The Vietnam Situation: An Analysis and Estimate
CONTENTS

South Vietnam

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam
II. The Enemy Forces in the South
III. The State of the Communist Infrastructure
IV. Political Developments and Prospects in South Vietnam
V. South Vietnam: An Economic Appraisal
VI. The Pacification Program

North Vietnam

VII. North Vietnamese Intentions in Regard to the War
VIII. The Effect of the Bombing on North Vietnamese Thinking
IX. The Effectiveness of the Rolling Thunder Program and Enemy Countermeasures:
    1 January 1966 - 30 April 1967
X. North Vietnam: An Economic Appraisal

International Aspects

XI. Chinese Attitudes Toward the War in Vietnam
XII. Soviet Attitudes and Intentions Toward the Vietnam War
    (Special National Intelligence Estimate 11-11-67)
XIII. North Vietnamese Political Capabilities in the Non-Communist World
XIV. Implications of the Vietnam War for the US International Position
The Military Situation in South Vietnam
THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Summary

The course of the war over the past two years has been marked by Communist efforts to offset the impact of the allied military build-up and the allies' military successes which have accompanied that build-up. Since early 1966, the allies have gained the initiative, carrying the war to enemy base areas, frustrating his offensive plans, and breaking his grip on the populace in portions of the central coastal provinces.

Although we now possess substantial advantages in tactical mobility and awesome firepower, the enemy has more than kept pace with our build-up in terms of infantry units, and has managed also to improve his fire support capability. Communist losses in the first quarter of this year have risen 70 percent above the monthly averages for last year. US losses have increased by over 90 percent, however, and GVN losses, which had declined during 1966, are now rising markedly. Moreover, the enemy has demonstrated the capability to replace his enormous losses, although probably at some cost in quality. Despite growing attrition from our attacks on his depots and lines of communication, an improvement in the enemy's logistical posture is reflected in the growing rate of ammunition expenditures. The expansion of the enemy's positional warfare threat in northern I Corps has forced major allied redeployments in the face of apparently reinforced enemy capabilities in the highlands and III Corps. On balance, the enemy's strategic posture in the main force war appears to have improved somewhat during the past year despite the allied build-up.

On the other hand, the Viet Cong's position in the countryside has been eroded in many areas.
The upgrading of guerrilla elements undertaken to accelerate the expansion of his main force capabilities has weakened the enemy's grip on the rural populace. Allied military pressure in some areas disrupted the enemy's organization, and the attendant lowering of Viet Cong morale has been reflected in increased Chieu Hoi rates. To check this deterioration, the enemy evidently has altered his strategy to achieve a better mix of his conventional and guerrilla activities. Since the first of the year, he has mounted an intensive guerrilla campaign against the pacification program, inflicting serious losses on NVA cadre, and has attacked a large number of population and administrative centers as well as major allied military installations. This campaign is designed not only to check the momentum of the pacification effort, but also to divert some of our conventional forces to protect our rear areas, thus enabling the enemy's reinforced main force units to cope more readily with our reduced offensive potential. The enemy's thrust in northern I Corps is designed to contribute to this thinning out of our mobile forces.

Current enemy plans and intentions, as demonstrated in prisoner interrogations, captured documents, and patterns of activity, apparently involve an intensive, grinding positional warfare campaign in the northern provinces, where ready access to logistical supplies, replacements, and substantial artillery and antiaircraft support enhance his capabilities. Over the next two months, this activity is to be supplemented by coordinated offensive thrusts in the central coastal provinces and the western highlands, combined with major actions in the I Corps area. These actions are to be supported by intensive guerrilla action elsewhere to tie down as many allied forces as possible. Although the enemy hopes to overrun a number of allied field positions, his principal aim is to inflict maximum attrition on our
forces at whatever cost to his own, and to check the momentum of the pacification effort. Hanoi thus is seeking to shake our confidence in ultimate military success by demonstrating that our build-up to date has not decisively altered the balance.

In the final analysis, the current campaign constitutes a crucial test of our ability to prevent a stalemate and maintain the momentum of our recent successes. The enemy’s military capabilities are such that he seems likely to achieve some of his objectives, although the allies almost certainly will be able to blunt his anticipated offensives, inflict heavy losses, and prevent decisive erosion in most pacified areas during the next few months. The situation thereafter will largely depend, as it has in the past, on the question of the will to persist of either side rather than on the attainment of an overwhelming military victory.
The Setting

1. The course of the war in South Vietnam over the past two years has been marked by Communist efforts to offset the impact of the allied military build-up and the allied military successes that have accompanied this build-up. US intervention in 1965 staved off the imminent collapse of the Vietnamese armed forces (RVNAF) and deprived the Communists of certain victory as clearly as did our intention in Korea 15 years before. The allied build-up was initially more rapid and effective than the enemy's response, and by the end of 1965 the enemy's offensive campaign had been contained. Allied forces moved to the offensive in 1966, carrying the war to the enemy's base areas and driving his main forces from the populated plains in the coastal provinces. The Communist position deteriorated throughout 1966 as its leaders sought for the means to regain a favorable balance. By the beginning of 1967, however, the enemy seemed to have settled on a strategic course which he hoped would reduce the advantage gained by the allies and might produce at least a stalemate. Since January, the Communists have mounted a campaign of intensive military action which threatens to stall progress in pacification and has forced major redeployments of allied ground forces. Military actions in the months ahead will show whether the enemy has successfully found means to absorb the introduction of over a half-million US and free world forces or whether the military situation will continue to go against him.

