

THE ATTRITION OF VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST FORCES, 1968-1969

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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ASSUMPTIONS

We have approached the complex problem of determining the ability of the Vietnamese Communists to withstand manpower attrition by constructing a hypothetical model of what could reasonably be viewed as a "worst case" situation for Hanoi. This approach is based on the fact that if the Communists have adequate manpower to meet the hypothetical "worst case" requirements during 1968 and 1969, then they can meet any lesser requirement resulting from the actual course of events. Our assumptions, therefore, are not offered as estimate judgments of the probable course of events during 1968 and 1969, but are presented as reasonable structural components of a "worst case" model.

In accordance with this approach we are basing our calculations on the following assumptions:

- a. That the level of combat will be significantly higher than that of 1967 but less than that during the first quarter of 1968.
- b. That manpower requirements must be met completely from resources within North Vietnam and South Vietnam, with no manpower inputs from third countries, e.g., China or volunteers from other Communist countries.
- c. That recruitment and impressment in South Vietnam will be adequate to provide manpower at an average monthly rate of 7,000 or about 85,000 persons a year.

d. That the rate of personnel infiltration from the North is determined by requirements in the South rather than being limited by existing capacities of the infiltration system.

e. That the Communists have an insurgency base in the range of 500,000 persons and that they will attempt to maintain this assumed base at this level.

f. The level of air attacks against NVN, and the associated requirement for air defense will be based on experience in the third quarter 1967.

I. Manpower RequirementsA. Military Forces(1) North Vietnam

The North Vietnamese are estimated to have about 475,000 men in the Armed Forces and another 400,000 in the militia/security forces today. Of this force some 115-130,000 are deployed out-of-country. About 300,000 are considered necessary to provide for defense of the homeland. This defense force includes basically six infantry divisions, air and coastal defense forces, and command and logistics elements. Thus, a force of about 50,000 or 4 division equivalents would be available for out-of-country deployment during 1968.

(2) Laos

The North Vietnamese military forces in Laos total about 30,000. They are a part of the NVA and are counted in the NVN total. Pathet Lao forces have remained in Laos and are not considered in this analysis.

(3) South Vietnam

VC/NVA forces in South Vietnam have probably developed a total insurgency base in the general range of 500,000 persons. The North Vietnamese component of this base is from 85,000 to 100,000 persons.

B. Civilian Labor Force

The North Vietnamese civilian labor force totals 9.8 million persons. Over 400,000 of this total are shown in our

figures as militia. About 200,000 full-time workers are assigned to essential war related work such as bomb damage repair, the maintenance and operation of LOC's, and logistics activities.

Of the remaining 9.2 million people we estimate that 8.7 million are necessary to maintain economic activity at its normal levels. Thus about 500,000 persons may be regarded as a potential manpower pool which can be diverted to other activities without excessive disruption to the economy.

We estimate that the North Vietnamese labor force contains about 1 million males in the 17 to 35 age group that are physically fit for military service.

North Vietnam also maintains a civilian labor force of about 20,000 persons engaged in LOC construction and repair activities in Laos.

II. Manpower Availabilities

North Vietnam has a population of about 18.7 million people of which about 2.8 million males are believed to be between the ages of 17 and 35. Of these draft age males, about 1.5 million are believed to be physically fit for military service. More than one million of these have yet to be drafted.

In addition every year about 200,000 males reach the age of 17, and it is believed that at least 120,000 of these are physically fit for military service. We have assumed that 100,000 of these can be drafted each year.

We have previously stated that a total of 500,000 males can

be drawn from the labor force. If we add to them the 200,000 that can be drafted during 1968 and 1969, a total of 700,000 persons can be diverted to the military service.

III. Manpower Losses

A. South Vietnam

Our calculations postulate that the insurgency base in South Vietnam will be attrited at a rate of 300,000 a year during 1968 and 1969. This figure is based on an assumed loss of 800 men per day from all causes -- killed, died of wounds, disabled, died of sickness, deserted, defected and captured. It is a compromise between the assumed enemy casualties if the enemy should revert to a 1965-1967 style protracted war, and the considerably higher casualties he would sustain if he continued the forward deployment which he adopted after the failure of the Tet offensive.

B. In Laos

We have almost no firm knowledge of the attrition experienced by enemy forces in Laos. For the purpose of this estimate we have assumed that the forces in Laos will be attrited at about 15 percent of force levels for annual losses of about 5,000 personnel during 1968 and 1969.

