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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

DOCS

Intelligence Memorandum

NVA Infiltration and Unit Deployments Since September 1971

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
 Directorate of Intelligence
 November 1972

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

**NVA INFILTRATION AND UNIT DEPLOYMENTS
 SINCE SEPTEMBER 1971**

Summary and Conclusions

1. Hanoi's decision to abandon the protracted warfare strategy employed for the past several years in favor of large-unit conventional warfare in 1972 has resulted in an unprecedented manpower commitment to the southern war zones during the past year. From September 1971 through August 1972, Hanoi sent out of North Vietnam some 248,000 personnel - 191,000 during the past dry season (September 1971 through June 1972) and 57,000 during the wet season (July-August 1972). Of the total commitment, about 187,000 were sent to Military Regions (MRs) 1 and 2 in northern South Vietnam; 38,000 to southern Cambodia and MRs 3 and 4 in South Vietnam; and 23,000 to southern Laos and/or northeast Cambodia. Approximately 179,000 (or 72%) of the 248,000 infiltrated south via the regular infiltration pipeline through Laos, while an additional 69,000 deployed into northern MR 1 in regular military units directly across the DMZ. A summary of Hanoi's out-of-country manpower investment, by destination, is shown in Table 1 and Figure 1.

2. The North Vietnamese manpower commitment to the war zone since September 1971 even exceeds that sent south between September 1967 and August 1968. In the 1967/68 period, about 230,000 troops⁽¹⁾ - 50,000 men in organic NVA units and 180,000 other infiltrators - moved into the war zone. In terms of organic units, this year's deployment of

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Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Economic Research and coordinated within CIA.

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Table 1

Hanoi's Manpower Commitment to the Southern War Zones

Destination	Regular Infiltration Cycle (Sep 1971 - Jun 1972)	Wet Season (Jul-Aug 1972)	Total
GVN MRs 1 and 2	82,000	36,000	118,000
VC MR TTH	35,000	35,000	70,000
VC MR 5	17,000	0	17,000
VC B-3 Front	30,000	1,000	31,000
GVN MRs 3 and 4/Cambodia	38,000	0	38,000
Southern Laos/northeast Cambodia	16,000	7,000	23,000
Subtotal	<u>136,000</u>	<u>43,000</u>	<u>179,000</u>
Unit deployment outside the infiltration system ^a	<u>55,000</u>	<u>14,000</u>	<u>69,000</u>
Total	191,000	57,000	248,000

a. All organic unit deployments outside regular infiltration channels went to VC Military Region Tri-Thien-Hue (TTH).

89,000 men (69,000 outside normal infiltration channels and about 20,000 in ordinary infiltration groups) also is by far the largest ever sent south. The total manpower investment since September 1971 increased the VC/NVA force structure in Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam to more than 350,000 men in August 1972. This is the largest VC/NVA force structure outside North Vietnam thus far during the war.

3. This unparalleled flow of manpower to the southern war zones was made necessary by Hanoi's shift to a conventional warfare strategy for the 1972 campaign. The decision to change strategies clearly was taken before the beginning of the 1971/72 cycle - in order to provide the time to train and equip the large numbers of personnel to be sent south. Early in the dry season infiltration cycle, Hanoi began sending large numbers of personnel, including one full infantry division and elements to form two others, into the western highlands of South Vietnam's MR 2 and into Cambodian areas adjacent to MRs 3 and 4. As these forces were being positioned and supplied, Hanoi also deployed an invasion force of four infantry divisions along with armor and artillery units into the DMZ/Quang Tri Province area of northern South Vietnam. In late March the Communists

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began their offensive by attacking South Vietnamese units just south of the DMZ, and this soon was followed by thrusts from the newly positioned forces into the western highlands of MR 2 and the An Loc area of MR 3.

