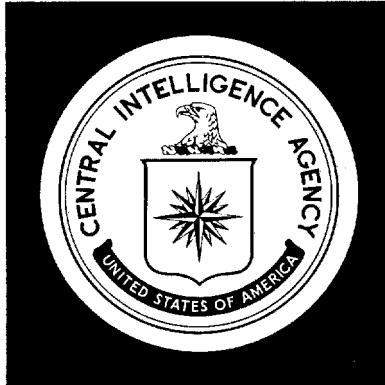


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Intelligence Memorandum

The Balance of Military Forces in South Vietnam

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SC-06971/73
March 1973

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March 1973



The Balance of Military Forces in South Vietnam

Key Judgments

Since the 1972 offensive, both the Communists and the South Vietnamese have worked hard to rebuild their strength and military positions in South Vietnam. At the present time, the military forces of both sides are at or near strength levels comparable to April 1972 -- just after the offensive was launched.

- In terms of raw military manpower, the GVN probably has the edge. ARVN's 287,000 combat troops, somewhat higher in number than in April 1972 at this time, compares with Communist regular combat strength of 154,000. On the enemy side, about 60% of the combat regiments are fully combat effective, with most of the others at least marginally effective. By way of contrast, more than 90% of South Vietnam's regiments are fully effective. Region by region, the Communists are strongest in MR 1 and weakest in MR 4.
- The firepower advantage, at least on the ground, appears to rest with the Communists. Hanoi has dispatched large numbers of tanks and artillery pieces to South Vietnam in the last several months, and inventories may be at or near their highest levels. A possible offset to this could be the preponderant air strength possessed by ARVN forces. However, the Communists have made an unprecedented commitment of AAA and SAMs, especially to MR 1, and the VNAF would have difficulty operating in such a hostile environment.
- Logistically, both sides have strengths and weaknesses. Hanoi has continued throughout the past dry season to ship supplies into South Vietnam. Sufficient ammunition has been moved into storage to support many months of heavy fighting. Under continuing US assistance, ARVN forces have improved their logistic skills, although they continue to be dependent upon air lift procedures which they have not yet sufficiently mastered. Inventories of military supplies available to the South Vietnamese forces are presently quite large.
- Overall, the Communists are now capable of undertaking major military action at any time. Both absolutely and relatively, they have the greatest capabilities in MR 1 and the least in MR 4.

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This basic outline of overall military capabilities suggests that the Communists and the South Vietnamese are, on balance, fairly evenly matched. This being the case, the outcome of any major military confrontation would depend more upon such imponderables as the tactical finesse of each side, the morale of the forces under renewed combat, and the success of leadership. None of these factors can be confidently judged before the fact.

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DISCUSSION

The Manpower Balance

1. The Communist offensive in 1972 precipitated the highest losses since 1968 for both South Vietnamese and Communist regular combat forces. Despite such losses, both sides have managed to keep their main forces intact and, since mid-1972, have been refitting depleted combat units as well as upgrading their respective military capabilities.

2. Since June 1972, the Communists have infiltrated from North Vietnam to South Vietnam roughly 145,000 men in regular infiltration groups and organic combat units.¹ Communist regular combat forces in South Vietnam currently number about 154,000 men, down from an estimated 162,000 men in April 1972² -- owing primarily to the heavy casualties suffered during the offensive. Despite the reduced total number of men, however, the Communists have more units deployed in South Vietnam than a year ago -- currently 14 infantry divisions (compared with 13 in April 1972),³ as well as numerous independent infantry, armor, artillery, and air defense regiments. The number of VC/NVA maneuver battalions deployed in the south has increased from 308 to 368, roughly 20%, between April 1972 and March 1973.

3. During and since the 1972 offensive, the South Vietnamese developed their most effective replacement system of the entire war, moving roughly 168,000 personnel⁴ into the regular force structure. As a result, the present-for-duty strength of South Vietnam's Army and Marine Corps (ARVN/VNMC) as a percent of authorized strength increased from an average of 75% in April 1972 to 90% by December 1972. Currently, South Vietnam's regular combat forces⁵ include about 287,000 men in 13 infantry divisions and several independent infantry, armor, and artillery battalions -- compared to 208,000 men in April 1972. The number of South Vietnamese

1. Since the beginning of the current dry season infiltration cycle (September 1972), the North Vietnamese have deployed 82,500 men in units and filler infiltration, compared with 103,500 during the same period last year. For a comprehensive treatment of troop deployments this dry season compared to last, see the Appendix.

2. Here and elsewhere in this memorandum, April 1972 (just after the 1972 offensive was launched) is used as the comparison point. Generally speaking, Communist capabilities were at their peak during April 1972.

3. This figure of 14 infantry divisions does not include the 308th, which apparently was pulled back to North Vietnam during January 1973.

4. Including 114,000 volunteers and 54,000 conscripts.

5. They include present-for-duty personnel in ARVN/VNMC combat, combat support units, and Regional Force battalions.

maneuver battalions⁶ has increased from 270 in April 1972 to 461 in March 1973, about a 70% increase. This increase is in large part the result of the upgrading of territorial forces into regular combat units (a 97,000-man augmentation).

