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DIRECTORATE OF
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Intelligence Memorandum

North Vietnam's Draft Policy Since 1965

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Foreword

This memorandum presents an analysis of information pertaining to the induction of North Vietnamese manpower as contained in interrogation reports of about 420 North Vietnamese prisoners captured primarily in 1968 but mobilized over a number of years. Of the 420 prisoners in the sample, 93 were enlistees and 20 were former servicemen. Because of inconsistencies in the interrogations, the data available on the prisoners varied; for some, age, date of draft or enlistment, and former occupation were not available. Other publications on North Vietnam's military mobilization and civilian labor force will follow.

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

North Vietnam's Draft Policy Since 1965Summary

The steadily increasing demand in North Vietnam for military manpower has been met since 1965 by the progressive broadening of the scope of compulsory service. In 1965 an estimated 800,000 males were eligible for military service, according to age and physical criteria. Changes in draft regulations by mid-1967 had extended the length of service in the army from a tour of three years to the duration of the war, had raised the maximum draft age from 25 to 30 years, and had subjected to recall former servicemen up to the age of 35 and officers up to age 45. The criteria for exemptions from service also were restricted, permitting additional callup within the eligible age groups. By 1967, these measures had added more than 600,000 to the number of males that were eligible for military service.

Draft regulations in North Vietnam are promulgated at the national level but executed by administrators at the local levels. Exceptions apparently are made at the discretion of district and village authorities who are responsible for filling allotted quotas. This probably accounts for the occasional reported drafting of the unusually young and those in poor physical condition.

A large proportion -- more than half -- of the draftees were farmers or worked in animal husbandry or fishing, reflecting the predominance of these occupations in North Vietnam's total labor force.

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The proportion of agriculture workers drafted during the years 1965-67, however, declined somewhat. The majority of draftees each year were in the age group 18 to 25.

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Introduction

1. North Vietnam's increased involvement in the war in South Vietnam beginning in 1965 and the US bombing of North Vietnam forced the regime to broaden the draft regulations in order to expand and maintain its armed forces. Rapid expansion of the armed forces and an increasing level of attrition, together with the need for civilian laborers to cope with the bombing and to provide a civilian defense organization, caused a demand on the manpower pool that could not be satisfied entirely by the estimated 120,000 physically fit males who reach draft age each year. Hanoi's response was to make basic changes in the draft regulations.

2. The exact sequence of events is not clear, but an analysis of interrogation reports of North Vietnamese prisoners indicates that the following changes were made during 1965-67: the term of army service was extended, former servicemen were recalled to active duty, the maximum draft age was raised, physical standards were lowered, and the grounds for exemptions from service were limited. In 1965 an estimated 800,000 males were eligible for military service according to the criteria of age and physical condition. The changes in these criteria had, by 1967, added in excess of 600,000 to the pool of males eligible for military service.

Terms of Service and Draft Age

3. Early in 1965 the term of army service was extended from three years to the duration of the war. In addition, former servicemen up to the age of 35 who were not on active duty were made subject to recall. In mid-1966, veteran officers up to the age of 45 were subjected to recall. The number of former servicemen and officers actually recalled to active duty is not known, but slightly less than 5 percent of the sample were recallees.

4. The ages of eligibility for the draft apparently remained at 18 through 25 years until early 1967, when the maximum draft age was raised to 30 years. Raising the draft age made an estimated 400,000 additional men eligible for military service in 1967. The minimum age for draft eligibility apparently was never reduced below 18 years. All males are required to register for the draft at age 16 and normally are not called up before reaching

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18 years. However, some males under 18 have been drafted, probably because certain areas could not fill their quotas otherwise. (Table 1 shows the age distribution of draftees for selected years.) Although the sample is limited, the data show that the large majority of North Vietnamese draftees have come from the prime 18-25 age group.

Physical Standards and Exemptions

5. All draft-eligible males are assigned to one of at least six categories, according to their physical condition. Categories designated A-1, A-2, and A-3 include those more physically fit and categories B-1, B-2, and B-3 those less physically fit. Before 1965, only men in the "A" physical categories were considered fit for active service. Men in categories B-1 were classed below average, those in B-2 were in poor health, and those in B-3 were in very poor health. Prisoners reported that since 1966 all men who are classified B-1 have been subject to the draft, at least in some provinces. There were no references to mental qualifications for draft eligibility. Under North Vietnam's original physical requirements, about 60 percent of all draft-age males were estimated to be physically fit for military service. Experience in South Vietnam has shown that more than 70 percent of males in the ages 18 to 33 years were fit for military service. If North Vietnam's relaxed physical standards added only 10 percent to the physically fit category, an additional 200,000 males would become eligible for the draft.

