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20 March 1968

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The "Order of Battle" Problem

1. For the past year, a growing body of evidence has indicated that long-standing conceptual and methodological approaches to the Communist Order of Battle in South Vietnam had led to a consistent understatement of enemy military and political strength. This new evidence was derived from the wealth of captured documents acquired from enemy headquarters elements overrun by Allied operations since 1966, supplemented by interrogations in depth of numerous captives and defectors. Accordingly, our knowledge of the organization, composition, strength and roles of the various components of the Communist political-military forces has increased dramatically in the past two years.

2. The intelligence community has sought to reconcile this new body of evidence with the official order of battle holdings developed in Saigon by J-2 MACV. Because of his greater access to the raw intelligence data, his larger analytical resources, and his direct command responsibility for assessing Communist capabilities and strengths, the Washington community had largely deferred to J-2 MACV's analyses. In mid-1967, however, during the preparation of NIE 14.3-67 ("Capabilities of the Vietnamese Communists for Fighting in South Vietnam"), the Washington community proposed an upward revision of the strength figures in several categories based on the new evidence. J-2 MACV countered with more conservative figures, and the strengths finally published in the NIE represented a compromise pending further detailed research on various aspects of the problem both in Saigon and in Washington. (J-2 MACV's previous holdings are listed in Column A in the attached table; the agreed NIE figures are listed in Column B.)

3. J-2 MACV subsequently adjusted the agreed figures to omit the spread, their new figures tending toward the lower end of the scale. (Column C in the attached table lists MACV's pre-Tet adjusted holdings.) These and subsequent adjustments were rationalized on the basis of a systematic accounting approach which deducts "known" enemy losses from the assessed strength of

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specific Communist units and force components. Since the Washington community already had serious reservations concerning the completeness of the data base, it was felt that this bookkeeping methodology exacerbated the problem of reconciling the new evidence with the officially "accepted" figures.

4. Our own detailed research in recent months on the various components of the Communist force structure has led us to conclude that their strengths -- before the Tet offensive -- were substantially higher than MACV's holdings. (Column D in the attached table lists our strength estimates.) Since Tet, J-2 MACV has further adjusted his holdings of enemy strengths to account for reported Communist losses and allow for the belated acceptance of additional NVA troops which infiltrated into I Corps in December and January. (MACV's current adjusted holdings are listed in Column E of the attached table.)

5. Our continuing problems with MACV are partly methodological, partly conceptual, and partly philosophical. MACV uses a series of tabulating methodologies which require "hard evidence" reflecting multiple confirmation before units are "accepted" in the order of battle. Although such methods ensure careful analysis at the working level, they do not produce best estimates of an actual state of affairs and inevitably lag behind current reality. This has been particularly true with regard to administrative service and guerrilla strengths, where the evidence is admittedly less conclusive than for Main and Local Force elements. As for the political infrastructure, our problem is to some extent one of clumsy definitions which encompass more than hard core leadership but exclude many full-time activists. Moreover, MACV is adamantly opposed to any quantified estimate of "irregulars." The philosophical problem derives from our desire to give the clearest possible picture of the total enemy threat which frequently conflicts with MACV's desire to maximize the appearance of operational progress and reluctance to acknowledge past estimative errors.

6. A more immediate problem -- since the Tet offensive -- results from MACV's deducting the entire reported KIA total from its military strength holdings. Thus, even after "accepting" about 20,000 NVA troops, MACV's strength figures were reduced by about 21,000. We have not yet adjusted our pre-Tet estimate for losses since 1 February because: (a) there is no clear evidence permitting a break-out of the reported losses against the various force components, and (b) there is yet no evidence permitting a firm assessment of the extent to which these losses have been offset by intensified recruiting and increased infiltration. We feel strongly, however, that whatever KIA figure is used -- and we have serious reservations regarding the reported figures -- it should be attrited against all enemy forces (i. e., the total "insurgency base"), and not against the select groups used by MACV.

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7. Our strength estimates, which are being coordinated in the Washington community, do not reflect, for the most part, a real increase in Communist military strength over recent months. Rather, they largely represent adjustments to reflect armed components and personnel which have existed but have been omitted from previous estimates. Most components (excluding NVA and VC Main Force elements) have actually declined somewhat from peak strengths reached in 1966 because of subsequent losses. We believe these figures represent a realistic assessment of current enemy strength, and one which should be taken into account in our policies and plans.

Attachment:

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COMMUNIST STRENGTH IN VIETNAM

<u>COMPONENT</u>	<u>A</u> <u>MACV Holdings</u> <u>Sept 67</u>	<u>B</u> <u>Agreed NIE</u> <u>Figures</u>	<u>C</u> <u>MACV Holdings</u> <u>30 Nov 67</u>	<u>D</u> <u>CIA Pre-Tet</u> <u>Estimate</u>	<u>E</u> <u>MACV Post-Tet</u> <u>Holdings</u>
Main Force- Local Force	116,552	119,000	114,577	160,000 ⁵	122,931
Administrative Services	25,753	35-40,000	37,600	75-120,000 ⁶	33,725
Guerrillas	112,760 ¹	70-90,000 ²	81,300 ²	100-120,000 ⁷	47,470 ²
Sub-Total	<u>255,065</u>	<u>224-249,000</u>	<u>223,477</u>	<u>335-380,000</u>	<u>204,126</u>
Self-Defense	----- ³	Unquantified ⁴	Unquantified ⁴	100,000 ⁸	Unquantified ⁴
Political Cadre	<u>39,175</u>	<u>75-85,000</u>	<u>84,000</u>	<u>80-120,000⁹</u>	<u>84,000</u>
Total	294,240	299-334,000	307,477	515-600,000	288,126

NOTES: 1. Grouped guerrilla and self-defense components into one category.

2. Includes guerrilla strength only.

3. Included with guerrillas.

4. Agreed that no figure would be listed, with statement that Self-Defense strength had reached 150,000 in mid-1966.

5. Difference between columns C and D results from our inclusion of identified units (22,000) infiltrated since November, plus 24,000 in specialized elements not reflected in MACV's holdings.

6. Difference results from inclusion of numerous elements at various levels not recognized by MACV's holdings.

7. Evidence strongly supports this higher spread.

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8. Evidence supports an order-of-magnitude estimate of this size; we believe this increment, which suffers losses and plays a significant role, should be included in the "insurgency base."
9. Accumulating evidence tends to support the existence of organized elements at the higher end of this spread.

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20March

The Director
GACarver, Jr.

The "Order of Battle" Problem

This is the brief summary you requested outlining our problems with the Communist Order of Battle in Vietnam. This paper has been coordinated with the appropriate elements of DDI.

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

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