4. A comparison of South Vietnamese and Communist regular combat force levels by military region in April 1972 and March 1973 is shown in the table below. The table does not reflect those infiltrators not yet integrated into combat units within South Vietnam. The data show a general improvement in South Vietnam's balance-of-forces relationship over the past year in all military regions except Military Region (MR) 1, where the Communist main force threat is greatest. This is due primarily to a general improvement in ARVN/VNMC manning levels plus the upgrading of regional forces into the regular force structure. Moreover, since April 1972 the Communist force structure has experienced some erosion in personnel in addition to a realignment of main force combat units between military regions. The 2nd NVA Infantry Division deployed from MR 2 to MR 1 in June 1972. The 5th NVA Infantry Division and two independent infantry regiments deployed from MR 3 to MR 4 in mid-1972.

Comparison of South Vietnamese and Communist
Regular Combat Forces by Military Region¹

| | MR 1 | MR 2 | MR 3 | MR 4 | Total |
|------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| March 1973 | | | | | |
| South | | | | | |
| Vietnamese | 85,000 | 57,000 | 67,000 | 78,000 | 287,000 |
| VC/NVA | 76,000 | 25,000 | 26,000 | 27,000 | 154,000 |
| Ratio | 1.1:1 | 2.3:1 | 2.6:1 | 2.9:1 | 1.9:1 |
| April 1972 | | | | | |
| South | | | | | |
| Vietnamese | 70,000 | 40,000 | 58,000 | 40,000 | 208,000 |
| VC/NVA | 65,000 | 35,000 | 35,000 | 27,000 | 162,000 |
| Ratio | 1.1:1 | 1.1:1 | 1.7:1 | 1.5:1 | 1.3:1 |

1. Communist regular combat forces include personnel in VC/NVA combat, combat support, and air defense units and in local force companies and platoons. In March 1973 there were approximately 16,000 men in air defense units, compared with 6,000 men in April 1972. GVN figures for March 1973 include present-for-duty personnel in ARVN/VNMC combat and combat support units, 33 Ranger, and 262 Regional Force battalions. For April 1973 they include present-for-duty personnel in ARVN/VNMC combat and combat support units, 33 Ranger, and 48 Regional Force battalions.

6. In April 1972, there were 189 ARVN/VNMC, 33 Ranger, and 48 Regional Force maneuver battalions. In March 1973, there are 166 ARVN/VNMC, 33 Ranger, and 262 Regional Force maneuver battalions.

The Firepower Balance

5. Hanoi's unprecedented commitment of firepower to its military forces in South Vietnam last dry season continued into the 1972/73 dry season with the movement south of large numbers of tanks and artillery groups, almost all of which have now reached their final destinations. Although this year's deployment appears to be on a scale roughly equal to the initial North Vietnamese buildup of armor and artillery forces for the Communist offensive in the spring of 1972, a greater number of these forces have deployed farther south this year -- as attested by the preponderance of tanks and heavy artillery noted moving toward southern South Vietnam, in marked contrast to a year ago, when the emphasis was on MR 1.

6. During the three months prior to 28 January 1973, Hanoi sent south an estimated 450 tanks -- probably surpassing the number estimated to have been initially committed to South Vietnam a year ago. Moreover, about one-third of the total number of regular infiltration groups destined for South Vietnam and Cambodia this year are estimated to be artillery groups, both field and antiaircraft artillery (AAA). In addition, six integral air defense regiments deployed from North Vietnam (four) and Laos (two) into South Vietnam, five into northern MR 1, and one into the Central Highlands of MR 2. (Four of these regiments moved in-country in January 1973 before the cease-fire, but two of the units were post-cease-fire deployments.) Combined, these groups and units are estimated to have some 200 field and 300 AAA weapons, including the long-range 122-mm and 130-mm field guns, as well as light-to-medium AAA weapons, such as the 23-mm, 37-mm, and 85-mm guns. Last dry season, some 1,000 such weapons deployed south, 70% of which were AAA guns. Some portion of these weapons still remain in South Vietnam. Although all of these weapons have previously been used by the Communists in South Vietnam, both the quantity of weapons deployed in such a short period of time (almost all starting south late in 1972 through the time of the cease-fire) and the more southerly destinations within South Vietnam enhance the significance of this year's firepower commitment. Overall, the long-range artillery -- 122-mm and 130-mm guns -- currently in the North Vietnamese inventory are superior with respect to accuracy, range, and rate of fire, to the comparable ARVN field guns, as shown in the following tabulation.

| Weapon | Rounds per Minute ¹ | Maximum Range (Meters) |
|----------------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| US 155mm howitzer (M109-SP) | 1 | 14,600 |
| Soviet 122mm howitzer (M1938) | 5-6 | 11,800 |
| Soviet 122mm field gun (D-74) | 6-7 | 21,900 |
| US 175mm gun (M107-SP) | 5 first 3 minutes, then 1 per 2 minutes | 32,700 |
| Soviet 130mm field gun (M-46) | 5-6 | 27,000 |

1. Sustained rate of fire.

7. There have been improvements in the firepower position of South Vietnam's Armed Forces (RVNAF) as well. Since mid-1972, ARVN/VNMC military forces have received more than 1,000 medium and light tanks, 120 175-mm guns, and over 2,000 155-mm and 105-mm artillery howitzers. However, considering the withdrawal of US air assets, the firepower balance (even considering the large numbers of weapons in the ARVN inventory) probably is more favorable to Hanoi than in the past. In particular, the Communist firepower is very favorably situated in some parts of the country, especially where they have or are in the process of establishing more permanent bases.

