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Capabilities of the Vietnamese  
Communists for Fighting  
in South Vietnam

17 July 1969

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# Capabilities of the Vietnamese Communists for Fighting in South Vietnam

Submitted by

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Concurred in by the

UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

As indicated overleaf

17 July 1969

Authenticated:

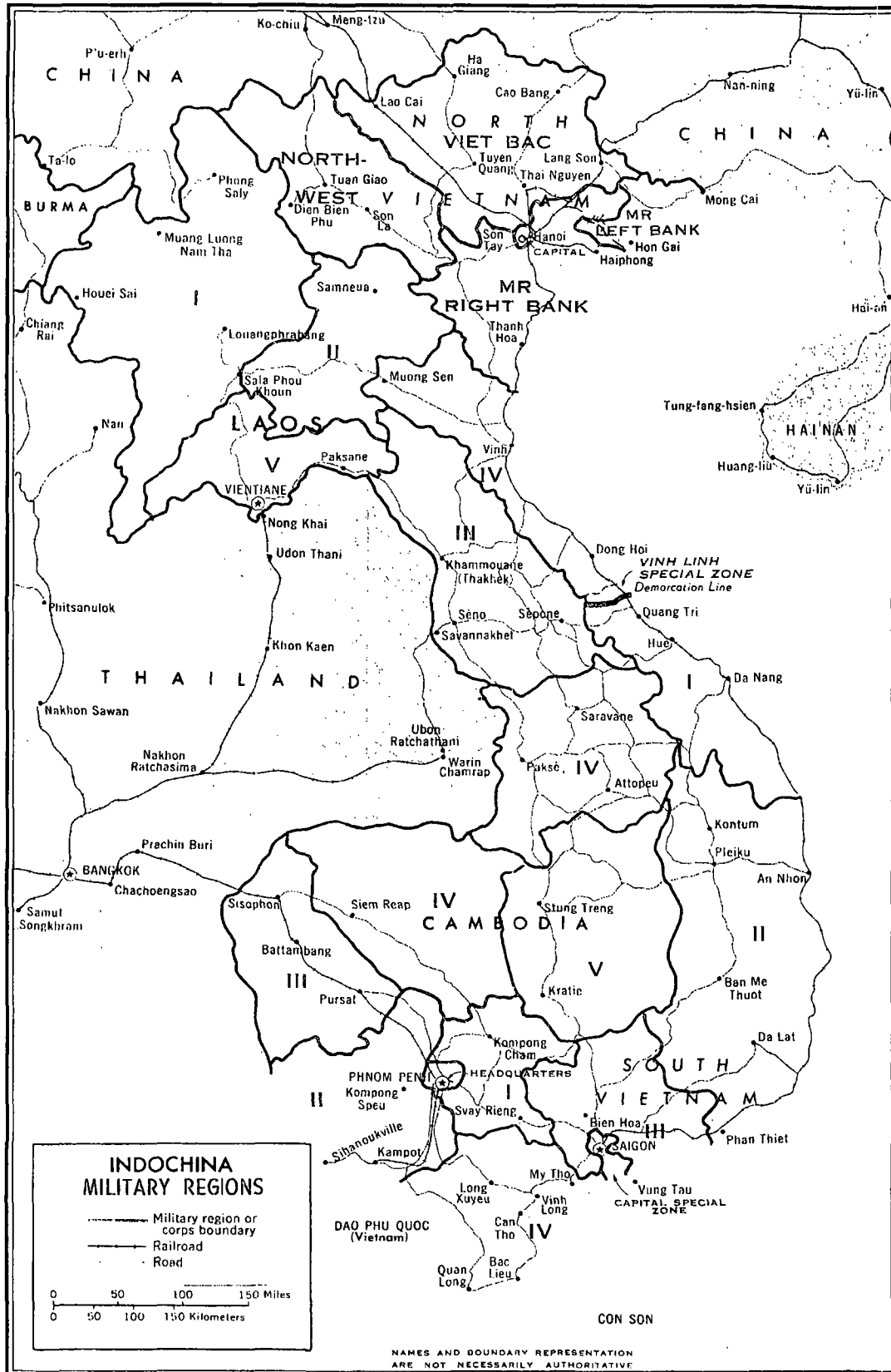
*James S. Lay Jr.*  
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, USIB

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## CAPABILITIES OF THE VIETNAMESE COMMUNISTS FOR FIGHTING IN SOUTH VIETNAM

### THE PROBLEM

To estimate Vietnamese Communist capabilities to sustain military operations over the next year or so.

### CONCLUSIONS

A. The military capabilities of Communist forces in the field in South Vietnam have declined over the past year, and the overall intensity of their military effort probably fell below intended levels. GVN/Allied operations have caused heavy casualties and logistic problems for Communist forces and, overall, have impaired their operational effectiveness. Despite their success over the past year in maintaining the numerical strength of their forces and a relatively high level of military operations, the Communists are suffering an erosion of their position in South Vietnam.

B. Nonetheless, the Communists retain a substantial capability to sustain military operations. The Viet Cong infrastructure, which plays a vital role in supporting the war effort, continues to function effectively despite some attrition and reduced access to the population and resources of the South.

C. Communist manpower losses reached record levels in 1968 and have continued high through June 1969. These losses are almost certainly a matter of serious concern to Hanoi, in part because of the longer term social and economic implications. But given the will, Hanoi could continue through 1970, at least, to supply replacements at the high rates of the past 18 months.

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D. The overall logistic system functions adequately in local procurement in South Vietnam and in the movement of arms and ammunition, some food, and other supplies from North Vietnam and Cambodia to the borders of South Vietnam. We nevertheless believe that the system has begun to feel the strain of the more intensive tempo of the war. There are many difficulties in movement through Laos due to the air interdiction campaign. Within South Vietnam, there are difficulties in pre-positioning and protecting supplies for contemplated operations. On balance, however, we conclude that the overall system can continue to support military operations at the average levels of the past 12 months.<sup>1</sup>

E. We believe that Communist capabilities will support the following options, at least through 1970:

1. to escalate military pressures substantially for a short period;
2. to reduce military operations well below average levels of the past year;
3. to undertake military operations at substantially the same average levels as over the past year.

F. Option (1) appears unlikely without a considerable decline in the strength or morale of Allied forces, since under present circumstances large-scale attacks would be extremely costly for the Communists and could not be sustained. A maximum effort with the forces available in South Vietnam might be launched as a prelude to proposing a general cease-fire and shifting the struggle almost entirely to the political/psychological arena.

G. Option (2) would conserve Communist manpower and might be adopted for some months to test its political effect in the US and in Saigon. But a prolonged stand-down would risk rapid loss of position in the countryside, deterioration of Communist morale, and a probable reduction of domestic pressures in the US to withdraw US forces.

H. Option (3), the course pursued by the Communists over the past year, would be relatively costly to Hanoi and would add to strains and pressures in North Vietnam which have become increasingly apparent. Yet so long as political issues are not resolved in negotiations

<sup>1</sup> For the views of Major Gen. Jammie M. Philpott, Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF, see his comments in his footnote to paragraph 51.

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and the fighting continues, Hanoi may feel it necessary to stay in the field with forces which will enable them to conduct periodic offensives, some of which may be fairly large and costly, and to maintain pressures on the GVN presence in the countryside.

I. As indicated above, we believe Hanoi has the capability to pursue this military course through 1970 at levels approximating those of the past 12 months. Whether it considers such an effort feasible or worthwhile depends, of course, on its judgment with respect to US and GVN resolve, subjects beyond the scope of this estimate. In any case, political action and maneuver will probably be intensified within South Vietnam and on the international scene as the Communists continue efforts to undermine the GVN and isolate its leaders from the US.

## DISCUSSION

### I. INTRODUCTION

1. In the aftermath of Tet 1968, if not before, the Vietnamese Communists recognized that they could not achieve decisive military results on the battlefield in South Vietnam against the combined strengths of GVN and allied forces. The alacrity with which the Communists responded to the March 1968 cutback in the bombing and the US offer to begin talks demonstrated their own readiness to enter a negotiating phase of the struggle.

2. The move to the conference table was followed by some adjustments in military tactics. Since the costly offensives of Tet and May 1968, there have been virtually no large-scale assaults on major cities; rather the Communists have attempted to maintain military pressures by standoff attacks on some cities and military installations, and by ambushes, sapper activity, and occasional frontal assaults on allied military positions. Meanwhile assassinations, kidnappings and other terrorist acts directed at pacification and other local officials have continued.