Build-Up Factors

2. In terms of infantry units, the enemy's build-up has kept pace with that of the allies. The number of identified Communist infantry battalions has increased 2.5 times, rising from 61 at the end of 1964 to 154 at the present time (May 1967). Allied infantry battalions have increased from 123 to 255, or by a factor of about 2.1. The ratio of enemy to friendly infantry battalions has grown from the level of 1 to 2.16 to
about 1 to 1.65.* Because of the relatively larger size of US and free world battalions, however, the ratio of strength in maneuver battalions has remained approximately the same—about 1 to 1.

3. With respect to combat support, the enemy has not been able to match the allied build-up quantitatively, yet his position again shows some relative improvement. Since the end of 1964, he has introduced larger quantities of recoilless rifles and mortars, including the 120-mm. type which he previously lacked, as well as artillery, of which he previously had only a handful, and artillery rockets, a recent addition to his arsenal. These weapons have multiplied the firepower of his units and increased the range at which he can strike at sensitive targets. These weapons have also multiplied the number of attacks which he can mount simultaneously. The Communists have also shown the ability to provide increasingly effective support in a number of areas. Allied forces, however, are able to concentrate overwhelming firepower in support of selected operations. For example, allied tactical air sorties have increased by a factor of ten since 1964, and, although not directly measurable, air strikes have had an impact on Communist forces—a fact amply borne out by captured documents and P.O.W.

4. Firm data on the enemy's logistical posture are lacking. We have little knowledge of the size of the stocks on hand in the south, and no precise information on the types and quantities of supplies being delivered by land and sea. We have noted substantially increased expenditures of ammunition of all types—particularly mortars and recoilless rifles—in all sectors, and a more plentiful supply of heavy weapons, including new types. These have occurred despite an intensive sea blockade, the overrunning of substantial arms and ammunition caches, and apparently effective air attacks on some depot areas. The continuing troop reinforcement from the north implies confidence in the ability to provide adequate logistical

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*The ratio may actually be less favorable if the enemy has introduced units not yet reflected in MACV's order of battle.
support. We estimate that current interdiction means are incapable of reducing the capacity of overland lines of communication below the current requirements of forces that the enemy now has in the south, or even a slightly larger force level. Moreover, we are not confident that the blockade is effectively interdicting the movement of supplies by sea, despite several instances of intercepted shipments. The intensity and persistence of enemy operations suggest that, although our operations may temporarily disrupt his logistical system locally, it is generally adequate to support actions on a scale and tempo at least as great as any mounted in the past.

5. Communist losses have increased dramatically during the past two years, but have not prevented the Communists from increasing their forces. In the first quarter of 1967, almost 24,000 Communists were reported as killed, and this is 70 percent greater than their average loss rate for 1966. Losses of this magnitude substantially exceed the Communists' estimated recruitment capability in South Vietnam (some 7,000 men per month), and the difference is made up by infiltration from the North. It is rather meaningless to attempt to assign a monthly infiltration average because in fact the numbers vary tremendously month to month (e.g., 14,700 men in March 1965 to 600 in April 1965). What is important is that the Vietnamese Communists have the capability to replace manpower losses at a rate higher than the present loss rate being inflicted on them, although probably at some cost in their overall quality.

6. US losses increased by some 90 percent in the first quarter of 1967 over the 1966 average, and RVNAF losses, which had declined during the first half of last year, have since risen toward the previous high levels of 1965. Hence, fluctuations in our losses roughly parallel those of the Communists, although not always in a direct ratio. Any significant and sustained increase in the losses inflicted on the Communist forces would most likely be accompanied by a similar increase in US losses as well.
7. The enemy's morale has obviously suffered considerably over the past two years: the deterioration has been particularly noticeable at the lower levels. It is difficult, however, to measure Communist morale precisely. The only statistical measure available is the Chieu Hoi rate, which has risen appreciably since mid-1966. This rise has generally occurred in areas where allied operations have had a direct impact on local Viet Cong guerrilla and self-defense forces, whose personnel make up the bulk of the returnees. Although not insignificant in the near term, the immediate military effect of such losses may not be critical. Over the longer term, however, such losses not only deprive the Communists of manpower but, more important, strike at the heart of the Communists' strength -- their political and rice-root infrastructures. While documents and prisoners reflect confusion, loss of confidence, and discouragement even among Communist political and military cadres, these attitudes have not noticeably altered the combat effectiveness of main force units, which continue to mount near-suicidal attacks when called upon. We are unable to predict when morale might become a decisive issue in the Communists' strategy concerning the war. We suspect, however, that it will not likely to become so in the near term unless the war takes a decidedly more adverse turn for the Communists.

Impact on the Operational Situation

8. The evolution of the situation since the introduction of US and free world forces has varied in each Corps area. In some, the allied position has improved markedly, while in others there has been no appreciable change. Nonetheless, since the introduction of US troops the overall military initiative has largely shifted to the allied side, and in the process the Communists have suffered a heavy number of casualties with precious few victories for their side. They may take solace in the fact that they have inflicted increased casualties on the US, but they have paid a heavy price in doing so. Recent developments, however, suggest that their strategic posture -- after ebbing throughout 1966 -- may have improved slightly, although it certainly is not yet as favorable as during late 1964 and early 1965.
9. In I Corps, the deployment of US Marines initially altered the balance in the allied favor. Enclaves were established around major bases, and intensive pacification operations were begun. The Viet Cong soon vigorously began to contest these efforts, and in mid-1966 began to develop a conventional threat in the DMZ area and the northernmost provinces. Although initially rebuffed with heavy losses to his forces, the enemy has persisted in his build-up in the North, and the growing threat in that sector has necessitated the deployment of US reinforcements from other sectors. At least four, and possibly five, enemy divisions, enjoying artillery and air defense support from the DMZ and North Vietnam, are in this area. Two other divisions threaten the northern portion of I Corps. The enemy's military position in I Corps with its proximity to his logistical base in North Vietnam, is significantly more favorable than it was two years ago, when he had very few forces in the area.

