

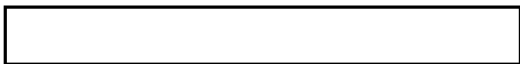
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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

Viet Cong Covert Agencies In South Vietnamese Territory



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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

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In South Vietnamese Territory

Introduction

Viet Cong military victories have been few and far between since the arrival of US ground forces in early 1965. Yet five years later, the Communists, with the aid of the North Vietnamese Army, are still hanging on. Among other reasons, their survival in the South is abetted by the presence in government territory of an extensive subversive apparatus. Save for a scattering of agents, the South Vietnamese have no covert organization in Communist territory, and the "secret war" is largely fought in areas nominally controlled by the government. This gives the Viet Cong four powerful advantages over the Allies.

First, Viet Cong local intelligence is superior in quantity, quality, and timeliness. The most obvious manifestations of the superiority are in the field of tactical warning, and in the ability of Viet Cong political operatives to target and reach specific individuals and groups. The imbalance in intelligence is less telling than it once was, but continues tilted in the Communists' direction.

Second, Viet Cong internal security is considerably tighter than that of the South Vietnamese. The Communists' large counter-

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espionage network planted in South Vietnamese intelligence and security organizations has helped to keep Allied agent penetrations to a minimum and has prevented the growth of a South Vietnamese subversive apparatus in Viet Cong areas.

Third, the Communists are able to impede or undermine South Vietnamese programs, particularly those aimed at the Viet Cong themselves.

Fourth, they can take advantage of and exacerbate South Vietnam's chronic political weaknesses, both on the local and national levels.

The purpose of this memorandum is to describe the Communists' subversive organization and to assess how the Viet Cong are using it under their current strategy.

The Viet Cong Subversive Organization

1. The Communist Party runs the Viet Cong organization, both in its own and government territory. Its controlling body at each echelon is a Current Affairs Committee, invariably located in Viet Cong territory. The Committee conducts its business through a number of agencies, or bureaucracies. At the upper levels, the agencies are formal, highly structured, and manned by full-time personnel. At the lower levels, they are less formal and depend on the activities of large numbers of part-timers in the villages and hamlets. The chart depicts the organization of a typical Viet Cong province.

2. Although all Viet Cong agencies, usually translated as "sections," run operations in South Vietnamese territory from time to time -- including, for example, the Civil Health Section, which buys many of its medicines in South Vietnamese drug-stores -- six are more heavily involved than the others in intelligence and subversion. The six agencies are:

The Military Proselyting Section;
The Security Section;
The Military Affairs Section
(labeled "Province Unit Headquarters" on the chart);
The Propaganda and Training Section;
The Political Struggle Section; and
The Civilian Proselyting Section

The first three agencies are largely targeted against the South Vietnamese government and army. The second three are primarily aimed at the population at large.

Agencies Targeted Against the South Vietnamese Government

3. The Viet Cong Military Proselyting Section, the Security Section, and the Military Intelligence Service each run agent penetrations within the South Vietnamese government.

4. The Military Proselyting Section is directed by the Enemy and Military Proselyting Directorate of the Political Staff of Hanoi's Ministry of Defense. The military proselytors, who are present at each echelon (village level and above), seek to undermine the morale and effectiveness of the South Vietnamese army and government security organizations. Primarily oriented toward subversion rather than espionage, the military proselyting agents -- called "fifth columnists" and "sympathizers,"* according to the degree the Communists trust them -- try to foment unit rebellions, encourage desertion and defection, and set up accommodations whereby South Vietnamese units refrain from actively participating in the war. The Military Proselyting apparatus also performs acts of sabotage and assassination, primarily for their psychological effect. Although a fair percentage of the agents are officers and noncoms -- often in sensitive posts -- they are usually less proficient than their security or military intelligence equivalents, because criteria for recruiting them are less strict. Also, because the agents are often required to proselyte South Vietnamese soldiers and policemen directly, they necessarily operate under lax security conditions.

* *These are the most frequently used translations of terms used by the Viet Cong.*

The Military Proselyting Section has, in addition to the agents, a large support apparatus in South Vietnamese territory. It includes recruiters, couriers, safehouse keepers, and agent spotters. Many belonging to the support apparatus are relatives of South Vietnamese soldiers and officials. Most are women.

