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SPECIAL ANNEX I

Infiltration

Much of the information on information on infiltration has come from COMINT (sources) particularly in the last five years, and INR's reports on the subject have been handled in RCI channels. This annex, using both COMINT and collateral material, is therefore able to review INR's position in more detail than was possible in the main text of the paper. The annex first briefly discusses the sources of intelligence on infiltration and methods of reaching estimates of enemy strength. It then reviews INR's writing about infiltration, with particular attention to the movement of regular North Vietnamese army (NVA) units into South Vietnam.

Sources

Intelligence on the infiltration from North Vietnam and the presence of NVA forces in the South has improved gradually over the past years, particularly since late 1967. Initially, the intelligence community relied primarily on prisoner testimony, captured documents, photography, and limited communications intelligence (COMINT) derived from direction-finding and traffic analysis. From mid-1964, this information was supplemented by reports from road-watch teams in central Laos. The information from these sources sometimes lagged as much as six months or more behind the fact. For example, although there were contemporary COMINT indications of the movement of NVA elements in southern Laos and then South Vietnam in late 1964-early 1965, it took several months, using the available sources, to confirm the deployment to South Vietnam of the 325th Division.

In November 1967, NSA began to read the communications of the low-powered voice radio network operated by the General Directorate of Rear Services (GDRS), the senior North Vietnamese authority in charge of infiltrating men and supplies from North to South Vietnam. Analysis of this material has provided evidence that some 215,000 NVA troops entered the pipeline in 1968 for deployment to South Vietnam. The analysis has enabled the intelligence community to project both probable destinations and arrival times for various groups, and to monitor their progress through the pipeline in North Vietnam and, to some extent, in Laos. In addition, this analysis has produced useful information on the movement of supplies.

Criteria

In early 1964, during the reorganization of joint US-GVN intelligence procedures which followed the fall of the Diem regime, MACV established criteria for reporting infiltration in its official statistics. If a

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group or unit was reported by two independent sources (POWs or captured documents); it was considered "accepted"; if reported by one source, it was deemed either "probable" or "possible." This system was used in reporting on main force VC strength and, later, on NVA units. MACV added up the reported strengths of these units to arrive at an estimate of total enemy strength in South Vietnam. This figure was adjusted weekly by subtracting the number of reported enemy casualties and adding any newly-accepted units or increased strengths for units already accepted. MACV was supported by DIA in its contention that "hard" figures on enemy strength could be obtained in this way.

After mid-1966, CIA disagreed with this method and claimed that, by using all available information, most importantly COMINT, one could estimate more accurately not only the number of NVA troops but the entire Communist force structure in the South. Because CIA included units not covered by MACV, its figures on enemy strength were consistently far higher than those of MACV or DIA. Although MACV adhered to its old method of reporting enemy strength, DIA and CIA finally resolved their dispute in February 1969, when DIA basically accepted CIA's methodology and the two agencies agreed on an estimate of NVA/VC strength.

Without sources of its own, INR restricted its role to evaluating the intelligence obtained and the estimates produced by other agencies. Up to 1966, INR sometimes thought MACV's figures were too high but, in general, accepted the MACV position. By mid-1966, however, INR came to feel that these figures were far too low and, on several occasions, suggested that evidence (usually from COMINT) pointed to more NVA units in the South than were accounted for in enemy Order of Battle reported by MACV, published by DIA, and based almost wholly on collateral sources. Only rarely did INR attempt to estimate a specific figure for NVA strength; it tended generally to accept CIA's analysis.

Review of Infiltration

1. The Early Period, 1955-1963

From the 1954 Geneva settlement until 1958, there was little movement from North to South Vietnam, although cadre were sent to strengthen and later to expand the underground Communist organization in the South. In 1959, there were indications of organized movement of infiltrators down the "Ho Chi Minh Trail" and of the expansion of the infiltration network. In mid-1963, MACV reported and INR agreed that only 13,000 men had infiltrated into South Vietnam in the period 1959-1963. This figure was revised upwards a year later when MACV estimated that some 30,000 had come South during 1959-1963. INR agreed with this estimate, which had been reached through analysis of more complete information from both COMINT and collateral sources, and the figure is still believed to be essentially accurate. Most of these troops were "regroupees," South Vietnamese members

of the Viet Minh who had been moved North under the Geneva Agreement and, for the most part, had been retained in special military units performing economic as well as military tasks.

