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28 JUN 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable George W. Ball
The Under Secretary of State

SUBJECT : Recent Trends in the Infiltration of Men and Supplies into South Vietnam

1. Our analysis of recent developments in the infiltration of men and supplies into South Vietnam shows that the North Vietnamese continue to rely upon the infiltration network through Laos as the principal means of supporting the Communist forces in South Vietnam. In recent months, however, we have evidence of an increase in the rate of seaborne infiltration from North Vietnam and a significant increase in the use of Cambodia as a source of supplies.

2. There is evidence that in the first five months of 1966 almost 21,000 troops infiltrated into South Vietnam, compared with a total infiltration of about 19,000 men in 1965. Although final figures on the infiltration of personnel in May and June will not be available for several weeks we estimate that the high rate of infiltration is continuing.

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3. [redacted] The NVA troops now in South Vietnam account for more than one-third of the 100,000 Communist main forces in South Vietnam. If infiltration is maintained during the rest of 1966 at the high rate of the first five months the NVA forces could account for about half of the Communist main-force strength in South Vietnam be January 1967.

4. The North Vietnamese have been able to maintain an effective balance between the flow of men and supplies into South Vietnam. During the past dry season, the North Vietnamese probably received about 34 tons per day of supplies through Laos. On an annual basis

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this movement approximated the VC/NVA requirement for 7,300 tons of supplies from external sources. The flow of supplies through Laos during the past dry season was not adequate to support a continued build-up of the Communist forces in South Vietnam. However, the North Vietnamese have made sufficient improvements to the network in Laos and have developed alternative means of resupply to enable a continued build-up to be supported.

5. They have, for example, made sufficient improvements to the road network in Laos to provide a rainy season capacity adequate to satisfy at least the logistic requirements of the forces in Laos and possibly to satisfy the current external logistic requirements of the forces in South Vietnam. The development of this all-weather capability could enable the Communist forces to use the surplus stocks brought in during the past dry season for a further expansion of their forces in South Vietnam or to support an increased level of combat by existing forces.

6. In addition the Communists can and are making further use of seaborne infiltration. Cambodia is also being exploited as a source of supply. The resort to these alternative means of supply has been in large measure a matter of logistic expediency. Thus probably as much as 10,000 tons of rice is being obtained from Cambodia. This rice is being used to supply the PL/NVA forces in Laos and the VC/NVA forces concentrated in the food-deficit central highlands of South Vietnam. The increasing use of seaborne infiltration is also probably a logistic expedient to resupply the Communist forces in the southern parts of South Vietnam. We do not attribute to the Viet Cong a capability to supply these troops effectively by an overland movement originating in North Vietnam.

7. We should note that there are other possible explanations for the increasing resort to other means of supply. These are principally the admitted difficulties encountered by the Viet Cong in distributing supplies within South Vietnam and the probability that air and ground operations in South Vietnam have denied the Viet Cong access to their stockpiles of supplies.

8. We feel that the North Vietnamese, in spite of these problems, will, by using the various supply alternatives, be able to support a build-up to some 125,000 main forces by the end of 1966.

9. The frequency with which supplies or men will infiltrate into South Vietnam is not a reliable indicator of Communist tactical intentions. A continued build-up of forces and supplies would indicate

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that North Vietnam intends to stay with the war. The build-up, or the rate at which it is carried out, does not, however, give a reliable indication of the courses of action the North Vietnamese will follow. It may be simply a desire to maintain an equilibrium with US/GVN and allied forces. It will also, however, give them an increased capability to launch occasional large-scale attacks on isolated outposts. Hanoi apparently still feels that it can maintain a balance with the US/GVN forces in the field in South Vietnam and that the U.S. will finally tire of the war and agree to a settlement on Hanoi's terms.

10. I am attaching an expanded statement of our thinking on this problem, which provides the specific data and information underlying our present estimates.

/s/ R. J. Smith

R. J. SMITH
Deputy Director for Intelligence

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RECENT TRENDS IN THE INFILTRATION OF MEN AND SUPPLIES INTO SOUTH VIETNAM

I. The Sources and Means of Supply

The overwhelming share of supplies needed to meet the external logistic requirements of the Communist forces in Laos and South Vietnam during the 1965-66 dry season moved by truck from North Vietnam into Laos and through the Laotian Panhandle. This flow of supplies was supplemented by a small movement of about 2 tons per day moving by primitive transport along the trails leading from North Vietnam into Laos. In recent months we have noted an increasing use of Cambodia as a source of supplies, particularly rice, and an apparent resumption of seaborne infiltration as a means of resupply.

