

NIE 14.3-66

**North Vietnamese Military Potential
for Fighting in South Vietnam**

7 July 1966

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North Vietnamese Military Potential for Fighting in South Vietnam

Submitted by

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DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

Concurred in by the

UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

As indicated overleaf

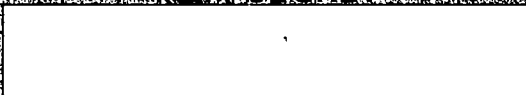
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[Signature]
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, USIB



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The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate:

The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Defense, and the NSA.

Concurring:

Mr. Sherman Kent, Acting CIA Member of USIB

Mr. George C. Denney, Jr., for The Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State

Lieutenant General Joseph F. Carroll, USAF, Director, Defense Intelligence Agency

Lieutenant General Marshall S. Carter, USA, Director of the National Security Agency

Abstaining:

Dr. Charles H. Reichardt, for Assistant General Manager, Atomic Energy Commission, and Mr. William O. Cregar, for Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, the subject being outside of their jurisdiction.

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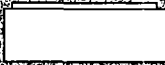


TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
THE PROBLEM	1
ASSUMPTION	1
CONCLUSIONS	1
DISCUSSION	4
I. THE NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES	4
A. Manpower and Mobilization	4
Population and Manpower	4
Mobilization	4
B. The Armed Forces	6
II. COMMUNIST CAPABILITIES TO SUPPORT FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM	7
A. The Current Situation	7
The Command Structure	8
Logistics	8
B. Factors Affecting Capabilities	9
Military Training and Infiltration	9
Infiltration	10
Capacities of the LOCs	11
Trucks	12
Sea Routes	12
Cambodia	12
Food Supply	13
Combat Losses	14
VC Recruitment and Conscription	14
VC/NVA Relationship	15
Morale	15
Effect of US Actions in the South	16
III. THE PROBABLE BUILDUP OF COMMUNIST FORCES	16

~~TOP SECRET~~

	<i>Page</i>
TABLE 1: ESTIMATED CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE OF NORTH VIETNAM WITH SEX BREAKDOWN	5
TABLE 2: ESTIMATED NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES	6
TABLE 3: ESTIMATED MILITARY STRENGTH IN SOUTH VIETNAM ..	7
TABLE 4: MONTHLY INFILTRATION	10
TABLE 5: ESTIMATED COMMUNIST MILITARY LOSSES	14
TABLE 6: ESTIMATED COMMUNIST FORCE DEVELOPMENT (Units)	17
TABLE 7: ESTIMATED COMMUNIST FORCE DEVELOPMENT (Numerical Strength)	17

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NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY POTENTIAL FOR FIGHTING IN SOUTH VIETNAM

THE PROBLEM

To estimate: (a) the present strength of the North Vietnamese military establishment; (b) its capability to expand; (c) its capability through 1967 to send troops to the South and support them there; and (d) the probable buildup of forces in the South.

ASSUMPTION

For the purposes of this estimate,¹ we assume that North Vietnam will generally continue to pursue its current strategy in the war over the next 18 months.

CONCLUSIONS

A. We estimate the present strength of the North Vietnamese Armed Forces to be slightly over 400,000 with about 375,000 of these in the army. North Vietnam has sufficient manpower to provide a total military force of over 500,000 men without serious strain.

B. The total Communist force in South Vietnam is estimated at between 260,000 and 280,000. The major combat elements include some 38,000 North Vietnamese troops, approximately 63,000 VC regular main and local forces, and about 100,000 to 120,000 guerrillas.

C. North Vietnam is estimated to have a current annual capability to train 75,000 to 100,000 individual replacements for infiltration. By making a maximum effort, this total might be doubled. From these, North Vietnam could organize some 24 to 36 infantry regiments per year.

¹The figures in this estimate are current as of June 1966.

D. There is considerable margin for error in estimating total Communist losses. Nevertheless, we believe these losses are mounting rapidly. The loss rate has already begun to strain the replacement capability of the VC in South Vietnam, but it appears that current total Communist losses could be replaced, if necessary, from within South Vietnam.

E. We estimate that the VC could recruit and train 7,000 to 10,000 men per month. The replacement of cadre, however, is probably a problem and is almost certain to become more difficult in the future. By the end of 1967, the loss rate may exceed the estimated capability of the VC to recruit replacements from within South Vietnam, especially if the rate of combat increases. In such case, the Communists might be forced either to scale down their plans for expansion or to step up the rate of infiltration from North Vietnam.

F. Present evidence suggests that the total infiltration for 1966 will probably be between 55,000 and 75,000 men. These would probably include one or two infantry regiments per month, additional units and combat support battalions, and individual replacements.

G. We have no reliable evidence of Communist force goals. By the end of 1966, however, the Communist regular force may include 35-40 regiments and other units and number about 125,000 (65,000 VC and 60,000 NVA)—a net gain of about 50,000 for the year. By the end of 1967, this force may grow to over 150,000, provided attrition remains substantially at 1966 proportions.

H. We believe that current and estimated future capacities of the Laotian road network are sufficient to meet the requirements of the Communist forces in South Vietnam. Even if this capacity could be reduced, say by one-third, and combat activities were to double, we would still estimate that the capacities would be sufficient on an annual basis to support the requirements for the Communist forces at current and future levels. However, at these higher levels of forces and combat, the excess of road capacities over requirements would be reduced during the rainy season.

I. Maintenance and operation of the North Vietnamese truck fleet in North Vietnam and Laos is a serious problem, and the regime is dependent on the Soviet Union, China, and Eastern Europe for trucks, spare parts, and POL. However, despite truck losses from air

attack, breakdown, and retirement, we believe these losses could be offset by imports. The POL requirement for trucks involved in the infiltration movement has not been large enough to present significant supply problems. But local shortages have occurred from time to time and may become significant as a result of attacks on the POL distribution system.