C. In North Vietnam

It is assumed that the North Vietnamese will lose approximately 10 percent a year, or 45,000, though normal administrative attrition.

.D. Summary

South Vietnam	300,000
Laos	5,000
North Vietnam	<u>45,000</u>
1968	350,000
1969	<u>350,000</u>
Total	700,000

IV. Manpower Replacement Capabilities

A. South Vietnam

We are assuming that the Viet Cong will be successful during 1968 and 1969 in recruiting at an annual level of 85,000 persons and thus calculate that the remaining 215,000 men required to replace total enemy manpower losses in South Vietnam must be infiltrated from North Vietnam. In addition, North Vietnam must provide an additional 50,000 persons to meet losses in North Vietnam and in Laos.

B. North Vietnam

We believe that in addition to its annual population increments that yield about 120,000 physically fit males of draft age, North Vietnam has a manpower slack in both its military and civilian forces.

In the existing military structure there are about 50,000 troops, or the equivalent of 4 divisions, that could be deployed to the South during 1968 without reducing NVN forces below the levels necessary for defense of the homeland. Such deployment would be a one-shot movement and could not be duplicated in 1969.

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We calculate that North Vietnam would have to draw down the surplus elements of its civilian labor force to make up any shortfalls not covered by annual drafts or the movement of existing military units.

As we see the situation North Vietnam would be able to obtain manpower to replace losses in the following numbers:

	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969</u>
Annual Draft Class	100,000	100,000
Military Deployment	50,000	--
Draw-down from Civilian Labor Force	<u>115,000</u>	<u>165,000</u>
Total	265,000	265,000

In each year 50,000 of the 265,000 would be required to replace losses in North Vietnam and in Laos, and 215,000 would have to be infiltrated into South Vietnam.

Our figures indicate that the drain on the civilian labor force would increase from about 115,000 men in 1968 to 165,000 men in 1969. The cumulative drain of 280,000 men is just over 55 percent of our calculation of surplus labor in North Vietnam.

V. Training

The current national estimate of the North Vietnamese capability to train 75,000 to 100,000 men a year for infiltration was based on an analysis

of units associated with this training and our estimate of their requirements. At that time, the identifiable training base

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consisted of six infantry divisions associated with infiltration training. Airborne, artillery, officer/NCO training, and specialists were trained by other appropriate organizations, schools, and the basic six divisions. In addition, some of the higher or specialized training is provided by Communist advisors both in country and in their homelands.

Subsequently, some of the divisions were redeployed and they no longer provide infiltration training. An analysis of the most recent data has revealed that the North Vietnamese are now employing four divisions and two training groups for basic infiltration training and that, for the most part, they have retained the three month training cycle.

It is estimated that each division (2/3 training, 1/3 regular duties) can assimilate, equip, and train 6,000 to 8,000 recruits every three months. The two training groups are rated at 6,000 each. On this basis, 145,000 to 175,000 recruits can be trained each year. By shortening the training cycle or expanding the base an additional 50,000 to 60,000 recruits could be trained.

Replacements for the NVN forces in-country are considered to be absorbed in the existing units although there may be some provisions for basic training prior to joining the units. For instance, replacements taken from the militia or other reserves would have had some prior basic training.

The most important manpower problem is the adequacy of available leadership. The quality of the leadership, officer

and NCO, has declined as the demand has increased. Officer and NCO schools have been shortened from two years to eight months. The largest single source of junior officers is now believed to be from battlefield commissions. The decline in standards and training, however, is offset to a considerable extent by the type organizations being deployed south and the absence of requirements for more sophisticated equipment. Basically the VC/NVA is an individual weapon, man pack army which uses equipment easily adaptable to the individual soldier. In the North, the training demands generated by more sophisticated equipment have been met by provision of foreign training at home and abroad.

Summation

In conclusion, we have examined North Vietnam's manpower resources under a set of "worst case" assumptions designed to maximize the attrition of the enemy's forces. It is clear that even under this "worst case", that Hanoi retains the capability of meeting all of its manpower requirements. Since the attrition assumed in our model is at an unusually high level we believe that the enemy will be fully capable of meeting the lesser requirements more likely to result from the actual course of events. Thus, we conclude that manpower is not a factor limiting Hanoi's ability to continue with the war.