A. Truck Traffic from North Vietnam to Laos

During the recent dry season (mid-November 1965 to mid-June 1966), trucks moving from North Vietnam into Laos delivered an average of about 84 tons of supplies per day, or a daily movement of about 28 trucks each carrying 3 tons of supplies. In addition, an average of four trucks a day moved into Laos, each carrying from 25 to 30 troops.

The daily flow of supplies varied sharply, ranging from a high of about 100 tons daily in the two opening and two closing months of the season to a low of about 15 tons daily during February and somewhat more than 35 tons a day during March and April. The variation in the movement of supplies would seem to relate most directly to variations in the observed movements of troops by truck. During February, the month with the lowest volume of cargo movements, the number of troops moved by truck increased dramatically to an average of 20 to 25 trucks per day.

The destination of these troops is uncertain. They may have been en route to the A Shan Special Forces camp that was overrun in early March a few weeks after the observation of the troops, or they may have been destined for the southern panhandle of Laos. New concentrations of troops were identified in March southwest of Attopeu and in the southern tip of Laos. It is equally possible that they were engineer battalions and support troops moved into Laos to expand and to keep the infiltration open. The large-scale movement of troops by truck during February was unique. All of the Communist forces known to have infiltrated into South Vietnam thus far have moved on foot.

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B. The Flow of Supplies from Cambodia

Communist use of Cambodia as a logistics base has increased significantly in recent months. In past years the Communists have used Cambodia as a means of acquiring, through commercial channels, limited amounts of supplies such as cloth, pharmaceuticals, salt, communications equipment, and surgical supplies. We estimate that during 1965 the flow of these supplies from Cambodia to the Communist forces in South Vietnam was less than a ton a day. Recent reporting indicates that the Communists are increasing their procurement of these supplies from Cambodia. We are unable, however, to quantify this movement. A more significant development in recent months has been the emergence of Cambodia as a major source of rice supplies. During 1966 the Communists will apparently acquire a minimum of 5,000 to 10,000 tons of rice and may acquire as much as 20,000 tons. This development is noteworthy because it marks a significant weakening in the ability of the Communist forces in South Vietnam to satisfy their food requirements from sources within the country.

The new reliance on Cambodia for rice supplies may be explained by several factors. We estimate that about half of the 10,000 tons of rice being obtained in Cambodia will go to the Communist forces in Laos. These troops are for the most part located in food-deficit areas and previously obtained their food supplies from North Vietnam. In view of the increasing amounts of traffic being moved through Laos to the Communist forces in South Vietnam under conditions of harassment and interdiction by US/GVN air forces, the Communists may now find it more expedient logistically to obtain food supplies in Cambodia. The remainder of the rice obtained in Cambodia is undoubtedly intended to meet the requirements for rice of the 21,000 VC/NVA troops stationed in the rice-deficit central highlands of South Vietnam. Although the Viet Cong have large stores of rice in South Vietnam, they are unable to distribute it freely throughout the country. It is also probable that the loss of existing stockpiles as a result of US/GVN and Allied forces ground and air operations has necessitated the purchase of Cambodian rice.

If rice deliveries from Cambodia should increase to 20,000 tons in 1966, they would be in excess of current VC/NVA requirements. Rice deliveries at this level could be the result of one or more of the following developments: (a) an increasing concentration of VC/NVA forces in food-deficit areas; (b) an attempt to establish new or to replace old stockpiles; or (c) an increasing disruption of the internal logistics supply system within South Vietnam.

C. Seaborne Infiltration

Until the launching of operation Market Time in the summer of 1965, the Communists had made fairly widespread use of seaborne

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infiltration to carry men and supplies from North Vietnam to South Vietnam. We have never been able to make a precise estimate of the volume of supplies actually moved by sea. We have also assumed the sea infiltration network to be principally for the movement of material supplies. The infiltration of manpower by sea has usually been confined to small teams of agents.

The immediate reaction of the North Vietnamese to the Market Time operation was to reduce their seaborne infiltration operations significantly. Nevertheless, we have always attributed to them a capability to move in by sea a minimum of 60 tons of supplies a day without detection by Market Time forces. Since the operation began, four attempts at seaborne infiltration by steel-hulled ships and several other attempts by small craft have been detected. The most recent estimate [redacted] during the period from November 1965 through May 1966 possibly two ships have arrived undetected in South Vietnam each month. If each ship carried 100 tons of cargo, an average daily total of 7 tons was delivered.

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The reasons for the revival of seaborne infiltration at this scale are uncertain. It may reflect a North Vietnamese decision, after a suitable period of observation, that the Market Time operation could be safely penetrated and that resupply by sea would be the most expedient way of supplying Communist forces in the southern parts of South Vietnam, or it could reflect an inability on the part of the Viet Cong to maintain an effective overland logistics system to resupply the Communist forces in the delta regions of South Vietnam.

