

Extracts from the CIA Publication,  
"The Vietnam Situation: An Analysis and Estimate"  
dated 23 May 1967

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Army review(s) completed.

Extracts from the publication "The Vietnam Situation: An Analysis and Estimate -  
Conclusions," dated 23 May 1967; [redacted]

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Section I. Paras. 6, 7, and 8 Pages 6 and 7:

6. The Enemy Force: Estimating the size, structure and effectiveness of the enemy force in South Vietnam is a difficult intelligence task complicated by methodological problems, the difficulty of acquiring hard data in a timely fashion, and the presentational issues involved in refining our data base in the light of new knowledge without giving data users the false impression that the enemy force has suddenly ballooned or without making new data difficult to relate to earlier analyses. There is, for example, the inevitable tension between the need to apply stringent criteria of confirmation and acceptability, which tend to produce inherently low "assessments" (in the real estate taxation sense), with the need, particularly on the part of unit commanders, for appraisals (in the real estate sales sense) which indicate what allied forces actually may be facing. Over the past year our methodology and data base have both improved markedly. Further refinement is still desirable, but some problems, particularly acquisition problems involving timeliness, are inherently insoluble (unless, for example, Communist infiltrators start defecting sooner after their arrival in South Vietnam).

7. Our review of all evidence available indicates that despite the allies' increasingly effective operations and resultant Communist casualties, the Vietnamese Communists have continued to expand the size of their main force structure in South Vietnam, both by infiltration and local recruitment. Though part of this main force expansion has been achieved at the expense of lower-level Viet Cong military formations (provincial and district units) and of the "political infrastructure," we believe the Viet Cong paramilitary and political organization is still probably far larger than official US order of battle statistics indicate. We think the official figure for main and local forces, currently 115,000, is probably fairly accurate, though lagging somewhat behind the actual input from North Vietnam. We estimate, however, that the strength of the so-called "administrative services" (and non-combat support troops) is in the 75,000 - 100,000 range, that the strength of the "irregulars" is in the 200,000 range, and that the number of Viet Cong political personnel is in the 80,000 range. Thus the overall strength of the Communists' organized force structure in South Vietnam is probably in the 500,000 range and may even be higher.

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8. We are not suggesting that the total Communist force structure has increased dramatically in recent months, but do believe an accumulation of improvements in methodology and data indicates that the allies have long been facing a total organized opposition far larger than accepted official figures have indicated. We also feel that an appreciation of the probable true size of this organized opposition will enable us to make far more valid and useful interpretations of future input and loss statistics.

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Extracts from the CIA Publication "The Vietnam Situation: An Analysis and Estimate," dated 23 May 1967, [redacted]

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Section I. Para 15 Page 11 and 12.

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.

Section II. Summary Pages 1 and 2:

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 low-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 [redacted] 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.

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In the case of the irregular forces, for example, the latest US order of battle holdings list their strength at 113,000.\* 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

\*MACV J-2 Monthly Order of Battle Summary as of 15 May 1967

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"administrative service" forces (staffs and non-combat support troops) are now listed in the OB 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 OB, 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 OB purposes.

In any event, it appears that strength of the insurgent apparatus in South Vietnam, instead of totalling 292,000 as listed in the 15 May 1967 OB, may actually be in the half-million range. If the Communists have an organized manpower base of anywhere 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.

Section II. Summary Paras. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, and 23; Pages 3 thru 10.

#### Main and Local Forces\*

1. The Viet Cong - NVA 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 196 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 NVA and 12 Viet Cong -- which

\*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.

in turn are subordinate to the seven accepted NVA 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/NVA COMBAT FORCES (SVN)

	<u>Strength</u>	<u>Division</u>	<u>Regiments</u>	<u>Battalion</u>	<u>Sep Co (VC)</u>	<u>Sep Platoon (VC)</u>
I CTZ	31,780 (21,340)	4 (4)	11 (43)	61	42	
II CTZ	33,045 (22,650)	2 (2)	10 (10)	57 (44)	56	31
III CTZ	31,652 (8,590)	3 (1)	13 (5)	56 (15)	38	27
IV CTZ	19,240		2	22	71	11

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.

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 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 OB 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 well 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.\*\*

\*Administrative Service Units are composed of military personnel in COSVN, military region, military subregion, province, and district staffs and rear service technical units of all types directly subordinate to these headquarters.

\*\* 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\*

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. Studies of the evidence by MACV as of March 1967 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 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 [redacted]. These estimates consider the type of VC infrastructure, the density of population, the scale of enemy military activity, and the extent of VC control [redacted]

12. The unofficial MACV estimate of about 198,000 irregulars is the result, in part, of a new countrywide collection effort focussing 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 OB 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.

\*Irregulars, by MACV's definition, are organized forces composed of guerrilla, self-defense, and secret self-defense elements subordinate to village and hamlet level VC organizations.

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 80,000 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 20,000 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 Youths 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.

\*The Political OB is defined as the strength, and disposition of the command, and administrative organization of the Viet Cong infrastructure, which embodies the Communist control structure, and the leadership and administration of a parallel front organization (National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam), both of which extend from national through the hamlet level.

( 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 lag 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.

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Section III Paras. 3 and 4 Page 4:

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 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.