J. Other channels of supply complement the Laotian corridor. Cambodia has become an increasingly important source of supplies, particularly food. Although sea infiltration has been curtailed, the Communists will probably continue to attempt to resupply their forces by this means, particularly in the delta area.

K. We believe that morale problems for the Communists will become aggravated in the future. Hanoi's problems in implementing its military strategy have increased, and the record of combat must raise questions, at least among some leaders in North Vietnam, as to the wisdom of their long term military strategy.

DISCUSSION

I. THE NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES

A. Manpower and Mobilization

1. *Population and Manpower.* The size and structure of North Vietnam's population are more than adequate to support the war at its present level and, if need be, expand it further. Though estimates vary, the total population is probably about 18 million. In the 15-49 age group, there are about 4.0 to 4.5 million males, and of these a little over 2.0 million are believed to be physically fit for military service. Moreover, approximately 110,000 physically fit males reach the age of 18 each year. Thus, there is a considerable pool of military age manpower available for the North Vietnamese armed forces.

2. A labor intensive society such as that of North Vietnam could not mobilize manpower resources for military or war-related tasks to the extent characteristic of developed industrial societies. But manpower could be taken from the North Vietnamese economy in three general ways. Use of the younger men who would normally enter the labor force each year could have provided as many as 250,000 males since the beginning of 1965, and Hanoi has probably already tapped this pool heavily. Transferring men out of various nonessential occupations, such as non-state trade and consumer services, and education, could provide another 300,000 to 350,000 males, but no widespread efforts appear to have been made yet in this area. The largest source, and the one which has been most extensively tapped, is agriculture, where the regime has made a considerable effort since early 1965 to replace men with women, children and old people.

3. Agriculture accounts for more than 7 million of a total labor force of some 9.5 million. A high proportion of the labor force has always been women, exceeding 50 percent in agriculture. North Vietnamese press and other sources have indicated this figure may have increased to 60 or 70 percent. While we feel there is insufficient evidence to argue for the higher figure, we are confident that women now constitute at least 60 percent of the agricultural labor force. An increase of 10 percent in the proportion of women in the agricultural labor force could have released as many as 700,000 males for other duties.

4. *Mobilization.* Some preliminary steps to expand the armed forces were probably taken in 1964. Some former servicemen, particularly NCOs, were recalled to duty in 1964 and 1965. A number of military units were expanded and some new units were formed. In early 1965, discharges were halted, at least temporarily. In April 1965, partial mobilization was officially proclaimed. The draft age limits, which had been 18-25, providing a pool of almost 700,000

TABLE 1

ESTIMATED CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE OF NORTH VIETNAM
WITH SEX BREAKDOWN—1 JANUARY 1966

	THOUSAND PERSONS		
	TOTAL	MALE*	FEMALE*
Total	9,522	4,482	5,040
Production and distribution	8,700	N. A.	N. A.
Agriculture	7,000	2,800	4,200
Industry	806	494	312
State-owned	(206)	(146)	(60)
Handicrafts	(600)	(348)	(252)
Construction	200	138	62
Transport and communications	328	N. A.	N. A.
State-owned	(106)	N. A.	N. A.
Non-state	(222)	N. A.	N. A.
Trade	282	171	111
State-owned	(75)	(51)	(24)
Non-state	(207)	(120)	(87)
Other	84	N. A.	N. A.
Services	822	N. A.	N. A.
Administration	74	70	4
Banking	8	N. A.	N. A.
Consumer Services	402	233	169
Culture, education, science	187	130	57
Medical and social service	83	49	34
Civil Defense	1	N. A.	N. A.
Other	67	N. A.	N. A.

* The absence of data for a number of categories in the male and female columns means they will not add up to the male and female total entries.

physically fit males, were broadened to 17-30 years, making available about 500,000 more physically fit men for a total pool of approximately 1.2 million. Physical requirements were lowered and some of those previously exempted were conscripted. In 1965, the tour of duty was extended from two to three years.

5. In our view, North Vietnam has undertaken a general effort to place the country on a war footing and probably has not yet exhausted the manpower resources that are available for military service or war-related tasks. The regime's main problems in utilizing its manpower resources appear to be managerial inefficiencies, low labor productivity, and dislocations caused by the war and mobilization, and compounded by US bombing. Hanoi has attempted to maintain its economy as well as to meet its wartime needs, but the mobilization program and the war have handicapped agricultural production and forced postponement of the Second Five-Year Plan. The war has also forced the regime

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to increase the number of those engaged in construction, transportation and communication to over 500,000—an increase of over 300,000 in the past two years. Despite these limits on the use of available manpower, we believe North Vietnam has the capability to expand its armed forces to over 500,000 without creating serious manpower problems.

B. The Armed Forces

6. We are confident that the North Vietnamese Armed Forces have expanded significantly since early 1964. Neither manpower availability estimates nor evidence on mobilization, however, offers the basis for exact estimates. Among the unresolved questions are the size of the infantry and air defense units and of the forces in or on their way to South Vietnam.

TABLE 2
ESTIMATED NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES
SUMMARY

ARMY	345,000-427,000
AIR FORCE	3,500-5,000
NAVY	2,500-3,000
ARMED PUBLIC SECURITY FORCES	27,000-35,000
TOTAL ARMED FORCES	378,000-470,000
MILITIA POTENTIAL ^a	3,000,000

North Vietnamese Army Breakdown

Out-of-Country

South Vietnam	38,000-55,000
Laos	17,000-20,000
TOTAL	55,000-75,000

In-Country

Infantry	145,000-175,000
Air Defense ^b	45,000-64,000
Other ^c	100,000-113,000
TOTAL	290,000-352,000

^a This is composed of elements of the civilian population between 17 and 45, including about one million women. A clear distinction between full-time regional forces, reserves, and militia is not possible from available evidence.

