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Problems of Viet Cong Recruitment and Morale

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DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

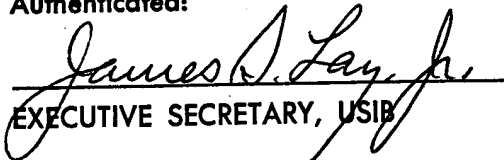
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SUBJECT: SNIE 14.3-1-67: PROBLEMS OF VIET CONG
RECRUITMENT AND MORALE

This estimate represents a preliminary treatment of this subject which will be worked out more fully in NIE 14.3-67, soon to be published. Accordingly we are distributing it only to Mr. Rostow, who requested it, and (in two copies each) to the members of USIB.



ABBOT SMITH
Acting Director
National Estimates

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PROBLEMS OF VIET CONG RECRUITMENT AND MORALE

THE PROBLEM

To assess the nature and extent of the recruitment and morale problems confronting the Viet Cong.

CONCLUSION

Although Viet Cong (VC) difficulties in recruiting personnel, obtaining qualified cadres, and maintaining morale in South Vietnam are likely to increase, they are not likely to lead to an early collapse of the VC effort. These difficulties are least evident in the VC Main Force units and most conspicuous among guerrilla and self defense forces, but they do not yet appear to have seriously weakened overall VC guerrilla warfare capabilities. The VC infrastructure, despite some weakening, appears to remain generally strong. The operations of Communist regular forces are becoming an increasingly North Vietnamese show and North Vietnam probably has sufficient manpower resources to support the war in the South at least for the next year or so.

DISCUSSION

I. COMMUNIST FORCE STRUCTURE IN SOUTH VIETNAM¹

1. The Communist organization in South Vietnam is made up of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong (VC) regular forces, administrative service units, guerrillas, self defense forces, and political cadres.

2. *North Vietnamese and VC regular forces* are composed of North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units, VC Main Forces (units directly subordinate to Central Office South Vietnam ((COSVN)) or regions or subregions), and VC

¹ Figures on administrative service units, guerrillas, self defense forces, and political cadres, are not provided in this estimate because new estimates on these strengths are in the process of being formulated. They will be published in the forthcoming NIE 14.3-67, "Capabilities of the Vietnamese Communists for Fighting in South Vietnam."

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Local Forces (units directly subordinate to provincial or district party committees). These regular forces total about 121,000 men; some 55,000 are in NVA units and 66,000 in VC Main and Local Force units. The VC Main and Local Forces, once composed almost entirely of southerners, have increasingly obtained their replacements from the North.

3. *Administrative service units* are composed of military staffs and rear service technical units (ordnance, signal, medical, etc.) from COSVN to district level.

4. *Guerrillas* are largely full-time forces organized into squads and platoons which do not always stay in their immediate home areas. In addition to combat operations, their missions include terrorism, sabotage, the protection of village party committees, propaganda, and tax collection. *Self defense forces* are paramilitary forces which do not leave their home areas, and members generally perform their duties on a part-time basis. Their duties include propaganda, the construction of fortifications, and village and hamlet defense. Units are only partly trained, and few members are armed.

5. The *political cadres* are the command and administrative personnel of the VC infrastructure, the instrument through which the VC control or seek to control the South Vietnamese people.

II. COMMUNIST RECRUITMENT AND MORALE PROBLEMS

6. *General.* Although our intelligence coverage is uneven, the burden of evidence from all sources in South Vietnam indicates increasing VC difficulties in recruiting personnel, developing qualified military cadres, and maintaining morale. The gravity of these problems varies considerably from region to region and with the type of unit. Difficulties are least evident in the regular forces and most conspicuous among the guerrillas and self defense forces.

7. These problems are not new. They have been apparent since 1965 when, in hopes of quick victory, the Communists began a rapid expansion of their forces. As the Communist forces grew, so did their difficulties.² These were compounded by Allied military pressures which increased casualties, defections, and desertions.³ In addition, the increased intensity of military action resulted in large-scale emigration from VC-controlled areas, draining off potential recruits.