4. As the battle wore on, South Vietnamese resistance stiffened and the Communists abandoned, at least temporarily, their attempts to overrun Kontum and An Loc cities and concentrated their efforts against government positions in Quang Tri and Hue. By June they had ceased sending additional manpower to their forces in MRs 2, 3, and 4. Their unprecedented troop commitment to the Quang Tri-Hue area in northern MR 1, however, continued with the deployment from North Vietnam of two fresh infantry divisions and with the highest level of wet season (July-August 1972) infiltration ever recorded in this area.

Discussion

The 1971/72 Dry Season Infiltration Cycle⁽²⁾

5. During the period September 1971 through June 1972, Hanoi inserted about 136,000 men into the regular infiltration pipeline destined for the southern war zones - South Vietnam, Cambodia, and southern Laos.⁽³⁾ This surpasses infiltration during the 1970/71 cycle, when about 106,000 men were sent south, and is more than double the 1969/70 level, when only about 66,000 men were dispatched from North Vietnam. The higher level of infiltration experienced during the 1971/72 season resulted both from the desire of the North Vietnamese to reinforce their combat and support structure in the south and the requirement to preposition replacements for losses expected from the large-scale offensive planned for South Vietnam in the spring of 1972.

2. During the 1971/72 dry season, changes in North Vietnamese infiltration and communications practices reduced our ability to monitor certain aspects of personnel infiltration. For example, the practice of sending large numbers of personnel directly across the DMZ into northern South Vietnam caused them to bypass the Binh Trams in Laos which are important sources of much of our infiltration data. (The current infiltration routes are shown in Figure 2.) As a result, the estimate of enemy personnel moving into northern South Vietnam, especially VC MR Tri-Thien-Hue (TTH), is more tenuous than that for the other areas in South Vietnam.

3. As used in this memorandum, regular infiltration denotes groups, usually of about 500 NVA troops that move south through the infiltration system, which have been assigned infiltration group designators by the North Vietnamese logistical administrators for purposes of control and accounting

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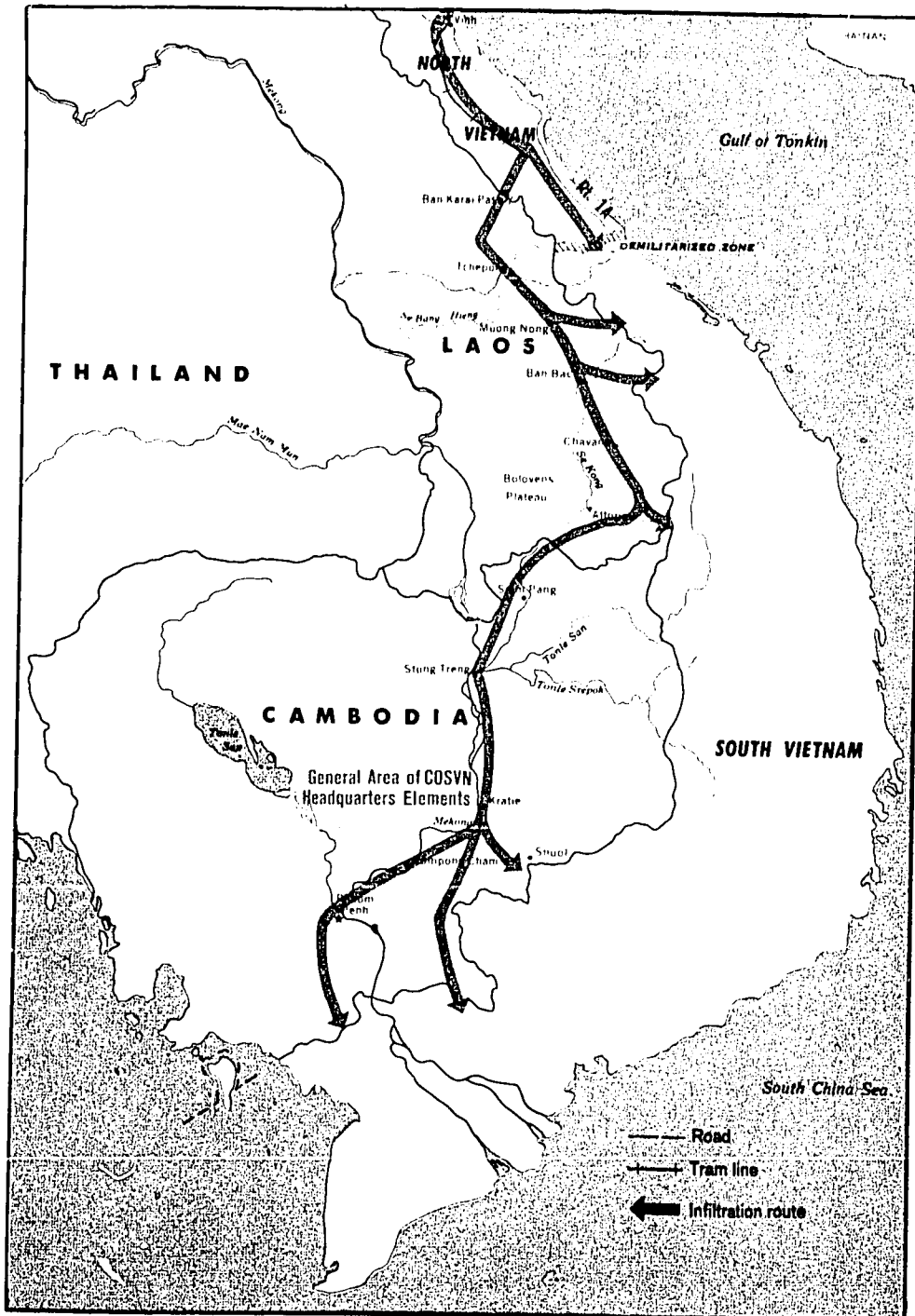
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THE NVA PERSONNEL INFILTRATION CORRIDOR