3. Despite the resort to "economy of force" tactics, the human and material costs to the Communists of sustaining military pressures have not been substantially reduced from the peak levels of January-June 1968. Casualties have been running at a high rate, necessitating continued inputs of North Vietnamese manpower to maintain force levels in the South, and logistic requirements are undiminished. In short, the Communists have felt it necessary to sustain a relatively high level of military operations in South Vietnam in support of their current objectives—undermining the position of the GVN and persuading the US to pull out or to settle generally on terms acceptable to Hanoi.

4. In the following sections of this paper, we examine Communist capabilities in terms of manpower and logistics to sustain the average level of fighting over

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the past year, and some of the considerations that might influence the Communists to intensify or de-escalate the level of combat.

5. We are aware, however, that the capabilities of Communist forces in South Vietnam are not a simple function of the availability of men and arms. Qualitative factors directly affecting the performance of Communist forces in the field and the will and morale of the population and the regime in North Vietnam, are important. Communist capabilities to prolong the war are also directly affected by the effectiveness and performance of the GVN and Allied forces. Finally, given the heavy dependence of the Communist effort on the active or passive support of several million people in South Vietnam, psychological and political factors affecting their allegiance bear heavily on Communist military capabilities. To the extent possible, we will deal with some of these additional elements in this estimate, but it is not our purpose here to "war game" or "net" Communist capabilities against the allies.

## II. COMMUNIST FORCES

### A. The Organization and Strength of Communist Forces in South Vietnam

6. Under Hanoi's direction, a large, well-organized, political-administrative apparatus motivates and manages the overall Communist effort in South Vietnam. This apparatus has existed throughout Vietnam since 1945; its control element is the Vietnam Workers Party (Lao Dong) and the southern wing is publicly called the Peoples Revolutionary Party (PRP). Front groups controlled by the Party include the newly formed Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG), the National Liberation Front (NLF), and the Alliance of National Democratic and Peace Forces. This organization acts not only as a government in Viet Cong-controlled areas, but maintains an important clandestine presence elsewhere, collecting intelligence and undertaking various subversive efforts. Its primary responsibilities, however, are to maintain discipline and morale, and to mobilize manpower and other resources in support of the overall effort. Because of these functions and the leading political role it would also play for the Communists should combat cease, this apparatus is the key element of the Communist presence in South Vietnam.

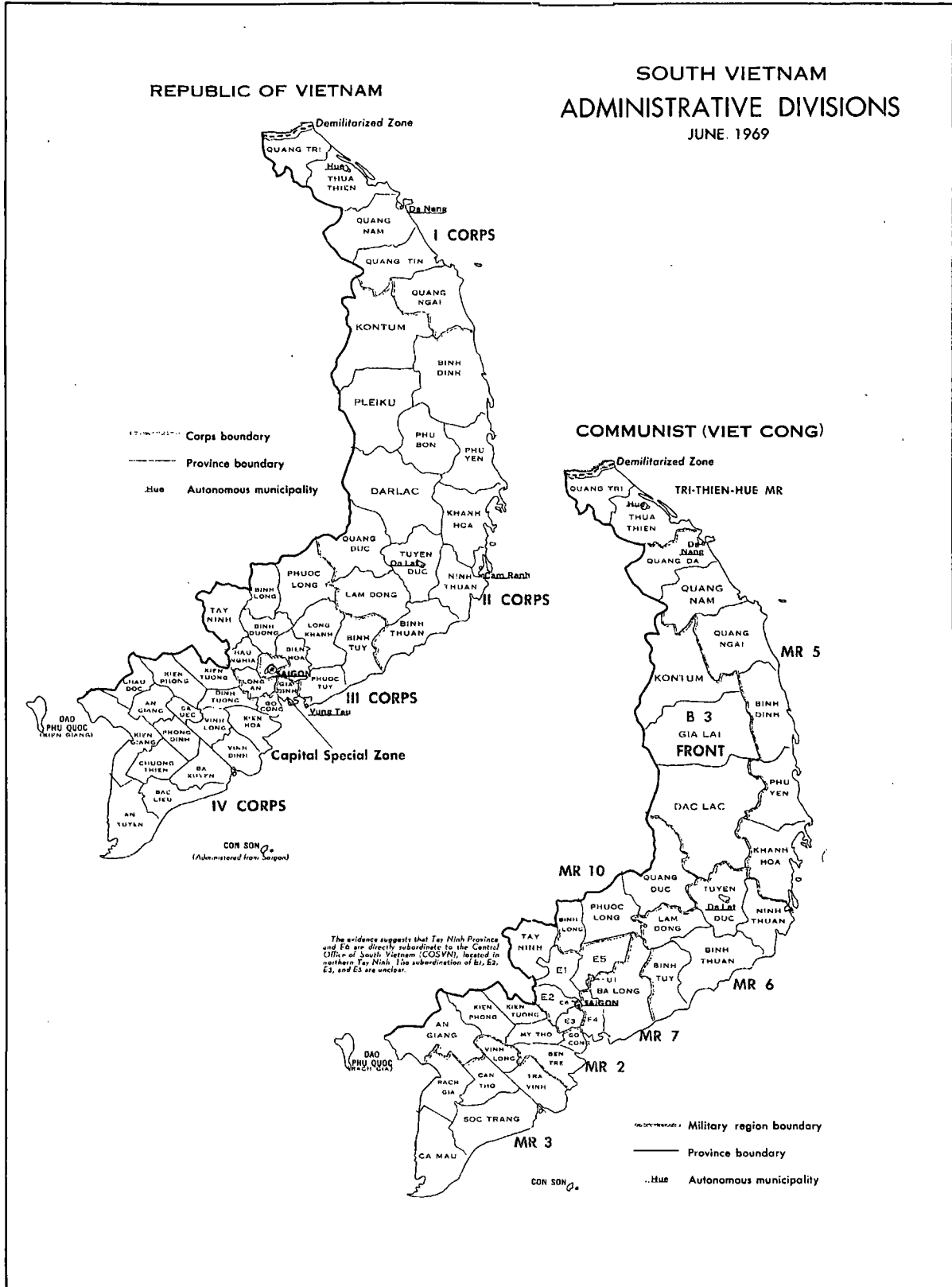
7. The current estimate of hard-core members of the infrastructure—totaling 80,000 to 100,000—is a projection based on sketchy and dated evidence. The widespread geographical distribution of the infrastructure and the dedication and effectiveness of its personnel are as significant as its numbers. A co-ordinated allied effort directed specifically against the political-administrative apparatus has gotten under way within the past year. It is difficult to assess the results of this effort thus far. It is clearly causing the Communists some concern but, despite some attrition and disruption, the infrastructure remains basically intact and capable of engaging in roughly the same magnitude of operations as it has during the past four years of the war.

8. *Military Forces.* Overall control of military operations in South Vietnam is exercised by the High Command in Hanoi. The Central Office for South Vietnam

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(COSVN)—the Vietnam Workers Party headquarters in the south—has a military affairs office which exercises tactical control over those military forces located in the southern half of South Vietnam. Elsewhere, Communist military forces are tactically controlled by Hanoi, either directly or through the military affairs sections of appropriate regional party headquarters. Hanoi and COSVN maintain effective links with the district and small-unit levels through a hierarchy of regional, subregional, and provincial commands.

9. Communist military forces are organized into three complementary structures or levels: the Main Forces, including North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units; the Local Forces; and the Guerrilla/Militia. Main Forces are battalion and larger units, supported by appropriate staffs, which are subordinate to military commands above the provincial level. Local Forces are battalion, company, and platoon-size organizations, also supported by appropriate staffs, which are subordinate to the provinces and districts. Guerrilla units are platoon and squad-size units which are subordinate to villages and hamlets.

10. Our latest estimate of the personnel strength of Communist military forces in the South is listed in Table I.

11. Organizationally, the Communists have increased their maneuver forces by a number of additional battalions, thus adding to their tactical flexibility. The intensity of combat has caused a wide fluctuation in the actual personnel

TABLE I  
ESTIMATED VIET CONG/NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY PERSONNEL STRENGTH  
IN SOUTH VIETNAM AND ADJACENT AREAS  
(As of 31 March 1969)

REGULAR COMBAT FORCES	
North Vietnamese Army .....	120,000-130,000 <sup>a</sup>
Viet Cong (Main and Local Force) .....	50,000- 65,000
Subtotal .....	(170,000-195,000)
ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES <sup>b</sup>	
North Vietnamese Army .....	25,000- 30,000 <sup>c</sup>
Viet Cong .....	40,000- 50,000
Subtotal .....	65,000- 80,000
GUERRILLAS .....	50,000-100,000 <sup>d</sup>
Total .....	285,000-375,000

<sup>a</sup> In addition to those troops deployed in South Vietnam, this figure includes two divisions and other forces in adjacent areas of Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam, and an estimated 25,000 NVA fillers in Viet Cong Main and Local Force units.