10. In II Corps, the deployment of Marine and US forces to the coastal provinces resulted in a series of offensives which broke the recently acquired grip of the enemy on the densely populated plain, and his main force units have been driven back into the foothills. Despite heavy losses, the enemy forces remain intact, however, with one division lurking in the boundary area between I and II Corps, and another division in the Phu Yen-Khanh Hoa-eastern Daklac province area. In the highlands, US forces have generally parried the thrusts of sizeable enemy forces in Kontum and western Mui Duc provinces, but have been unable to neutralize their sanctuary along the Cambodian border. At least five enemy regiments there -- possibly about to be reinforced from the north -- appear to be preparing for new offensive action. The movement of two US brigades from II Corps to reinforce I Corps will reduce our ability to contain this threat.

11. In III Corps, there has been a net improvement in the allied position over the past two years. Although the enemy has built up to a strength of three divisions, and has enhanced his ability to recuperate from heavy losses, the presence of more than three US divisions in the area
inhibits the significance of this enemy threat. Allied forces have been able to mount major thrusts into key enemy base areas, disrupting command and logistical functions, and keeping the enemy's main forces off balance. At the same time, significant gains have been made in bringing populated areas under government control. The loss of one US brigade to I Corps has not significantly altered the favorable force ratio. Although the Communist forces may mount significant sections on their own, or in reaction to friendly operations, these can be contained, albeit with heavy fighting.

12. In the Delta, the situation remains essentially unchanged. Pacification has progressed in some areas, but Communist bases remain essentially intact and the force balance in roughly the same as it was two years ago. The deployment of one US brigade to Binh-Duong Province has not yet had significant impact on the situation there. Elsewhere, the Communists have intensified their military activities over the past six months, and particularly since the first of the year, in an effort to stall pacification progress. The combat effectiveness of Communist forces in the Delta decreased during 1965 and 1966, but government forces were unable to exploit this effectively.

13. With respect to pacification, the greatest progress has been made in areas where US and free world troops have been deployed -- i.e., in the Marine and ROK enclaves along the coast, and in the vicinity of Saigon in III Corps. Nationally, the population under GVN control has increased by 13 percent since the end of 1964, while the population under Viet Cong control has decreased by eight percent. This gain was made during the period when the enemy was attempting to adjust, both psychologically and physically, to the introduction of free world forces. His reaction thus far has varied in different regions: in I Corps and III Corps, he soon began to contest hotly the security forces in the pacified areas, while in the coastal provinces of II Corps he has seemed to withdraw. The reasons for this are not clear; nevertheless, since the first of the year the enemy has mounted a major
counteroffensive against the pacification program in all parts of the country, inflicting heavy losses on the AR teams, and repeatedly demonstrating his capability to strike at province and district capitals. While it is too early to gauge the results of his campaign, he has clearly demonstrated that current security arrangements for pacified areas are not adequate in most parts of the country.

**Enemy Strategy, Plans and Capabilities**

14. The strategy adopted by the enemy in the latter part of 1964 was to accelerate the development of conventional military forces in the south in order to mount operations which would cause the collapse of the Vietnamese armed forces. Captured documents reveal that this strategy was endorsed in 1965, and again in early 1966, despite the introduction of US and free world forces. The enemy's plan entailed the commitment of North Vietnamese army forces in order to achieve the necessary force equilibrium. The scope of this commitment has increased progressively to counter the allied build-up. As a further means of accelerating the build-up, the command in the south in mid-1965 directed the upgrading of up to one-half of its local guerrilla elements. This "extraordinary" step was justified on the basis of its short-term contribution to a potential early victory. In the absence of such a victory, however, it weakened the Communists' control in rural areas and reduced their ability to counter the pacification effort; they have not yet recovered from this short-sighted action.

15. As the situation evolved favorably for the allies during 1966, the enemy's confidence in his strategy was shaken. The subject was debated at length during the last half of 1966 in party and military journals in the north, with one faction calling for more emphasis on guerrilla warfare, and another pressing for a further build-up of conventional military forces. Captured documents in the south, dating from the latter part of 1966, reflected an awareness of deteriorating conditions (despite exaggerated claims of allied losses), which provided fuel for the debate. By the first of this year, however, the debate apparently was resolved in favor of developing
a more balanced mix of guerrilla and conventional capabilities. Thus, we have seen an apparent reinforcement of guerrilla capabilities by local force, and, in some cases, main force units. We have also seen an apparent reinforcement of main force capabilities in the form of continued infiltration from the north, particularly in the DMZ area.

16. By reinforcing his guerrilla potential, the enemy has been able to intensify attacks on pacified areas, population and administrative centers, and allied base installations. The purpose of this activity is to divert some of our main force units from offensive operations to the protection of rear areas. By maintaining -- and reinforcing -- his main force potential, his conventional units will then be in a better position to cope with our reduced offensive potential. This advantage is further enhanced by the creation of a new conventional threat in the northern part of I Corps, which was calculated to draw off some of our mobile forces from other regions. While his hopes for an early victory have disappeared, the enemy apparently believes that his modified strategy will at least produce a stalemate, enable him to check pacification and frustrate our offensive plans, and impose an ultimately unacceptable level of attrition on our forces.