Figure 2



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6. A heavy input of personnel into the infiltration system began in October, one month later than during the 1970/71 infiltration cycle. In four months, October through January, an average of about 20,000 men a month entered the infiltration pipeline, compared to an average of about 15,000 a month for a similar period in the 1970/71 cycle. Infiltration also continued at a high rate through the later months of the infiltration cycle -- in support of the large-scale NVA offensive in South Vietnam which had begun at the end of March 1972.

7. Of the 136,000 NVA infiltrators entering the pipeline to the south, about 120,000 were destined for South Vietnam and Cambodia, while the balance infiltrated into southern Laos or northeastern Cambodia. An estimated 5% of the total number of infiltrators (approximately 6,800) either fell victim on the trail to accident, sickness, or Allied attacks or returned to North Vietnam as deserters or training cadre after supervising the delivery of individual groups.

8. In addition to the 136,000 men sent south via the infiltration system, another 55,000 troops entered the war zone in organic units apparently outside regular infiltration channels. This compares to an organic unit deployment of about 24,000 during the 1970/71 dry season. The units moved into South Vietnam's MR 1 either directly across or just around the western end of the DMZ. This organic unit deployment, coupled with regular infiltration, brings Hanoi's commitment to the war zone during the 1971/72 dry season infiltration cycle to approximately 191,000 men and is the largest since the 1967/68 season. The organic units which have deployed out of North Vietnam to the south during the past year are shown in Table 2.

9. During the 1971/72 infiltration cycle, the number of special-purpose groups detected entering the pipeline were markedly lower than those detected entering during the 1970/71 season. These groups, usually less than 50 men each, ordinarily consist of specially trained military and political personnel such as sappers, engineers, and specially trained noncombatants. The latter includes cryptographers, medical corpsmen, administrative cadre, teachers, and entertainers. The number of special-purpose groups was unusually high during the 1970/71 infiltration cycle, probably reflecting in large part the initial staffing of the Communist infrastructure in Cambodia.