2. Native Northern Draftees Sent South, 1964.

During the late spring of 1964, native Northern soldiers were captured for the first time in South Vietnam. They were draftees who had been sent south to fight in Viet Cong units. On the basis of this circumstance, the GVN began to claim publicly that regular NVA units were fighting with the VC, an assertion which MACV contradicted. Nonetheless, in October, the American command sharply increased its estimate of infiltration--4,800 as compared with the mid-summer estimate of 3,000--for the first five months of 1964; it also reported for the first time that the majority of new arrivals were now native North Vietnamese.

INR agreed with MACV that there was nothing to confirm the GVN claim that NVA units were in the South, but it was very skeptical at first of the two other aspects of MACV's October report, doubting that there had been so great an increase in infiltrators or such a great change in their composition from Southerners to Northerners. INR did, however, believe that the Washington community lacked the depth and volume of intelligence available to MACV and, as a result of concern over this intelligence gap, a joint team from State, CIA, and DIA was dispatched to Saigon in November. Having examined MACV's evidence as part of the team, INR revised its estimate on enemy infiltration and stated that there had been "a significant increase" in 1964 "in the magnitude indicated by MACV." INR contended, however, that the evidence did not seem to support MACV's claim that the majority of the new troops were native North Vietnamese.

3. NVA Units Infiltrate, Late 1964 - mid-1966.

In late 1964, there were indications in COMINT that some elements of the NVA 325th Division were preparing to deploy to Laos and, in December, road-watch teams along routes in south-central Laos observed the equivalent of several battalions of NVA forces moving into that area. There was no evidence that the troops were destined for South Vietnam, and, on balance, it was generally surmised that North Vietnamese units fighting with Pathet Lao forces were being reinforced in preparation for the coming dry season when combat usually increased.

Perhaps the best idea of how the evidence unfolded can be obtained from a perusal of the weekly Watch Committee reports which INR approved after participating in the preparation of the final inter-agency draft. The first tentative evidence of movement was reported in the Watch Report

of December 9, 1964. It noted NSA analysis which indicated that a radio station serving an NVA operational headquarters in central Laos had been reactivated a month earlier after some eight months of silence. The NSA analysis showed that the station was communicating with two unidentified subordinates of the NVA 325th Division, and revealed that radio terminals of the 325th had been using operational communications procedures since November 10. Two weeks later, the Committee recalled this intelligence in reporting that some 500 NVA soldiers had been observed moving westward along a route in central Laos. The next week, on December 30, the Watch Report estimated that several battalions might have come into the area. More were seen moving southward, and, on January 6, 1965, the Committee for the first time raised the possibility that they might be destined for South Vietnam.

On January 13, the Watch Report carried the first radio-direction-finding (RDF) analysis which indicated that an element of the 325th possibly its Division Headquarters, had moved from North Vietnam into southern Laos at about the same time that road-watch teams had seen NVA troops moving southward. The station was thought to be located in Laos along Route 9, in the vicinity of the South Vietnamese border, and subsequent reports noted observations in Laos of truck traffic, stockpiling, and the movement of additional forces.

A first tenuous indication that the "possible" headquarters element of the 325th had moved into Kontum province in South Vietnam was reported on February 3 by the Watch Committee on the basis of analysis of medium-level RDF. This type of direction-finding was quite unrefined, and its product was subject to an error factor

which made it impossible to confirm whether the NVA unit had moved into South Vietnam or whether it was based in Laos. In fact, during February other RDF analyses at times located the station in Laos.

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As a result of this problem, the more reliable Air RDF (ARDF) was brought into the effort and, by mid-March, it began consistently to locate the 325th element in South Vietnam. In late March it was determined that the station was co-located with the NVA operational headquarters formerly based in central Laos.

Thus, by late March 1965, it was clear that the North Vietnamese had decided to deploy a headquarters element to South Vietnam, but, as a March 31 CIA memorandum concluded, there was still "no firm evidence that tactical units of the 325th" had moved from North Vietnam.* This evidence came in the following month when a defector, picked up in South Vietnam, claimed to be from a battalion in the Division's 101st Regiment.