17. In evolving its strategy, Hanoi has rationalized it within the context of the dogma which led to its victory over the French. Indeed, the nature of the plans for the current spring-summer campaign bear the earmarks of General Giap's 1953-54 campaign against the French. From Hanoi's point of view, the circumstances of 1966-67 bear a striking similarity to those of the earlier period. Then, General Navarre had brought a new offensive spirit to the French Expeditionary Corps. He relegated ARVN to the task of pacification, using ARVN units to replace those of the Expeditionary Corps in static missions, and grouping the latter to form an unprecedentedly large general reserve whose mission was to engage the Viet Minh's main battle force. Navarre used his mobile force in a number of dramatic raids into Viet Minh base areas -- including
the seizure of Dien Bien Phu -- and creating an atmosphere of confidence in ultimate French success. He also planned -- and launched -- a major offensive in the south designed to roll up the Viet Minh and pacify Phu Yen and Binh Dinh provinces. But Giap countered with a series of thrusts which caused the French to deploy most of their general reserve to protect previously unthreatened areas, so that the French were left with inadequate reserves to deal with the main Viet Minh effort when it developed at Dien Bien Phu. All of these main force operations were accompanied by intensified guerrilla warfare throughout the country aimed at immobilizing the maximum number of French-Vietnamese troops to protect pacified areas and bases. This strategy succeeded before, and Hanoi apparently believes that it will again.

18. Captured documents, recent prisoner interrogations, and other indications point to the similarity in current enemy plans. In the initial phase -- now under way -- the plan apparently is to draw additional allied forces to the DMZ area, where by wagging positional warfare with their backs to their logistical base in the north, the Communists hope to inflict maximum sustained attrition on our forces at minimum (albeit heavy) cost to themselves. Later in the campaign -- June or July -- other forces farther south are supposed to mount operations in the coastal plain, exploiting whatever opportunities exist, but still with the aim of inflicting losses on our main forces rather than of seizing specific terrain objectives. This phase may be preceded or accompanied by major attacks in Quang Hai and Quang Tin provinces, and by large-scale operations in Kontum and Pleiku provinces, combined with lesser actions in Phu Yen, Daklac, and Khanh Hoa provinces. Depending on the status of US operations in III Corps, major engagements are also planned in that region. Throughout the country, enemy provincial, district, and village units are to attempt to maintain a relatively high degree of pressure by attacking outposts, RD teams, and village, district and provincial administrative centers, while sapper units attack key base installations.
19. The Communists would hope to overrun some allied field positions, but they might consider the campaign a success if it produced record allied casualties and if one or more of the engagements could be depicted as a "victory" in terms of annihilating a battalion here, or causing us to abandon a strongpoint there, whatever the cost to them. If, at the same time, they could demonstrably check our pacification progress in some areas, they might gain the psychological boost necessary to overcome the discouragement which afflicted them toward the end of 1966. In their eyes, they would have demonstrated the "correctness" of their doctrine, and their ability to cope with our forces despite our technological superiorities. They would also have shaken the confidence of the Vietnamese populace in an allied victory. At the end of the campaign in July, they might then feel able to match any further reinforcement of our effort and would be disposed to follow their strategy for at least another campaign.

20. But should they fail to achieve their aims and continue to suffer one defeat after another on the battlefield, they might feel themselves faced with a very bleak picture of their prospects. This would be particularly true if in the process some of their major units were effectively destroyed. In effect, the Communists have not had any appreciable successes for over a year, and if this trend persists despite their increased efforts to cope with the situation, we could see the beginning of disintegration among the Communist forces. They are paying a heavy price to continue the war, and they, too, probably get war weary. A strategy which continually postpones the prospect of success and offers nothing visible to sustain the hope of even ultimate success might be palatable for a time, but eventually its appeal, particularly in the South, might begin to wear thin. Under these circumstances, especially if progress is made in the pacification program and in political development in Saigon, the erosion of mass support for the Communists would mount, perhaps to critical proportions. Once such a process began it would be hard to arrest, and ultimately it would be as critical to Communist success as the more headline-grabbing main force military battles.
21. Thus, the current campaign will provide a crucial test of our ability to prevent a military stalemate and maintain the momentum of our successes in 1966. We are unable to estimate with any degree of confidence how the military situation will develop during this period. Nonetheless, at this stage the odds seem about even that the Communists will achieve some of their minimum objectives, although certainly at a heavy cost to their own forces. The enemy’s capabilities are such that his chances of an occasional — if isolated — tactical success must be considered good. But we would expect that the allied military forces will largely contain the anticipated enemy offensives and prevent any substantial erosion of the pacification effort in the months ahead. In the final analysis, the situation appears likely to hinge, as it has in the past, more on the question of Communist versus allied will to persist than on a clear-cut and overwhelming military success by either side.
The Enemy Forces in the South
THE ENEMY FORCES IN THE SOUTH

Summary

Despite increasingly effective "search and destroy" operations by the allies, the Vietnamese Communists have continued to expand their Main Forces, both by infiltration and by local recruitment. Part of the expansion has been at the expense of lower-level Viet Cong military formations and of the so-called Viet Cong "political infrastructure." In spite of the drain, however, the Viet Cong paramilitary and political structure is still large -- probably considerably larger, in fact, than carried in the official US Order of Battle.

Despite intensive efforts by COMUSMACV and US intelligence agencies, we have been unable as yet to compute the full strength of the Viet Cong paramilitary, combat support, and political elements with any real precision. The evidence on the numbers of such personnel, and on their exact duties in relation to Communist military operations, has been extremely scanty until the very recent period. Captured enemy documents and prisoner interrogations are now indicating that the strength in all these categories is almost certainly much higher than it had appeared to be in the past. In most cases, however, the evidence is still insufficient to indicate more than a broad range for strength in these categories.

In the case of the irregular forces, for example, the latest US order of battle holdings list their strength at 113,000.\(^1\) Studies by COMUSMACV, however, indicate that irregular strength is more likely in the neighborhood of 190-200,000, although a final judgment has not yet been made. The strength of the so-called "administrative service"

\(^1\)MACV J-2 Monthly Order of Battle Summary as of 15 May 1967.
forces (staffs and non-combat support troops) are now listed in the OD at 25,000, but may be several times higher -- possibly in the neighborhood of 75,000-100,000. The number of Viet Cong political personnel, listed at 39,000 in the OD, may be well over twice as high. Part of the difficulty in estimating the strength of the above categories is that we are not sure to what degree political cadre, for example, can be clearly delineated from irregulars in counting for OD purposes.