5. The Security Section is controlled by Hanoi's Ministry of Public Security. It directs the Viet Cong internal security and counterintelligence effort in South Vietnam, and mounts agent penetrations against the South Vietnamese police -- particularly the Special Branch -- against ARVN's Military Intelligence and Military Security organizations, and against the South Vietnamese Central Intelligence Organization. In recent years, the Section's main success has been against the lower levels of the police and all levels of the military agencies. Security Section operatives are also targeted at the South Vietnamese political parties and religions and are responsible for most political assassinations.* Perhaps because its agent handlers are among the Communists' best, the South Vietnamese have uncovered few penetrations run by the Security Section. No important security agent has yet been reported caught. [REDACTED] that the espionage and subversive effort of the Security Section in Saigon is large and is aimed at high-level targets. In addition to its agent penetrations, the Section runs large informant nets in South Vietnamese territory. These informant nets compile blacklists, which the Section uses to target operations and to prepare for such contingencies as a coalition government or ceasefire.

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6. The Military Intelligence Service is controlled by military headquarters at each echelon (village and above) and is ultimately directed by the Research Agency (Cuc Nghien Cuu, or CNC) of Hanoi's Ministry of Defense. The Military Intelligence apparatus has both "strategic" (high-level) and "tactical" (low-level) branches. It is primarily an intelligence-gathering organization targeted at the South Vietnamese military establishment. However, some of the strategic operatives appear to

* For example, Security Section assassins made unsuccessful attempts to kill ex-Prime Minister Huong and US Ambassador Bunker.

be politically oriented and are assigned as "agents of influence" to manipulate policy. A preliminary analysis of what is believed to remain of the CNC's strategic espionage apparatus in Saigon suggests that South Vietnamese security agencies have apprehended less than half of high-level CNC nets operating there. Recent reporting indicates the CNC also has a large COMINT apparatus -- perhaps with some access to South Vietnamese cryptographic key-lists* -- and an extensive organization which manufactures forged documents. The documents are used by Communist "legalized" cadres operating in South Vietnamese territory. Like the Security Section, the Military Intelligence Service has a large informant network in areas controlled by South Vietnam.

7. Evidence is lacking on which to make a firm estimate of the number of agents the Viet Cong carry on their rolls as serving in the South Vietnamese armed forces and government structure. However, an analysis of captured documents, POW reports, and [redacted] suggests there may have been on the order of 30,000 agents in early 1969. The total, as shown in the tabulation, can be broken down roughly as follows (see also the table):

Military Proselyting Section agents (estimate based on extrapolations from Viet Cong agent rosters)	20,000
Security Section agents (estimate based on the size of the Section's agent-handling apparatus)	3,000
Military Intelligence agents (estimate based on ratios between types of agents)**	7,000
<i>Total</i>	<i>30,000</i>

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8. Such an estimate represents a spectrum rather than a homogeneous group. It conceals enormous differences in agent quality. [REDACTED]

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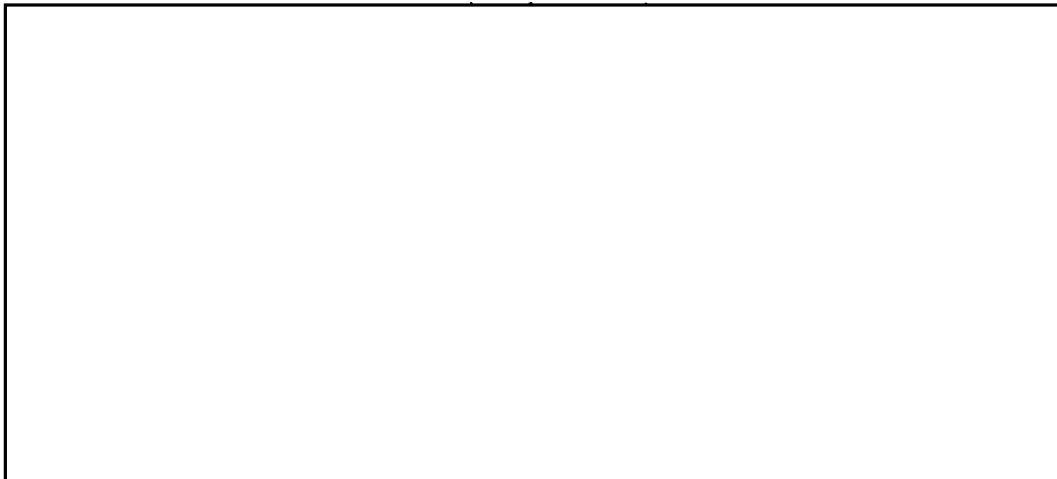
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9. The low-quality end of the spectrum includes several thousand operatives who are inept and unenthusiastic. They cooperate with the Viet Cong sporadically and often have little motive other than a desire to string lines out to both sides. Although they may comprise as much as half the estimated agent total, they continue on Viet Cong rolls because of administrative inertia, because of the ability of some of them to gull Communist case officers, or, most important from a numerical point of view, because of padding by Viet Cong agent-handling bureaucracies. Although often slipshod in the occasional performance of their duties, the lower quality agents are potentially dangerous should Viet Cong fortunes improve.