<sup>b</sup> Within the Communist military organizations, administrative services personnel are included among NVA, Main Force, and Local Force troops.

<sup>c</sup> This includes up to 10,000 personnel of the 559th Transportation Group who may be deployed in South Vietnam at any given time.

<sup>d</sup> We believe that the military threat represented by the Guerrilla forces is not on a parity with that of the Main and Local Forces. The number of guerrillas who are well-trained, organized, and motivated is somewhere near the lower end of the range given above.

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strength of these units, and overall has led to a lower average strength. The major change in the general positioning of enemy forces during the past year or so has occurred in III Corps, where a significant buildup has taken place.

12. Trends relating to the size and mix of Communist forces are extremely difficult to discern. In general, however, it appears that Viet Cong Main Force and NVA strength has increased slightly since the end of 1967; the proportion of North Vietnamese troops in the regular forces has also increased somewhat during this period. Viet Cong Local Forces have probably declined in numbers despite a growing number of NVA replacements, while guerrilla strength has declined numerically and qualitatively during the past year and one-half. Generally, all of these trends appear to have involved only moderate shifts, and overall, we believe that total Communist military personnel strength as of 31 March 1969 was about the same as in the months prior to the dramatic 1968 Tet offensive. Since then, there may have been some decline due to continuing high losses in combat.

13. *Other Groups.* In addition to the political infrastructure and military forces, the Communist presence in South Vietnam includes other organized paramilitary insurgent groups. Self-Defense Forces, for example, construct fortifications, warn of the approach of allied forces, and defend hamlets and villages in Viet Cong-controlled territory. They are not well-armed, do not leave their home areas, and perform their duties only on a part-time basis. Assault Youth primarily perform rear service functions at the district and province level. They serve full-time, however, and are organized into companies and platoons. We believe that Self-Defense Forces may number between 80,000-120,000 while the Assault Youth total about 10,000-20,000. These estimates are projected from limited data, and are included only to suggest a rough order of magnitude.

#### B. Communist Manpower Requirements and Availability

14. *Losses.*<sup>2</sup> Our estimate of VC/NVA personnel losses in South Vietnam for 1967 was about 170,000; in 1968, it increased to nearly 300,000, and was running at about the same high level during the first half of this year. Up to now, the Communists have managed to offset these heavy losses by local recruitment in South Vietnam and by the deployment of replacement groups and organized units from North Vietnam. In the following paragraphs we consider Communist capabilities to continue the replacement process.

15. *Recruitment in South Vietnam.* There is no reliable demographic estimate of the manpower pool in South Vietnam. Seemingly slight variations in assump-

<sup>2</sup> These estimates include defectors, prisoners, and allowances for various other types of losses, but depend primarily upon an admittedly imperfect count of those killed in action. Because of the widespread use of allied artillery and air power, the effects of which cannot often be verified, it is likely that our estimates of Communist losses are somewhat understated. In light of the tenuous nature of these estimates and other difficulties, it is not possible to apportion Communist losses among the various types of Communist forces.

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tions regarding the age-sex ratio of the population or the percentage of physically fit males can result in differences of many hundreds of thousands of available men. Moreover, the manpower actually available to the Viet Cong varies considerably as the Communist presence expands or contracts in various areas of the country. Nevertheless, it is clear that the manpower supply available to the Viet Cong is growing smaller. It is being reduced by continuing casualties on both sides, by the recently intensified GVN mobilization effort and by the continuing shift of population from rural to urban areas; the latter is especially damaging to Communist recruiting. Our estimates of Communist recruiting in South Vietnam remain tenuous. During the past year and one-half, the estimated monthly recruitment rate has ranged from a few thousand during certain periods to 15,000 for several months following the 1968 Tet offensive. Estimates of total recruitment in 1968 ranged from 60,000 to 100,000.

16. In any event, the growing manpower squeeze has affected the quality of the recruits to some extent. Men of prime military age are becoming more scarce, and there is evidence of a growing number of recent recruits in the 13-17 year age bracket within Viet Cong ranks. The high, rapid turnover has necessitated a shorter training period for recruits, which also detracts from performance. Most important, the growing recruitment problem in the South has forced the Communists for some time to rely primarily on troops from North Vietnam to maintain the strength of their forces.

17. *Manpower Available in North Vietnam.* Heavy troop requirements for the South coupled with increases in the North Vietnamese Armed Forces have been cutting into North Vietnam's pool of able-bodied young men. From 1965 through the first half of 1969, North Vietnam increased its original armed forces of 300,000 by 230,000-255,000 men and infiltrated to the South an estimated 540,000-615,000 men. These figures suggest that close to one million men were mobilized by the armed forces during this period.

18. A precise manpower balance is impossible to construct because of the lack of reliable demographic data on North Vietnam and uncertainty about the number of males physically fit. Nonetheless, we estimate that close to 200,000 North Vietnamese males reach 17 each year, that some 130,000 of these would be physically fit for military service, and that the total number of physically fit males remaining in the 17-35 age group is something less than one million.

19. The men in this pool are variously employed in the agriculture, industry, and services sectors of the economy, or are students. No very precise calculation of the numbers of men that could be drawn from these civilian activities for military service is possible. So long as foreign aid is available to replace losses in material production, military exemptions could be limited primarily to those with special skills in administrative, distributional, transport, and war support activities. In addition, a few men may be excluded from military service for political reasons, including some Catholics, "rightists," and ethnic minorities.

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20. There are other indications that North Vietnam is not yet at the bottom of its manpower barrel. During the bombing program, North Vietnam was able to mobilize a considerable civilian labor force to repair bomb damage and, with the help of Chinese troops, to expand its transportation network. With the cessation of the bombing and the improvements in the transportation system, the total demands on the civilian labor force have slackened considerably. Moreover, analysis of North Vietnamese prisoners indicates that North Vietnam has not yet taken significant numbers of draftees from outside the primary draft age group of 18 to 30.

21. However, the mere existence of manpower in a given age group is not the sole determinant of Hanoi's willingness or ability to supply troops to South Vietnam. A continuing drawdown of manpower reserves over the long-term imposes social and economic strains on any society that cannot be ignored. Such social and economic strains could place a more relevant ceiling on the number of men Hanoi could send south than the absolute numbers involved.

22. *North Vietnamese Armed Forces.* The North Vietnamese Armed Forces continued to expand during 1968 and are estimated to total 530,000 to 555,000 as of 31 March 1969.

TABLE II  
ESTIMATED NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES  
(As of 31 March 1969)

SUMMARY	
Army .....	500,000-525,000
Air Force .....	10,000
Navy .....	2,500
Armed Public Security Forces .....	17,500
<b>TOTAL ARMED FORCES .....</b>	<b>530,000-555,000</b>
<i>Breakdown</i>	
Out-of-Country	
South Vietnam <sup>a</sup> .....	145,000-160,000
Laos .....	60,000- 70,000
<b>Total .....</b>	<b>205,000-230,000</b>
In-Country <sup>b</sup>	
<b>Total .....</b>	<b>325,000</b>

<sup>a</sup> In addition to those troops deployed in South Vietnam, this figure includes two divisions and other forces in adjacent areas of Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam, and an estimated 25,000 NVA fillers in Viet Cong Main and Local Force units.

<sup>b</sup> In-country North Vietnamese forces include the following major units: 6 infantry divisions, 1 artillery division, 1 anti-aircraft artillery division, 3 training divisions, 1 infantry brigade, 6 independent infantry regiments, and 2 armored regiments. These combat elements total some 105,000 men. The remaining 220,000 are in training, air defense, engineer, transportation, administration and other support units including personnel assigned to the High Command.

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23. *Military Training in the North.* From 1965 to 1969, demands on North Vietnam's training capability grew as increasing numbers of men were recruited, trained, and infiltrated to South Vietnam. From prisoners and other evidence, we know that Hanoi's regular training establishment now consists of three training divisions plus one training group, with an estimated capacity to train a total of 25,000 recruits in one three-month training cycle, or 100,000 recruits per year. Beyond this, we also know that subordinate units of regular line divisions and independent regiments in North Vietnam are used to perform a training mission. We estimate that the eight infantry and one artillery divisions could train about 60,000 recruits per year using one regiment per division, or 120,000 using two. Similarly, the eight independent regiments could turn out an additional 18,000 recruits per year using one battalion per regiment for training or 36,000 using two. On this basis, we estimate that the North Vietnamese have the capability to train a total of about 180,000 to 250,000 men annually and the upper limit of this range could be raised by shortening the training cycle.