6. Criteria for exemptions from compulsory military service also were changed since 1965. Catholics and males from wealthy land-owning families, for example, reportedly were considered politically unreliable and were not generally drafted for military service. In 1967, however, Catholics were no longer exempt from service and social status no longer appeared to have been a meaningful criterion for exemption. Similarly, entertainers became eligible for the draft in 1967, as reflected in the sample. Prisoners report that, for the most part, exemptions are still being given to university students, sole surviving sons, men with key positions in government or industry, and fathers of four or more children. With few exceptions, the students in the sample had completed their studies and had no other occupation. Although they are not being drafted into military service, young unmarried women of at least 17 years

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are urged to enlist to fill such jobs as clerks and technicians.

Administering the Draft

7. Draft regulations are determined at the national level, and provincial level administrators apparently formulate draft quotas for the districts and villages according to local availabilities. Actual draft practices, however, probably vary considerably, according to the difficulties encountered by district and village officials in fulfilling the quotas. National mobilization guidelines, therefore, are not strictly adhered to at the local level, and these exceptions are apparent in the sample. For example, despite exemptions for university students, one prisoner claimed to have been drafted in 1967 while studying electronics at a university. Another prisoner, a 35-year-old Catholic, was drafted in May 1966 at a time when political unreliaables reportedly were exempt from service.

8. From the limited sample, no conclusions can be drawn concerning the draft burden on particular occupations, although most drafted males were agricultural workers (see Table 2). The proportion of draftees from agriculture, animal husbandry, and fishing declined from 65 percent in 1965 to about 55 percent in 1967; about 70 percent of North Vietnam's total labor force is engaged in these occupations. Other occupations represented by the small sample of those drafted in 1967 included teachers, entertainers, factory workers, and mine workers. Nearly 10 percent of those drafted in 1967 were factory or mine workers and about 15 percent were students.

Table 1

Age Distribution of Draftees by Year Drafted a/
1960-68

Age Drafted	1960-64		1965		1966		1967		1968	
	Number	Per- cent	Number	Per- cent	Number	Per- cent	Number	Per- cent	Number	Per- cent
Under 17	2 <u>b/</u>	4	1 <u>c/</u>	3	5 <u>d/</u>	10	6 <u>e/</u>	5	1 <u>f/</u>	6
17	7	14	3	8	5	10	18	15	2	12
18 to 25	37	72	28	75	33	68	72	62	11	64
26 to 30	5	10	3	8	5	10	15	13	3	18
31 to 35	0	0	1	3	1	2	6	5	0	0
Over 35	0	0	1 <u>g/</u>	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	51	100	37	100	49	100	117	100	17	100

a. Data are based on reports of interrogations of 271 North Vietnamese prisoners drafted into military service. Enlistees and recallees are excluded from the sample.

b. One 15-year-old in 1962 and one 16-year-old in 1963.

c. One 16-year-old.

d. Five 16-year-olds.

e. One 14-year-old, one 15-year-old, and four 16-year-olds.

f. One 16-year-old.

g. One 36-year-old, who formerly served three years as a village chief of public security.

Table 2

Distribution of Prisoners by Occupation and Year Drafted a/
1960-68

Former Occupation	1960-64		1965		1966		1967		1968	
	Number	Per- cent	Number	Per- cent	Number	Per- cent	Number	Per- cent	Number	Per- cent
Agriculture <u>b/</u>	31	70	23	65	27	56	53	56	14	78
Student	6	14	1	3	6	13	13	14	0	0
Teacher	1	2	3	9	3	6	1	1	0	0
Entertainer	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	0	0
Factory worker	2	5	0	0	0	0	7	7	2	11
Mine worker	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0
Other	4	9	8	23	12	25	15	16	2	11
<i>Total</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>95</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>100</i>

a. Data are based on reports of interrogations of 240 North Vietnamese prisoners drafted into military service or recalled to active service. Enlistees are excluded from the sample.

b. Including those occupied in farming, fishing, or animal husbandry.

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