Communists have an organized manpower base of any-where near this size to draw upon for their combat units. It is hard to visualize how they can get into serious trouble in the near future in obtaining the necessary replacement personnel, particularly when their capacity for recruitment in South Vietnam outside their organized apparatus is considered and when infiltration from the North is added. Current estimates place these latter inputs at a maximum of about 14,000 per month. Current losses may be mounting close to this figure, but are probably not above it.

While it appears that the Communists can continue to sustain their overall strength during the coming year, it is unlikely at current loss rates that they can add much to it, except in northern South Vietnam where the availability of manpower from the North provides a seemingly plentiful supply. If, on the other hand, the Communists check the erosion of their manpower base and possibly even make inroads into allied-controlled areas as a result of military developments this year they may succeed in significantly expanding their overall force.
Main and Local Forces

1. The Viet Cong - HVA Main and Local Forces have expanded considerably since early last year. In January 1966, the MACV Order of Battle listed 85,000 in these categories. As of mid-May this year the OB figures had increased 36 percent, to over 115,000.

2. The VC/NVA who comprise the Main and Local Forces are, for the most part, serving in 136 battalion formations, of which 102 battalions are clearly North Vietnamese Army units. One hundred and eight of the total 196 battalions are subordinate to 36 regimental formations — 24 HVA and 12 Viet Cong — which in turn are subordinate to the seven accepted HVA divisions and two Viet Cong divisions. The units above include those in the DMZ area which have been accepted into the Order of Battle. In each case, they are either operating in South Vietnam or in an adjacent area following operations in the South. In addition to the above units, there are 207 separate companies and 69 platoons listed in the OB, all of which are Viet Cong units.

DISTRIBUTION OF VC/HVA COMBAT FORCES (SVH)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Regiment</th>
<th>Battalion</th>
<th>Sep Co (VC)</th>
<th>Sep Platoon (VC)</th>
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<tr>
<td>I CTZ</td>
<td>31,780</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(21,340)</td>
<td>(44)</td>
<td>(43)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>33,045</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(22,650)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>(44)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III CTZ</td>
<td>31,652</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>(1)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(15)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV CTZ</td>
<td>19,240</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Main Force troops are those subordinate to the Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN) or to one of the Viet Cong's military regions, or to command elements in the North. Local Force troops are subordinate to Viet Cong provinces and districts.
3. It is likely that the mid-May 1967 (OB) figure of 115,000 men in the Main and Local Forces is somewhat lower than the actual Communist force in the field. This is due primarily to the inherent time lag, often up to six months, in obtaining current information on newly arrived or recently created units. A secondary reason is the strict acceptance criteria which demand highly credible evidence before a unit is accepted into the order of battle.

4. Another factor influencing our belief that OB is somewhat low at this particular point in time is the status of North Vietnamese infiltration to South Vietnam. During the first four months of this year we were observing all of the intelligence indicators which, from past experience, suggested that a new round of large scale infiltration into South Vietnam was taking place. Within the past two weeks MACV accepted another North Vietnamese division, the 325th, raising the figure from about 110,000 to its current level of 115,000 men. There is a significant amount of other information -- from captured documents and prisoners -- suggesting that still additional units had arrived in South Vietnam before mid-May. For example, documents captured by MACV on 12 and 13 May indicate that the 9th NVA Regiment from the 304th NVA Division arrived in South Vietnam in early March and participated in an attack south of Quang Tri City on 6-7 April. To date, however, the information available on this unit is not sufficient to warrant its inclusion in the OB.

Administrative Service Units

5. It is currently recognized within the intelligence community that the number of administrative service troops -- listed at about 25,000 in MACV's April 1967 OB -- is probably substantially

*Administrative Service Units are composed of military personnel in MACV, military region, military subregion, province, and district staffs and rear service technical units of all types directly subordinate to these headquarters.
below their real strength, perhaps by as much as 50-75,000 men. Information on such personnel was relatively scarce until US military operations began to result in large numbers of prisoners and captured documents.

6. This has allowed us to begin to fill in some of the gaps in this category. Others still exist, however. For example, although the administrative service designation encompasses all VC province and district staffs, the OB lists fewer than a dozen provincial staffs and no district staffs, partly because precise information is still unavailable on many such units. We know, however, that the Viet Cong have a total of 36 provinces broken down into over 200 districts. Since there are almost certainly administrative service staffs in the large majority of these districts, their inclusion would raise this category substantially. In sixteen provinces we have no detailed information at all on Communist administrative service troops, although it seems certain that some of them are present in each province.

7. There are, moreover, other non-combat military personnel such as the medical personnel subordinate to national, regional, provincial, and district headquarters, smaller signal units, and personnel working in Viet Cong base areas who are not yet picked up in any OA category. Such personnel include those performing ordnance and quartermaster functions, repair and maintenance personnel, and troops engaged in running such facilities as recruit depots, training centers and POW camps. These individuals, as more information becomes available, will be included under the administrative service category.

8. MACV is now reviewing its estimate of administrative service personnel and attempting to include at least some of the additional elements. It is believed that the MACV estimate of enemy strength in this category will be substantially raised, but that it will still, due to the lack of precise information, be on the conservative side.
9. An unofficial estimate made in the Washington intelligence community on the basis of extrapolations from a limited number of documents suggests that total strength in the administrative service category may be in the neighborhood of 100,000, a figure roughly equivalent to Main and Local Force strength. This ratio for full-time service and staff personnel to combat forces would not seem unreasonable for a military apparatus of the present sophistication of the Viet Cong/NVA. **

Irregulars

10. On the basis of information received during the past year it is apparent that our previous estimates of Communist irregular strength are also too low. Pending complete examination of this information, the MACV order of battle continues to list some 113,000 irregulars. This figure was arrived at over a year ago and has remained unchanged since that time. Scrutiny of the evidence by MACV as of March 1965 tentatively arrived at what was thought to be a slightly conservative figure of 198,000 irregulars.