24. In 1968, the infiltration of unprecedented numbers of troops from the North indicates that record numbers of North Vietnamese were trained during that year. A sample of NVA prisoners captured in South Vietnam indicates that about four-fifths of those who were drafted in 1967 and earlier years had received at least three or four months of basic training, while three-fourths of those inducted in 1968 had less than three months. Thus it appears that a reduced training cycle and somewhat less than two-thirds of the line units were used to train the record number of troops trained in 1968. The North Vietnamese have apparently attempted to compensate for the shortened training cycle to some extent by expanding pre-induction militia training for 17-year olds.

25. We believe that the level of training carried out in 1968 represents a near maximum effort, and that it could probably not be sustained without a deteriorating effect on both the caliber of training cadre and the quality of the training received by the infiltrees. This effort, for example, apparently spread thin the available high-caliber training personnel, and this, together with a shorter training cycle, probably contributed to the observed decline in Communist combat performance in the South in recent months.

26. *Infiltration.* Since 1959 the North Vietnamese have dispatched well over half a million men to South Vietnam and adjacent areas. We estimate that about 250,000 and possibly as many as 300,000<sup>3</sup> arrived in 1968. Based on inputs into

<sup>3</sup> Vice Adm. Vernon L. Lowrance, Acting Director, Defense Intelligence Agency; Major Gen. Joseph A. McChristian, Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army; Rear Adm. Frederick J. Harlfinger, II, Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Intelligence), Department of the Navy; and Major Gen. Jammie M. Philpott, Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF, believe that the best single estimate of infiltration into South Vietnam during 1968 is 250,000. If anything, this figure may be high. Experience has shown that as new information is obtained, the total figure for 1968 has decreased. It is, therefore, considered unlikely that the estimate will go above 250,000.

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the system through March 1969, 85,000-100,000 probably arrived during the first half of this year.

27. The picture for additional arrivals in South Vietnam for the remainder of the year is now in doubt. Analysis of available intelligence indicates that since the end of March there has been a sharp reduction in the numbers of new troops put into the infiltration system in North Vietnam. several groups entering the pipeline in May, and in July

movements of some 11,000 personnel plus five groups of undetermined size over the next few months. We cannot determine the departure dates from North Vietnam for these personnel. southward

28. In any event, and even if replacement inputs pick up substantially in coming weeks, it appears that there will be a substantial reduction in the numbers of replacements arriving in South Vietnam during the next few months. This reduction might not have a noticeable impact on Communist capabilities until later in the summer since the troops which have already arrived in South Vietnam, those projected to arrive by July, and those recruited in South Vietnam, should largely offset Communist losses during the first half of the year.

29. The rate of infiltration has always been erratic, with no clear pattern apparent, and the totals varying considerably from month to month. While weather and other seasonal factors have occasionally disrupted infiltration, they have never been important in limiting it, or even controlling it in the sense of establishing any seasonal patterns. There are considerable logistic problems in feeding and caring for the troops enroute, but on the basis of actual numbers of troops infiltrated we can only conclude that the Communists have steadily expanded this capability. There is some attrition among troops during infiltration because of sickness, desertions, and hostile actions. The overall loss rate for infiltrators from all causes is estimated at 10 to 15 percent.

30. North Vietnam probably has the capability to sustain even the relatively high 1968 level of infiltration at least through the end of 1970. There is, as explained earlier, sufficient manpower available in North Vietnam. Provision of adequate training for such a large number of recruits over such a prolonged period would be something of a strain, but it probably could be managed. The present logistical facilities along the infiltration pipeline are probably sufficient to support such levels of infiltration.

31. *Availability of Forces for a Major Reinforcement Effort.* If North Vietnam decided to make a maximum effort rapidly to reinforce Communist troops in South Vietnam, it could conceivably deploy eight to nine division equivalents—the bulk of its combat forces in Laos and North Vietnam—to the DMZ area within 90 days. There are, however, a number of considerations militating against such an effort. By removing troops which play an important role in recruit train-

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ing, Hanoi would impair its capabilities to provide a continuing flow of replacements. Such a removal would also weaken North Vietnam's internal security and home defenses, probably to an extent not acceptable to Hanoi. In this connection, Hanoi might fear that such a major reinforcement would precipitate renewed bombing of the North. Hanoi could remove its forces from Laos for deployment in South Vietnam, but this would weaken severely the military position of the Pathet Lao. Given these limitations, and depending on Hanoi's view of the risks and opportunities, it might be willing at some point to extract an additional three or four divisions (some 30,000-40,000 men) from its existing forces in North Vietnam and Laos for reinforcement of the South.

### III. LOGISTICS

32. To supply their forces in the South at the relatively high level of combat which has developed, the Communists have had to create an extensive and elaborate logistical network within South Vietnam, supported from North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. In addition, they have had to depend increasingly upon military and other supplies received from the USSR, China, and other Communist countries.

#### A. Logistical Requirements of Communist Forces in South Vietnam and Adjacent Areas

33. In their own planning the Communists almost certainly establish supply requirements based upon the anticipated levels of combat and upon forecasts of losses to allied action. We have insufficient information regarding detailed Communist military planning or their expectations of losses to estimate these requirements, but the normal tendency would be for the planners in the field to cover all contingencies. Moreover, the pattern of actual supply movements in support of the Communist effort in South Vietnam fluctuates considerably. The seasonal weather pattern, changing levels of combat, the requirement to maintain some contingency stockpiles, and the vulnerabilities of the two major external logistical systems all contribute to these fluctuations in traffic. As the external requirement for arms and ammunition has grown since 1965, so has the need for stockpiles. Thus, leaving aside the question of consumption and losses in Laos or elsewhere in the external system, the total tonnages actually moved for use in South Vietnam almost certainly are somewhat greater than would be indicated by the average daily requirements shown in Table III.

34. At this point, however, we are concerned with estimating the actual quantities of supplies needed to sustain military operations at the average levels of the past year or so. For purposes of making this estimate we define these requirements as the total of supplies actually consumed or expended plus losses due to capture or destruction by allied forces. Despite the uncertainties involved in estimating these tonnages, there is no doubt that the Communist logistical burden has increased considerably. Our estimate of their daily consumption

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requirements in South Vietnam is now about 276 tons per day,<sup>4</sup> about 25 percent more than estimated requirements in late 1967. About 75 tons of this daily requirement comes from outside South Vietnam—an increase of 35 percent. These increases in requirements over late 1967 are due to the higher rate of combat, to a larger Communist force structure in South Vietnam, and to the equipping of nearly all Communist forces with newer and heavier weapons.

35. *Losses.* The quantities of Communist supplies captured or destroyed by allied ground action have also increased since late 1967. For the past six months or so, these losses have been averaging 40 tons per day, including an estimated 10 tons of arms and ammunition received from external sources. Communist supply losses from allied air operations in South Vietnam are much more difficult to estimate, but they clearly constitute another significant burden on the Communist logistical system which further increases the volume of needed supplies from out-of-country sources. Among the supply categories, the loss of ammunition is the most serious problem for the Communists; overall ammunition losses may total more than three times the current daily Communist consumption requirement. Considering both losses and consumption requirements then, it appears that over the past two years total supplies needed for NVA and Viet Cong regular and administrative support forces in South Vietnam have increased by over 50 percent, while the proportion which must be procured from external sources has almost doubled.

<sup>4</sup> See Table III.