10. In any case, recent roll-ups of agents by the South Vietnamese security agencies indicate Communist operatives have occupied a number of key posts. Among those captured or tentatively identified as Viet Cong agents in 1969 and 1970 were an

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Agencies Targeted Against Nongovernmental Organizations and South Vietnamese Civilians

11. The Propaganda and Training Section, the Political Struggle Section, and the Civilian Proselyting apparatus are the three agencies targeted against the general population. Each has substantial components in South Vietnamese territory. The components aim at subverting nongovernmental organizations and the "masses." The number of persons employed is indeterminate, because so many are part-timers, often merely members of the National Liberation Front.

12. The Propaganda and Training Section produces propaganda, provides entertainment in Viet Cong territory, and runs the Viet Cong school system. Its operatives in South Vietnamese territory distribute pamphlets, give lectures, and try to recruit teachers, journalists, and entertainers to the Viet Cong cause. The evidence suggests that there are substantial numbers of Viet Cong-trained teachers serving in South Vietnamese schools and that several South Vietnamese newspapers employ Viet Cong reporters and editors.

13. The Political Struggle Section, where it formally exists, is designed to foment mass political disturbances in South Vietnamese territory, particularly in the cities.* Ordinarily, the number of full-time Political Struggle operatives is small because most of its cadres are on loan from other bureaucracies. In times of political strife, however -- for example, the Buddhist Struggle Movement of early 1966 -- the operatives are heavily reinforced. Recent documents suggest the Viet Cong's Political Struggle mechanism is undergoing considerable expansion in many areas.

14. The Civilian Proselyting apparatus is not a formal unitary bureaucracy, but a collection of agencies targeted at different groups. The agencies' main purpose is to provide manpower and other support for the Viet Cong organizations such as the army or the Military Proselyting apparatus. They do so working in the name of the associations of

* *In some areas, such as Saigon, there is no formal Political Struggle bureaucracy and its functions are performed by other agencies.*

the National Liberation Front (NLF).* The apparatus also has a critical role in generating support for, and lending legitimacy to, the Communists' Provisional Revolutionary Government, announced in June 1969.

15. The NLF associations have both overt elements -- based in Viet Cong territory -- and secret components which operate in contested areas or those controlled by Saigon. Some associations -- for example, Peasants, Womens, Youths, and Labor -- have many members. Other proselyting organizations are relatively small -- for example, Intellectuals. Their effectiveness varies widely both by area and by type. For example, Communist reports claim that they are faring well among the students and Khmer Buddhists but are "failing to meet their requirements" among certain types of workers.

Communist Policy and Plans

16. Communist documents make it clear that the Viet Cong have greatly increased emphasis on their subversive structure in the last few months. The new emphasis is rooted in decisions apparently made in early 1969 by the Communist Politburo in Hanoi. At that time, Hanoi decided to scale down military activity in South Vietnam and to increase emphasis on the political side of the war. The change has been reflected by three major phenomena: a shift from large Main Force operations to small-unit warfare; a transfer of experienced cadres from the military to political and subversive tasks; and the going underground of large numbers of cadres, often into South Vietnamese territory.

17. Hanoi's decision to change the Communist army's mode of warfare became evident on the battlefield after the Viet Cong winter offensive in early 1969. Since then, the enemy military activity has largely consisted of skirmishes, stand-off artillery bombardments, sapper raids, and acts of terrorism

* At one time, the chief of the COSVN Civilian Proselyting Section was Vo Chi Cong, who was also deputy chief of the NLF. As a COSVN Section Chief (and concurrently a member of the COSVN Current Affairs Committee), he was a more important figure than Nguyen Huu Tho, the NLF's chairman. Civilian Proselyting Sections are sometimes called "Front Sections."

and sabotage. Parallel with the decline in large unit warfare has been a decrease in the rate of infiltration of troops from the North and a consequent shrinkage of their military forces. The Communists have adapted their army to follow the new mode of warfare -- several large units have split up into smaller formations, and the Communist sapper (or special action) organization has been strengthened.* A COSVN Directive of early 1970 indicated that the purpose of most current Communist military activity is to support their Political Struggle and Military Proselyting operations.