11. The basic problem in estimating irregular strength is that the irregular force structure does not lend itself to the precise measurements which can be made for conventionally organized military

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*The ratio of US combatant to US service and staff personnel in South Vietnam is at least six to one in favor of service and staff. That US forces should have proportionally so many more service and staff troops than the Communists can be explained by the relatively high sophistication of US equipment and the higher standard of living enjoyed by US troops.

**Irregulars, by MACV's definition, are organized forces composed of guerrillas, self-defense, and secret self-defense elements subordinate to village and hamlet level VC organizations.
units based upon unit nomenclature, command structure, and unit historical data. Many of the captured Viet Cong records are available for some provinces are obviously estimates rather than statistical tabulations of strengths for irregular platoons and squads. In the absence of more precise data, MACV's estimates of VC irregular strength are derived primarily from the estimates provided by allied provincial officials. These estimates consider the type of VC infrastructure, the density of population, the scale of enemy military activity, and the extent of VC control in the various districts, villages and hamlets comprising each province.

12. The unofficial MACV estimate of about 198,000 irregulars is the result, in part, of a new countrywide collection effort focusing on the sector level. Estimates and supporting information developed at the sector are forwarded to Saigon for review and comparison with information available there.

13. Despite the increased emphasis on collection of intelligence on the Communist's irregular force, we are still not confident that the figure of 198,000 is accurate. The number of irregulars is probably not less than the 198,000 figure, but it could be considerably more.

14. In any case, it is expected that the current 01 figure of about 113,000 will rise considerably in the near future. This will not indicate that actual irregular strength has jumped, but only that we have refined our knowledge of it.

Political Order of Battle

15. The MACV Order of Battle lists 39,000 VC political cadre in South Vietnam, but this estimate,
like those for administrative service and irregular personnel, is probably also too low. The 39,000 figure, arrived at in early 1965, did not, partly because of the scanty information available, include those political cadre at the hamlet level where the largest number would normally be expected to serve. If hamlet cadres are included in the Political OB, an unofficial MACV extrapolation from the available data shows the number of political personnel is between 90,000 and 120,000. Unofficial ARVN estimates put the number of political personnel as high as 150,000.

16. An on-going CIA study of one area of the political infrastructure -- the security apparatus -- also suggests that the current figure of 39,000 political cadres is too low. This study concluded that there are probably at least 70,000 VC security personnel alone in South Vietnam. Other personnel which belong in the political OB include those assigned to the Propaganda/Culture and Indoctrination, Civilian Proselyting Military Proselyting, Postal Transport, and Communications and Civil Health elements of the Viet Cong apparatus.

17. The basic problem in moving ahead to firm up the political OB is that we do not know how many of the political personnel are already accounted for in some fashion in either the Main/Local Force, Irregulars, or Administrative Service personnel. Particularly at the lower echelons, it would seem likely that many of the political personnel also fill in at military or paramilitary posts. Moreover, there is unquantifiable evidence that the Communists during late 1966 and early 1967 cannibalized some of their political apparatus to get replacements for military units; the extent of this is unknown at present.
18. Excluded from the Order of Battle altogether have been the Viet Cong Assault Youths, whom the Communists created in early 1965, after their decision to emphasize "mobile warfare." Many Assault Yout's from COSVN to district level appear to be full-time personnel, expected to perform logistic functions in support of the Communist Main and Local forces. Their tasks include the transportation of supplies. Partially armed and often uniformed, they have the secondary function of acting as a manpower pool for Communist regular units. There are also Assault Youths in Viet Cong-controlled villages and hamlets, but these are clearly part-time personnel.

19. As yet no attempt has been made to estimate their over-all numbers, but extrapolations from available documents suggest their total strength is in the low tens of thousands.

Input Capabilities

20. There are two basic input factors to Communist strength in South Vietnam—recruitment of indigenous manpower and infiltration from the North. We cannot be precise in our estimate of Communist capabilities and present rates for either of these factors.

21. MACV has developed what is believed to be a better estimate than in the past of the maximum rate per month at which the Communists can obtain and train manpower in South Vietnam for their armed forces—currently 7,000 men per month. This estimate is based on an assessment of the percentage of the male population available to the Communists and on a limited number of documents discussing indigenous recruitment from which an extrapolated rate for all of South Vietnam was developed. It represents input both to the regular and irregular forces. Whether or not the Communists are actually attaining this rate, or perhaps exceeding it, is unknown. No numerical documentation, it should be noted, was available for the delta in making the estimate. The delta, of course, has long served as a main reservoir of manpower for the enemy.
22. The average monthly rate of infiltration into South Vietnam cannot be determined with any real degree of confidence for the period after about September 1966 due to the overall lay in obtaining information. It does appear, however, that the rate dropped substantially in the last months of 1966 and in early 1967, although the exact extent of this and the reasons for it are not clear at present. The evidence, as indicated earlier in the paper, strongly suggests that infiltration has again increased in the last few months and is now probably at or above the prior average rates. If the time from October of 1965 -- when a heavy round of infiltration began -- to the present is taken as a base period, the maximum infiltration reported (including confirmed, probable and possible) works out to a rate in excess of 6,800 per month.

23. Applying this rate of infiltration, together with the 7,000 per month estimated internal recruitment rate would give the Communists a total input capacity of around 14,000 men per month. When this is measured against estimates of the Communist overall loss rate, it appears that the Communists are still able to add substantially to their overall strength in the South. It should be noted, however, that our estimates of enemy losses are in many respects just as tenuous as our estimates of enemy input. Moreover, much of the enemy input from infiltration in the last year has been into northern South Vietnam and, while it has greatly increased the threat in that area, has not added directly to the enemy strength from II Corps southward.

