

**SNIE 53-2-61**

**Bloc Support of the Communist Effort  
Against the Government of Vietnam**

**5 October 1961**

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NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE  
NUMBER 53-2-61

**BLOC SUPPORT OF THE COMMUNIST  
EFFORT AGAINST THE GOVERN-  
MENT OF VIETNAM**

*Submitted by the*  
**DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE**

*The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and The Joint Staff.*

*Concurred in by the*  
**UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD**

*on 5 October 1961. Concurring were The Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Intelligence), Department of the Navy; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF; the Director for Intelligence, Joint Staff; the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, Special Operations, and the Director of the National Security Agency. The Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the USIB, and the Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of their jurisdiction.*

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Nº 368

## BLOC SUPPORT OF THE COMMUNIST EFFORT AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM

### THE PROBLEM

To estimate the extent and nature of Bloc support of the Communist effort against South Vietnam.<sup>1</sup>

### THE ESTIMATE

1. The Communist subversive and guerrilla apparatus in South Vietnam, known as the Viet Cong, is an integral part of the North Vietnamese Communist Party and it looks to Hanoi for political and military guidance and various forms of support. Hanoi is the implementing agency for Bloc activity in South Vietnam, and the Hanoi authorities are allowed considerable local freedom in conducting Viet Cong guerrilla and subversive activity. The Communist Bloc probably views the guerrilla and subversive campaigns in Laos and South Vietnam as two parts of a single broad political-military strategy, and of the two, considers South Vietnam as the more significant prize.

2. The Viet Cong are using Maoist tactics. A large part of the North Vietnam Army was trained in Communist China during the Indochina war ending in 1954, and some of these troops are leading operations in South Vietnam now. Each Bloc country has supported the "struggle" in the South with propaganda, notably during Pham Van Dong's trip to other Bloc areas in June-August, 1961.

3. Since early 1960 a general Hanoi-directed political and paramilitary Communist offensive against President Diem and his government of Vietnam (GVN) has been underway, and during the past year this campaign has taken on increased tempo and scale. The Viet Cong apparatus has undergone rapid expansion, and the scope and area of operations of its guerrilla units have increased significantly. More recently, the Viet Cong has begun to operate in larger sized units (500-1,000 men) and they have extended large-scale attacks to include, for the first time, the plateau area in the northern part of South Vietnam.

4. Apparently in response to this direction from Hanoi, cadre personnel and many special items, such as communications equipment, chemicals, medical supplies, and other items needed for guerrilla warfare not available in the countryside, are being infiltrated into South Vietnam via long established land and sea routes. Thousands of junks which ply the coastal routes of the Indochina peninsula provide a means of infiltration extremely difficult to control. Mountain trails in southern Laos have been used freely by the Communists for years for movement of men and supplies between North and South Vietnam. Other infiltration routes pass through Cambodia. Nevertheless, the Viet Cong effort is still

<sup>1</sup> For a broader treatment of the situation and prospects in South Vietnam, see NIE 14.3/53-61, "Prospects for North and South Vietnam," dated 15 August 1961.

largely a self-supporting operation in respect to recruitment and supplies. The Viet Cong live upon locally produced food which they either grow themselves or levy upon villages. They meet most of their currency needs by taxing areas under their control, by robbery, or by blackmail. Most of their arms and much of their ammunition have been locally acquired or captured from GVN Army and security forces.

5. We estimate present armed, full-time Viet Cong strength at about 16,000, an increase, despite substantial combat losses, of 12,000 since April of 1960 and of 4,000 in the past three months. About 10-20 percent of total Viet Cong strength consists of cadres infiltrated from North Vietnam mostly via mountain trails through southern Laos. Most of the remaining 80-90 percent of the Viet Cong are local recruits, but they also include remnants of the approximately 10,000 stay-behind personnel who went underground during the 1954-1955 regroupment and evacuation of Vietnamese Communist Army units following the Indochina War. Approximately 90,000 Vietnamese Communist troops were evacuated to North Vietnam during this period, most of whom were from south and central Vietnam. It is from this pool of experienced fighters that most of the guerrilla cadres now operating in South Vietnam are drawn. These hard-core guerrillas are augmented by several thousand supporters who, under the cover of normal civilian pursuits, join the organized insurgent bands to assist in intelligence, sabotage, propaganda, and terrorist operations. In addition, local inhabitants in many areas provide the Viet Cong with recruits, food, refuge, and operational support, in some cases voluntarily and in others as the result of intimidation or coercion.

6. As part of the buildup for their current campaign, the Viet Cong have established an extensive communications network. Much of the communications equipment in use is probably quite primitive and some of it is assembled in the field. There is evidence, however, that in addition there are substantial quantities of sophisticated communica-

tions equipment and well-trained technicians serving the Viet Cong. Such equipment and the necessary maintenance and operating personnel were infiltrated into South Vietnam.

7. There has been no positive identification of Bloc manufactured military equipment in South Vietnam. Most of the arms and equipment now in use by the Viet Cong is of US or French origin. Although weapons have been infiltrated from North Vietnam, most Viet Cong equipment is probably from caches established at the end of the Indochina War or is equipment captured from GVN armed forces or security forces. During 1960, over 3,000 small arms were lost by GVN armed forces during combat. Some items, such as grenades, land mines, booby traps, and small arms ammunition are locally manufactured by village level Viet Cong "arsenals," from materials procured locally or imported from North Vietnam and Cambodia. Moreover, in view of the physical problems of infiltrating large amounts of arms and ammunition into South Vietnam, many Viet Cong operations are primarily for the purpose of capturing arms, ammunition, medical supplies, and other equipment. A major buildup of Bloc equipment in South Vietnam is likely to await the improvement of lines of communication into and within South Vietnam.

8. *Outlook.* Viet Cong control of the Ca Mau peninsula at the southern tip of South Vietnam has been virtually complete for several years. During the dry season beginning in November, the Viet Cong will probably intensify the exploitation of GVN weaknesses in the plateau areas of the north and central parts of the country, seeking to establish another "liberated area" as a logistics base from which larger scale operations could be mounted. The creation of a second "liberated area" in the plateau region adjacent to southern Laos would enable the Viet Cong to keep GVN forces split and prevent the concentration of effort against either. Moreover, a strong Viet Cong position in the plateau area would seriously threaten the rear of Diem's troops posted along the demilitarized zone.

9. To a considerable extent the ability of the Viet Cong to maintain this expanded effort will depend upon improved logistical support from the outside. It is probable that the Bloc intends to build up the eastern part of south Laos, improving the roads, mountain trails, and airfields, as a major supply channel to

support a stepped up Viet Cong campaign in north and central Vietnam. There has already been a considerable increase in Communist troop strength in south Laos, a substantial supply buildup, particularly east of Thakhek, and an increase in the Communist airlift into the area.