women from their irregular recruitment pool.

\\textsuperscript{10}Translation Report 01-1593-66, 7 February 1966, p. 5.
irregular strength of some 62,000 more men than
carried on MACV's OB for the provinces. The prov-
inces are:

a. Binh Dinh Province. In a Viet Cong re-
port written in the spring of 1966, the irregular
strength for Binh Dinh was listed as 15,084 guer-
rillas (including 2,990 women), 34,441 (including
6,147 women) in the militia, and 719 secret guer-
rillas, totaling 50,244 irregulars.11 The figures
in this document are consistent with those found in
other documents captured in Binh Dinh in 1966.12
MACV's OB lists Binh Dinh as having 1,448 guerrillas,
1,056 people in the militia, and 2,166 in the
"Secret Self-Defense Force," totaling 4,668 irregu-
lars. MACV's estimate is 9 percent of the figure
in the document.

b. Phu Yen Province. In a Viet Cong di-
rective dated 5 August 1965, the irregular strength
in Phu Yen was listed as 3,304 guerrillas (including
1,226 women), 17,009 in the militia (including 9,334
women) and 94 secret guerrillas, totaling 20,407.13

12 M A C V DEC Log #07-1159-66, 14 July 1966, M A C V DEC
Log #07-1122-66, 12 July 1966, M A C V DEC Log
MACV's OB lists 916 guerrillas, 2,039 in the militia, and 253 in the "Secret Self-Defense Force," totaling 3,210 irregulars in Phu Yen. MACV's estimate is 16 percent of the figure listed in the document.

c. Phuoc Long Province. In a report dated 1 April 1966, the irregular strength for Phuoc Long was listed as 174 guerrillas and 141 militia men, totaling 315 irregulars. MACV's OB lists Phuoc Long as having 387 guerrillas, 40 militiamen, and 105 in the "Secret Self-Defense Force."

8. A preliminary survey of MACV estimates of irregular strength in other provinces suggests that many are too low. The OB lists Long An Province as having only 160 irregulars, but almost twice that many defected in Long An last year.15 Estimates by local officials put the irregular strength in Long An at at least 2,000. In Quang Duc Province, the OB lists


15. Chieu Hoi Records in Long An Province, checked in February 1966 by permission of Lt. CHAT, then head of the Long An Chieu Hoi Center, and Col. ANH, then Long An Province chief, now head of the Chieu Hoi program.

391 irregulars. One US estimate, however, puts Viet Cong irregular strength at at least one thousand.*17

A combination of factors—including the level of Viet Cong activity, the number of people controlled by the Viet Cong in the province, and the relatively small number of irregulars listed in the OB—suggests that irregular strengths have been substantially underestimated in Kien Hoa, An Xuyen, Chuong Thien, Binh Long, Quang Tin, and Quang Nam. Probably several other provinces should be on the list as well.

Conclusions

9. It would appear from the foregoing analysis that Viet Cong irregular strength should be carried at a figure at least as high as 250,000. It may, in fact, be even higher.

10. It also appears that the relative numbers of guerrillas, militia, and secret guerrillas have been mis-estimated by the US intelligence community. The MACV OB,

* A Viet Cong document dated 28 February 1966 indicated that in a single village in Quang Duc, there were 175 irregulars. Quang Duc has 19 villages.


for example, estimates the ratio of guerrillas to militia to secret guerrillas (or "Secret Self-Defense") as approximately 1:1:1. Extrapolations of irregular strength figures from captured documents suggest the ratio is about 20:60:1. If this ratio is applied to a preliminary over-all estimate of 250,000 irregulars, then there would be about 60,000 guerrillas, 180,000 militiamen, and a few thousand secret guerrillas.

11. Raising the estimated total of irregulars in the Viet Cong would have a number of important analytical ramifications. The most important would be that it would provide an explanation for the Viet Cong's ability to increase their regular force strength despite heavy casualties and a high desertion rate. Viet Cong regular losses apparently are in large part replaced by drafts of trained and partially trained soldiers drawn from the relatively ample irregular ranks.

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