24. Enemy losses involve his killed in action, his permanently disabled (the wounded and sick who do not return to combat duty), his deserters and defectors, and those captured by friendly troops. In the case of KIA's, the average reported losses for the same period over which infiltration was computed above amounted to slightly over 5,000 per month. There is simply no way of determining the accuracy of KIA estimates. There are both inflationary and deflationary factors; however, it is generally felt in the intelligence community that if KIA are taken to include both killed and permanently disabled, the resulting estimate almost certainly must be on the conservative side.
25. Our estimates of enemy military deserters and defectors are very tenuous. A recent internal study by CIA, however, of the evidence available in captured enemy documents indicates that there may have been in the neighborhood of about 40,000 military defectors and deserters from Communist forces in 1966. It is entirely possible, nevertheless, that the Communists recovered up to one half of the deserters so that the net loss to the enemy may have been on the order of 25,000 men from both desertions and defections, or about 2,000 per month. The number of enemy soldiers captured during military operations appears to constitute a negligible loss to the Communists.

26. Thus we are able to compute overall estimated losses of about 7,000 per month for enemy forces (KIA, plus desertions/defections). This would be well below the enemy's current theoretical input rate. It is probable, however, that his disabled and wounded add substantially to his losses. Moreover, in the last few months his battle casualties have risen substantially. During the first three months of 1967, for example, reported enemy KIA ran at a rate of almost 8,000 per month. Defections also rose substantially in the first few months of 1967, strongly suggesting that desertions are probably also higher, perhaps double those of 1966. If losses of this magnitude continue to be sustained by the enemy in 1967 they would probably bring his input capacity much closer into balance with losses.

27. There are, in addition, other aspects to enemy losses which are not computable, but which must rise apace with his other difficulties. It would seem reasonable, for example, to subtract somewhat for all enemy wounded, in terms of lost man-days at least, even though the wounded, aside from permanently disabled, may eventually return to combat. Moreover, there must be some enemy troops who leave active service because of old age or other personal reasons. In the force the size of the Communist military apparatus in South Vietnam, this might be a significant loss.
Outlook

28. If the Communists continue to sustain heavy losses and to lose control of the population at the rates experienced during 1966, it seems unlikely that they will be able to do much more than maintain the strength of their overall political and military apparatus during the balance of this year. They probably will put major emphasis on keeping their Main Force structure up to current strength throughout 1967, both by juggling personnel from less sensitive units and areas to formations and regions threatened by the allies, by in-country recruitment, and by increasing infiltration. An estimated 80,000 North Vietnamese personnel infiltrated into South Vietnam during 1966 and there is no reason why the North Vietnamese cannot continue to send an equal, if not greater, number of men south in 1967 should they feel it necessary to do so.

29. If they are able, in addition, to check the erosion of their population base, they may be able to or significantly increase their overall strength. In either case, they are likely to accomplish their minimum strategic goal of protracting the war.
The State of the Communist Infrastructure
THE STATE OF THE COMMUNIST INFRASTRUCTURE

Summary

The infrastructure is the Viet Cong's political and administrative organization, embodying the Communist Party and the leadership and administrative apparatus of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF), from national to hamlet levels. Unofficial estimates of its strength range from 80,000, regarded as a rock bottom minimum, up to 150,000. Nevertheless, it is probably not as big as it once was. There has been, according to captured Viet Cong documents, a significant erosion of the Communist-controlled population base since mid-1965. In some areas, such as in parts of Binh Dinh and Phu Yen provinces and certain parts of the Delta, the infrastructure has partially disintegrated because of allied military pressure. In other areas, however, particularly in I Corps it appears to be as resilient and as strong as ever.

Although the Viet Cong infrastructure is large, its overall quality has gradually declined since 1964. Part of the qualitative decline has been the result of growth. A second, and perhaps more significant, reason for the decline in quality of civilian officials has been the Viet Cong's emphasis, since early 1965, on the military side of the conflict. Moreover, morale apparently has become a serious problem in some areas as a result of allied military pressure and related hardships.

The party's initial response in early 1966 to the decline in the infrastructure's quality was to increase the number of reindoctrination courses and emulation campaigns for its cadres. More recently, the Communists have attempted to tighten up their control apparatus in the countryside. There are also indications that the Viet Cong are assigning high-level cadres to lower echelon positions.
This down-shifting of gears may tend to exacerbate the morale problems of infrastructure, since it could be construed as a partial step backwards and thus a tacit admission that the past strategy has failed. The infrastructure's morale and the quality of its personnel are not so low, however, that they cannot be buoyed up, particularly by a series of successes, real or apparent. Although shaky in some areas, the infrastructure remains largely intact at middle and higher echelons, and poses a formidable obstacle to the pacification program.
Composition and Strength

1. The infrastructure is the Viet Cong's political and administrative organization, embodying the Communist Party and the leadership and administrative apparatus of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF), from national to hamlet levels. Its highest level is the Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN), a large and complex command organization located in the forests of northern Tay Ninh province. The status and structure of COSVN exemplifies that of much of the rest of the Viet Cong apparatus. Not only is it a supra-regional Party committee; it is also an administrative bureaucracy, with all the trappings -- budgets and reports, departments and agencies, typewriters and carbon paper -- of a government apparatus.