II. The Flow of Supplies and the Logistic Requirement in South Vietnam

Except for the requirements of those Communist forces in the central highlands whose rice supplies are being met from Cambodia, the current external logistic requirements of the Communist forces in South Vietnam are about 20 tons a day, principally for quartermaster supplies, signal equipment, and weapons and ammunition. If these requirements remain unchanged during 1966, they will amount to an annual total of 7,300 tons of which slightly more than 7,100 tons have been made available through Laos during the past dry season. It is evident, therefore, that sufficient tonnage has not yet been delivered over the land routes in Laos to sustain a continued build-up of the Communist forces in South Vietnam and to continue fighting at the current rate.

We estimate, however, that truck traffic from North Vietnam into Laos and food shipments from Cambodia will continue during the present rainy season at a rate at least equivalent to the current requirements in Laos. It is even possible that the volume of traffic

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during the rainy season may be adequate to meet the current requirements in South Vietnam, which would involve the movement of only seven trucks a day. If this movement is realized, then the stockpile built up during the past dry season could be left intact or used to support a further build-up of Communist forces.

The recent evidence of the increased use of Cambodia as a source of supplies and of the possible acceleration of infiltration by sea indicates that the Communists have additional alternatives for effective resupply. Our estimate of the new rainy season capacity of the road network through Laos should make the volume of supplies moving through Laos during the remainder of the year adequate for current requirements. In this case, the surplus stocks of supplies brought in during the past dry season plus the supplies now estimated to be actually moving by sea would provide a total volume sufficient to support present estimates of the build-up of Communist forces through the end of 1966 -- some 125,000 main force troops. Moreover, if seaborne infiltration of supplies continue at the present rate the augmented force can be sustained without the receipt of supplies from Cambodia.

It should be noted, however, that an increase in the movement of supplies in the absence of other data is an inconclusive indicator of the courses of action planned by the VC/NVA forces in South Vietnam.

III. Infiltration of Personnel

There are not enough data available yet to form a full picture of the infiltration rate during the past three months. The evidence already on hand for the period, however, when combined with that for January and February, indicates that the overall pace climbed sharply to a new high during the first five months of 1966. 25X1

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Most of the infiltrating personnel, once into Laos, move largely by foot over well concealed trails down into South Vietnam. Infiltrators captured in the South still speak of the rigors of the trek, including a high rate of sickness and lowered morale along the route as a result of the hardships. Hanoi's reluctance to use the truck transport available in Laos to move a large number of the infiltrators is probably explained by a desire to reserve the trucks for resupply activity and to provide greater security from attack.

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If we consider only the North Vietnamese units whose infiltration has already been confirmed, it is apparent that DRV personnel now constitute more than one third of the total Communist main force strength in South Vietnam (some 38,000 out of approximately 100,000). If the rate of infiltration for the first five months of this year is maintained through the rest of 1966, it is probable that by January of 1967 about half of the regular Communist military strength in the South will be North Vietnamese.

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Recent US 'spoiling" operations may have upset Communist plans for their "monsoon" offensive, which would have employed at least some of these newly arrived units. Nevertheless, the Communists retain sufficient strength in place in South Vietnam to launch a series of large-scale attacks and may well attempt to do so in the near future.

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There is no indication, however, that the Vietnamese Communist leadership sees any necessity to make a "go for broke" military effort now in South Vietnam. Their objective in stepping up infiltration during 1966 appears to be mainly to counter the US military buildup. The Communists apparently estimate that they will still hold a powerful military hand in South Vietnam if they can maintain large main force units intact following the completion of the next phase of the US buildup, which Hanoi propaganda claims will raise American strength in Vietnam to around 400,000. The Vietnamese believe that they will still retain the option of protracted war. This has long been their main strategy, one which they hope will eventually wear out the Allied will to fight.

Judging from the placement of the newly infiltrated North Vietnamese units, we believe it most likely that the Communists, at least in the central highlands, will for the present stick largely to their recent tactic of hitting isolated outposts with overwhelming force, choosing a situation where they can use terrain and weather to advantage. Their objective in part will be to clear out Allied military posts in the highlands which hamper the Communist movement and buildup in the area. They will also be seeking new victories, using their proven technique of attack and subsequent ambush of the reaction forces. The Communists will try to inflict the maximum number of casualties on American forces, even if it results in a heavy loss rate among Communist troops. Their aim will be to spur pressure from the American public for concessions in US policy on the war.

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