18. The transfer of cadres from military to political and subversive endeavors began in earnest about the middle of 1969, apparently in response to a key COSVN directive, Number 88, of early May. The transfer involves both a physical shift of cadres from the army to political agencies and a shift of responsibilities within the army itself. It has been evidenced since then by several lower level reports, and represents a reversal of policies extant since the middle of 1965, which had sent political cadres to military units. This policy, designed to counter the US troop buildup by strengthening the Viet Cong military structure, had over the years weakened the Viet Cong political agencies and left them with insufficient cadres to fulfill their expanded role under the new strategy. As noted below, the Military Proselyting apparatus, and particularly its agent network within the South Vietnamese governmental structure, has been a principal recipient of the newly assigned Viet Cong functionaries.

19. Directive 88 also called for sending large numbers of cadres into South Vietnamese territory. Viet Cong documents ordinarily describe the process as that of "legalization": that is, the acquisition by the cadres of legal South Vietnamese papers. Substantial evidence indicates that a large-scale "legalization" of cadres has been going on since the middle of 1969, and perhaps longer in some areas. The shifted cadres have included Security police, Military Intelligence agents, Military Proselyting operatives, political agitators, and teachers.

* *The strength of the average maneuver battalion has declined, while the size of the military structure has increased somewhat.*

Significantly, Communist decrees on implementing the "legalization" campaign, which a recent report called "Can Dan Hoa Hoan Dan" ("Transformation of Party Cadres into Innocent People") insist that a substantial percentage of the infiltrating cadres should be Party veterans of several years' experience.

20. The Viet Cong have sent "legalized" cadres into South Vietnamese territory with a variety of instructions. In areas where US troops have left, or where the South Vietnamese control is weak, most cadres have been assigned short-term missions designed to disrupt government control. In areas where there are still large numbers of US soldiers, or where the South Vietnamese position is relatively strong, most "legalized" cadres have been assigned longer term tasks. Recent directives indicate that legalized cadres in some of these places have been instructed to join the South Vietnamese government, to rise as high as they can in the governmental structure, and then to sit tight without rocking the boat.* Presumably, they would be activated as the opportunity arose. In any case, a province-level circular of February 1970, almost certainly reflecting recent COSVN directives, stated that primary Viet Cong efforts this year would be political, aimed at "promoting the revolutionary movement" in South Vietnamese controlled areas.

21. The best-documented method the Communists are using to obtain legal papers is false defection through the Chieu Hoi program, although many other methods -- notably forgery -- are used as well. During 1969, reports of substantial numbers of false defectors were received from more than half the provinces in South Vietnam. These reports suggested that the overall total of false defectors last year reached into the several thousands.

* A recent report indicated that an entire South Vietnamese village council in I Corps was arrested for working for the Viet Cong. Captured Viet Cong documents show certain areas (for example, Ba Tri District in Kien Hoa Province, and Quang Long District in An Xuyen Province) have unusually large numbers of "legalized" cadres.

22. Although the reporting was not always clear as to the ralliers' ultimate destination, it did suggest that many were slated to join the South Vietnamese Army as Military Proselyting operatives. In line with COSVN directives calling for an "Accelerated Military Proselyting Campaign,"* several documents suggest that the Viet Cong hope to raise the total number of Military Proselyting agents, roughly estimated at 20,000 as of early 1969, to 50,000 in the not-too-distant future. Although such a target is almost certainly unrealistic, it indicates the stress the Viet Cong have placed on their subversive effort.

Conclusions

23. The Viet Cong subversive and espionage network is one of the major factors explaining the Communists' ability to survive in the face of enormous Allied military pressure. Their virtual monopoly in the field of subversion has given them the ability to exploit even minor South Vietnamese weaknesses and is one of the reasons why the South Vietnamese control in many areas seems so fragile. The fact that the Communist structure is almost wholly free of Allied subversive penetrations helps to explain much of the Viet Cong's resilience.

24. The network's continuing existence also helps illuminate the state and strength of many political allegiances in South Vietnam. If large numbers of people or officials felt bound to report Viet Cong agents and agitators to South Vietnamese authorities,** the network's effectiveness would be severely curtailed. However, the vast majority has chosen to remain silent. Whether the silence stems from fear, admiration, or apathy is moot. The result is the same; Viet Cong subversive operations continue.

* COSVN Directive CTNT 105 of June, amplified by Directive CTNT 124 of October, Directive CTNT 136 of December, and Directive CT 1 of January 1970.

** For example, Military Security Service statistics indicate that only 348 South Vietnamese Army personnel reported [Footnote continued on p. 12.]

