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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR



22 November 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Robert W. Komer
Special Assistant to the President

SUBJECT : Viet Cong Recruitment

SUMMARY

Hard evidence on actual Viet Cong recruitment rates is scanty. An analysis of theoretical recruitment capabilities and estimated manpower requirements, however, permits us to frame an estimate of current recruitment rates which we have checked against such evidence as is available. We believe the Viet Cong may have difficulty in meeting their overall recruitment goals but believe that the essential Communist requirement of replacing VC main and local force losses is being met by recruitment within South Vietnam. This recruitment -- averaging 3,000 to 4,000 recruits per month -- is not only within VC capabilities but is almost certainly being met in actual practice.

1. In response to your request of 17 November, we have taken a fresh look at Viet Cong capabilities for recruiting manpower within South Vietnam and endeavored to assess the current rate at which South Vietnamese are being recruited and trained by the Viet Cong.

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2. The judgments, methodology and argumentation offered below reflect the views of all components of this Agency concerned with Vietnam. For your request, however, this paper has not been discussed with any other component of the intelligence community. Thus it constitutes a CIA rather than a community appraisal, though we believe DIA and State would probably be in substantial agreement with it.

3. As you are aware, hard evidence on actual Viet Cong recruitment rates is scanty. Hence in responding to your request we have analyzed the Viet Cong's theoretical recruitment capability, estimated their manpower requirements and, in light of these, framed an estimate of current recruitment rates which we have then checked against such evidence as is available. This procedure does not yield very firm conclusions but, given the paucity of hard evidence, we feel it is the best available line of attack on this problem.

4. Viet Cong Recruitment Capabilities: The number of South Vietnamese living under some form of Viet Cong control is at least 3.5 million and could be as much as five to six million people, depending on the extent to which the VC have access to contested areas. The population to which the VC have effective access for recruitment purposes (largely concentrated in the Delta region) probably contains some 500,000 physically fit young males. Within this potential recruitment pool some 30,000 to 35,000 youths annually become old enough for military service. In addition to this population pool, living in areas to which the VC have relatively unrestricted access, the VC also draw on the population of military age in contested areas, on GVN deserters and on recruits from urban areas. On the basis of what we consider the available manpower resources, we estimate that in 1966 the Viet Cong had a theoretical capability to recruit and train some 7,000 to 10,000 personnel a month. These figures are based on a consideration of available males and hence are certainly on the low side, since we know the Viet Cong make extensive use of females even in combat and combat support roles.

5. Recruitment at this rate would probably be close to the maximum capabilities of the VC. Several factors combine to place this ceiling on VC recruitment and training capabilities. The deterioration of the VC political control resulting from allied military operations shrinks the population pool to which VC recruiters have ready access. Increasing manpower losses being sustained by VC forces and an apparent VC requirement to meet at least part of the North Vietnamese troop losses in South Vietnam diminishes the number of cadre available for training assignments and hence imposes an effective training limit on theoretical recruitment capability.

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6. VC Manpower Requirements: There is little hard intelligence on the actual manpower requirements which guide Viet Cong recruitment activity. An examination of the known buildup of VC military forces from 1958 through 1965 and the estimated losses sustained by the Viet Cong during the same period, however, give some indication of recruitment requirements that obviously were met. As shown in the following table, the total manpower requirements during these five years -- to expand VC main and guerrilla forces and to replace losses -- was on the order of 356,000 ~~to~~ 371,000 men, or an average monthly requirement during this period of about 6,000 persons. During this period additional personnel were recruited to form the VC political/military cadre and combat support units which now probably include from 60,000 to 90,000 persons.

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8. Viet Cong recruitment requirements have varied sharply during the 1961 to 1965 period, ranging from at least 40,000 a year during 1961-1964 to over 120,000 in 1965, the year of the Viet Cong's greatest force increase and the year during which their estimated manpower losses more than doubled.*

9. 1965 also saw a leveling off in the estimated buildup of VC regular forces. Although these forces will probably increase only by about 5,000 personnel in 1966, the rising number of casualties being sustained by the VC will keep the manpower requirements at about 1965 levels. We estimate that Viet Cong forces will suffer manpower losses of from 90-100,000 personnel during 1966.** This yields a total manpower replacement requirement from 95,000 to 105,000 personnel for Viet Cong forces alone. In addition the Viet Cong may be tasked with providing replacements for a growing number of North Vietnamese losses. Depending on the extent of North Vietnamese infiltration, the Viet Cong could be called upon to provide as many as 15,000 troops to compensate for northern losses.

10. Estimate of Actual Current Recruitment Rates: The precise extent to which these theoretical manpower requirements are actually satisfied cannot be determined on the basis of available evidence. We are reasonably sure, however, the Viet Cong are having difficulty in meeting their recruitment goals. This is reflected in the increased frequency of reporting on Viet Cong recruitment difficulties and increasing Communist recourse to forced conscription despite the adverse political effects of such coercion.

11. It should also be borne in mind that the figures on VC manpower losses do not directly translate to true military recruitment requirements since a large number of the estimated losses are probably civilians -- either innocent victims of military action or labor engaged for logistic support activities and recruited or impressed only for short term periods. Furthermore,

* The recruitment figures expressed here represent the personnel input required after allowance has been made for the infiltration of personnel from North Vietnam.

** Bar (i.e., the CIA) estimate of manpower losses ^{includes} ralliers, deserters, captured and seriously wounded personnel in addition to the KIA figures reported as casualties by J-2 MACV. 7

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the Viet Cong undoubtedly compensate for at least some of their military manpower losses by upgrading personnel assigned to irregular units (i. e., transferring them to main and local force units) rather than by direct levies on the civil population.

12. We believe the Viet Cong will consider it imperative to replace the manpower losses sustained by their main and local force units. Our estimate is that during 1966 such forces will lose some 35,000 to 40,000 troops as a result of casualties, disease, desertion, etc. If the VC are to compensate for these losses and, at the same time, expand their main and local forces by 5,000 troops during 1966, their manpower requirements for main and local forces alone would be on the order of 3,000 to 4,000 troops a month or 36,000 to 48,000 new troops per year.

13. One of the few captured documents giving meaningful aggregative data on annual recruitment in a VC province indicates that total recruitment in 1965 amounted to 1.5% of the total population controlled by the VC. Recruitment specifically for military purposes (including militia and defense forces) was just over 1% of the population. On a nationwide basis, recruitment at this rate would be insufficient to meet total estimated Viet Cong manpower requirements, but recruitment at this rate, projected nationally, would provide from 35,000 to 50,000 personnel annually -- or enough to meet local and main force requirements outlined above. Hence this document tends to confirm our estimate of what the VC need to do and in fact are doing in recruitment.

14. A few isolated reports on recruitment programs indicate that VC overall recruitment targets in 1965 were generally fulfilled by at least 50%. In Binh Dinh province, for example, the percentage of population joining guerrilla forces has reached only 3.3% of the lowland population and 5.1% of the highland population -- compared to targets of 5% and 10% respectively. Captured documents indicate, nevertheless, that the Communists in Binh Dinh considered 1965 recruitment sufficient to permit marked increases in the strength of guerrilla and militia forces.

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15. In sum, although we are reasonably confident of our estimate of VC manpower losses we lack adequate or detailed knowledge of the way the Viet Cong attempt to compensate for those losses and, particularly, lack hard evidence on the role of recruitment in this process. Nevertheless, we believe that the essential requirement of the VC for replacing main and local force losses which average 3,000 to 4,000 troops a month is not only within VC recruitment capabilities but reflects a minimum recruitment goal that is probably being met.

/s/

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

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