TABLE III  
ESTIMATED AVERAGE DAILY REQUIREMENTS FOR  
NVA AND VC REGULAR AND ADMINISTRATIVE  
SUPPORT FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM<sup>a</sup>  
(November 1968-April 1969)

Class	SHORT TONS PER DAY					
	Daily Consumption		Daily Losses		Total Requirements	
	Total	External	Total	External	Total	External
I (Food) . . . . .	235	60	37	2	272	62
II and IV (Weapons and Equipment) . . . . .	35	10	3	3	38	13
III (POL) . . . . .	Negl.	Negl.	Negl.	Negl.	Negl.	Negl.
V (Ammunition) . . . . .	6 <sup>b</sup>	5	21	20	27	25 <sup>c</sup>
TOTAL . . . . .	276	75	61	25	337	100

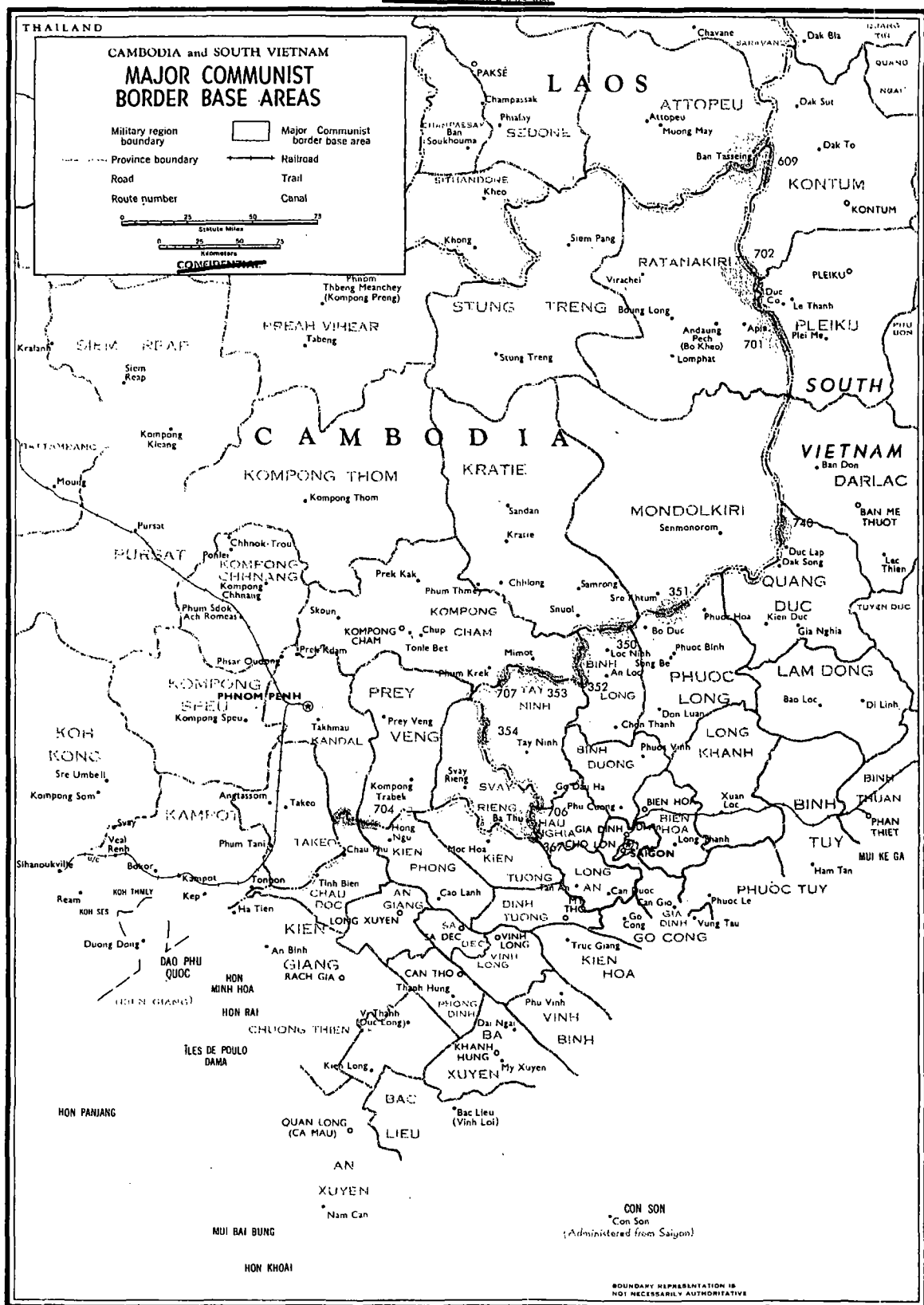
<sup>a</sup> This table does not include the requirements for those forces deployed in and immediately above the DMZ.

<sup>b</sup> For all of 1968, the total consumption of Class V was about 11 tons per day of which about 10 tons came from external sources. The lower requirement in the table reflects the decline in ammunition expenditures that occurred in the last half of 1968 compared to the higher expenditures of the Tet, May, and August 1968 offensives.

<sup>c</sup> One-third of the weight of the external requirement represents a packaging factor; two-thirds of the weight is actual ammunition.

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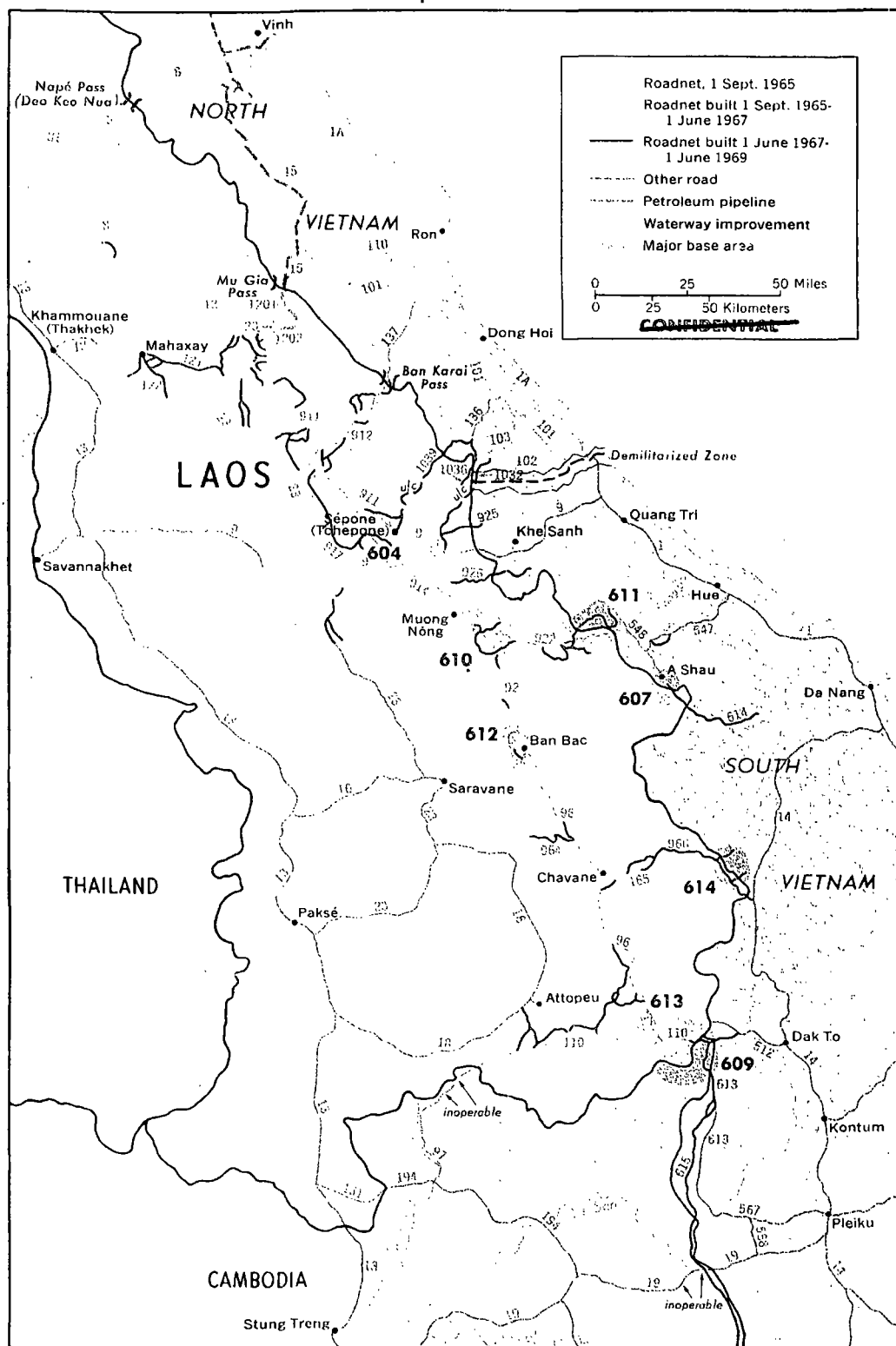
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### B. The Logistical System

36. The logistical system consists of a well organized structure within South Vietnam which has both procurement and distribution functions, procurement-transportation arrangements in Cambodia, and supply lines from North Vietnam extending through the DMZ and Laos into South Vietnam.

37. Communist forces in the field do not operate with a "logistics tail"; they depend on prepositioned stocks of food, ammunition, and other necessary supplies. Thus, the entire object of the system is to get supplies to the right places in forward areas, in the necessary quantities, and in advance of planned operations. Given the time-consuming process of moving supplies, it is obvious that requirements must be estimated and submitted well in advance, probably in six-month cycles geared to the seasonal campaigns in South Vietnam (e.g., "winter-spring campaign"). It is also obvious that if the prepositioned stocks are captured, destroyed or otherwise denied, the Communists have to reduce the intensity of operations, or shorten, postpone or cancel them.

