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MEZ 706

23 April 1967

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Order of Battle Concept for Vietnam

1. The prime responsibility for military order of battle in Vietnam lies with MACV and the Defense Intelligence apparatus. At an interagency conference on the subject held recently in Honolulu, which included representatives of CIA, MACV's order of battle definitions, criteria and methodology were reviewed. Some changes were made in certain procedures, accounting and reporting, but the conference generally endorsed MACV's current approach. Further refinements are desirable and some are likely, but military order of battle, per se, is a function of military command, with CIA's role being essentially one of advice and coordination. Because the Viet Cong order of battle problem extends beyond the purely military aspect into the realm of political and civil intelligence, however, we have more than a passing concern with the problem. It is within the framework of our role in political and civil intelligence activities in Vietnam that we offer the conceptual thoughts outlined below.

2. Our first thought with respect to the Viet Cong order of battle problem is that it should be broken out more precisely in terms of the military and non-military components. The current practice of adding together the strengths of the military and political elements tends to becloud the enemy's potential in both spheres, and creates real problems in terms of calculating net gains and losses. Although the dividing line between political and military components is a fine one, it can be drawn in a fashion which would more meaningfully portray the nature and scope of the threat posed by each element and facilitate development of more effective plans and programs for coping with each threat.

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3. Secondly, we should portray the enemy's organization as he envisages it, rather than arbitrarily (and artificially) slicing it up to suit our own parochial American viewpoint of how things should be. Since the enemy talks in terms of "three categories of forces," and organizes and directs their activities accordingly, our problems in analyzing and keeping book on these forces would be simplified and clarified if we looked at them in the same way. This would also facilitate a more widespread and realistic understanding of their roles and missions and, thus, tend to clarify our thinking regarding the roles and missions of our own forces.

4. A third point is the need for flexibility and dynamism in our approach to the order of battle problem. An over-fixation on the accounting and bookkeeping, combined with overly rigid criteria and definitions, precludes the development of a realistic "estimate" of the enemy's strength and, hence, of his capabilities. For example, if units are listed at their last "confirmed" strength, without any allowance for undetected replacements, strength figures tend to become inherently low "assessments" (in the taxation sense) rather than realistic estimates (in the real estate sales sense) of potential. Similarly, if the data shows that the enemy has adopted a widespread policy of creating certain types of units at a specific level (say anti-aircraft battalions for each division) and this policy has been confirmed, but we don't permit listing any unit as even "possible" until we have had at least one specific reference to it by a document or a prisoner, we are not presenting the planner with a realistic "estimate" of the enemy's anti-aircraft potential in a given situation.

5. A fourth point involves the need to fix a realistic estimate of the enemy's manpower potential within South Vietnam. No estimate of his recruitment replacement capability can approach validity without a more realistic estimate than that now used. The current estimate and methodology is so restrictive that it barely allows enough manpower to staff out the probable Viet Cong apparatus, let alone provide a pool for additional recruitment. It allows the Viet Cong access to only 90 percent of the manpower within areas under their control, 30 percent in areas "undergoing clearing," 30 percent in areas undergoing securing, and 10 percent in secured areas. Because their recruiting is accomplished largely through their "infrastructure," which operates clandestinely in areas not under VC control, their access to manpower is certainly greater than that established by these arbitrary assessments. Moreover, the increasing reliance on females for use even in provincial battalions and district companies, as well as in guerrilla units, terrorist cells, and non-military organizations, should be reflected in assessing the availability of people to fill out the enemy's military, paramilitary and

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political ranks. Recent documents have directed that guerrilla and assault youth units recruit up to one-third of their strength from among females.