^b This includes AAA, SAM units, radar, and miscellaneous air defense administration and support. This force operates under an Air Force/Air Defense Headquarters located in Hanoi. An additional 5,000 men involved in air defense are in AAA battalions organic to the infantry divisions and brigades, and are included in the infantry strength figure.

^c This includes artillery, armor, high command, logistics, engineers, and transportation units.

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7. There is no way of resolving this wide range of estimates with certainty. In our view, the lower estimate, which implies a total increase of about 100,000 over the last year or so, is probably somewhat conservative. There is some question about the exact status of the infantry brigades, and the larger figure for the infantry assumes that four of the six brigades carried have been raised to division status. We are not persuaded, however, that the evidence is sufficient to show that all four of these brigades have been upgraded, and we doubt that all units are continuously at full strength. We do think that the strength of infantry and air defense (primarily AAA) units, and the number of troops in or enroute to South Vietnam are probably larger than the lower figures given in Table 2. Therefore, we estimate the strength of the army to be about 375,000, and the total armed forces slightly over 400,000. These estimates are well within Hanoi's capacity, and well above the estimated minimum requirements for in-country forces.

II. COMMUNIST CAPABILITIES TO SUPPORT FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM

A. The Current Situation

8. The estimated VC/NVA military strength in South Vietnam is between 260,000 and 280,000, as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3

TYPE	NUMBER	ORGANIZATION
VC Main and Local Forces ^a	63,000	2 division-type headquarters ^b 2 front headquarters ^c 13 regiments 95 battalions (regimental and separate) 173 separate companies 101 separate platoons
North Vietnamese Combat Troops	38,000	3 division-type headquarters ^b 16 regiments 63 battalions (regimental and separate)
Combat Support Personnel	17,000-18,000	
Armed Political Cadre	40,000	
Guerrillas	100,000-120,000	

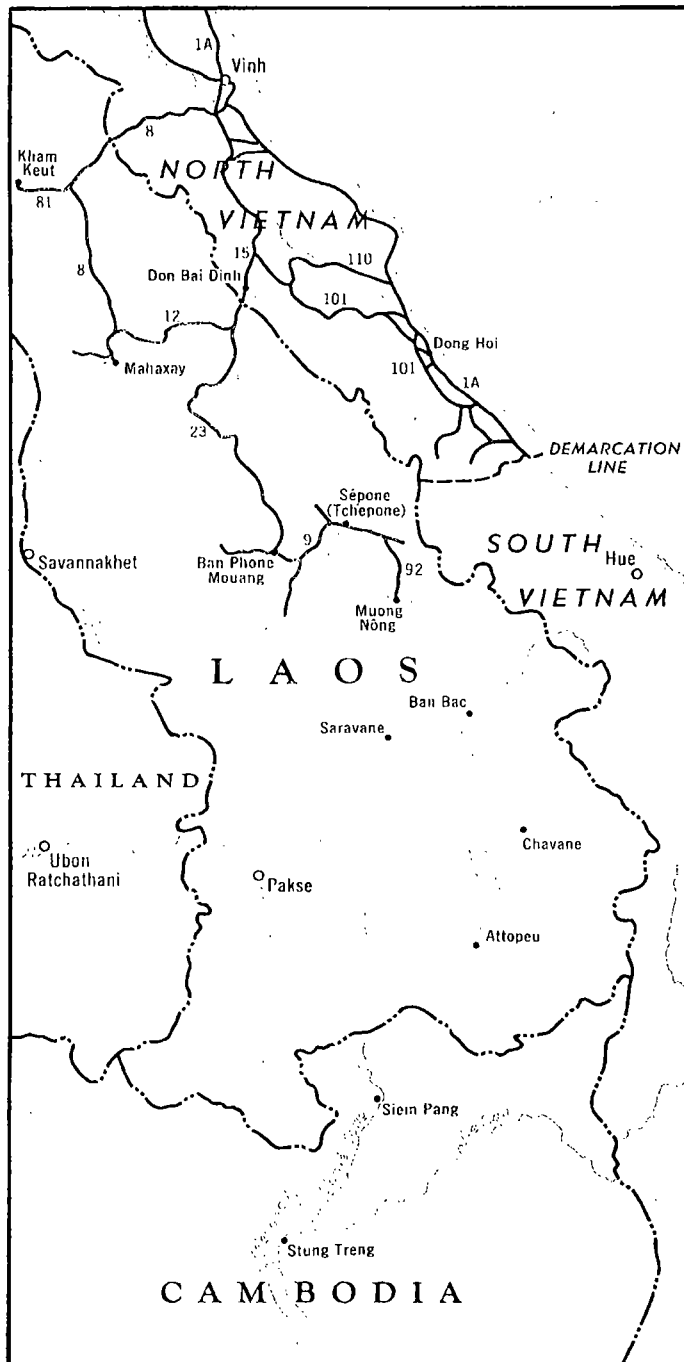
^a Main Forces are subordinate to the Central Office for South Vietnam and to the Military Regions; Local Forces to the Provinces.