25. As US troop withdrawals proceed, the Viet Cong, by increasing the assets of their political/subversive apparatus, are strengthening their strongest suit. The Viet Cong clearly hope to shift the focus of the contest increasingly to the political arena, in which they have historically performed much more effectively than the South Vietnamese. Thus, as the hot war simmers down or is carried out with less US assistance, the Communists undoubtedly feel that the prospects are high that their strategy will succeed.

Viet Cong approaches during an 18-month period ending in June 1969. Viet Cong documents suggest that the number of approaches made to South Vietnamese soldiers and policemen during the same period probably reached into the hundreds of thousands.

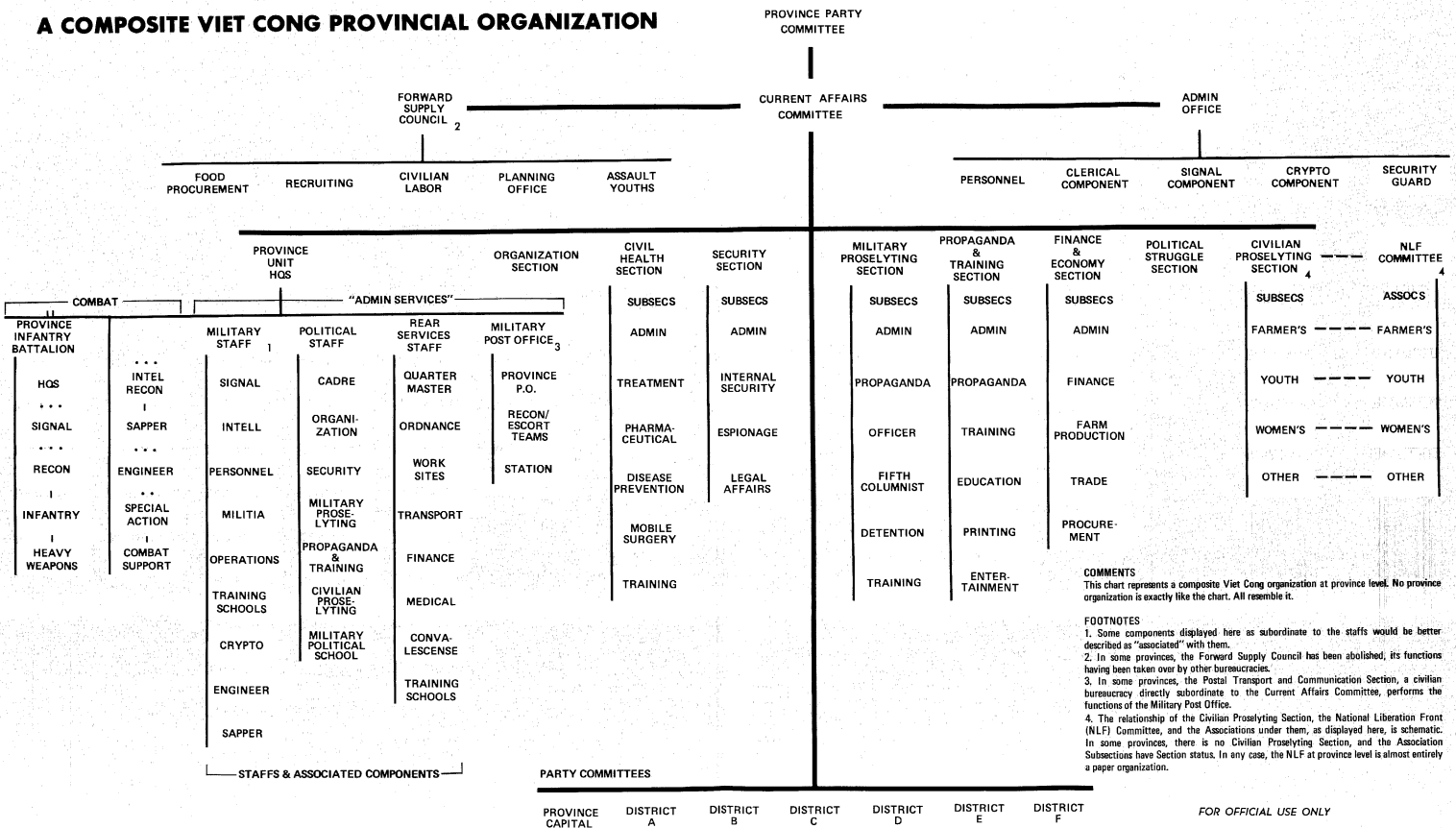
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