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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

Viet Cong Manpower Problems

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VIET CONG MANPOWER PROBLEMS*

Summary

A study of enemy documents captured in South Vietnam indicates that during 1966 the Viet Cong experienced increasing difficulties in keeping certain units up to strength and in recruiting new manpower for their military units and civilian labor force. Their difficulties were largely the result of the rapid expansion of Communist forces in 1965 and increasing losses through combat, desertions, and defections. Growing hardships and a lessening of confidence in victory have contributed to the growing number of desertions and defections and have hampered recruitment as well. The evacuation of Vietnamese civilians to areas controlled by the Government of South Vietnam and the increased presence of allied troops have also impeded recruitment.

The Viet Cong have had to upgrade an increasing number of local and irregular forces to keep main force units up to strength. The result has been a deterioration in the quality of local and irregular forces. There is as yet no indication that manpower problems will force the Viet Cong to curtail their combat operations. If these problems worsen in 1967, however, the pace and scope of combat operations may be affected.

* This memorandum was produced by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Research and Reports and coordinated with the Office of Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs, the Office of Current Intelligence, and the Office of National Estimates; the estimates and conclusions represent the best judgment of the Directorate of Intelligence as of March 1967.

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I. Documentary Evidence

Documents issued by the Viet Cong Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN) as well as by Viet Cong regional and provincial agencies have revealed manpower shortages and recruitment difficulties in a number of areas. In its report for May 1966, for example, the Forward Supply Council for Viet Cong Military Region I (see the map) acknowledged a request of the Party Committee of Ba Ria Province to reduce the latter's draft requirements by 40 percent. Farther south in Long An Province -- an area of traditionally strong Communist control -- a directive of the Viet Cong Current Affairs Committee, dated April 1966, stated explicitly that there had been manpower shortages and insufficient recruitment in the province since the beginning of the year. Evidence of a lack of available recruits also is contained in a captured document (dated September 1966) of the Viet Cong military staff headquarters for Binh Duong Province. In addition, two Viet Cong who recently defected to the Government of South Vietnam reported unsuccessful recruitment drives in Quang Nam Province in 1966.

Inability to mobilize sufficient manpower to meet the requirements of the "front lines" also is indicated in a Viet Cong directive of May 1966 for the Forward Supply Council of Phu Yen Province and in the minutes for January 1967 of a district Forward Supply Council of the recently established Viet Cong Thu Dau Mot Province (formerly, the Viet Cong Binh Duong and Phuoc Thanh Provinces). Similarly, a captured document of the Viet Cong Party Committee of Tay Ninh Province states that the difficulties encountered in the buildup of forces during the first five months of 1966 were "due to the shortage of recruits, who can no longer be obtained from villages and hamlets." This document also suggests that, in some areas, combat capabilities of Viet Cong units have been affected by their inability to obtain necessary replacements.

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[redacted] -- who defected to the Government of South Vietnam in August 1966 from the Viet Cong [redacted] which operates [redacted] -- provided further evidence of the inability of the Viet Cong to get needed replacements. He stated that his division had considerable difficulty keeping up to strength because of the lack of replacements. [redacted] attempted to maintain strength by using North Vietnamese as fillers and by taking recruits directly into the division from training centers, in spite of the fact that many had apparently had no previous military experience.* Available evidence also indicates that some North Vietnamese

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* It should be noted that there is evidence of the Viet Cong being used as fillers for North Vietnamese Army units in other areas.

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forces have appeared as replacements even in local force units in Viet Cong Military Regions V and VI.

A Viet Cong notebook, captured in the recent Operation Cedar Falls, reveals the extent of the Viet Cong's inability to fulfill manpower goals. This notebook, probably written by a member of the COSVN Current Affairs Committee, indicated that Viet Cong recruitment throughout the country is a serious problem and that irregular forces have decreased in both quantity and quality. In addition, a captured 1966 report of the Military Staff for Viet Cong Military Region IV stated that the Viet Cong experienced "great problems in recruiting personnel" in the region. The recruitment goal for 1966 was 5,000 men, but only 600 men were enlisted.