^b The VC and NVA division-type formations in South Vietnam do not conform in structure or strength to the normal NVA division. Forces under the division-type headquarters range from two regiments to as many as six or seven. Moreover, the field artillery regiment, a normal feature of a NVA division, is not present in any of the division-type formations in South Vietnam. Instead, units armed with mortars and recoilless rifles provide fire support. In addition to those forces regularly composing these formations, local forces and guerrillas are sometimes temporarily assigned to them for the execution of a specific operation.

^c See paragraph 11.

LAOS PANHANDLE AREA:

1 JANUARY 1964

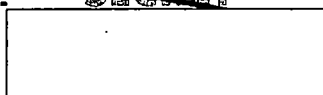


1 SEPTEMBER 1965



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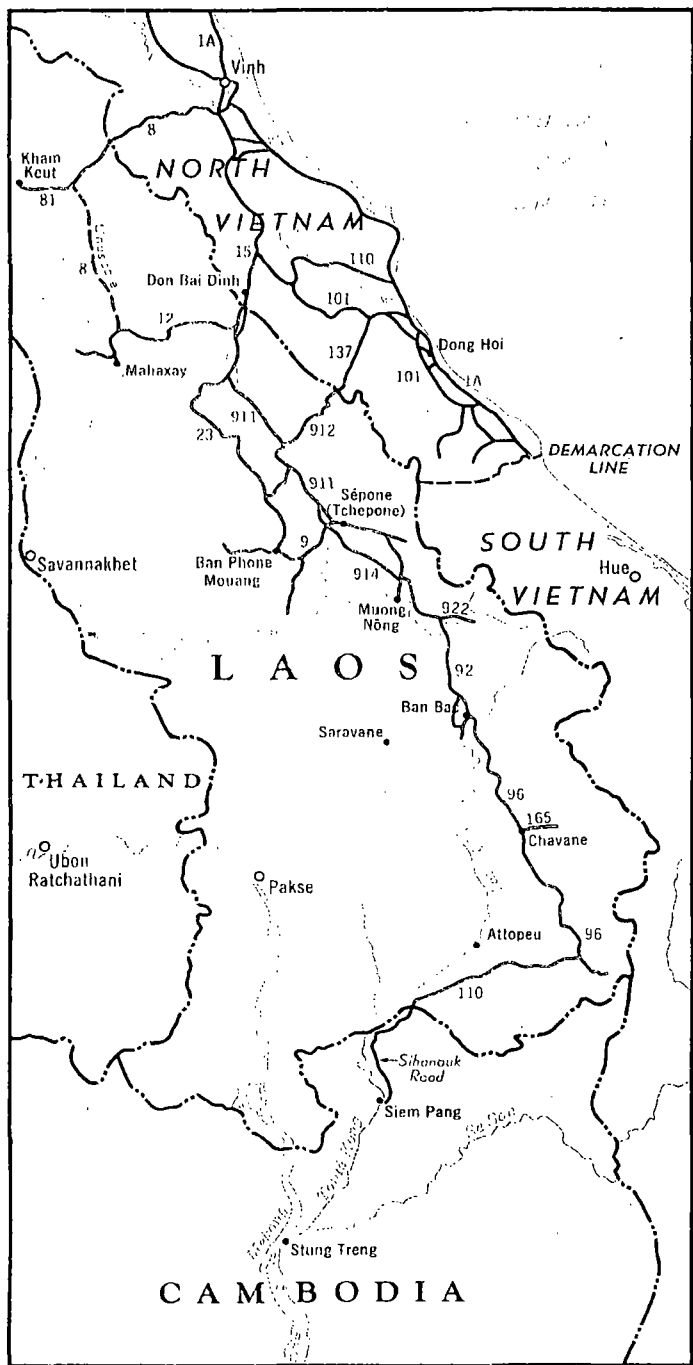
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COMMUNIST ROADNET

1 JUNE 1966

INFILTRATION AND ROAD CAPACITIES



— Communist roadnet
 - - - Other road
 Personnel infiltration (by foot)
 — Dry season
 400/100 — Rainy season

0 25 50 75 100 Miles
 0 25 50 75 100 Kilometers

*For explanation of road capacities, see footnote to paragraph 19

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There is room for error in these estimates. The combat strength of the various units is carried at the last reported total. At any given moment, specific units could be well under or over reported strength because of casualties, desertions, or replacements. Totals for guerrillas, political cadre, and combat support personnel indicate a rough order of magnitude based on available information.

9. The NVA force in South Vietnam has been built up primarily by the introduction of complete units since January 1965, though preliminary training and some infiltration took place in 1964. Present evidence indicates that some 24,000 NVA troops entered South Vietnam in 1965, and about 24,000 in the first five months of 1966. Acceptance of the presence of NVA units and personnel in South Vietnam often lags several months behind their actual time of entry, and the figures on infiltration are subject to continual revision. Thus, on the basis of past experience, it is almost certain that the total infiltration both in units and replacements so far in 1966 actually exceeds 24,000.

10. *The Command Structure.* To accommodate this expanding force, the Communist structure in South Vietnam has grown systematically. Platoons and companies were formed in 1960 and 1961; battalions and the first indications of regimental-size VC headquarters were noted in 1962; and the first NVA regiment entered South Vietnam in late 1964. The first division-type and front headquarters were also detected in 1964. For many years, the two major military control points in South Vietnam have been the Communist Headquarters element in VC Military Region 5 (MR-5) and the Military Affairs Section of the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN). COSVN appears to be the top military-political headquarters in South Vietnam. Both COSVN and MR-5 are subordinate to the High Command in Hanoi. The overall direction of the war lies in Hanoi, but we are unable to determine the extent of tactical control exercised by Hanoi or the military relationship between COSVN and MR-5.