10. In addition to the traditional "special-purpose" groups, a new series of infiltration groups -- arbitrarily called "specially designated groups" -- appeared during the past season. About 50 of these groups were detected with strengths varying from as few as two or three to as high as 554 persons. The mission and function of most of these specially

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Table 2

Organic Units That Deployed
from North Vietnam to the War Zone
During the Period September 1971
Through August 1972

Military Region 1

304th Infantry Division 9th Infantry Regiment 24th Infantry Regiment 66th Infantry Regiment 68th Artillery Regiment	324B Infantry Division 29th Infantry Regiment 803rd Infantry Regiment 812th Infantry Regiment
308th Infantry Division 36th Infantry Regiment 88th Infantry Regiment 102nd Infantry Regiment	325th Infantry Division 18th Infantry Regiment 95th Infantry Regiment 101st Infantry Regiment
312th Infantry Division 141st Infantry Regiment 165th Infantry Regiment 209th Infantry Regiment	270th Regiment/711th Infantry Division 202nd Armor Regiment 203rd Armor Regiment 38th Independent Artil- lery Regiment 45th Independent Artil- lery Regiment 58th Independent Artil- lery Regiment 84th Independent Artil- lery Regiment 164th Independent Artil- lery Regiment 166th Independent Artil- lery Regiment
320B Training Division 48B Infantry Regiment 64B Infantry Regiment	

Military Region 2

320th Infantry Division
 48th Infantry Regiment
 52nd Infantry Regiment
 64th Infantry Regiment
 Two battalions of the former
 54th Artillery Regiment
 Two battalions of the 203rd
 Armor Regiment

Military Region 3

271st Infantry Regiment
 18th Infantry Regiment^{a b}
 Three battalions of the 203rd
 Armor Regiment

Military Region 4

Z-17 Infantry Regiment (deployed
 as the 95th Regiment)^b

Z-18 Infantry Regiment (deployed
 as the 101st Regiment)^b

-
- a. Appears to have been broken down and used as fillers for VC/NVA units in MR 3.
 b. Generated and trained in North Vietnam by the 325th Division sometime prior to the current offensive.

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designated groups are unknown, but two of the groups revealed that they were made up of cinematographers and doctors, and one was associated with an antiaircraft artillery unit.

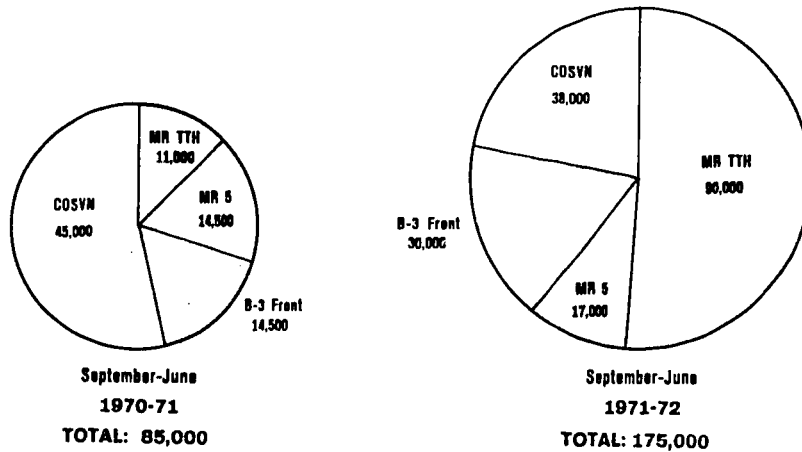
GVN MRs 1 and 2

11. From September 1971 through June 1972, Hanoi sent at least 137,000 men into South Vietnam's two northern military regions.⁽⁴⁾ Of

Figure 3

THE MANPOWER COMMITMENT FROM NORTH VIETNAM TO SOUTH VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA *

□ GVN, MR's 1 and 2



*Excluding Southern Laos and Northeastern Cambodia.

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4. For the distribution of manpower committed by South Vietnam and Communist administrative divisions, see Figure 3. There is substantial evidence that the movement of organic units outside regular infiltration channels occurred only into northern MR 1 -- unlike the personnel flow to the remainder of South Vietnam. A review of the available captured documents and prisoner/rallier interrogation reports from the organic units which moved into northern MR 1 during the 1971/72 dry season has failed to turn up any references to infiltration group designators. This is in sharp contrast to the information obtained from such sources on units which moved into MR 2 and areas farther south which did specify infiltration group designators. It seems likely that if the units now in northern MR 1 had moved through infiltration channels there would have been some references to their infiltration group designators.