Therefore, in late April, CIA stated, and LNR agreed, that there was a growing body of evidence that the 101st Regiment had deployed to South Vietnam in February 1965. LNR also agreed with two other points in CIA's

* COMINT [sources could not provide] the identity of the unit's subordinate stations nor even their number with any certainty.

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memorandum: that (1) over 8,000 troops, a substantial number of them native Northerners, had infiltrated to South Vietnam in 1964; and that (2) the infiltration communications complex in Laos had been expanded.

North Vietnamese army units continued to arrive throughout 1965. In mid-July, using its established criteria, MACV confirmed the presence of the 101st Regiment of the 325th, held the presence of the 18th Regiment to be "probable," and believed that the Division's 95th Regiment was "possibly" in South Vietnam.* By December 1965, the MACV OB carried seven "accepted" NVA regiments in the South, one "probable" and another "possible." The number of "accepted" NVA regiments on duty in South Vietnam had grown to 19 by mid-1966, according to MACV's August 1966 report.**

The majority of the personnel in these NVA units were native Northerners. Most of them were recent draftees and, until the summer of 1966, most of them came south in organized units--regiments and battalions--which remained intact and conducted operations in South Vietnam.

4. Controversy over Size of Increase in NVA Forces, Mid-1966 - 1967.

From mid-1966, there was growing disagreement in the intelligence community over the rate and size of the NVA expansion, with MACV usually claiming that there were far fewer Northern troops in SVN than did CIA. While DIA generally supported MACV, INR leaned towards the CIA position. (See discussion of Criteria above, p. 2.)

* In March 1968, INR reviewed all the information which by then had become available, both from more complete analysis of COMINT and later collateral information, on the first infiltration of NVA units. INR concluded that elements of the 325th Division were being readied for movement south as early as April 1964. Its first battalion (the 808th) had departed North Vietnam in August 1964, arriving in South Vietnam in November. The first elements of the Division's 95th Regiment, which left in October, also arrived in the South in November. Elements of the Division's 101st Regiment departed North Vietnam in December 1964, and arrived in February 1965. The Division's third regiment, the 18th, left the North in February and arrived in April. The report also noted that there was some COMINT evidence that the 32nd Independent Regiment had moved to the South between September/October 1964 and January 1965.

** See Table 1 for estimates of the numbers of NVA units in the South 1965-67, as made at the time and as currently revised.

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Table 1

ESTIMATES OF NUMBERS OF NVA UNITS IN SOUTH AT GIVEN TIME, 1965-67

(MACV) <u>Then</u>	(Washington Intelligence Community) <u>Now</u>
<u>April 1965</u>	
1 Battalion	1 Division, 4 Regiments
<u>December 1965</u>	
7 Regiments Accepted 1 Regiment Probable 1 Regiment Possible	2 Divisions, 9 Regiments
<u>August 1966</u>	
4 Divisions Accepted 1 Division Possible 19 Regiments Accepted	5 Divisions, 21 Regiments
<u>October 1966</u>	
Same as August	6 Divisions, 24 Regiments
<u>November 1966</u>	
Same as August	7 Divisions, 27 Regiments
<u>January 1967</u>	
5 Divisions 22 Regiments	7 Divisions, 28 Regiments
<u>December 1967</u>	
26 Regiments Accepted 1 Regiment Probable 1 Regiment Possible	35 Regiments, at least 4, possibly 7, more deploying

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In October 1966 MACV's report of the enemy order of battle (OOB) (based entirely on collateral) showed 19 NVA regiments in SVN. INR noted that this figure did not include an NVA division which had been observed moving through Laos towards SVN in September, nor an additional four battalions probably located in Laos just west of the DMZ. Later, in November, INR reported that COMINT showed two additional division headquarters in the northern part of the DMZ. These were not accounted for in MACV's OOB, presumably because they were "out-of-country."

INR also repeatedly noted evidence in COMINT of expansion of the infiltration system in Laos and NVN, and suggested that this would mean an increased flow of troops to the South. For example, in February 1967, INR cited expanded NVA communications networks, increased numbers of messages sent, and the reappearance of low-level intelligence communications as indicating that there had been increased NVA infiltration into the DMZ/northern I Corps area in preparation for stepped-up military operations.

Later in February, INR noted a further increase of communications activity in the North Vietnam networks associated with infiltration, as well as the relocation of important control authorities such as the 559th Transportation Group. It concluded that the flow of men and/or supplies through the Laotian panhandle to SVN was still increasing.

