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mainforce 1 (normass/deepe)

SAIGON, JULY 27—It is now being openly discussed in informed circles here: The Communists have withdrawn "a large proportion" of their main-force units from South Vietnam.

Some informed sources estimate that the Communist big-unit formations —mostly North Vietnamese— that have withdrawn across South Vietnam's borders "might well be more than fifty per cent." They estimate that elements of seven Communist divisions have withdrawn into Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam. In the past, at least ~~two Communist~~ twelve Communist divisions were confirmed ~~as~~ present in the South.

Earlier this month, informed sources estimated that between ~~25~~ twenty five to thirty three per cent of the Communist main force units ~~had~~ had withdrawn into traditional ^{BASE} sanctuaries outside of the South.

Because of the difficulties of intelligence gathering and interpretation here, these statistical estimates are generally considered as "order of magnitude" ~~and~~ guidelines or "ballpark figures" rather than specific factual data.

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mainforce 2 (normass/deepe)

This de facto Communist de-escalation of the war—reflected in the "subdued" level of fighting and the reduced casualties on all sides—has increased speculation, if not apprehension, in Vietnamese government circles that the American policy-makers might make a major and dramatic move at the Paris peace talks, possibly to include a cessation of the bombing over North Vietnam. This would, according to the line of reasoning, accelerate the momentum of the Paris peace talks, possibly designed to coincide with American Presidential convention or election timetables.

Other informed sources, however, do not repeat not believe either the Americans or North Vietnamese in Paris are committed to ~~dramatic~~ ~~crucial decisions~~ a fixed timetable for making crucial decisions.

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mainforce 3 (normass/deepe)

From the military point of view, the withdrawal of the Communist units, mostly North Vietnamese Army units, "is not without precedent," as one informed source explained. "Last fall, the Communists did the same thing, sending their units back and forth across the borders....He's made surges and ~~the surges~~ before and then ^{HAD} lulls, while sending down more men for another surge." On this historical basis, American military commanders here predict another major Communist offensive within the next six weeks.

But, from the political point of view, the de-escalation comes at a crucially sensitive moment, when American ~~neg~~ negotiators in Paris have been demanding some sort of unspecified, undefined Communist reciprocity before meeting the North Vietnamese condition of ceasing all bombing "and other acts of war" against the North.

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mainforce 4 (normass/deepe)

Of the seven Communist divisions that have at least partially ~~not~~ withdrawn across the South Vietnamese borders, the exit from the five northernmost provinces, called I Corps, seems to be particularly pronounced. It is reported that two of the five North Vietnamese divisions ordinarily operating south of the demilitarized zone have slipped back across the line into North Vietnam or westwards into Laos. These are the 320th and 304th Divisions, elements of which formerly elung to the American Marines operating around Khe Sanh. A third division, the 325C Division, left the Khe Sanh area last spring and moved southwards into the Kontum-Dak To perimeters. It is now believed to have ~~infiltrated~~ swerved westward to rest and regroup in a traditional sanctuary in Cambodia. Some sources believe it is moving southwards ~~by~~ towards the Saigon area on the Cambodian side of the border.

A fourth division, the 1st North Vietnamese Army Division, has also exited South Vietnam and moved ~~southward~~ across the border into a Cambodian sanctuary. This division formerly moved in ~~as~~ a west-east axis ~~to~~ along the Pleiku/ Kontum-Binh Dinh axis in the northern two-thirds of South Vietnam, ~~which is now being used as a base for operations in the southern part of the country.~~

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ma inforce 5 (normass/deepe)

In the outer peripheries of the Saigon area, the Communist order of battle is more confused. In the past, three Communist divisions have operated in a wide radius from Saigon--the 5th, 7th and 9th Divisions. These are called Viet Cong Divisions and were exclusively Southern in character several years ago. But with the high casualties suffered by these "homogrown" recruits, as distinct from the North Vietnamese, more and more Northerners have been brought in as replacements, not only for rank-and-file troops, but also for ~~com~~ unit commanders and political officers. These "mixed" divisions around Saigon "have now disappeared on the Allies," as one informed source explained.

Some believe elements of these three divisions have moved across the border into another Cambodian sanctuary, or they may have fragmented into smaller units to hide out in isolated areas of the South.

(Hank: I consider this an update of my deescalation article of July 16, ^{BUT} ~~also~~ with more specific details in it. I think this is ^a ~~the~~ most important development in Vietnam at this time, ~~everything else revolving around this~~ so it ~~will~~ may be worth the space. Also, there was a n accidental fire in the JUSPAO office where we get out mail; if you've sent me any important messages via mail during the past week, I probably won't receive them. Regards Bev).

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