38. The nature of the system also places a premium on maintaining major supply stocks reasonably close to the combat zone. The Communists have attempted to do this by establishing numerous base areas in relatively secure districts in South Vietnam, in the sanctuary offered by the Cambodian border region, and in Laos convenient to the exit routes into South Vietnam. These base areas serve other functions; they contain hospitals, troop training facilities, rest areas for combat forces, way stations for infiltrating troops, and secure camps for high-echelon command and administrative authorities.

39. As indicated earlier, a large proportion of the total Communist supply requirement is met from sources within South Vietnam. Much of the food, clothing, and POL used in South Vietnam is purchased, confiscated, or produced by the Communist apparatus in the South. But important quantities of rice come from Cambodia and nearly all arms and ammunition come from sources external to South Vietnam.

### C. North Vietnam: The Rear Supply Base

40. Domestic economic conditions do not greatly affect North Vietnam's capabilities to support the war in the South. The principal material contributions of the North Vietnamese to the war have been manpower and the maintenance of a transport system capable of moving men and imported war materiel to the combat zones. The lost domestic output of North Vietnam's rather primitive economy has been compensated for by increasing imports of a wide variety of non-military goods, particularly food. In addition to heavy imports of foodstuffs, North Vietnam receives from the Soviet Union, Communist China, and Eastern Europe virtually all of its requirements for petroleum, machinery, and construction materials. The bulk of the military equipment used by the Communists in both North and South Vietnam is, of course, also imported from the Communist countries. The value of military aid from other Communist countries is estimated

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at about \$400 million in 1968, down from about \$600 million in 1967. The decline in military imports in 1968 probably reflects reduced needs for air defense weapons, particularly ammunition and surface-to-air missiles, since the US bombing cutbacks of 31 March and 31 October 1968. So long as external sources continue to supply North Vietnam's basic domestic requirements and the resources necessary to maintain the flow of war materiel to the South, the deteriorated economy will probably have little effect on the regime's capability to wage war.

41. Since the bombing halt, North Vietnam has restored the essential parts of its transportation system to normal use, and has stepped up the expansion and improvement of selected facilities. The important rail lines have been fully repaired and construction has begun on some new rail segments. Additional berthing facilities and other improvements are being made in the port of Haiphong. The major LOCs running south from Hanoi/Haiphong to the DMZ and the Laos border were quickly restored after the bombing halt, and the three main roads to Laos through the Nape, Mu Gia, and Ban Karai passes have been improved. In addition, the North Vietnamese have been constructing a new supply corridor—consisting of three roads—into Laos along the western edge of the DMZ, which when completed, will provide a shorter and much less exposed means of moving supplies into Laos.

42. These developments now provide Hanoi with the capability to move supplies rapidly toward Laos and the DMZ. Indeed, since the bombing halt, the Communists have undertaken a major supply movement into the southern panhandle of North Vietnam using available rail lines, truck routes, waterways and coastal shipping. This has produced a substantial military supply buildup in the southern panhandle of North Vietnam some of which is visible in open storage. While we have not attempted to quantify this buildup or the overall stockpile level in North Vietnam with any precision, we are confident that the stocks available are more than adequate to support the war in South Vietnam without further imports into North Vietnam for several months.

#### D. The Laos Panhandle

43. *Communist Forces Involved in Logistic Movements Through Laos.* The responsibility for the establishment, operation, maintenance and protection of Communist infiltration and supply routes in Laos rests with the NVA 559th Transportation Group, headquartered near Tchepone. It is organized into a number of "Binh Trams"—i.e., military way stations—which are assigned specific areas of responsibility and are located along major LOCs extending at least as far south as the Cambodian frontier. They have organic ground security and air defense forces, and the larger stations have engineer forces, civilian laborers, and Assault Youth available to effect road repairs and construction.

44. We estimate that the strength of the NVA 559th Transportation Group, including transportation, engineer, AAA, commo-liaison and infantry elements, is between 25,000-40,000.<sup>5</sup> Normally some of these forces return to North Vietnam

<sup>5</sup> This figure includes 10,000 who may be deployed to South Vietnam at any given time and are also carried in the order of battle for South Vietnam.

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from the Laotian Panhandle during the rainy season; such a movement is currently underway.

45. *Road Construction.* Since the North Vietnamese started to build roads on a large scale in the Laos Panhandle in 1965, they have followed a construction schedule influenced primarily by weather. In the dry season (November to June) they construct new roads and improve existing ones; in the rainy season when the roads deteriorate, new construction stops and work is concentrated on maintenance of the existing roadnet. Because of the intensified bombing during the past dry season, the Communists had to devote greater efforts to the repair of existing roads and to the construction of new bypasses. These new bypasses, together with other new road construction, added about 300 miles to the road network in the Laotian Panhandle. Most of this year's work has been devoted to the three new cross-border roads from North Vietnam near the DMZ, and to bypasses around heavily-bombed chokepoints.<sup>6</sup>

TABLE IV  
COMMUNIST ROAD CONSTRUCTION IN THE LAO PANHANDLE

<u>PERIOD</u>	<u>MILES CONSTRUCTED</u>
In existence prior to June 1965 .....	300
September 1965-June 1966 .....	363
September 1966-June 1967 .....	118
September 1967-June 1968 .....	280
September 1968-June 1969 (estimated) .....	300

46. In addition to their road construction and improvement activities, the Communists have constructed a petroleum pipeline and undertaken waterway improvements including dredging. The petroleum pipeline—first noted in July 1968—now extends from the Vinh area in North Vietnam through the Mu Gia pass southward some 30 miles into Laos.<sup>7</sup> The pipeline is undoubtedly intended to lighten the truck traffic on the LOC net, to free truck resources for other cargo, and to aid in better distribution of fuel to the upper panhandle region. The pipeline does not extend the length of the North Vietnam-Laos logistic corridor, however, and trucking operations must still be maintained from the pipeline terminus southward. Finally, in attempting to divert aerial attacks from primary targets, the Communists have increased their use of deception techniques such as building dummy roads and water crossings, lures, extensive camouflage and trellising.

47. Thus, the Communists now have in Laos a more complex year-round logistical system with a higher capacity than ever before, even though truck

<sup>6</sup> See centerspread map of Laos Panhandle.

<sup>7</sup> This pipe is four inches in diameter and has a daily capacity of about 1,000 metric tons. The heaviest demand for petroleum in Laos is in the region between the Mu Gia Pass and Tchepone, and along Route 912. If the pipeline is extended beyond its present terminus to meet this demand, it would release additional trucks for other duties.

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traffic falls off sharply during the rainy season. The many new bypasses around interdiction points and other troublespots will assist in diversifying traffic patterns to counter air interdiction efforts. The new cross-border roads just north of the DMZ will offer more options for introducing supplies into the Laotian Panhandle and could become a main route for truck traffic during the forthcoming monsoon season because they have less mileage vulnerable to the weather and air attack than the routes through more northerly passes.

48. *Logistical Movement.*

49. The variance in the information reported from the sources available makes it difficult to make accurate determinations on the quantity of supplies moved into Laos over the dry season.

There are other complicating factors. The average truck load appears to have increased from three to almost four tons, but we are not sure when this change took place. On balance, we believe that the volume of supplies actually moved into Laos from North Vietnam from November 1968 through April 1969 was at least as much as during the same period in the preceding year, and probably slightly higher.

and extrapolating, which provides a lower estimate than other sources, we calculate that about 220<sup>8</sup> tons per day of supplies moved into the Laos Panhandle during the period as compared with 210 tons per day during the same period last year. This does not include any figure for POL tonnages moving through the pipeline.

50. *Losses from Air Attack.* The air interdiction effort in Laos has been very costly to the Communists. Over the past six months trucks and supplies have been destroyed at a high rate. More manpower has been necessary to construct new roads, to repair damaged roads and trucks, and to man anti-aircraft posi-

<sup>8</sup> A USAF study indicates that this total may be 290 tons per day.

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tions. It is difficult to estimate the amount of goods lost in Laos by bombing because of the inherent possibility of error in pilot reports of trucks destroyed and damaged, and assessments of the amounts lost in secondary explosions, which are the main sources of these estimates. Nevertheless, given these caveats and potential for error, we estimate that during the 1968-1969 dry season, enemy supplies lost as a result of trucks effectively destroyed by bombing probably totaled about 15 percent of the tonnages of supplies entering Laos from North Vietnam during the period; secondary explosions and fires resulted in additional losses.