8. In addition to its armor and artillery, North Vietnam also has the capability to mount limited offensive air operations in support of its ground forces. The Communists currently have about 200 MIG-15, MIG-17, MIG-19, and MIG-21 aircraft, substantially less than the some 250 which were available prior to last spring's offensive. Although these aircraft have been used exclusively in a defensive role against US aircraft, they could be converted and used in a tactical support role with little trouble. In addition to these MIG fighters, North Vietnam has eight IL-28 light bombers in its inventory. These have sufficient range to be used against targets in South Vietnam.

9. If North Vietnam decided to initiate offensive air operations, it is likely that the Communists would initiate such action from the airfields at either Dong Hoi or Quang Lang, both located less than 70 miles north of the DMZ. The base at Khe Sanh in MR 1 now being developed by the North Vietnamese, however, could also be used by some types of MIG aircraft.

10. Although Hanoi has the capability to launch limited offensive air operations, the principal deterrent to its doing so over at least the near term remains the threat of US retaliation. Even if there is a total withdrawal of US air assets, the South Vietnamese would not be defenseless. South Vietnam's Air Force (VNAF) already includes more than 125 of the F-5A "Freedom Fighter" supersonic (MACH 1.4) aircraft which they began using in mid-1967. This aircraft could inflict substantial losses in air-to-air combat especially against the older MIG-15 and MIG-17 aircraft. In addition, VNAF has about 100 of the older A-1 "Skyraiders" and 200 of the A-37 light attack jet aircraft. These aircraft are employed primarily for close air support, can be used at night, and have an all-weather capability. However, they would be ineffective in an air defense role. Should the need for an even stronger air defense system arise, it could be provided in a short time. Probably the quickest and cheapest way would be to deploy AAA pieces. Currently the South Vietnamese have only four air defense battalions with some 100 self-propelled 40-mm guns, but GVN forces could be trained to operate additional AAA pieces in a short time.

The Logistical Balance

VC/NVA

11. The Communists' dry season military resupply campaign has now been in full swing for nearly six months, and large quantities of supplies -- virtually every type of ordnance and military equipment -- have been dispatched to South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Ammunition shipments alone have amounted to at least 24,000-31,000 tons.

12. Many of these supplies have already moved into South Vietnam; the remainder either has been stockpiled or is still moving in contiguous areas. Deducting ammunition expended or destroyed during the past six months, we estimate that there is currently enough ammunition in (or en route to) South Vietnam to sustain fighting at the current level for the next 12 to 21 months, or at levels comparable to the 1972 offensive for at least six months. Moreover, if the North Vietnamese were to renew heavy fighting, they could move additional quantities of ammunition into northern South Vietnam relatively easily, further increasing their military capabilities.

13. The first sign of a major pickup in logistic activity occurred in October, when COMINT detected a surge in supply shipments through the Binh Tram 18 area in the central Panhandle of North Vietnam. By November, the pace of Communist logistical activity in Laos and Cambodia was beginning to increase. Following initial emphasis on road repair and local resupply, priority soon shifted to the southward movement of supplies for South Vietnam. The greatest surge occurred in February and early

March, when more than 9,000 tons of food and ordnance were moved into Laos via the Ban Karai Pass alone. Meanwhile, large amounts of supplies were moving into Laos on roads west of the DMZ. Activity on these input corridors has remained at substantial levels through late March.

14. Throughout this period, heavy vehicle activity continued south through the Laotian Panhandle and into MR 1, the Central Highlands, and Cambodia. No comprehensive wrapup of the quantities moved is available, but certainly hundreds of trucks have moved thousands of tons of supplies close to (or into) South Vietnam. Movement south through Laos has been especially emphasized since 15 March, when the North Vietnamese kicked off a new phase of their "transportation offensive" designed to move supplies into forward areas.

15. In eastern Cambodia, information has been scarce on Communist logistic activity most of the dry season, but recent information indicates that a high level of activity is being sustained on both the roads and waterways from southern Laos to the South Vietnam border base areas. A newly constructed road through eastern Cambodia improves Communist capabilities to move supplies toward South Vietnam, and we estimate that large quantities of food, ordnance, and military equipment have reached the base areas and are available for transshipment into South Vietnam.

16. During the past six months, Communist logistical activity has sustained a very high level within South Vietnam itself. There has been widespread road construction along key logistical corridors, and, overall, North Vietnam is now generally in a strong logistical position in almost all areas of South Vietnam, with the possible exception of MR 4.

ARVN

17. The US armed forces made impressive progress in equipping and supplying RVNAF and training personnel in the use, repair, and overhaul of complicated equipment. In turn, the South Vietnamese have made some progress in managing their own affairs. They are increasingly able to cope with logistic and related problems confronting them, but technical assistance will be needed for some time to come. If a major North Vietnamese offensive were to occur in the near future, South Vietnam probably would be hard pressed to support its troops in the field without outside help.