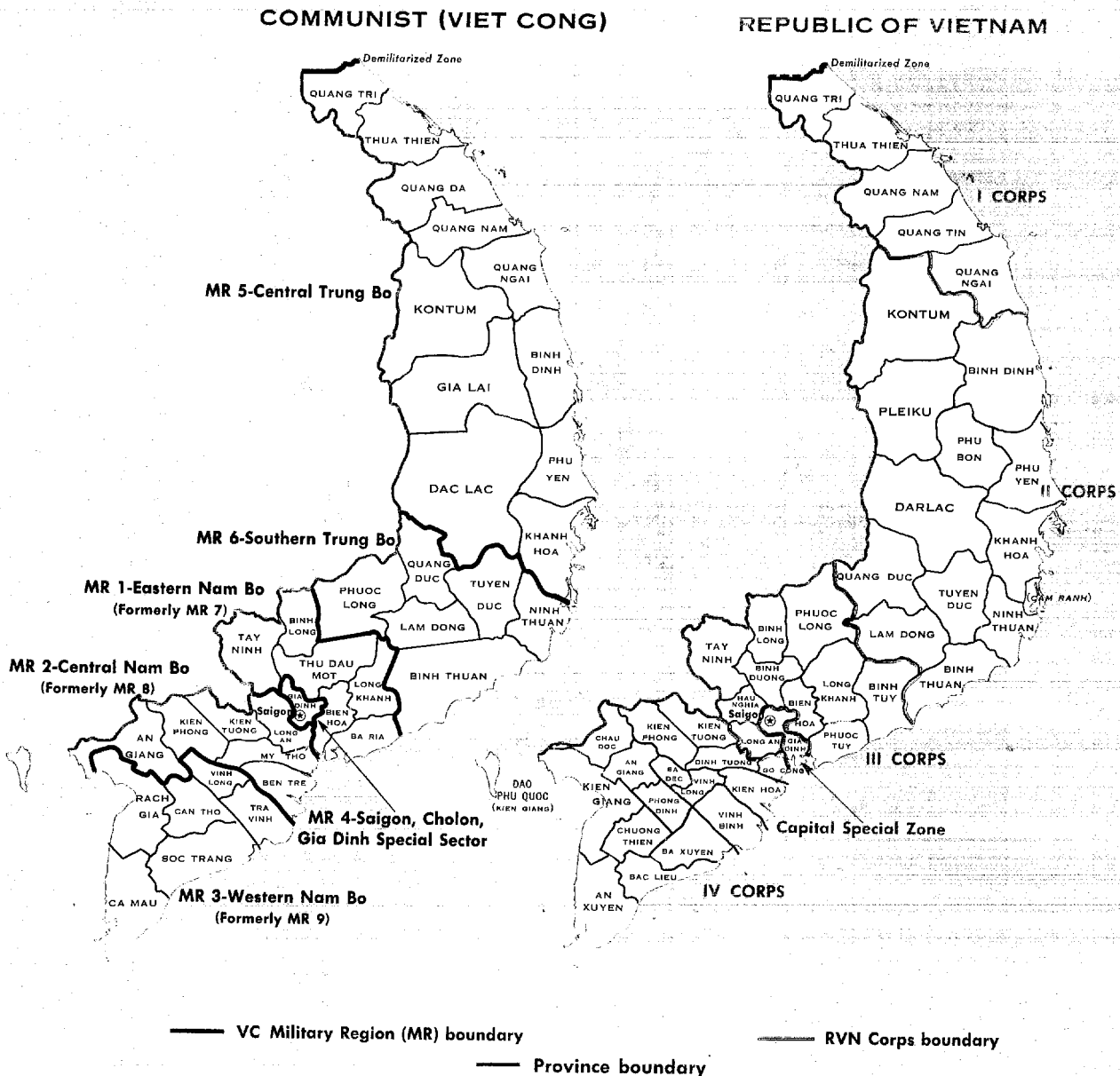
Captured documents also suggest that similar problems exist with respect to civilian laborers. In populous Binh Dinh Province, where the Communists have relied on local manpower to provide food and replacements for their main force units in the highlands, an enemy directive issued in May 1966 stated that, because of a shortage of labor, military units would henceforth receive only 40 percent of their rice ration in the form of husked rice. The remaining 60 percent would be paddy to be husked by the units themselves. Similarly, a report for May 1966 of the Forward Supply Council for Viet Cong Military Region I revealed that during the first five months of 1966 the Communists were able to recruit only about 45 percent of their civilian manpower requirements in five of the seven provinces in this region. An additional indication of the strained manpower situation is the growing criticism by high party officials of improper mobilization and use of civilian laborers by local Viet Cong party committees.

II. Reasons for Manpower Problems of the Viet Cong

The current manpower problems of the Viet Cong are in part the result of the considerable buildup of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces during 1965 and in part the result of their increasing losses through combat, desertions, and defections. Viet Cong recruitment rose considerably during 1965 as a result of increasing emphasis on main force operations. In order to satisfy their increased manpower needs, Viet Cong main force units drew much more heavily on experienced local and irregular forces to reinforce their own ranks. The demand for administrative and support personnel also increased. Although reliable estimates on the demand for and supply of Viet Cong manpower cannot be made, available information suggests that the Viet Cong were at least partly successful in meeting their increased manpower needs in

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Administrative Divisions in South Vietnam



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1965 by recruiting new troops and by upgrading local forces, irregulars, and low-level cadres. As a result, however, the number of irregular forces appears to have fallen steadily since the end of 1965, contributing in part to the growing manpower problems experienced by the Viet Cong in 1966.

Losses by Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces have also been an important factor contributing to current manpower problems. Official figures of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) on losses by Communist main force units and local and irregular forces during 1966 are as follows: 56,000 killed,* 2,000 prisoners of war, and 13,000 military defections. Enemy losses also included 7,000 political defections and an unknown but probably significant number of seriously wounded and dead carried off the battlefield. In addition, it is estimated that a large number of the Viet Cong deserted their units and returned home. The total of these losses, however, is probably still below current estimates of the number of Viet Cong recruited plus the number of North Vietnamese infiltrated during 1966.