51. *Tonnages Available for South Vietnam.* We estimate that Communist consumption requirements for their forces in the Laos Panhandle together with losses there total about 130 tons per day. Using the estimate of 220 tons per day entering Laos, this leaves a total of about 90 tons per day for stockpiling or movement to South Vietnam. It is estimated that Communist forces in South Vietnam require only 50 tons a day of supplies from North Vietnam via the Laotian Panhandle.<sup>9</sup> If pilot sightings

are used as a basis for estimating the flow, the net amount available for onward movement to Communist forces in South Vietnam or stockpiling in Laos would be even greater. In sum, all the available evidence indicates that over the past year the Communists have moved more than enough supplies through Laos to the South Vietnamese border to cover our estimate of their requirements in South Vietnam that are satisfied from the North.<sup>10</sup>

### E. Cambodia

52. Cambodia has long been an important source of supplies for the Viet Cong. The Communists obtain some of their medical supplies, chemicals useful in the manufacture of explosives, and communications equipment there, but most of the non-military shipments consist of Cambodian rice. We believe that Cambodian sources supply as much as 15 percent of the daily food requirement of Communist forces in South Vietnam. Cambodian rice is particularly important to

<sup>9</sup> The estimate of total external requirements of Communist forces in South Vietnam is about 100 tons per day (see Table III, page 13). Roughly, it is estimated that some 15 tons of these external requirements come directly across the DMZ, another 35 tons (mainly food) from Cambodian sources, and the remaining 50 tons via Laos.

<sup>10</sup> Major Gen. Jammie M. Philpott, Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF, dissents from the figures quoted in, and the judgment at the end of, this paragraph. While it is useful to tabulate the enemy's estimated consumption and losses in order to gain a better understanding of his logistic system, as was done in Table III, page 13, his actual requirements, of necessity, must be related directly to his intentions and his capabilities. USAF analysis indicates that during the November 1968-April 1969 period, after internal consumption and losses from bombing, the net logistic tonnage available for onward movement to South Vietnam was approximately 60 tons per day. This amount represents a reduction of about 20 tons per day from stockpiles that existed in Laos prior to November 1968. The foregoing, when viewed in conjunction with his supply losses within South Vietnam indicates that the enemy has experienced a logistics shortfall that should result in a reduced level of enemy activities during the last half of 1969.

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Communist troops in the rice-deficit highlands of II Corps and northern III Corps, where it probably constitutes their main food source. Most of the food is shipped directly across the Cambodian border; some of it is moved up the Se Kong River to Communist forces located in Laos or in adjacent parts of Vietnam. The Cambodian Government controls the trade in foodstuffs for profit and in order to maintain some political leverage. Recent evidence, for example, indicates that the Cambodians temporarily suspended major shipments to the Communists while working out new arrangements governing the use of Cambodian territory by Communist forces.

53. We have also been convinced for some time, that some of the arms and ammunition arriving in Sihanoukville from Communist China are diverted to the Communists in the III and IV Corps regions of South Vietnam.

\_\_\_\_\_ have provided a reasonably detailed and consistent picture of an organization within the Cambodian Army,

\_\_\_\_\_ which controls these arms shipments to the Communists, as well as deliveries of food and other supplies.

\_\_\_\_\_ two types of contracts exist between Cambodian authorities and the Viet Cong. The first involves the shipment of non-military goods to the Communists; the other concluded between FARK and VC/NVA representatives, governs the shipment of arms and munitions.

54. We have been less successful in obtaining reliable and consistent evidence on the actual tonnages involved in these arms shipments. We lack firm and reliable information on the actual tonnages of arms and ammunition off-loaded at Sihanoukville, and there is considerable doubt over what proportion represents the legitimate military requirements of the Cambodian armed forces.

55. Nonetheless, recent evidence strengthens the case for something more than minor diversions from Cambodian stocks.

We still cannot quantify the flow, but recent evidence suggests that the tonnages involved over the past year or so have constituted an important, and at times a substantial proportion of Communist requirements in III and IV Corps.

56. Perhaps the major limitation on Communist use of the Cambodian route for movement of arms and ammunition—as well as reliance on Cambodian rice—is the dependence on Cambodian co-operation. The entire system is vulnerable

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to sudden termination.

Over the past few months there have been numerous instances of Cambodian-initiated military clashes with Vietnamese Communist forces on Cambodian territory. The recent embargo appeared to involve arms and ammunition as well as food. It almost certainly was designed to force the Communists to reduce the presence of their troops on Cambodian soil and stop the support they are alleged to give local dissidents. But whatever the reason for this recent Cambodian move it serves to illustrate the limits on the reliability of the Cambodian portion of the Communist logistical system.

57. As for the logistical route leading southward from the Laos Panhandle, we have difficulty estimating the extent of its use over the past year or so. Southbound traffic levels in the vicinity of the tri-border region in 1967 and 1968 suggest that Communist requirements for southern II and all of III Corps could have been met via the Lao Panhandle logistical route. But the direct evidence available on the actual movement of arms and ammunition moved southward from the tri-border area towards III Corps is extremely limited. Nevertheless, there is a long-established and extensive trail network there which is continuously being improved, and Communist forces are present along its entire length. Moreover, personnel are infiltrated via this route. For these reasons, and in view of the small tonnages involved, we believe this trail system is more than adequate to handle all the estimated arms and ammunition requirements of Communist forces in southern II Corps and all of III and IV Corps.

58. In sum, we believe that Communist forces in III Corps now obtain arms from both the Laotian route and the Sihanoukville route. The evidence remains insufficient to prove that one or the other route presently carries the bulk of the required arms and ammunition to IV, III and southern II Corps, although there is little doubt that the importance of the Cambodian route has grown significantly over the past two years or so. Whatever the past or present pattern of movement, however, we believe that Hanoi considers the Laotian route as its most important channel since it is firmly under Communist control, has the necessary capacity, and is not subject to the political vagaries. We believe the Communists will continue to defend and improve the Laotian route.

#### F. Seaborne Infiltration

59. We believe that the Communists no longer rely to any important degree on sea infiltration as a means of obtaining arms from abroad. The last detected attempt at sea infiltration by a steel-hulled trawler was in March 1968. It is highly unlikely that such large craft can evade US patrols and we doubt that attempts to do so are now being made. However, it is possible that small craft

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do bring in some supplies from North Vietnam and Cambodia. The principal Communist use of the sea routes is for the local movement of supplies along the coast in small wooden craft within South Vietnam.

#### G. Principal Supply Problems and Prospects

60. It is evident that the Communist logistic system, through internal procurement in South Vietnam, overland shipments from North Vietnam, and deals with the Cambodian Government, has functioned adequately over the past two years to make supplies available sufficient to sustain a tempo of combat much higher than that prior to mid-1967. The system is well developed and continues to deliver more than the minimum supplies we estimate are necessary to sustain Communist forces in combat at the average levels of the past year.

61. We nevertheless believe that the system has begun to feel the strain of the more intensive tempo of the war. The portion within Laos is encountering many difficulties and strains because of air interdiction. Difficulties in positioning and securing supplies within the actual combat zones in South Vietnam, particularly those far removed from Communist bases, have grown appreciably. Denial of cached supplies, as a result of allied ground operations and allied artillery and air power, frequently upset plans for particular military operations and perhaps in some instances caused the Communist to alter specific campaign objectives and tactics. These difficulties are among the several factors which limited the overall level and intensity of Communist military pressures during 1968 to levels which we believe were below those intended. Logistic problems have also had some influence upon Communist strategy thus far in 1969. The present reduced intensity of combat, however, is not one that imposes severe strains on the Communist logistics system. Thus, so long as Hanoi continues to receive the necessary external supplies, the Communists should be able to provide their forces with the necessary support to continue the war at the average levels of the past 12 months.

#### IV. OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING COMMUNIST CAPABILITIES

62. *New Weapons.* In certain respects Communist forces in South Vietnam have managed to improve their capabilities. They have re-equipped their forces, including a portion of the guerrillas, with new Chinese Communist and Soviet weapons, including AK-47 automatic rifles, and various caliber mortars, rockets, and recoilless rifles. This has improved the assault capabilities of Communist infantry and enhanced their street fighting and sapper capabilities as well. The new weapons have also increased the Communists' defensive capabilities and, in general, the confidence of their lower level troops. Perhaps most important, these developments have enhanced their capability for standoff attacks. Finally, while the equipping of Communist forces with heavier weapons has increased tonnage requirements from external sources, the standardization of weapons simplifies their logistics.