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this total, about 82,000 men moved down in regular infiltration groups and another 55,000 or so deployed into northern MR 1 in organic units outside regular infiltration channels. This manpower commitment is a 240% increase over that of the 1970/71 infiltration season, when only 40,000 men (35,000 infiltrators and 5,000 in units) were sent into these two military regions.

12. The total North Vietnamese manpower commitment to northern MR 1 (VC MR TTH) during this past infiltration cycle was about 90,000 men (35,000 in infiltration groups and 55,000 men in organic units). This commitment was more than eight times that which occurred during the 1970/71 season, when only 11,000 men (6,000 in infiltration groups and 5,000 in organic units) moved into the area. The additional units which moved into northern MR 1 increased the number of Main Force combat units there to a level above that of Tet (February) 1968.

13. The movement of organic units into northern MR 1 and into MR 2 began in February 1972 with the deployment of the 324B NVA Division into Thua Thien Province. The division then began offensive operations against the 1st ARVN Division's complex of firebases west of Hue. Also, the 320th NVA Division infiltrated from North Vietnam to the western highlands of MR 2. It began offensive operations in March against major elements of the 22nd ARVN Division and airborne divisions northwest of Kontum city, driving the South Vietnamese units back into the town.

14. During March the 304th NVA Division deployed from Quang Binh Province in southern North Vietnam to western Quang Tri Province, initiating the Communist Easter Offensive by attacking the 3rd ARVN Division's firebases in the vicinity of Cam Lo. The largest influx of organic units to MR 1 thus far during the entire war occurred during April. These units included the 308th NVA Division, major elements of the 325th and 320B NVA Divisions, two armor regiments, and four artillery regiments. These forces launched successful attacks against South Vietnamese units in the vicinity of Dong Ha and Quang Tri cities. In addition, a second generation of the 270th NVA Independent Regiment infiltrated into Quang Nam Province during April and was subordinated to the 711th NVA Division. This division has been conducting offensive operations in the Quang Nam/Quang Tin Province border area near the Que Son district capital.

15. Unlike northern MR 1, all detected personnel movements into the western highlands area (B-3 Front) of MR 2 occurred in regular infiltration channels - including the movement of the 320th NVA Division. Infiltration group designators were assigned to each of the unit's battalions.

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which then moved as groups through the regular infiltration system in the Laotian Panhandle. The total commitment (both unit and filler) to the B-3 Front area during the 1971/72 season was about 30,000 men, more than doubling the 1970/71 level when only 14,500 men moved into the same area. Even without counting the 10,000-man 320th Division, infiltration to the B-3 Front surpassed the previous year's total.

16. Personnel infiltration to VC MR 5 (the central coastal portion of GVN MRs 1 and 2) was about 17,000 men during the 1971/72 infiltration cycle - all in regular infiltration groups. This compares to about 14,500 men sent to the area during the 1970/71 season. Men included in this infiltration provided replacements for the NVA 3rd Division, which occupied the three northern districts of Binh Dinh Province early in the Communist offensive. (South Vietnamese forces recaptured the district capitals in northern Binh Dinh in August.)

17. Hanoi's manpower strategy in GVN MRs 1 and 2 was developed to replace losses incurred by units which had participated in blocking operation Lam Son 719 in Laos and had returned to South Vietnam and to augment its forces in preparation for the 1972 Easter Offensive. Between December 1971 and March 1972, a substantial number of infiltrators were sent to the northern provinces to provide replacements for units of the B-5 Front and MR TTH. These units had suffered heavy losses in the summer and fall of 1971. Replacements also were sent to units of the B-3 Front in the western highlands during this period. Then the four divisions deployed into South Vietnam in March and April provided the forces to carry out the attacks during the recent offensive - which have been among the heaviest of the war. Replacement infiltration has continued at high levels throughout the offensive to maintain the strength of enemy units in combat.