11. VC and NVA units are being integrated into larger, more cohesive bodies with the formation of division-type and front headquarters; a similar development occurred within the Viet Minh during the Indochina war. The front headquarters appear to be associated with specific geographic areas, while the division-type headquarters do not. Both have the capability for conducting multi-battalion and multi-regimental operations. Three NVA division-type headquarters have been confirmed in MR-5, two composed of both NVA and VC units and one with NVA units only. There are also two front headquarters with multi-provincial responsibilities, directly subordinate to MR-5 Headquarters. Further south, two probable VC division-type headquarters have been identified. The remainder of the command structure is composed of provincial commands, with their own organic and attached units, and of separate units, both directly subordinate to the respective VC military regions.

12. *Logistics.* The daily logistical requirement for the Communist forces has steadily increased. It is estimated that as of July 1965, 72,000 VC/NVA troops required about 85 tons of supplies each day. In mid-1966, an estimated

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118,000 VC/NVA troops probably required approximately 150-170 tons daily at present levels of activity.

13. The bulk of this daily requirement is not drawn from outside sources. Indeed, we believe there is no external requirement for POL, and food is obtained primarily in South Vietnam and to some extent from Cambodia. The VC guerrilla forces are not estimated to have a significant external logistical requirement. Thus the main requirement levied on external sources is for some types of Class II (weapons), IV (quartermaster, engineer, and medical), and Class V (ammunition). For 1965, we estimated that this external requirement was only about 12 to 15 tons. In 1966, this has risen, and we now calculate a daily requirement of about 20 to 30 tons—about 12 to 20 tons of Class V. The daily requirement may increase substantially depending on the rate at which the Communist forces are built up and the rate at which they are engaged in combat. Moreover, the nature of the external logistic requirement could change significantly if, for example, the frequency and level of combat should deprive the Communist forces of access to local food supplies in South Vietnam.

B. Factors Affecting Capabilities

14. *Military Training and Infiltration.* Prior to US bombing, infiltration training in North Vietnam was conducted in several training centers. Army basic training was normally two to three months, training for infiltration six months, and specialized training up to one year. After the US bombing began, unit training and training for infiltration was decentralized and transferred to designated military units, which then formed new units, trained them, fleshed them out, and dispatched them to the South. In early 1965, this type of training lasted three months. By late 1965, there were several instances where some individual prisoners reported their training lasted only four to six weeks, and in a few cases even less.

15. It is estimated that a NVA division has the capability of training 4,500 to 6,000 combat-ready men every three months or possibly 18,000 to 24,000 per year. Reports indicate that since 1964, at least six divisions have conducted training of units for South Vietnam. It is doubtful that all elements of the six divisions would be used concurrently for infiltration training, because of the requirements of normal duties plus the scheduling of the training cycle. Therefore, we estimate that North Vietnam has the capability of training 75,000 to 100,000 men a year for infiltration. By broadening the number of units in the training base or shortening the training cycle, North Vietnam might, with a maximum effort, train double the above number of individual personnel in one year. Actual training performance prior to 1966 has apparently been short of these projections of capabilities.

16. While we estimate that individual replacements could be trained at the rates projected above, we do not believe that all of them could be organized into infantry regimental units and provided with the requisite leadership at such a rate. The 325th Division, the most active source of infiltrated regiments,

trained and dispatched six regiments into South Vietnam between the fall of 1964 and the spring of 1966. We consider it possible to accelerate such unit-type training so that North Vietnam could produce infantry regiments at a rate of 24 to 36 per year. This would account for about 48,000 to 72,000 men per year.

17. *Infiltration.* For the period 1959-1964 inclusive, an estimated 44,000 personnel were infiltrated into South Vietnam. During 1965, the rate increased considerably and varied between about 200 in June to some 6,500 for October. In 1966, the rate of infiltration appears to have climbed further. No clear pattern for infiltration is apparent, but with the buildup of Free World combat forces in the summer of 1965, the complexion of the war in South Vietnam changed, and the Communists evidently decided to increase significantly their effort. Almost all of the personnel infiltrated into South Vietnam traveled by foot, and the trip usually took up to ten weeks. Infiltration is not geared to the dry season, as those who arrived in September and October would have been enroute during the severest part of the rainy season, perhaps to take advantage of factors which would limit surveillance.

18. We believe we have not yet observed a maximum rate of infiltration. Factors limiting the rate of infiltration to some extent are the weather, time enroute, and the logistical problems of feeding the troops enroute. Because of sickness, desertions, and hostile actions, there is attrition among the troops during infiltration. However, we believe the North Vietnamese have the capability to increase logistical support for the infiltration system and that more

TABLE 4

MONTHLY INFILTRATION: 1965-1966*

1965		1966	
January	3,032	January	4,525
February	3,890	February	9,350
March	617	March	5,240
April	2,000	April	210
May	400	May	4,450
June	210		
July	300		
August	450		
September	3,367		
October	6,570		
November	860		
December	2,450		

* These figures include all four accepted infiltration categories. Categories 1 and 2 are based on confirmation by two or more prisoners or returnees, or on a PW statement, the major portion of which is confirmed by other sources. Category 3 is based on PW interrogations which are judged to be probably true, but the major portion of which has not been confirmed by other sources. Category 4 is derived from PW statements not supported by other sources.

important determining factors working on infiltration are the number of troops available for deployment, Hanoi's estimated requirement for them in South Vietnam, and finally, Hanoi's decision to send them there.

19. *Capacities of the LOCs.*² The capacity of the roads in North Vietnam and Laos to deliver supplies to South Vietnam is restricted by the capacity of the roads in Laos rather than by those in North Vietnam. In Laos, the total uninterdicted capacity of the infiltration roads for truck movement is about 400 tons per day in the dry season and 100 tons per day in the rainy season.³ This capacity is available to points within a few miles of the South Vietnamese border. The movement of supplies into South Vietnam is dependent on the trail system and on the numbers of porters, bicycles, and animals used.