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63. *Intelligence Capabilities.* Communist military capabilities in South Vietnam are considerably enhanced by good tactical and strategic intelligence information. The quality and timeliness of their intelligence is due partly to the nature of the war; there is no front line and Communist sympathizers exist throughout South Vietnamese society. In addition, however, the Communists have a highly developed and professional intelligence effort

64. *The NVA Presence.* The impact of the increased proportion of North Vietnamese troops and units in South Vietnam in recent years is more difficult to assess. This trend may have caused some resentment in Viet Cong units, though there is no evidence that friction has reached serious proportions. Moreover, the North Vietnamese are far less familiar with the terrain. But they are better trained and equipped, and more tightly disciplined than southern recruits of recent years. On balance, the increased NVA presence has probably enhanced Communist capabilities.

65. *Morale.* It is evident from captured documents, ralliers, and prisoners that morale problems among Communist forces in South Vietnam are increasing. The main reasons appear to be the diminishing expectation of clear-cut victory, and the unwillingness to face increasing physical hardships and allied firepower, especially with the Paris talks raising hopes of an early peace. The impact of these concerns is reflected to some extent in the large number of Communists who have rallied under the Chieu Hoi program over the past year and the evidence of increased desertions. Moreover, captured documents and other evidence indicate that Communist leaders are increasingly concerned about troop morale.

66. Any conclusions as to the impact of these morale problems on Communist military capabilities must be tempered by the knowledge that similar evidence of serious morale problems has been available throughout the war, even in late 1967 just prior to the Tet offensive. Moreover, there have been no large-unit defections. Nor are there many medium- or high-level political or military cadre among the ralliers. It is also evident that Communist forces still show considerable aggressiveness and initiative on the battlefield.

67. Communist capabilities are also being adversely affected by signs of increased alienation of the population under Communist control and in contested areas. Disillusionment with the Communist cause, increased Communist demands, and anticipation of an early end to the fighting appear to be the main causative factors. The situation has contributed to increasing migration to areas under GVN control, and greater popular reluctance to co-operate with Communist recruitment and tax collection efforts. However, these trends have existed for some time and their effects have developed in a slow, cumulative manner rather than sharply and suddenly.

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68. *Allied Operations.* Allied military activities have imposed major limitations on Communist military operations. The heavy casualties suffered by the Communists in the 1968 Tet and May offensives, when they sent large units against urban centers, undoubtedly contributed to the decision to switch to the more conservative, economy-of-force tactics which have since characterized their offensive operations. Even so, many of these more recent attacks have been blunted by increasingly effective Allied spoiling operations. Allied military action has resulted in the capture and destruction of large quantities of Communist supplies and, along with the GVN's pacification program, has constricted Communist controlled territory and hampered their ability to recruit personnel; it has also limited Communist access to local funds and supplies. In short, Allied forces have not only denied the Communist forces in the field any military progress but have also reduced their overall military capabilities during the past year and a half.

69. *Political/Psychological Factors in the North.* The cohesion and determination of the leadership in Hanoi are among the most important intangibles affecting Communist capabilities. The leadership probably has been strained by increasing opposition to committing more and more of North Vietnam's resources to the war without the clear prospect of early success in the struggle. Debate over the proper extent of involvement by the North has gone on since late 1963 when Hanoi first decided to send regular North Vietnamese troops to the South. We have recently learned, for example, that this debate reached such proportions in the months prior to the 1968 Tet offensive that a number of middle-level officials were arrested.

70. Late last summer, the regime appeared to have reached some new conclusions about the overall effects of its previous policies. These were reflected in a long report by party theoretician Truong Chinh which criticized implicitly the inadequacy of political preparations for the 1968 Tet offensive and expressed deep dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in the North. Not only had the results of Hanoi's efforts in the South failed to match earlier expectations, but the war had adversely affected the all-important "socialist-base" in North Vietnam. Marxist orthodoxy was being eroded, and the country remained dependent on massive doses of foreign aid. Chinh's report left no doubt that the regime was bent on correcting these internal problems and that it was reluctant to make them worse by launching more large-scale offensives in the South, until adequate political and other preparations had been made.

71. Since last autumn, the leadership has been making a major effort to tidy up affairs in North Vietnam and to counter increasing war-weariness. Its appeals to youth, party cadre, and the military, in particular, reflect growing concern with the long-term corrosive effects of the war on these key elements of the population. They also suggest that the regime finds it increasingly difficult to obtain full support for its policies and the sacrifices they entail.

72. It is possible that all factions in Hanoi now agree that the US will to continue the struggle is declining rapidly, citing the start of US troop reductions

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as the most recent evidence of this. But the evidence available suggests that Hanoi remains quite uncertain regarding US intentions, the implications of Vietnamization, and the probable duration of the military conflict. We believe that recent developments have not removed the grounds for debate in Hanoi; indeed the policies of the new US Administration may have served to sharpen and enlarge the area of debate.

73. These political and psychological considerations restrict Hanoi's ability to exercise the capabilities described in this paper. Their influence should not be overrated; we do not believe that they will necessarily force Hanoi to make early concessions in order to bring the war to an end. We certainly see no evidence, for example, which suggests that problems of security, morale, or indecision will cause any early collapse of the Communist war effort. The Vietnamese Communists have proved quite skillful in coping with such problems in the past and they have devised their current military and diplomatic tactics to take account of these weaknesses.

#### V. THE OUTLOOK FOR COMMUNIST MILITARY STRATEGY AND TACTICS

74. We believe it is fair to say that Communist military effectiveness on the battlefield has suffered a qualitative decline over the past year. In any prolonged conflict at the current level of GVN/Allied commitment, this decline would almost certainly continue and perhaps at an accelerating pace. While Hanoi is almost certainly concerned about these trends and its heavy casualties, it retains a firm and disciplined control over its people and armed forces, and there is little evidence that the infrastructure in South Vietnam is weakening in its dedication and effort, despite long years of struggle.

75. As indicated above, the Communists appear to have sufficient manpower to absorb casualties and to maintain military pressures at the 1969 levels for at least another year or so. The logistic system is also adequate to sustain such efforts, although its maintenance in Laos will involve considerable difficulties so long as air interdiction continues and, within South Vietnam, logistic problems will continue to influence the overall level and intensity of Communist military operations.

76. Within the present level of effort, there are many variations in tactics open to the Communists; they can concentrate their efforts on US forces and bases, on the ARVN, on the pacification organizations, on urban areas, or on some mix of all these. They can attempt relatively low-level but sustained pressure, or they can mount relatively large-scale attacks interspersed with prolonged periods of regroupment to base areas for rest and refit.

77. The Communists could also opt for a substantial escalation of the conflict for a short period. Some might argue, for example, that later this year, or early in 1970, conditions in South Vietnam and the US will be ripe for a major military effort similar to Tet 1968. But given allied military power and the current state of readiness, such attacks would be extremely costly and they

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could not be sustained. Particularly in view of past concern in Hanoi over the indecisive results of heavy investments of northern resources, and its desire to retain a capability for protracted war, we doubt that Hanoi would gamble on a desperation campaign to bring decisive results. Hanoi might be more tempted to increase military pressures some time in the future, however, if it concluded as a result of phased US troop reductions that morale in Saigon and the ARVN was declining and that higher US casualties would accelerate the reduction of US forces. Finally, it might launch a maximum effort with the forces available in South Vietnam, as a prelude to proposing a general cease-fire, and shifting the struggle almost entirely to the political/psychological arena.

78. Hanoi could, of course, decide to reduce military pressures to a substantially lower level. If they do this, the North Vietnamese would be likely concurrently to increase efforts in Paris to extract allied concessions, both in terms of a political settlement and in terms of curbs on allied military activity.

79. A prolonged reduction of military pressure, however, would raise several problems for the Communists in the absence of political progress or an obvious reduction in Allied military pressures. It would probably produce a decline in the US casualty rate, and the Communists might consider that this would ease US domestic pressures for an end to the fighting. Furthermore, the Communists might feel that such a reduction in their military effort would appear as a tacit admission of military weakness, shaking the confidence of their troops and political apparatus in the South, and reinforcing that of the GVN. Finally, the Communists might be concerned that such a course would permit allied operations and programs to erode their political and military base.

80. Even at their present force levels and with their present military effort, the Communists are suffering in the South an erosion of their organization and of their control over the population. Nevertheless, if they see the war continuing well into 1970, it seems likely that Communist strategy will call for them to stay in the field with forces which will enable them to conduct periodic offensives, some of which may be fairly large-scale and costly, and to maintain pressure on the GVN presence in the countryside. In any case, political action and maneuver will probably be intensified within South Vietnam and on the international scene as the Communists continue efforts to undermine the GVN and isolate its leaders from the US.

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