The COSVN Area

18. Approximately 38,000 men traveled to the COSVN area (Cambodia and South Vietnam's MRs 3 and 4) during the 1971/72 infiltration cycle. Included in this total were about 10,000 men who moved down in organic units with regular infiltration group designators. As a result of these unit deployments, the COSVN forces in MR 3 were augmented by at least two and possibly three regiments from North Vietnam, while enemy forces in MR 4 were reinforced by at least two new NVA infantry regiments.

19. The 1971/72 dry season infiltration to COSVN was about 15% below the level recorded during the previous season, when about 45,000 men were detected moving into the same area. Almost certainly, the high level of infiltration during the 1970/71 season resulted from the necessity

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to establish Communist control over rice-producing areas and logistic corridors in the Cambodian countryside, as well as the requirement to reconstitute COSVN units hurt during the Allied cross-border operations in the spring of 1970. Infiltration to COSVN in 1971/72, in contrast, primarily was in preparation for the 1972 NVA offensive in GVN MRs 3 and 4.

20. The organic units which moved to the COSVN area this past season began their journeys early in the infiltration cycle. Both the 271st Independent Regiment and three regiments of a divisional entity (apparently generated and trained by the 325th NVA Division) departed from North Vietnam in late 1971. They arrived in the COSVN area in Cambodia in late February and were moving into South Vietnam by mid-April. The 271st Independent Regiment was attached to the newly formed C-30B Division, which then moved into Hau Nghia and southern Tay Ninh Provinces of MR 3. One regiment of the divisional entity apparently generated by the NVA 325th Division infiltrated into MR 3 and appears to have been broken down and used to fill out understrength VC/NVA units in the region. The other two regiments moved into the Parrot's Beak area of Cambodia and were redesignated the Z-17 and Z-18 Regiments in GVN MR 4. In addition, three battalions of the 203rd Armor Regiment deployed into southern South Vietnam during the spring of 1972, the last unit arriving in Binh Long Province of MR 3 in May.

21. The Communist manpower strategy for the COSVN area this past dry season was to use early infiltration arrivals to strengthen enemy units in Cambodia prior to their deployment into MR 3 and MR 4, and then to use later infiltration arrivals as replacements for losses as the offensive progressed. About 27,000 men deployed from Cambodia into MR 3 for the offensive, and as many as 10,000 of them were newly infiltrated personnel. About 11,000 men from the Phuoc Long Front (also known as the 1st NVA Division) and two newly infiltrated regiments deployed from Cambodia to GVN MR 4 for the offensive as well. The Phuoc Long Front elements were driven back into Cambodia soon after their initial penetration, although they have since returned. Additional infiltrators were also used to fill out understrength units in both MR 3 and MR 4 just prior to the offensive. Several units in both these regions were substantially understrength before these infiltrators arrived. (The geographic pattern of infiltration to South Vietnam during the period September 1971 through June 1972 is shown in Figure 3.)

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Southern Laos/Northeast Cambodia

22. Most of the 16,000 personnel destined for southern Laos and northeast Cambodia⁽⁵⁾ during the 1971/72 infiltration cycle probably were used to expand the logistic structure. Since the end of the 1970/71 dry season, the North Vietnamese have expanded their logistical apparatus in the Laotian Panhandle and northeast Cambodia by forming three new transportation groups and seven new subordinate Binh Trams. North Vietnam also sent a number of replacement personnel to combat units in southern Laos, besides deploying in mid-1972 two infantry battalions which formed the nucleus of the new 19th Regiment. This regiment appears to be subordinate to the 968th Infantry Division, created in January 1972 from units formerly subordinate to Front Y -- the NVA tactical authority for the southern part of the Panhandle.