6. The above constitute the basic principles of our conceptual approach to the Viet Cong order of battle. We would suggest applying these principles as follows:

a. In dividing the order of battle into military and non-military components, the "three categories" of forces outlined in the enemy's doctrine -- main forces, regional (or local) forces, and guerrilla-militia forces -- should be listed with the military components. One might also include certain para-military formations which are partially armed, such as the assault youth, public security, etc. The combined strength of these forces would constitute the enemy's military potential. Political cadre, including members of terrorist cells and other non-military components either serving as Party committee members at various echelons or as agents, commo-liaison agents, front cadres, etc., whether armed or not, should be listed separately and considered as constituting the enemy's political-subversive potential. While the two might be added to provide a sum total of enemy personnel (political and military) this should be avoided so as not to mix apples and peanuts. This separation between military potential and political-subversive potential should be maintained in computing gains and losses. In the same way, we would not expect the Viet Cong to group GVN Public Works officials at province level with ARVN, RF and PF strength in calculating our probable gains and losses.

b. With respect to categorizing breakdowns within the two broad groupings listed above, we would divide the various forces in the same general fashion as they are organized by the enemy. The current groupings used by MACV are: combat strength, administrative service strength, irregular strength, and political strength. We would propose a different grouping, as follows: main force, local force, and guerrilla-militia. Sub-categories for combat, combat support, and administrative service could be established within the main force and local force categories to preserve the computations for those components. Guerrilla-militia strength should be sub-categorized between the guerrilla and self-defense militia components in order to reflect the distinction between their roles and missions and, hence, their combat potential.

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c. In applying the third principle, we would recommend a review of MACV's definitions and criteria both to clarify their meaning and bring them into consistency with Viet Cong terminology, and also to permit greater flexibility in developing realistic strength estimates. Although we respect the need for effective bookkeeping devices, we also see a need for injecting dynamism into the bookkeeping process so that planners have an appreciation of the enemy's potential strength in a given situation, rather than a statistical listing of "confirmed" -- but very likely outdated -- data. The entire glossary of order of battle terms and definitions currently used by MACV might be reviewed and refined in this light.

d. In developing a manpower base for the Viet Cong, any of several methodological approaches might achieve realistic results. One approach would be to take the population data derived from the new hamlet evaluation system, assessing full VC access to all people living in VC-controlled and unevaluated hamlets, and a successively diminishing degree of access to those people living in those hamlets wherein the VC infrastructure has not been fully eliminated (i. e., E through B). The percentages might range from 75 percent for E hamlets down to 10 percent for B hamlets, although careful consideration by experienced field personnel would be required before establishing these percentages. The use of females should also be considered in computing the manpower base, perhaps calculating that up to one-third would be available for recruiting for local force, paramilitary formations and political components.

7. There are other factors which might be considered in connection with the Viet Cong order of battle problem. These include the need for adequate (if not equal) emphasis on every component -- military, paramilitary, and political-subversive -- in order to insure equal reliability of the basic data and ultimate strength estimates. In this connection, we would hope that our military colleagues would rely on and make use of the efforts of those agencies with whom we work on the field of Viet Cong political order of battle. The National Police in particular are focussing on this subject, and the analytical sections of their Provincial Interrogation Centers are collating a substantial

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amount of information on the VC organization at hamlet, village, district and provincial level. We would hope that all Vietnamese agencies -- civil and military -- could focus their efforts more effectively on the guerrilla-militia and other paramilitary components of the Viet Cong. Unfortunately, the composition and roles of these forces are not widely understood, and there is considerable confusion on both the Vietnamese and American sides from the Saigon level on down. The collection of reliable data on these forces is contingent on an educational program which would eliminate this confusion.

8. The related problems of infiltration and internal recruitment are not so amenable to resolution. While one might prefer some minor refinements in the existing methodology and criteria for infiltration, the current system does fill the bill in most respects, and the data are presented in such a form as to permit meaningful analysis. The major problem is really one of the timeliness of data, and there is little one can do to improve that other than to urge the VC to defect sooner after their arrival, or to urge MACV to capture prisoners sooner.

9. With respect to internal recruitment, not much can be done until a realistic manpower base is established and more effective exploitation of prisoners and documents permits the development of adequate experience factors. We would hope, of course, that the ultimate methodology takes into account the differing requirements of the various military, paramilitary, and political components of the Viet Cong, rather than assessing all losses and all gains to the sum total of those forces.