18. South Vietnam probably has sufficient quantities of arms and ammunition to meet current needs. During the fourth quarter of 1972, large numbers of tanks, artillery pieces, personnel carriers, individual weapons, and ammunition were brought into South Vietnam. Moreover, since the cease-fire there has been a continuous flow of ordnance into the country, presumably replacing expended military supplies on a one-to-one basis thereby maintaining stockpiles. For its part, ARVN apparently has

performed adequately all functions relating to the stock management and control of all classes of supply since the cease-fire.

19. Although ARVN apparently has sufficient quantities of military equipment, it may have some problems in making full use of the equipment. Few ARVN units have an adequate maintenance program. A lack of trained personnel is evident at all levels, particularly in field maintenance. Unit requisitioning procedures are often haphazard, unsupervised, and, as a result, uncertain and unreliable. ARVN, however, has the capability of attaining an adequate maintenance program if the necessary command emphasis is given, timely and accurate practices established, and appropriate personnel trained and utilized in maintenance skills.

20. Another RVNAF weakness at present is its inability to meet airlift requirements. In March 1972, just before the offensive, VNAF was hauling more than 80% of the total RVNAF cargo requirements -- the US Air Force handling the remainder. However, VNAF had insufficient surge capacity to meet the requirements during the offensive. The next month, the share of RVNAF cargo hauled by VNAF had dropped to about 30%, even though absolute tonnage hauled by the VNAF increased. By October 1972, VNAF's capability was climbing, and it was carrying about 55% of RVNAF cargo.

21. Recent massive US aid deliveries should substantially boost VNAF's cargo-carrying capability. During the fourth quarter of 1972, more than 600 planes and helicopters were delivered to South Vietnam, including 30 of the huge C-130 transports. Adding C-130s to the existing air transport force, however, has put more pressure on VNAF's already strained maintenance, supply, and training activities. Therefore, until the C-130 squadrons are equipped with trained personnel and adequate supply and maintenance support, the effectiveness of the increased air capability cannot be evaluated. Once these planes are fully integrated and put into service, however, RVNAF should have adequate airlift capabilities to meet all requirements, except possibly those generated by a major offensive.

22. RVNAF logistic units also make extensive use of trucks to move troops and supplies. With the withdrawal of US units, ARVN has assumed the mission of providing all highway transport. ARVN has six transportation truck groups with about 2,500 transport vehicles. According to MACV, these units have performed well: given open roads, ARVN transportation units have adequately accomplished their mission.

23. In areas where the roads have been closed, it has been necessary to airdrop supplies to ARVN units. The most recent example of this was

at Tonle Cham where supplies were airdropped by the VNAF. In this regard, VNAF apparently has developed the necessary expertise to operate and maintain the more than 600 helicopters it possesses. During last spring's offensive, VNAF helicopters airlifted about 400,000 troops and 21,000 tons of cargo. US advisers now believe that the VNAF fleet is adequate to meet current requirements.

Regional Analysis

Summary

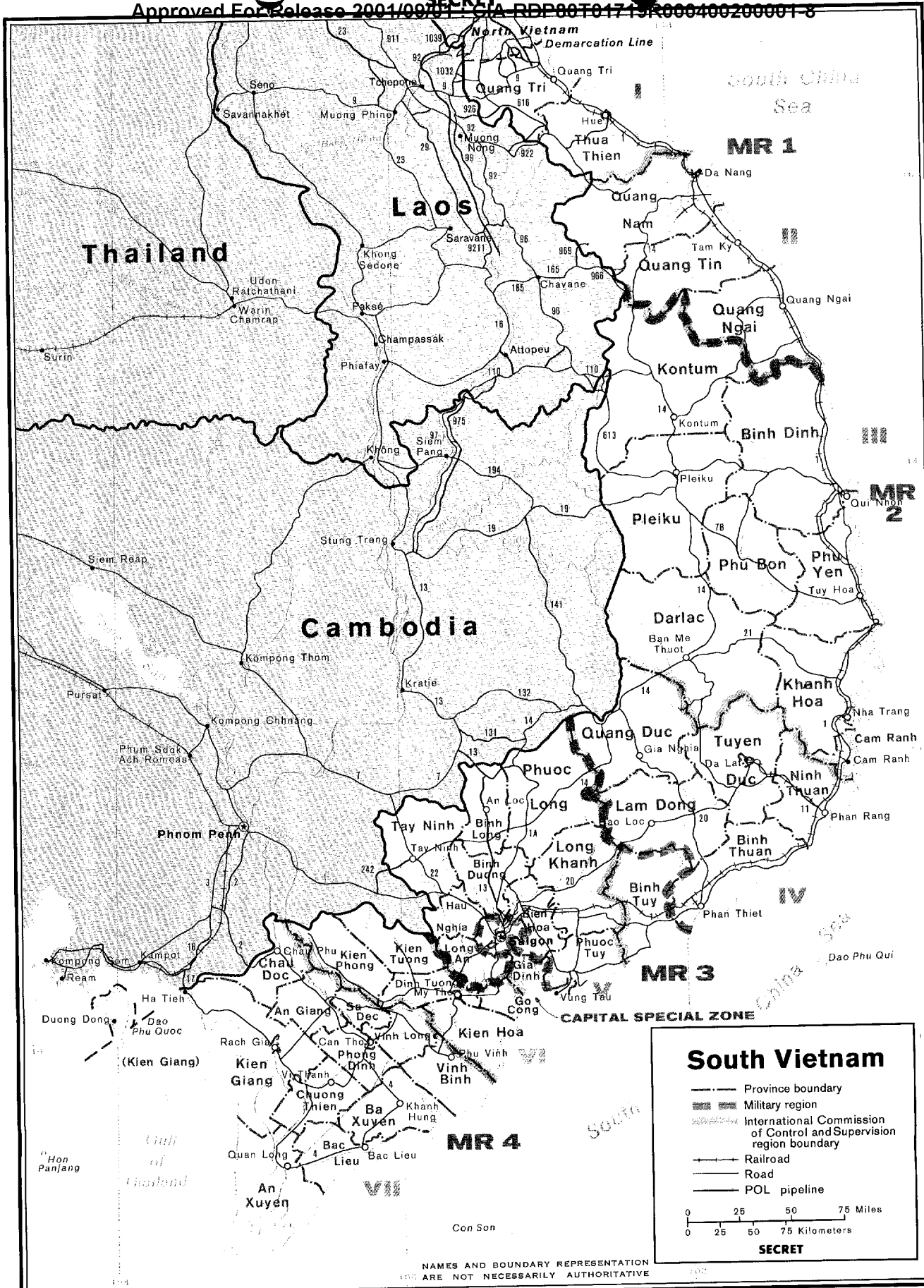
24. Taking both manpower and logistics into account the Communists have the best capability for carrying out a major offensive in the next month or so in MRs 1 and 3. Hanoi's forces in these regions have the capability of severely testing ARVN, threatening major population centers, and possibly capturing some provincial capitals. In contrast, North Vietnamese capabilities in the lowlands of MR 2 and probably throughout MR 4 are limited to road interdictions, attacking isolated outposts and tying down ARVN forces. In the highlands of MR 2, however the enemy could launch multi-regimental attacks, but probably could not threaten any provincial capitals. South Vietnamese forces are in a maximum defensive posture countrywide, and no General Reserve currently exists for speedy deployment to high threat areas -- as was done in 1972.