Thus, in June 1967, INR thought that MACV's estimate of NVA infiltration for the first five months of 1967 was too low. Moreover, in June, INR felt that both COMINT and collateral indicated that additional NVA units were moving towards South Vietnam. INR saw in these large unit movements a clear break from the pattern, established in mid-1966, of infiltration of large numbers of replacement personnel for units already in the South, of cadre, and small specialized units.

Three months later, INR warned that there appeared to be a major build-up of NVA forces south of the DMZ. It noted that there was a total of 30,000 NVA troops in the DMZ area in units accepted by MACV, and that possibly four or more new regiments, not accepted by MACV, had recently entered the area from North Vietnam.

5. Late 1967-68

From late 1967 to the end of 1968, at least three more NVA divisions and a number of independent regiments moved into South Vietnam, but the majority of the 245,000 troops who are believed to have arrived during 1968 came in replacement packets which broke up on arrival.

On December 22, 1967, after the deployment of the 304th and 320th NVA Divisions to South Vietnam, INR reviewed MACV's latest OOB report,

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which held 28 NVA regiments in South Vietnam. INR thought the figure should be 35 regiments and possibly 42, since, according to COMINT, there were seven additional regiments in the South and seven more appeared en route. INR noted another peculiarity in MACV's figures for NVA troop strength. Whereas, in January 1967, MACV held 50,000 men for 22 units, in December it increased the number by only 5,335 while adding six more regiments. INR implied that there was ample reason to think that the manpower figure was far higher, despite MACV's assertion that heavy enemy casualties accounted for the small net increase.

In March 1968, after the Tet offensive, MACV raised the accepted number of regiments from 28 to 37, and increased its estimate of total NVA strength to 85,000. Despite this increase, INR believed, the list of enemy units was incomplete. INR counted eight more NVA regiments in or immediately adjacent to South Vietnam, which would put total NVA strength at about 95,000 "and possibly higher."

In June INR again reported that there was COMINT evidence of NVA units in South Vietnam which were not reflected on MACV's OOB, even though the latter now showed 49 NVA regiments. According to INR, there were possibly as many as twelve additional NVA regiments in or adjacent to South Vietnam.

On several occasions in the spring and summer of 1968, INR noted the greatly improved information about infiltration which COMINT was providing. In fact, in August, INR suggested a new analytical technique which would show that the total infiltration since November 1967 might be far higher than the 176,000 figure then deduced from COMINT, perhaps by as many as 41,000.

Although initially criticized by other agencies, this technique was later adopted and used to produce the estimate that there were possibly 30,000 additional infiltrators during this period (as opposed to the original INR estimate of 41,000).

In view of the wide discrepancy that had developed between the MACV/DIA estimate and those of CIA over NVA strength in the South, the White House directed a committee of CIA and DIA analysts to work out an agreed figure on this matter. In the process, DIA accepted CIA's methodology based on a broader range of intelligence than used by MACV. Thus, in November, when the agreed figure of 140-160,000 NVA troops in South Vietnam as of August 31, 1968, was announced, it was 50,000 higher than MACV's estimate for the same period. INR accepted this figure, as well as the lower estimate of 105-125,000 for December 31, 1968, which the committee issued in February 1969. This end-of-year estimate of

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105-125,000 NVA troops "in and posing a direct threat to South Vietnam,"* takes into consideration the 181,000 NVA/VC men reportedly killed in action in 1968, as well as the 245,000 new NVA troops who arrived in South Vietnam in that year.** The difference between the August figure of 140-160,000 and the December figure of 105-125,000 largely is explained by the withdrawal well into North Vietnam during the fall of 1968 of the NVA 304th, 308th, and 320th Divisions as well as several independent regiments.

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- * In other words, the estimate includes those NVA forces which have withdrawn into base areas in Cambodia, Laos, and immediately north of the DMZ, but not those which were moved further north in North Vietnam.
- ** The 245,000 troops who arrived in 1968 should not be confused with the 215,000 who were [detected] in COMINT entering the infiltration pipeline in North Vietnam in 1968. The higher figure for troops arriving in South Vietnam includes nearly all of those 215,000 plus the 30,000 who entered the pipeline in November/December 1967 but who did not actually arrive in the South until early 1968.