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26 July 1967

MEMORANDUM

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

1. A recent study of several hundred captured documents, interrogation reports, and agent debriefings tends to confirm reports of increasing VC difficulties in obtaining sufficient numbers of recruits for their military effort and political infrastructure. Difficulties began to crop up in 1964-65 when the VC began to quickly expand their force structure and create multi-battalion sized combat units. Efforts to further expand the VC force structure at the same time as allied military pressures increased casualties, defection and deserters and forced the movement of civilians from rural areas to towns have exacerbated the VC recruiting problem. This year, the overall rate of manpower recruiting appears to be below that achieved last year. The problem, however, does not appear at this time to be serious enough to endanger the vitality of the VC infrastructure or greatly reduce the combat effectiveness of main force VC units. Moreover, the VC have been able to maintain regular forces at relatively constant levels, but at the cost of reducing the size and effectiveness of their irregular forces. North Vietnam represents a source of manpower that can be drawn upon to flesh out VC military units in the South and take over many logistics responsibilities, thus reducing the overall requirement for VC personnel.

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2. Apart from needs for main and local force military personnel, the VC infrastructure and military effort requires great numbers of laborers, militia elements, guerrillas, administrative personnel, and various types of cadre. Recruiting problems have been apparent in all these VC groups -- underfulfilled recruitment quotas, gradually reduced standards, (age, physical condition, and political reliability) and greater employment of women. In addition, evidence of substantial numbers of NVN forces being introduced into VC ranks continues to mount. The VC have met these difficulties with intensified recruiting drives, increased propaganda, and various types of pressure on youths to "observe their patriotic responsibilities." It does not appear, however, that widespread forced conscription or coercion by means of terror or physical violence has been used to obtain new military recruits. Captured documents indicate that the VC believe such methods would produce unreliable soldiers, increase desertion rates and morale problems, and cost them political support in areas of VC control.

3. VC recruiting problems have been most severe in areas of intense allied military pressure, although they have not been confined to these areas. A captured official report of VC recruiting in Binh Dinh Province reveals that only 67 recruits were provided to main and local force units in the first quarter of 1966 -- only 30 percent of the planned number. A 1965 Binh Dinh annual report details similar difficulties in recruiting troops and laborers. In a mid-1966 letter, a VC recruiter in Tay Ninh Province recounted problems caused by US sweep operations. He encountered "many difficulties in rounding up 200 recruits required for personnel replacement."

4. An official 1966 report of MR IV (VC Gia Dinh Province, which

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includes Saigon) captured during Operation Cedar Falls states that evacuation of the populace to urban areas and areas of OVN control as well as allied military operations resulted in only 600 of the planned 5,000 men to be recruited.

5. A 1965 VC annual report for parts of Phong Dinh and Chuong Thien Provinces shows a substantial dip in recruiting and upgrading over 1964 results.

6. It seems clear that the Communist leadership would like to be able to recruit more manpower within South Vietnam. Captured enemy documents indicate that recruitment targets for guerrillas and main and local force units -- for the country as a whole -- lag behind goals. We see this in terms of unfulfilled nationwide goals calling for large expansion of force levels. Additional reports tell of difficulties in filling local recruitment quotas.

7. We do not believe, however, that the failure to fulfill personnel recruitment goals necessarily indicates a critical flagging of support for the VC. But rather it should be viewed as an indication of increased manpower needs of the Communists in South Vietnam in response to the rapid build up of US forces and mounting Communist manpower losses. The Communist response to the US build up was in turn to expand the number of men in their own main force units in order to protect their local political and military structure from coming under possibly intolerable pressure from US/ARVN troops. This tactic has been largely successful. In addition, Communist losses from combat increased particularly as a result of the increasing number of larger battles which have taken place between US forces and VC local and main force units.

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8. A major Communist response to the increased pressure, including the losses incurred in meeting that pressure, was to augment their locally recruited forces in the South with NVA regulars -- in the form of whole units and as fillers to VC units -- infiltrated through Laos and later directly across the DMZ.

9. As a result, since the middle of last year (1966) NVA regulars have carried an increasing burden of the war in South Vietnam. The level of infiltration of personnel, particularly into the northern provinces, which are more sparsely populated, more than doubled during 1966. The increasing role of US forces caused the Communists to increase their reliance on North Vietnamese manpower.

10. The commitment of North Vietnamese manpower poses a serious threat to the US/South Vietnamese strategy in the south. In our view, Hanoi has sufficient manpower to support the war in the South at present or even expanded levels without seriously weakening the military posture of the regime in North Vietnam. We estimate that North Vietnam trained and sent to South Vietnam at least 53,000 and possibly 81,000 men during 1966. Although we see some signs of strain on North Vietnam's manpower resources with about 110,000 physically fit youth reaching draft age each year, North Vietnam is capable of maintaining this flow to the South, the present military force level in the North, and all essential economic activity in the North, as long as it continues to receive outside material support at approximately present levels. Further, if Hanoi believed it sufficiently important, it could increase the flow of men to the South by shortening

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training cycles and/or drawing down its presently estimated 366,000 or more in-country troop strength. Hanoi's apparent willingness to commit its manpower resources to the war in the South will in large measure reduce the pressure on the Viet Cong's own manpower resources.

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