20. Aerial interdiction has increased the cost and difficulty of keeping traffic moving, has slowed truck movement, and has reduced road capacity to some extent. Nevertheless, during the past year the North Vietnamese have managed to maintain the overall capacity of the roads both in Military Region IV (MR-IV) and in Laos at a level sufficient to meet their military needs. They have at the same time significantly extended the road network, increased its flexibility, and made it less vulnerable to interdiction by construction of alternate routes, short cuts, and bypasses, apparently aimed at providing an alternate for each major supply route. The new road from North Vietnam into Laos alleviates the pressure on the Mu Gia pass road and adds to the total tonnage which can be delivered into Laos. The new "Sihanouk Road" from Cambodia into southern Laos also permits the acquisition of some additional supplies which can be delivered all the way to the tri-border area.

21. Logistical problems, caused by aerial interdiction, are imposing a considerable cost in terms of manpower, transport and construction equipment. Several hundred thousand workers are being employed full time to maintain transport routes in North Vietnam. In Laos, possibly four engineering groups are employed in maintaining, constructing, and improving routes in the corridor area, and for each engineering specialist up to five civilian laborers are believed to be recruited at least for part time work. Because of the scope of this effort, we anticipate that, despite the cost and difficulty caused by aerial interdiction and slower truck movement, the North Vietnamese will continue to improve the motor routes into the Laotian Panhandle and will concentrate their construction efforts in Laos on increasing the existing road capacity, particularly for the rainy season.

² See centerspread map.

³ Tonnage capacity figures are expressed in short tons per day. These road tonnage capacity figures are very conservative, based on estimates for sustained heavy use over at least a 90 day period. Over a short-term period it is estimated that the roads could carry at least three times the capacity figure, but the roads would then require some maintenance work. Further, the capacity figure is set by the most restrictive point (e.g., choke point) on the road; capacity for other stretches may be considerably higher.

22. *Trucks.* This expansion of the roadnet indicates increasing dependence on truck transport for logistic support. North Vietnam is estimated to have about 11,000 to 12,000 cargo trucks. Imports totaled about 3,500 in 1965. So far in 1966, at least 1,600 trucks have been imported. The POL requirement for trucks involved in the infiltration movement has not been large enough to present significant supply problems. But local shortages have occurred from time to time and may become significant as a result of attacks on the POL distribution system.

23. Maintenance of the truck fleet which consists of over 30 different models, is a serious problem, primarily because of lack of adequately skilled mechanics and because lack of spare parts has become critical. In some cases, it has been easier to get new trucks than to get the spare parts needed to put vehicles back into service. Vehicles damaged by airstrikes have been removed rapidly and cannibalized to salvage usable parts. However, despite truck losses from air attack, breakdown, and retirement, we believe these losses could be offset by imports.

24. An estimated 400 trucks are believed to have been operating on the infiltration routes within Laos during the past dry season delivering at least 35 to 40 net tons of supplies per day to the South Vietnam border area. Waterways and primitive means of transport are used to deliver additional supplies, the amount of which cannot be quantified. Transport aircraft, including helicopters, are in the North Vietnamese inventory. However, we do not believe that these aircraft will be used to any significant degree in transporting supplies into the Laotian corridor and South Vietnam.

25. *Sea Routes.* From 1960 to 1964, sea routes appear to have been a major means of infiltrating supplies, particularly to the southern part of South Vietnam. These have declined in importance since the inception of the US Market Time Operation in March 1965. Nevertheless, there are some 50,000 commercial and private craft registered in South Vietnam, some 3,000 of which are at sea on any given day over a coastline roughly comparable in overall length to that from Maine to Florida. Of some 393,000 ships detected between August 1965 and mid-June 1966, some 117,000 were inspected and an additional 74,000 boarded and searched. While this large operation continues to expand, there is still room for infiltration. Recent reports indicate that larger steel-hulled craft are attempting to resupply the VC in southern South Vietnam from time to time. Even if only a few craft reach the coast of South Vietnam carrying a few tons of supplies each, they would still constitute a valuable means of supply, particularly for the delta area.

26. *Cambodia.* In the past, Cambodia served more as a sanctuary for the VC rather than as an infiltration channel for men and supplies into South Vietnam. During the past year, however, Cambodia has become an increasingly important source of supplies other than armaments. For example, in recent months Cambodia has apparently reached some sort of agreement for the sale of substantial quantities of food to the Communists. Sihanouk has also offered to permit hospitalization of wounded Communists in Cambodia and even their

return to South Vietnam after recovery. Sihanouk stated that this offer was made in an attempt to deter the VC/NVA from establishing their own hospitals in Cambodian territory, and there is some evidence that the offer is being implemented. The Cambodian portion of the so-called "Sihanouk Road" has apparently been constructed, if not by or with the cooperation of the Cambodian Army, at least with its knowledge. Rice is being purchased in Phnom Penh and delivered to Communist military units via this road. Other supplies obtained in Cambodia either clandestinely or privately are primarily goods such as pharmaceuticals, chemicals, and some radios. Armaments would probably be moved through Cambodia only clandestinely.

