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air 1 (normass/deepe)

SAIGON, APRIL 24—President Lyndon Johnson's announced ^{of 1000 m. distance} de-escalation of the air and naval bombardment brought squeals of dismay and bitterness within ²the American military circles here.

Air commanders especially were tactically critical of the President's move even though the first airraids since the de-escalation announcement have been flown as far ²north as two hundred miles north of the 17th parallel dividing north and south Vietnam. Initially, ^{Allowed} air commanders thought they would be ²able to continue air strikes only as far north as the city of Vinh, 145 miles north of the seventeenth parallel.

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air 2 (normass/deepe)

Political observers here believe—and air commanders fear—that the 200-mile bombing limit will be rolled back, gradull gradually be rolled back, closer and closer to the demilitarized zone at the seventeenth parallel. They These sources justify the bombing as high as 200 miles on the map because they view President Johnson as facing two main difficulties: not only to persuade North Vietnam to negotiate—but also to keep the up the morale of the anti-Communist government and its army in Saigon in case Hanoi rejects negotiations.

In short, the President Johnson now has the option of de-escalating further within his already announced policy of de-escalating, these sources believe.

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air 3 (normass/deepe)

~~viets~~

Vietnamese politicians here, without knowledge of peace attempts outside the country, believe Hanoi will reject President's Johnson of negotiating with his 90 per cent de-escalation of the air and naval bombardment. "Hanoi wants 100 per cent de-escalation," one source explained.

A Western diplomat ventured, "What the bombing reduction means to me is that in about two months, you and I in Saigon are going to be receiving Communist rocket and artillery fire every night. I've calculated that two months is about what it will take them to move down their supplies with the reduced bombing. We'll be lucky to get ^{Plan} ~~out~~ ~~of~~ ~~Saigon~~ ~~with~~ ~~our~~ ~~skins~~." _{WEARING}

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air 4 (normass/deepe)

Reliable sources report air American air reconnaissance missions are scheduled to be continued oe over the entire country of North Vietnam, such as was done during other bombing past bombing "stand-downs." Air commanders here believe it critically important these non-violent^{er} air m^{ss} missions be allowed to continue since it will provide the United States government with virtually its sole means of minute-to-minute intelligence of whether North Vietnamese men and supplies are continuing to flow southward from the Communist Chinese border and the Hanoi Hanoi-Haiphong complex.

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air 5 (normass/deepe)

~~Refuse~~

Informed sources, speaking either officially or privately, refused to discuss the effect of the President's de-escalation over North Vietnam on the bombing missions in Laos, ^{which has been} never officially admitted here.

"The official position of air officers here has always been against a bombing pause," one source explained. "But that is speaking as strictly a military guy. Once the political decision is made we press on as best we can." of AIR COMMANDERS,

Their basic conclusion, however, was that the President's bombing de-escalation would make it ^{more reuter} more difficult to ^{interdict} stop North Vietnamese men and supplies from getting into the South where the ground war is at a critical point and where the Allies ² are considered to be on the strategic defensive.

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air 3 (normass/deepe)

Officially, the American military men kept a stiff upper lip. ^{ABOUT THE DE-ESCALATION} Officially, the answer to inquisitive newsmen and senior commanders was the same: "The President's announcement outlined clearly the reduction of bombing over the North. We have no comment."

Or: "We are behind our President 100 per cent--no matter what his decision."

Or, when asked about what their public reactions should be before American television cameras, ^{on} cameras, American troopers were told: "You are free to say whatever you want--but remember you're wearing a uniform--and you took an oath before entering the military service."

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air 4/ (normass/deepe)

~~American commanders~~

Senior American commanders were notified of the bombing ~~de~~ deescalation roughly twenty four hours before the President's speech, but were not informed about his decision to refuse a second nomination.

But, beneath this crust of military men obeying their without question the orders of their commander-in-chief erupted subdued verbal dissent, especially ~~for~~ among officers involved in air operations which were so greatly affected by the President's order.

~~Subconsciously~~

initially Subconsciously and without ^{Realizing} ~~knowing~~ it, air officers

referred to the President's decision as a "bombing pause," and then

later began calling it a "bombing back-drop."

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air 8 (normass/deepe)

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Even/American civilian officials, speaking privately,
the de-escalation brought a ponderous shake of the head and "I hope
Johnson knows what he's doing."

The dissent articulated by ~~some~~ senior military officers here
was based on a number of arguments, ~~eg~~ ranging from political evaluations
to the tactical employment of air power.

The first revolved around the sincerity of North Vietnam
in desiring real peace and reciprocating the President's bid for a
negotiated settlement. Hence their fear that while the Communists
hold the ~~initiate on the~~ initiative on the ground in the South, the
President's unilateral retraction of American air offensive will not
necessarily lead to peace, but instead of more disadvantages for the
Allies in the military fighting.