The growing number of desertions and defections stems partly from the increasing physical and mental hardships experienced by the troops -- for example, shortages of food and medicines, high rates of illness, increasing battle casualties, and the necessity to move frequently in order to avoid allied military action. In addition, there is probably a growing realization among the enemy rank and file that a decisive military victory is far from certain. Such factors also probably deter many potential recruits from joining the Viet Cong. Captured documents show that recruitment is impeded as well by the evacuation of Vietnamese civilians to government-controlled areas and by the increased presence of allied troops. The notebook captured in Operation Cedar Falls, for example, indicated that, as a result of the presence of US forces,** the Viet Cong lost control of or access to one million persons in rural areas during the period from about mid-1965 to late 1966.

III. Consequences of Manpower Problems

As a result of these manpower problems, the Viet Cong have had to upgrade an increasing number of irregular forces to secure replacements for their main force units. Because upgrading has been particularly heavy over the past year and a half, there are now considerably

* It should be carefully noted that MACV figures on losses include an undetermined number of civilian casualties.

** According to the notebook, there were 5 million persons in Viet Cong-controlled areas in 1966. Official US figures for the number of persons under Viet Cong control currently range from 3.5 to 5 million persons.

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25X1 fewer trained men in the irregular forces. In two districts of Ba Xuyen Province, for example, the Viet Cong complained early in 1966 that the decision of COSVN in 1965 to upgrade guerrillas and village level cadres to meet the needs of Viet Cong Military Region I resulted in their being forced to recruit fillers who were incompetent and illiterate. Statements of the defector, [redacted] also suggest that the enemy guerrilla forces in several areas are no longer capable of supplying large numbers of men with basic military experience for upgrading to main force units. The captured Viet Cong notebook indicated that 20 to 30 percent of "qualified or backbone cadre" (presumably at the hamlet and village level) were transferred to higher echelons between mid-1965 and late 1966.

The guerrilla elements probably are now trying to hold on more tightly to the qualified men still in their ranks, and in some areas competition apparently has developed between Viet Cong main forces and guerrillas for new recruits. A recently captured document, believed to have been prepared at least at the regional level and issued early in 1966, indicated that the Viet Cong main force and guerrilla units were competing vigorously for the assignment of new recruits to their own services.

IV. Changes in Manpower Policies

To compensate for their inability to obtain needed recruits, the Viet Cong have modified some of their policies for procuring manpower. Captured documents indicate that they are now cutting back on "excess" personnel working in civilian agencies and that these "excess" staff people are being used as replacements in combat units. In August 1966, the Viet Cong headquarters unit of Bien Hoa Province issued a directive calling for a reduction of personnel working in Staff and Political Sections and Rear Service agencies at province and district levels to help meet the replacement requirements for combat units in the province. Another captured document of September 1966 stated that, in compliance with "higher echelon" directives, Viet Cong party chapters should send some of their own members, including hamlet and village cadre, to enlist in military units. Moreover, according to a report of October 1966, the Viet Cong Party Committee of Tra Vinh Province had directed that, wherever necessary, replacements for combat units would be drawn from qualified administrative cadre within the province.

Similarly, a captured document, dated November 1966, indicates that the purpose of the COSVN directive to merge Viet Cong Binh Duong

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and Phuoc Thanh Provinces into Thu Dau Mot Province was to improve the command and control of military forces as well as to increase the availability of reinforcements for combat units by reducing staff agencies. Although Viet Cong civilian agencies probably have been overstaffed, tentative evidence suggests that, in order to assure a flow of qualified personnel in military units over the past year, some functions of local party committees were sacrificed and in some areas the local party structure was weakened temporarily.

There have been other modifications in Viet Cong recruitment policies. Because of a lack of males, Viet Cong forces appear to be using women increasingly -- in both civilian and military capacities. For example, the captured document of September 1966 indicates that party chapters have been directed to widen the responsibilities of women in order to offset the loss of male personnel. In addition, one of the defectors from Quang Nam Province stated that because his unit was unsuccessful in obtaining male recruits, it was forced to enlist women as combatants. Other modifications include more widespread recruitment of youths below the age of 16 and above age 50* and renewed emphasis on getting former Viet Cong veterans to re-enlist and South Vietnamese troops to defect. Finally, there have been some instances recently in which the Viet Cong apparently have resorted to wholesale kidnapping of civilians within a village. Such tactics are used at least in part to dragoon more manpower into the ranks, and the practice of forced recruitment now seems to be more widespread than in recent years.

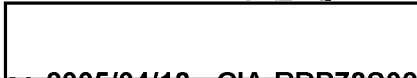
* Viet Cong recruitment is normally conducted among men between the ages of 16 and 50 and women between the ages of 16 and 45.

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