8. *Recruitment.* Recruitment problems throughout the VC structure have been evidenced by unfilled recruiting quotas, reduced recruitment standards (age, physical condition, and political reliability), and greater employment of women and youth. They have been particularly severe in areas of intense Allied military pressure, but have not been totally absent elsewhere.

² NVA Major General Tran Do said in a speech at COSVN headquarters in August 1966, "Our difficulties are those of growing up. If we did not have a sizable main force, we certainly would not have to worry about replacement personnel. It is precisely because our main forces are strong and big that there are difficulties."

³ A defector is defined as a VC who leaves his unit and comes over to the GVN. A deserter leaves his unit with intent not to return.

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9. Allied military operations and a heavy flow of refugees to Allied controlled areas have reduced the manpower pool available to the VC. Captured documents indicate that, since early 1965, the Communists have lost control of over one million persons.⁴ Refugee groups generally contain somewhat less than the normal proportion of men of military age. Recruiting will become more difficult if the South Vietnamese Revolutionary Development (RD) program further restricts VC access to the population. The Communists acknowledge the potential seriousness of this threat.

10. In order to maintain its strength, the VC Main Force has, since mid-1965, drawn heavily upon the guerrillas and self defense forces for replacements. With greater losses in the past year, VC Main and Local Force units have also come to rely increasingly on North Vietnamese as replacements. As a result, some VC Main Force units, particularly in the north, are probably now composed largely of North Vietnamese. Local force units have had greater difficulties in maintaining strength than the Main Force units, but like them continue to draw on guerrilla and self defense units for replacements.

11. The difficulties in recruiting have affected the guerrillas and self defense units most directly. They have not been able to meet their recruiting quotas.

12. The overall availability and quality of VC political cadres at the lower levels have also declined in many areas where losses have been heavy and replacements generally inferior.

13. *Morale.* The general state of VC morale cannot be judged with any degree of certainty; the factors affecting it are numerous and the information is spotty. The defector rate, which is a statistical indicator of VC morale, is running currently at about double last year's rate. Virtually all defectors are low ranking South Vietnamese, and the rate of defection is highest among guerrilla and self defense forces. There is good evidence to indicate that desertion also is recognized by the Communists as a serious problem, and one which seems to be increasing. These facts point to a decline in VC morale; nevertheless, VC troops continue to fight well and there have been no mass or unit defections.

III. COMMUNIST RESPONSES AND PROSPECTS

14. *Communist Responses.* Evidence from prisoners and captured documents indicates that the VC have been acutely aware of their growing recruitment and morale problems and are attempting to take corrective action. The Communists are trying to reinforce and tighten their political control apparatus in the countryside by dispatching experienced, higher level cadres to lower echelon positions, by using more North Vietnamese cadres in VC units, and by some organizational streamlining. The VC have increased their propaganda and

⁴We estimate the number of people in South Vietnam remaining under some degree of Communist control at three to four million.

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other pressures on youth to enlist and are relying heavily on conscription to obtain recruits.

15. *Prospects.* Allied military pressures will continue to impair VC recruitment and morale, particularly in areas of major military operations and where US and Free World forces are stationed on a more or less permanent basis. Successes achieved by the RD program will add to the VC's problems, at least on a localized basis, and it is possible that the GVN's National Reconciliation program and its progress toward popular government will promote additional defections. Some of the Communist countermeasures may prove ineffective. Cadres may be disappointed by their seeming demotion to a lower level, and an increased number of North Vietnamese in direct contact with southerners could exacerbate traditional regional frictions.

16. Although the VC problems of recruitment and morale are likely to increase, they are not likely to lead to an early collapse. Counting heavily in favor of the VC is the continued effectiveness and good morale of their middle and upper echelon leaders. The VC infrastructure, despite some weakening, appears to remain generally strong. Furthermore, it would not be prudent to assume that the VC cannot improve leadership at lower levels.

17. Meanwhile, the operations of Communist regular forces are becoming an increasingly North Vietnamese show. This will reduce demands on guerrilla and self defense forces for replacements. North Vietnam probably has sufficient manpower resources to support the war in the South at least for the next year or so.

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