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air 9 (normass/deepe)

The military men here consider ~~themselves~~ themselves as somewhat expert judges of the North Vietnamese intentions—and double-crosses, as they say. Their trump-card argument is that the bombing pause and ground ceasefire agreed to during Tet, when, in the ~~mi~~ minds of American generals down the ranks, the Communists flagrantly took advantage of the situation to launch ^{their} ~~an~~ astonishingly successful lunar new year offensive.

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air * (normass/deepe)

"Our last bombing pause was at Tet," one officer recalled. "And remember we really got zapped them."

Or, as another explained, "If Hanoi wants to play a bad game-- if they're not sincere and they've not shown themselves to be in the past--then they can step up their infiltration of men and supplies into the South considerably. We'll make every effort to stop this in-flow in the South--but we're already on the defensive on the ground in the South."

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air 11 (normass/deeps)

~~_____~~
An Air Force officer mused: based, at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut
airbase, ~~based~~: "I was listening to the President's speech re-broadcaste
at 3 i the three o'clock in the morning. and the Viet Cong ~~sg~~ started to
mortar the base. We didn't like that one bit. I wish the President
would stop giving those speeches of his."

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air 12 (normass/deepe)

The second argument of the ~~senior~~ ^{SENIOR} military ~~men~~ ^{OFFICERS} against the de-escalation centered on how airpower ~~could~~ ^{SHOULD} be employed most effectively to interdict the North Vietnamese movement of supplies ~~and~~ and men southward. The air commanders wanted to hit concentrations of supplies; the President's order now forces them attempt to interdict supplies after they have been dispersed along jungle canopied trails and waterways. These air commanders argue that even given the same number of airstrikes as before the de-escalation in a more compact geographic area north of the demilitarized will not produce as ~~much~~ ^{EFFECTIVE} interdiction as before when they could hit supply depots and concentrations in the Hanoi-Haiphong complex.

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air 13 (NORMASS / DEEP)

"since we can't hit the targets of concentration in the Hanoi-Haiphong area, which is where the bulk of their supplies ~~come~~ come into, we must face the problem of interdicting them as they are dispersed along those many little trails and inland waterways just from Vinh south," one Air Force officer explained.

And, as a Western diplomat explained: "The American air strikes are not going to be as effective as before, ^{Not much} now many how many ~~strikes~~ missions they fly in a smaller area north of the DMZ. It's logical. Before, the American fighter-bombers were hitting the maybe 400 miles-worth of roads snaking roads, and they could hit a supply convoy traveling say four-hundred miles of snaking roads from Hanoi and Haiphong. Now, they're going to be able to hit the convoys on two hundred miles of roads."

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air 14 (normass/deepe)

A third argument that disgruntled the air officers was they had estimated half million to 700,000 North Vietnamese, and some Communist Chinese, had been tied down on re-construction projects just to keep the roads and railroads open, as well as providing air defense measures in the North. Now, these persons would be able to re-construct the railines and roads "without impunity."

"It's not a question of whether Hanoi can move five times or hundred times more supplies with this de-escalation," one officer explained. "The fact is Ho Chi Minh can do as much as he wants--without any threat of air to stop him effectively."

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air ~~W~~ (normass/deepe)

Other officers were irked that just as the President's order was received limiting their bombing raids, the weather had turned in the pilot's favor in the Red River Delta area around ~~Hanoi~~ Hanoi and Haiphong. "Our most effective air strike are those ~~visually~~ ^{visually} in which we visually see the target," one officer explained. "For ~~weeks~~ ^{months} the past now, the rainclouds ~~are~~ ^{HAVE} hung over the Red River ~~Delta~~ Delta, so we couldn't see what was happening on the ground. And we estimate the Reds increase their movements by three to five times during bad weather. But, just now we're coming into the southwest monsoon over the Red River Delta) which would give us good weather—and ~~now~~ the President says we can't fly up there."

Most officers agreed, however, that the de-escalation policy would reduce a American air ~~W~~ losses, as the Communist concentrations of firepower around the demilitarized zone ~~was~~ ^{are current} less than in the Hanoi-Haiphong ~~area~~ Red River Delta areas. "And I don't think Hanoi will move their ~~sam's~~ anti-aircraft southward right now. After all, the President was smart enough to leave this de-escalation open-ended. We still might be flying over Hanoi again."

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air ¹⁶ (normass/deepe)

¹⁵ (Hank: I'll file ~~an~~ ^{stuff} another piece tomorrow, but all my pieces will be either reaction or local in nature. We can not get a scrap of information on ~~Assess~~ ^{or} peace attempts here either from Americans, diplomats and the Vietnamese officials thus far have not been informed. Hence, I hope you can ~~arr~~ ^{Buller} arrange for other ~~bureaus~~ ^{to} cover progress of peace, and all its associate developments. ~~We can only cover the~~ ~~reaction from here.~~ ^{Normass} Regards Bev).

--end reuter