27. Unrestricted use of Cambodia as a transit zone for supplies would provide the Communists with a logistic route capacity far in excess of their maximum projected needs. Any physical limits on this potential would be set by the capacity of the ports rather than by that of the roadnet. Sihanoukville is the only port of significant size on the Gulf of Siam and at present has a capacity of about 1,000 tons per day above and beyond the normal Cambodian traffic through the port. The roadnet from the ports to the South Vietnamese border is capable of handling more than this. The degree to which the Cambodian government will itself become further involved in traffic with the Communists or accede to unrestricted use of its ports will depend on Sihanouk's fluctuating views of the course of the war and of where Cambodia's best interests lie. At the moment, Sihanouk appears to be making efforts to adopt a more neutral posture. Nevertheless, Cambodia will probably continue to condone the transit and sale through well-established private channels of supplies to the Communists in South Vietnam but will probably not officially permit armaments traffic.

28. *Food Supply.* Rice is the main food essential for the Communist forces, although salt is the scarcest item. The total Communist force would require at most 75,000-85,000 metric tons of rice per year; current NVA/VC main force units probably do not consume much over 30,000 tons annually. These totals are far below the amount of rice available to the Communists in South Vietnam, but their problem is moving supplies to the rice-deficient areas in the highlands where most of the NVA/VC main force units are located. This problem has been aggravated by the increased level of combat which has disrupted distribution and limited VC harvesting operations in the highlands. And in recent months US operations into Communist-controlled areas have seized an average of about 1,500 tons of rice per month.

29. The Communists have resorted to a variety of measures to overcome their food problems. The country is studded with food caches. The VC have raised food taxes in most regions and have increasingly resorted to coercion in attempting to meet their quotas. To meet their needs in 1966, the VC have moved closer to the food-producing areas. They have also increased their procurement of rice in Cambodia. The Communists are not likely to solve completely their food problems by these tactics. But neither are they likely to suffer serious food shortages on any large scale in the near future.

30. *Combat Losses.* Communist military losses in South Vietnam have mounted rapidly. In 1965, the Communists were reported to have suffered a loss of some 37,000 men killed in battle. This figure is subject to considerable error because of duplications, omissions, and inability to identify nonmilitary casualties. We are unable to estimate with any degree of confidence the number of Communists wounded in action, but the total might approximate 60,000 with as many as 20,000 to 30,000 being seriously wounded. During 1965, some 6,000 troops were captured and an additional 9,000 rallied to the GVN. The number of deserters who just melted into the countryside and cities is unknown but probably exceeds 10,000. The Communists also permanently lose personnel through sickness, but there is no reliable information from which to derive a figure for such losses. Not counting those who might be seriously wounded or who desert, the Communists may have lost at least 50,000 men of their total fighting force during 1965. If losses caused by wounds and desertions were included, the total loss might be as high as 90,000.

31. The upward trend in Communist military losses has continued in 1966. Through May, almost 20,000 Communists were reported killed, slightly over 2,500 captured and about 6,000 had rallied to the GVN. If these figures were projected to January 1967, the total loss might approximate 70,000 men. The overall loss might approach 125,000 men if personnel possibly lost because of wounds and desertions were included.

TABLE 5
ESTIMATED COMMUNIST MILITARY LOSSES

	1964	1965	1966 ^a
Killed	16,800	36,900	48,000
Captured	4,150	6,300	6,000
Returnees	1,900	8,800	14,400
SUB-TOTAL	22,850	52,000	68,400
Seriously Wounded ^b	8,400-13,600	18,450-29,900	24,000-38,900
Deserters ^c	1,900	8,800	14,400
TOTAL	33,150-38,350	79,250-90,700	106,800-121,700

^a Based on January through May data and assuming that the current level of VC/NVA activity continues throughout the year.

^b This total is derived from a methodology which has a ratio of VC/NVA wounded-in-action to killed-in-action of between 1.5:1 and 1.62:1, and which has between one-third and one-half of the total number wounded being seriously wounded, i.e., out of action for upwards of one year or lost permanently.

^c There is no data base for this total; it is based on the assumption that there is at least one Communist deserter for each returnee to the South Vietnamese Government.

32. *VC Recruitment and Conscription.* No precise figures are available for the population under VC control, but it is probably in the vicinity of from three to five million, primarily in the delta region. Of this total, approximately 500,000 would be physically fit young males; in addition, there are a number

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GROUP 1
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of youths each year who become old enough to fight, perhaps about 30,000. Some VC recruitment is undoubtedly conducted in contested areas and in GVN-controlled areas as well. There is no way to determine exactly how far the VC have drawn on their manpower pool, but the growth in Communist forces plus the increasing casualty losses probably have begun to tax the VC recruitment and training apparatus in South Vietnam. At a minimum, the VC have had to relax their recruiting standards and rely more on conscription.

33. The squeeze on VC manpower has become more apparent in 1966. Increasing numbers of prisoners mention the lack of personnel and the poor quality of the new replacements, many of whom are very young and poorly trained—sometimes with only two or three weeks of training. Moreover, the use of combat units, even regiments, for training appears to be increasing. We estimate that the VC could train 7,000 to 10,000 men per month. In addition, the VC probably recruit and conscript large numbers of personnel who receive little or no formal training. Thus it appears that current in-country training capability could replace current Communist operational losses. But over the next 18 months or so, the loss rate will possibly exceed the estimated capability of the VC to recruit and train replacements from within South Vietnam, especially if the rate of combat increases.

34. The loss of VC cadre, however, is probably already a problem and is almost certain to become worse in the future. The development of cadre is a lengthy process, and hasty, stop-gap measures to provide new cadre create almost as many problems as they alleviate. The Communists also have rapidly advanced personnel to serve as cadre; judging from prisoner statements and captured documents, this has caused a noticeable drop in quality among the cadre.