Military Region 1

25. Despite the heavy 1972 losses, the Communists have been able to keep most of their main forces combat effective through substantial infiltration of personnel and the deployment of additional combat units. Currently, out of a total of 39 combat regiments, 26 are estimated to be combat effective. As of March 1973, Communist regular combat forces in MR 1 are estimated to total about 76,000 (down from a peak of some 80,000 but somewhat above the 65,000 men estimated in April 1972). The Communist main force threat is highest in the two northern provinces of MR 1 -- Quang Tri and Thua Thien -- where an estimated 60,000 regular combat forces in five infantry divisions and 16 air defense, two armor, seven artillery, and seven independent infantry regiments are opposing roughly 50,000 South Vietnamese regular combat forces in three infantry divisions supported by independent infantry, armor, artillery, and Regional Force battalions.

26. In southern MR 1, there are approximately 16,000 to 20,000 Communist regular combat forces in two infantry divisions, two sapper regiments, and one tank/artillery group threatening the populated coastal lowlands. The Communists control most of the rural areas and have deployed a large share of their main forces near major cities and towns -- Hoi An, Tam Ky, and Quang Ngai cities. Main force units have access to

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South Vietnam

- Province boundary
- ▬ Military region
- ▬ International Commission of Control and Supervision region boundary
- Railroad
- Road
- POL pipeline

0 25 50 75 Miles
0 25 50 75 Kilometers

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large base areas with secure lines of communication near the Laos/South Vietnam border. South Vietnamese regular combat forces countering Communist units in southern MR 1 number approximately 35,000 to 40,000 men in two infantry divisions supported by independent infantry, armor, artillery, and Regional Force battalions.

27. In early January 1973 the 308th NVA Infantry Division was detected in North Vietnam, representing the first major combat division noted withdrawing from MR 1 to North Vietnam in the past year. Despite this, however, the number of Communist infantry divisions in MR 1 has increased from five to seven between April 1972 and March 1973.⁷ The command and control links for these divisions have not changed, but the independent regiments operating in the two northern provinces have recently been resubordinated to provincial-level military/administrative units.

28. The deployment of firepower assets to MR 1 over the past six months is estimated to have been adequate to replace most of the losses incurred over the past year. Moreover, the Communists have distributed this year's armor and long-range artillery -- 130-mm and 122-mm field guns -- more evenly throughout the military region. (Last year these resources were concentrated in northern MR 1.) It is quite possible that additional heavy armor and artillery weapons have moved undetected across the DMZ -- suggesting an additional augmentation in Communist firepower capabilities.

29. The current deployment of South Vietnamese regular combat forces represents a maximum defensive posture. South Vietnam's ability to conduct offensive operations outside of territory currently under government control is limited by the absence of reinforcements from within as well as outside the military region. This will allow the Communists to concentrate their military efforts on key target areas surrounding large cities such as Quang Tri, Hue, Da Nang, and Quang Ngai without jeopardizing the security of rear base areas.