Northern Laos

23. Although the aggregate annual infiltration flow to northern Laos cannot be estimated with the degree of reliability of that for the rest of Indochina, more than 7,000 personnel were detected deploying in units and filler groups to the Plaine des Jarres area during the 1971/72 dry season. Some 90% of the detected flow occurred during the six-week period between 15 October and 30 November 1971. This infiltration included the 141st Infantry Regiment and support elements of the 312th Division, the 335th Infantry Regiment, the 213th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment, and elements of the 351st Artillery Command. The remaining 10% were detected deploying during February 1972 and undoubtedly were used as replacements to offset some of the personnel losses suffered by NVA units during the dry season fighting and for logistics-related activities such as the road building effort.

The Rainy Season

24. During the height of the rainy season -- July and August -- Hanoi sent south some 57,000 personnel -- 50,000 to South Vietnam and about 7,000 to southern Laos and northeast Cambodia. This manpower flow represents the highest level of personnel infiltration ever during a rainy season. Of the 50,000 sent to South Vietnam, 36,000 came down in regular infiltration groups and about 14,000 entered in organic units⁽⁶⁾ directly

5. Some of the personnel destined for the logistic structure in southern Laos may have moved into northern South Vietnam when major logistic elements relocated there from southern Laos to support the offensive.

6. These units include the 95th and 101st Regiments of the 325th NVA Division, the 165th Regiment of the 312th Division, and the 45th Artillery Regiment of the B-5 Front.

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across the DMZ outside infiltration channels. Almost all of this infiltration appears to be a direct result of the need for additional replacements during the current offensive in northern MR 1.

25. Only 1,000 of the 50,000 men who infiltrated into South Vietnam during July and August moved farther south than GVN MR 1. These personnel were destined for the western highlands of the B-3 Front, where heavy personnel losses in May-June depleted enemy units. No rainy season infiltration was detected moving to the COSVN area. One reason for this lack of infiltration activity to the southern region of South Vietnam is the difficulty of moving personnel long distances through the Laotian Panhandle during the wet season. It also is likely that available replacements currently have a lower priority for COSVN than for MR 1. By contrast, the Communists did dispatch a significant number of infiltrators - more than 15,000 - to the COSVN area during July and August of 1968 to replace losses incurred during the 1968 Tet and May offensives.

26. The 57,000 personnel committed to the war zone during July and August increases Hanoi's total manpower commitment to the south since September 1971 to about 248,000 men. This commitment has now surpassed the level attained in 1967/68, when about 230,000 men in infiltration groups and organic units were sent south in support of the 1968 General Offensive.⁽⁷⁾ Furthermore, in 1968 several of the line divisions

Table 3

North Vietnamese Manpower Deployment
to Southern Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam^a

	<u>1967/68</u>	<u>1968/69</u>	<u>1969/70</u>	<u>1970/71</u>	<u>1971/72</u>
Dry season (Sep-Jun)	200,000	105,000	76,000	130,000	191,000
Wet season (Jul-Aug)	30,000	1,000	9,000	Negl.	57,000
Total	230,000	106,000	85,000	130,000	248,000

a. Rounded to the nearest thousand. Manpower deployment includes both unit deployments and replacement and specialist infiltration.

7. For an illustration of NVA manpower commitment over time, see Table 3.

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which had deployed into South Vietnam began moving back to North Vietnam by mid-year. By the end of October, all of these divisions had returned to the north. This year, none of the organic units which infiltrated have yet returned north, and there are no present indications that they plan to do so.

Outlook for the 1972/73 Infiltration Cycle

27. Until a ceasefire takes effect, it is likely that the high levels of infiltration observed over the past year will continue into the southern war zones. During the first two months of this dry season's infiltration cycle (September and October) some 16,000 personnel have entered the infiltration pipeline, about double the number entering during the same period a year ago. High levels of infiltration have continued into northern South Vietnam and substantial numbers of personnel have recently been detected moving to the CCSVN area as well. The resumption of infiltration to COSVN coupled with the continuing infiltration to the north indicates that the Communists are replacing the heavy losses incurred by their forces during the offensive since 30 March. If additional major offensive activity is planned by the Communists, continued high levels of personnel infiltration during the next few months will almost certainly be required.

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