35. *VC/NVA Relationship.* There is little evidence of significant friction between NVA and VC troops, although personality clashes, food shortages, and misuse of guerrilla forces have created isolated incidents. The integration of North Vietnamese personnel into the VC organization as both high and low level cadre since 1959 has aided in controlling problems arising between the two regional groups. The use of both NVA and VC personnel in the same unit suggests that the Communists consider the two groups compatible. Nevertheless, there is a possibility that as the war takes on even more of a North Vietnamese character, antipathies between the Southerners and Northerners may increase.

36. *Morale.* Also important in the long run, though difficult to measure, is the impact on Communist morale of the adverse factors in the war. Captured documents and prisoners indicate that there is mounting uneasiness among the Communist ranks, and that many of the troops are having doubts as to the ultimate victory of the Communists. For example, VC documents have candidly discussed the adverse effect of the GVN's "Open Arms" (defector) program, and many documents have gone to great length to counter pessimism within the Communist forces. But there have been no mass defections and the Communists continue to fight well. Life for the Communist soldier has become even grimmer

than previously, and morale problems for the Communists will probably become aggravated in the future.

37. *Effect of US Actions in the South.* The stepped-up activity of US forces has almost certainly upset Communist plans for the conduct of the war. The Communists have been increasingly unable to pick and choose combat at times and places to their liking. This has forced them to rely increasingly on defensive measures and improvisation rather than on their preferred tactics of well-planned battles. Finally, the US forces have pushed deeper into Communist base areas and have forced the Communists to place more emphasis on self-defense and protection of their main base areas than ever before. They have retained, nonetheless, considerable strategic initiative and are capable of attacking with sizable forces in many areas.

38. Thus, Hanoi's leaders have not been forced to change their strategy for the war, but their problems in implementing it have been increased. While Hanoi's leaders believe in the concept of a protracted conflict, they must, nevertheless, see the war as a far longer and more costly affair than it appeared to them two years ago. And they must now recognize the high risks in concentrating large numbers of their troops and have serious doubts of ever achieving another Dien Bien Phu. The Communists have paid a considerable price in both North and South Vietnam to increase their forces and continue the battle. They are probably willing to continue doing so for some time to come. But the record of combat must raise questions, at least among some leaders in Hanoi, as to the wisdom of their long term military strategy.

III. THE PROBABLE BUILDUP OF COMMUNIST FORCES

39. Although the VC/NVA are apparently developing higher level command and control headquarters and are including more units under control of these headquarters (division-type and front), it is not anticipated that they will conduct large scale conventional operations, at least not within the time frame under consideration. It is more likely that these headquarters will be used to centralize control over multiple, widespread, and possibly simultaneous operations in their respective areas of responsibility in South Vietnam.

40. Present evidence suggests that the North Vietnamese regime will probably send between 55,000 and 75,000 troops into South Vietnam during 1966. These forces would probably include a number of units and combat support battalions (artillery, mortar, and AAA) and replacements to meet combat losses. The buildup in infantry regiments will probably continue at about one or two per month.

41. We have no reliable evidence of what force goals the Communists hope ultimately to achieve. They are likely, in any event, to reassess their tactics and strategy periodically, especially after the 1966 summer campaign. Present trends indicate that the Communists are probably moving toward a force structure this year of seven to nine division-type headquarters and two front head-

TABLE 6

ESTIMATED COMMUNIST FORCE DEVELOPMENT (Units)

UNITS	PRESENT	1 JANUARY 1967
Division-type Headquarters	5	7-9
Front Headquarters	2	2
Regiments	29	35-40
Battalions (Regimental and Separate)	158	170-190

TABLE 7

ESTIMATED COMMUNIST FORCE DEVELOPMENT (Numerical strength)

UNITS	1 JANUARY 1966	PRESENT	1 JANUARY 1967
VC Main and Local Forces	62,000	63,000	65,000
NVA Troops	16,000	38,000	60,000
Combat Support	17,000-18,000	17,000-18,000	20,000
Political Cadre	40,000	40,000	40,000
Guerrillas	100,000-120,000	100,000-120,000	100,000-120,000

quarters with 35-40 regiments. By the end of 1966, the Communist regular force strength may total about 125,000, thus representing a net gain of about 50,000 for the year. By the end of 1967, this force may grow to total about 150,000, provided attrition remains substantially at 1966 proportions.

42. We calculate that the force structure outlined above for the end of 1966 would require 30-45 tons of external logistics daily if current levels of activity were sustained. If the level of activity were doubled, the external need would be 45-75 tons per day. Similarly, by the end of 1967, the force postulated would require 40-55 tons of external supplies daily at present levels of activity, but 60-90 tons if the level of activity doubled. Though we cannot be confident of what the requirement would be, we believe the lower figures more nearly represent the actual requirement.

43. We believe that current and estimated future capacities of the Laotian road network are sufficient to meet the requirements of the Communist forces in South Vietnam. Even if this capacity could be reduced, say by one-third, and combat activities were to double, we would still estimate that the capacities would be sufficient on an annual basis to support the requirements for the Communist forces at current and future levels. However, at these higher levels of forces and combat, the excess of road capacities over requirements would be reduced during the rainy season.

44. The projected force structure for the end of 1966 would require heavy recruiting within South Vietnam. The total NVA/VC manpower requirement may be as much as 170,000 and could perhaps go even higher if the rate of combat forced on the Communists increased substantially. If 55,000-75,000

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troops are sent from the North and allowances made for combat losses, VC requirements could be between 95,000 and 115,000 recruits. Such an effort is within VC capabilities. By the end of 1967, however, the possible increase in force strength and the combat losses will possibly exceed VC recruitment capabilities, especially if the rate of combat increases. In this case, the Communists might be forced either to scale down their plans for expansion or to step up the rate of infiltration from North Vietnam.

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