30. Logistically, also, the Communists are in a favorable position in MR 1. Extremely heavy resupply activity has been detected in Quang Tri Province in recent weeks, and large stockpiles are now in place. Recently intercepted messages have revealed that a large share of the supplies on hand is ordnance. The Khe Sanh area has evolved into a major logistic staging point. Farther south, logistic activity in the A Shau Valley area recently surged, and there are no signs that the current effort will slow down soon. In both areas, large quantities of ordnance are involved. From

7. In April 1972, Communist infantry divisions included the 324B, 320B, 308th, 304th, and 711th. As of March 1973, they included the 325th, 324B, 320B, 312th, 304th, 711th, and 2nd NVA Infantry Divisions.

these two points -- one just south of the DMZ and one at A Shau -- large quantities of supplies can be easily moved to all parts of the region.

31. Part of the current strength of the Communists' logistical posture in MR 1 derives from the area's proximity to North Vietnam and the timing of its rainy season. Very large quantities of supplies can be rapidly moved directly across the DMZ (as was done during last spring's offensive). Recent road improvements and construction in western MR 1 have improved North Vietnam's capability to move supplies deep into MR 1. The capability would be further improved if current extensions of Route 614 evolve into a corridor connecting with Route 14. If this linkup is made, supplies can be moved on the South Vietnamese side of the border from the DMZ to any sector of MR 1. Therefore, we estimate that the North Vietnamese in MR 1 are now able to support logistically virtually any level of tactical activity they desire, even without reliance on the Laotian support system.

Military Region 2

32. Currently the Communists have some 25,000 combat troops deployed in MR 2, compared with approximately 35,000 at the peak of last year's offensive.⁸ Most of the strike force consists of 10 infantry regiments (of which only four are estimated to be fully combat effective) and one artillery regiment. However, the North Vietnamese do have considerably more firepower available in MR 2 this year, partly offsetting the manpower reduction and the reduced effectiveness of the units. The number of tanks deployed in this region is at least equal to last year's commitment, substantially more 122-mm and 130-mm field pieces are now in place, and a AAA regiment is operating in MR 2 for the first time. In addition, there has been a major command and control reorganization within the B-3 Front which probably has improved intra-unit tactical coordination -- a major North Vietnamese shortcoming in the spring offensive.

33. Within MR 2 the disposition of NVA forces and the relative threat have not changed appreciably since April 1972. Nearly half -- 11,000 -- of the region's combat troops, most of the armor and artillery, and the sole AAA regiment are located in the Central Highlands area. The only other area in which the Communists have units of regimental size deployed is Binh Dinh Province, where the 3rd NVA Infantry Division with some 3,400 troops is operating. The NVA military threat in the remainder of MR 2 is concentrated in Khanh Hoa, where seven maneuver battalions with a total of 1,400 troops are deployed, and in Binh Thuan Province which contains six maneuver battalions with 1,000 troops.

8. These units probably have already integrated the moderate number of infiltrators who have been assigned to MR 2 during the current dry season.

34. Opposing the North Vietnamese forces is a total of 57,000 ARVN troops -- 17,000 more than South Vietnam committed during the 1972 spring offensive. A second key, favorable factor is that the ARVN forces in general have improved qualitatively. Specifically, the ARVN 23rd Division, now located in the vital Central Highlands area, appears to be capable of strongly contesting any Communist advances. This unit has replaced the 22nd Division which broke and ran during the defense of Kontum Province in the spring of 1972.

35. Saigon has its forces deployed in almost an identical fashion to the Communists. Nearly half -- 25,000 -- of the South Vietnamese are deployed in the Central Highlands. The other principal concentration of force represented by the 22nd Division is located in Binh Dinh Province opposite the weak 3rd NVA Division.

36. Over the next several months, the major North Vietnamese threat in MR 2 will be in the Central Highlands where the North Vietnamese, with a reduced but more efficient fighting force supported by increased firepower, could launch multi-regimental attacks. Their capability to achieve significant territorial gains against a larger, significantly improved ARVN force will be dependent upon the Communists' planning and execution and on their ability to deny air support to ARVN ground troops by effective AAA fire. Nonetheless, only in the worst possible case should the NVA be able to seriously threaten the provincial capitals of Kontum and Pleiku.

37. In the remainder of MR 2, the Communist main force attack capability is limited to Binh Dinh Province. In that province (barring major ARVN command or behavior lapses), the Communists could at best tie down ARVN forces and prevent them from reinforcing the highlands sector. In Khanh Hoa and Binh Thuan Provinces the Communists currently do not have the capability to make any significant gains.

38. The VC/NVA have the logistic capability to escalate the fighting sharply in the western highlands of MR 2, but, except for Binh Dinh Province, they probably cannot support a sustained offensive in the coastal lowlands.

39. During the past few months, extremely heavy logistic activity has been noted on Route 96/110 in the tri-border area and on Route 19 in Cambodia leading into South Vietnam. Vehicle reports show that up to 100 tons daily may have been moved into the B-3 Front during 1-10 February, and there has not been a marked decline since. Food from Cambodia has contributed a major part of the supplies, but large quantities of weapons and ammunition also have been shipped. Because of the lack of heavy fighting in this region recently, the Communists have probably

been able to stockpile most of these shipments. The heavy supply shipments observed over the past few months will probably continue at least through May. With the bombing halted in Laos and the rainy season still some weeks off in this region, the Communists should have few problems in maintaining the route structure there. Moreover, over the next several weeks the large quantity of supplies moving through the northern and central Panhandle of Laos should arrive and further augment stocks.