2. Similar but progressively smaller Party-controlled bureaucratic entities exist at the regions, provinces, districts and villages in Communist-run portions of South Vietnam. Even hamlets have small management organs which execute and implement policies coming from above. At all levels, the Party and the bureaucracy are intertwined, with Party members holding all the most important positions. Paralleling the Party apparatus -- but not possessing a line of command of its own -- is the NLF, which has committees at all levels down to district. These committees provide a facade for the Party management machinery, but exercise no real control over the activities of the hundreds of thousands of members in Front associations in the villages and hamlets which receive direction from the Party element at that level. Also en- twined in the infrastructure is the Viet Cong's military organization, including the guerrillas and paramilitary elements at the lowest levels. This complex organization makes for considerable confusion in identifying a person's position within the Viet Cong organization. A deputy head of a hamlet Party cell, for example, might simultaneously be chief of the hamlet guerrilla squad, and head of the local Front, Farmers' or Youths' Association.
3. No systematic study of the size of the Communist infrastructure has yet been published. Research indicates, however, that it has far more than the 39,000 members carried in current political order of battle estimates. Unofficial estimates of its actual strength range from 80,000, regarded as a rock bottom minimum, up to 150,000. These estimates are based on extrapolations from captured documents, as applied to allied population control statistics. They exclude those who are only casually connected to the Viet Cong, such as members of front associations.

4. Although the infrastructure is far larger than listed in the OB, it is probably not as big as it once was. There has been, according to captured Viet Cong documents, a significant erosion of the Communist-controlled population base since mid-1965. Many members of the infrastructure have fled, been killed, captured or faded away. In some areas, such as in parts of Dinh Dinh and Phu Yen provinces and certain parts of the Delta, the infrastructure has partially disintegrated because of allied military pressure. In other areas, however, particularly in I Corps it appears to be as resilient and as strong as ever.

Quality and Morale

5. Although the Viet Cong infrastructure is large, its overall quality has gradually declined since 1964. Part of the qualitative decline has been the result of growth. With the expansion of the infrastructure, recruiting has necessarily been less selective, so that political and administrative officials who acquired their jobs in recent years are, on the average, inferior to the hard-core cadres of earlier vintage. A provincial party directive of April 1966 reflected this phenomenon by stating that more recently recruited cadres were unable to "cope with hardship," ascribing "the drop in quality..." to recent heavy recruiting which resulted in members' putting too much stress on quantity..."
6. A second, and perhaps more significant, reason for the decline in quality of civilian officials has been the Viet Cong's emphasis, since early 1965, on the military side of the conflict. In order to fill the expanding Liberation Army, the Viet Cong instituted what came to be called the "Reduction in Administrative Personnel." This involved a large-scale transfer of bureaucratic functionaries to the army, particularly the main force, as officers and noncoms. A COSVN-level document written in the middle of 1966 noted that at that time "10 percent to 30 percent of the competent...cadres" had been so transferred from local levels of the infrastructure.

7. The gradual qualitative deterioration of the civilian infrastructure has varied widely both by area, and by level of assignment. Generally speaking, the decline has been most pronounced at the lower levels, but the Viet Cong hierarchy has also been affected. This pattern is reflected in a study of Chieu Hoi statistics jointly compiled by RAND and MACV, which shows that enemy political cadre defections were most common among the lower level personnel.

8. The study determined that some 25 percent of the ralliers listed in weekly defector reports as "civilians had cadre status. The percentage of civilian (or "political") cadres by their level of service was found to be as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional Level</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial Level</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Level</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village/Namlet Level</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. It is also evident that the deterioration has been more rapid in the Delta, for example, than it has been in I Corps. A recent study by a RAND researcher indicates that not only have the number of civilian ralliers in the Delta increased considerably in recent months, but the length of service with the VC among the ralliers has gone up as well.
The number of civilian ralliers in I Corps, on the other hand, is so small as to be statistically insignificant.

10. Morale apparently has become a serious problem in some areas as a result of allied military pressure and related hardships. Documents, prisoners and ralliers suggest reduced confidence in victory, and growing "revisionism" and "subjectivism" among the cadre. Doctrinal disputes on strategy, and bureaucratic wrangling on its implementation have also created problems. But deteriorating morale does not yet seem to be a serious problem in areas where the Viet Cong have not yet been forced into a retrograde situation.

Communist Countermeasures

11. The Party's initial response in early 1966 to the decline in the infrastructure's quality was to increase the number of reindoctrination courses and emulation campaigns for its cadres. Although politically helpful, from the Communists' point of view, the courses did little to solve the basic problem. One Party document dated August 1966 indicated that although the courses had been partially effective, there was still "weakness" in leadership, and that "the status of desertion always prevails." [sic.]

12. More recently, the Communists have attempted to tighten up their control apparatus in the countryside. Recent low-level reports from several provinces cite personnel, administrative and territorial reorganizations, and, in some cases, introduction of North Vietnamese political cadres to supervise or replace local Party agents. While these reports reflect a streamlining rather than a general purge, some regional and provincial levels have been told to tighten up their organizations and to remove or replace those local cadres who are not considered reliable or sufficiently enthusiastic in their jobs. The documents also
reflect considerable concern over vulnerabilities to GVN intelligence and defection operations.

13. There are also indications that the Viet Cong are assigning high-level cadres to lower echelon positions. A recent detainee -- a PRP member connected to the Can Tho Party committee -- said that some of the provincial committee's section leaders had been downgraded to serve at district level. The detainee indicated that the downgrading was not a demotion but was an attempt by the Viet Cong to strengthen the apparatus at the lower echelons. There have been other similar reports which suggest that this may be a general trend.

14. This down-shifting of gears may tend to exacerbate the morale problems of infrastructure, since it could be construed as a partial step backwards and thus a tacit admission that the past strategy has failed. The infrastructure's morale and the quality of its personnel are not so low, however, that they cannot be buoyed up, particularly by a series of successes, real or apparent. Although shaky in some areas, the infrastructure remains largely intact at middle and higher echelons, and poses a formidable obstacle to the pacification program.