40. Strong ARVN presence on key east-west roads in the coastal lowlands has prevented the Communists from establishing a reliable supply system into this region. The one exception to this is probably Binh Dinh Province, where the Communists have been able to establish a supply corridor southward out of Quang Ngai Province. The corridor has been recently further improved by the construction of a road from the Laotian supply system through Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces, which provides a viable line of communication from Laotian base areas to Binh Dinh.

Military Region 3

41. During the last few months prior to the cease-fire, Communist main force units in MR 3 were avoiding heavy combat and husbanding their resources. Main force elements were primarily engaged in training and refitting activities, while the local force units made their land grab attempts just prior to the cease-fire. As a result, the main force units should be well rested and in a position to absorb the infiltrating personnel who will be arriving from North Vietnam and Cambodia during the next two months. Currently, virtually all VC/NVA regiments in MR 3 are considered to be combat effective. The present total of about 26,000 men in the region compares to 35,000 at the height of the 1972 offensive.⁹

42. During the 1972 offensive, Communist forces in MR 3 did not enjoy the firepower advantages offered by the 122-mm and 130-mm field guns used in MR 1. However, recent COMINT and collateral evidence indicates that most of these weapons will be assigned to enemy units in MR 3 within the next month or so. COMINT also indicates that more tanks are moving to MR 3 to replace those lost in 1972. An additional factor which should improve enemy capabilities in MR 3 is the movement of enemy command and control elements and base area facilities from Cambodia into MR 3 itself. This redeployment should provide Communist commanders with better control over their units in contact with ARVN, as well as shorten lines of communication for resupply from larger forward stockpiles.

⁹. This number reflects a significant portion of this dry season's infiltration, but additional troops are still moving through the pipeline.

43. In opposition to the Communists in MR 3, South Vietnam has fielded a force of about 67,000 men, including three regular infantry divisions; one divisional equivalent composed of rangers, armor, and artillery support units; and about 100 regimental force battalions. While the government force in MR 3 is more than 2½ times the size of that of the Communists, it is charged with defending all government-held territory from attack. This allows the Communists to concentrate superior forces for selected engagements. During the next month or so, the Communists will have developed the manpower capability to severely test particular government positions should they decide to do so.

44. Similarly, on the logistic side, the Communists are rapidly building toward an offensive capability. Late in 1972, aerial observers frequently sighted truck convoys, sampans, and "hundreds" of loaded cycle-drawn carts along identified infiltration corridors. During the past few months, there has been no let up in activity: as recently as mid-March, aerial reconnaissance showed numerous truck convoys moving from Cambodian base areas into South Vietnam. This large-scale resupply effort has also been confirmed by clandestine sources. In late January, a former member of the 814th Rear Services Group primarily responsible for resupplying VC/NVA forces in Tay Ninh, Binh Duong, and Bien Hoa Provinces in MR 3 indicated that his unit was transporting large quantities of arms and ammunition from Cambodia to South Vietnam over fairly secure supply corridors.

Military Region 4

45. The Communists' capability for offensive activity in the Delta is quite limited and probably will remain so for the near future. Widespread manpower shortages have been exacerbated by continuing heavy casualties during the cease-fire period. These factors, in part, have led to sweeping command and control changes -- including the deactivation of at least one division headquarters -- which have had the effect of downgrading the enemy's large-unit maneuver capability, especially in the northern Delta. Moreover, although some of the tanks and artillery recently deployed to the COSVN area could move into MR 4, their effectiveness would be limited by the open terrain and numerous canals which crisscross the Delta. Coupled with these handicaps are morale problems stemming from the past inability of enemy units to make much headway against ARVN. In contrast, ARVN has continued to perform well in the Delta and has rebuffed repeated enemy thrusts. The three-division force normally committed to the Delta is intact -- after deployments out of the region during last year's offensive -- and neither manpower shortages nor the quality of units appears to pose any significant restraint on ARVN capabilities.

46. Compared with last year's pre-offensive situation, the advantage currently rests more heavily with ARVN. In the spring of 1972, the enemy had 27,000 men in the Delta, concentrated in one division and eight regiments operating primarily in Dinh Tuong, Kien Phong, Chuong Thien, and Chau Doc Provinces. Current Communist strength is still estimated to be about 27,000 men, operating in the same areas, despite augmentation by a full division and two independent regiments in mid-1972, because of the failure to replace casualties. Of the 16 maneuver regiments in and near MR 4, only six are estimated to be fully effective. Moreover, it is unlikely that infiltrators currently in the pipeline could be fully integrated into these decimated units in the next month or so.

47. ARVN combat strength, on the other hand, is now 78,000 men, and, barring deployments to other military regions, is likely to remain fairly stable. Difficulties for ARVN could arise, however, because of uncertain fire support. US air assets -- especially B-52s -- were instrumental in containing the enemy threat last year, and their absence, coupled with the increased use of SA-7 missiles in the Delta, could make the remaining VNAF air support problematic. On the other hand, ARVN artillery fire has continued to inflict heavy enemy casualties and would afford a significant measure of support in renewed hostilities.

48. Given the above conditions, a significant deterioration of the South Vietnamese position in the Delta in the next two months appears unlikely. However, the Communists still retain enough punch in several areas -- notably Dinh Tuong and Chuong Thien Provinces and the border areas of Chau Doc and Kien Phong -- to overrun isolated positions and temporarily interdict lines of communication, but there is little reason to suspect that they would achieve greater success than they did in last year's abortive attempt.

49. As in MR 3, the Communists have been successfully rebuilding stocks. According to the recent report of a VC cadre, as of late February there were sufficient stocks on hand in at least one base area in MR 4 to support fighting for several months. The accuracy of this report is impossible to judge, but there is substantial evidence that supplies are now moving through northeastern and central Cambodia into the border base areas adjacent to both MRs 3 and 4. By the end of the dry season, the Communists should be able logistically to support sustained major military action in most parts of both of these regions. This is not to say that they would experience no logistic difficulties. In the past the Communists have had trouble moving supplies to main force units in battle areas, especially those close to Saigon or deep in the Delta, because of ARVN ground operations. Moreover, as the rainy season sets in this summer, they will undoubtedly have increasing difficulty moving supplies from border base areas.

APPENDIX

MANPOWER DEPLOYMENTS

Manpower deployments into South Vietnam during the period 1 September 1972 through 26 March 1973 have totaled some 82,500 men, or a 20% decrease from the 103,500 men who deployed there during the same period last season. This season's manpower commitment has consisted of organic combat units as well as replacement (filler) personnel. A comparison of unit and filler deployments for this dry season and last dry season is shown in the following tabulation:

| | Sept 71-26 Mar 72 | Sept 72-26 Mar 73 |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Total | 103,500 | 82,500 |
| Filler Personnel | 73,500 | 71,500 |
| Personnel in Units ¹ | 30,000 (18,000) | 11,000 (7,000) |

1. Figures in parenthesis are personnel who deployed in units without infiltration group designators.

As shown in the tabulation, the number of filler personnel sent south so far this season is only about 3% lower than that for the same period last season. This continued high commitment of fillers was made necessary by the heavy losses, about 100,000 to 120,000 men, suffered by Communist units in last year's offensive. The filler personnel dispatched thus far during the 1972/73 dry season (some 71,500), coupled with the replacements dispatched during July and August of last year (about 43,000), should be adequate to replace most of the losses suffered by the Communists during the 1972 offensive when they arrive in the south and are integrated into units. In the past several weeks there have been increasing signs that this dry season's replacement infiltration flow may be ending. There is some evidence, however, that the replacements now in the infiltration pipeline are moving in trucks. If this is the case, most could be integrated into their recipient units within the next 30 days.

The composition of this season's deployment of personnel in units is quite different from that of last season. Last season's unit deployment at a comparable point in time consisted mostly of personnel from five infantry divisions and their supporting units which had begun moving to South Vietnam in preparation for the 1972 offensive. Thus far this season,

identified unit deployments into South Vietnam have consisted of six air defense regiments (including one SAM regiment), only two infantry regiments, and one armored battalion. Five of the air defense regiments, one of the infantry regiments, and the armored battalion moved into northern MR 1, while one AAA regiment moved into MR 2. The other infantry regiment, the 201st from Cambodia, moved into MR 3. The deployment of these units coupled with the arrival of the infiltrating filler personnel should increase the capabilities of Communist forces in South Vietnam to levels at least comparable to those of 1972.

Personnel infiltration and unit deployments by area of destination for the period 1 September 1972 through 26 March 1973 are shown below:

| Destination | Total | Filler Personnel | Personnel in Units |
|----------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| Total | 82,500 | 71,500 | 11,000¹ |
| MRs 1 and 2 | | | |
| MR Tri-Thien-Hue | 31,300 | 22,000 | 9,300 ¹ |
| MR 5 | 9,200 | 9,000 | 200 |
| B-3 Front | 14,500 | 14,000 | 500 |
| MRs 3 and 4/Cambodia | | | |
| COSVN | 27,500 | 26,500 | 1,000 |

1. Including 4,000 personnel who moved as an organic unit through regular infiltration channels.

As shown in the tabulation, the largest commitment of Communist manpower so far this dry season is to the two northern provinces of South Vietnam (VC Military Region Tri-Thien-Hue). This commitment has consisted largely of infantry replacement personnel and new air defense units. The second largest recipient of personnel thus far this dry season has been the COSVN area which includes South Vietnam's MRs 3 and 4 and most of Cambodia. Since most VC/NVA units have now pulled out of Cambodia, virtually all of the 26,500 replacement personnel destined for the area can be expected to move into MRs 3 and 4.

The manpower commitment to VC MR 5 and the B-3 Front (about 9,000 and 14,000 men, respectively) consists almost wholly of infantry replacement personnel. The 9,000 men destined for VC MR 5 will be used to rebuild Communist units in the coastal lowlands of central South Vietnam, while those destined for the B-3 Front will strengthen units operating in the Central Highlands near the cities of Kontum and Pleiku.

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